PROTAGORAS
By: Plato

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Persons of the dialogue: Sokrates (who is the narrator of the Dialogue to his Companion), Hippokrates, Alkibiades, Krinas, Protagoras, Hippias, Prodikos, Kallias

Scene: The House of Kallias

Protagoras (c. 490-c. 420 BCE) of the polis Abdera, in the northern region of Greece known as Thrace, was a professional teacher of wisdom. He would travel from city to city and, for a fee, would teach about civic virtue (i.e., how to be a good citizen and human).

Most of what we know about Protagoras’ views come from the works of Plato and it is important to remember that Plato did not agree with what he understood his teachings to entail. Plato, through the character ‘Socrates’, calls him a ‘sophist’ (sophiste) which literally means “wise man”. And though the ‘Socrates’ of Plato’s dialogues often refers to him as being among the “wisest” of people he has met, it is clear that this is meant to be taken ironically as Socrates will either refute or reduce Protagoras’ arguments to absurdity.

It is difficult to know exactly what Protagoras taught, but it is safe to say that he believed that virtue (aretai - i.e., human excellence) was something that could be acquired through instruction. That means that it must be, or depend, on some kind of knowledge. It is also clear that Protagoras believed that moral virtue, like civic law, was based on custom (nomos) and not an absolute natural (or supra-natural) law (phusis). In other words, he was a moral relativist. His most famous quote is: “Of all things, the measure is man; of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, [and] how they are not.”

In this dialogue, Socrates will explore what kind of knowledge is or entails virtue, and whether or not it can be taught. In an ironic twist, Socrates and Protagoras will switch positions with Socrates concluding that not only is virtue a kind of knowledge, but that one and the same knowledge is the essence of all the cardinal virtues (i.e., temperance, piety, justice, wisdom, and courage). This socratic position is often called the “Unity of Virtue”.

The Scene

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I have changed spellings of proper names to more accurately match the Greek text as opposed to the more traditional Latinized spellings which were dominant in Jowett’s time. I have also changed UK spellings to US spellings where appropriate, as well as made clarifications in translation (noted with brackets) and have added explanatory footnotes.

When we entered, we found Protagoras taking a walk in the cloister; and next to him, on one side, were walking Kallias, the son of Hipponikos, and Paralos, the son of Perikles, who, by the mother's side, is his half-brother, and Xarmides, the son of Glaukon. On the other side of him were Xanthippus, the other son of Perikles, Philippides, the son of Philomelus; also Antimoerus of Mende, who of all the disciples of Protagoras is the most famous, and intends to make sophistry his profession.

A train of listeners followed him; the greater part of them appeared to be foreigners, whom Protagoras had brought with him out of the various cities visited by him in his journeys, he, like Orpheus, attracting them his voice, and they following. I should mention also that there were some Athenians in the company. Nothing delighted me more than the precision of their movements: they never got into his way at all; but when he and those who were with him turned back, then the band of listeners parted regularly on either side; he was always in front, and they wheeled round and took their places behind him in perfect order.

After him, as Homer says, "I lifted up my eyes and saw" Hippias the Elean sitting in the opposite cloister on a chair of state, and around him were seated on benches Eruximaxos, the son of Akumenos, and Phaedrus the Myrrhinusian, and Andron the son of Androtion, and there were strangers whom he had brought with him from his native city of Elis, and some others: they were putting to Hippias certain physical and astronomical questions, and he, ex cathedra, was determining their several questions to them, and discoursing of them.

Also, "my eyes beheld Tantalus"; for the Kean was at Athens: he had been lodged in a room which, in the days of Hipponikos, was a storehouse; but, as the house was full, Kallias had cleared this out and made the room into a guest-chamber. Now Prodikos was still in bed, wrapped up in sheepskins and bed-clothes, of which there seemed to be a great heap; and there was sitting by him on the couches near, Pausanias of the deme of Kerameis, and with Pausanias was a youth quite young, who is certainly remarkable for his good looks, and, if I am not mistaken, is also of a fair and gentle nature. I thought that I heard him called Agathon, and my suspicion is that he is the beloved of Pausanias. There was this youth, and also there were the two Adeimantuses, one the son of Kepis, and the other of Leukolophides, and some others. I was very anxious to hear what Prodikos was saying, for he seems to me to be an all-wise and inspired man; but I was not able to get into the inner circle, and his fine deep voice made an echo in the room which rendered his words inaudible.

No sooner had we entered than there followed us Alkibiades the beautiful, as you say, and I believe you; and also Kritias the son of Kallaesxros.

On entering we stopped a little, in order to look about us, and then walked up to Protagoras, and I said: Protagoras, my friend Hippokrates and I have come to see you.

Do you wish, he said, to speak with me alone, or in the presence of the company?

Whichever you please, I said; you shall determine when you have heard the purpose of our visit.
And what is your purpose, he [asked]?

I must explain, I said, that my friend Hippokrates is a native Athenian; he is the son of Apollodoros, and of a great and prosperous house, and he is himself in natural ability quite a match for anybody of his own age. I believe that he aspires to political [greatness]; and this he thinks that conversation with you is most likely to procure for him. And now you can determine whether you would wish to speak to him of your teaching alone or in the presence of the company.

Thank you, Socrates, for your consideration of me. For certainly a stranger finding his way into great cities, and persuading the flower of the youth in them to leave company of their kinsmen or any other acquaintances, old or young, and live with him, under the idea that they will be improved by his conversation, ought to be very cautious; great jealosies are aroused by his proceedings, and he is the subject of many enmities and conspiracies. Now the art of the Sophist is, as I believe, of great antiquity; but in ancient times those who practiced it, fearing this odium [i.e., bad reputation], veiled and disguised themselves under various names, some under that of poets, as Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, some, of hierophants and prophets, as Orpheus and Musaeus, and some, as I observe, even under the name of gymnastic-masters, like Ikkos of Tarentum, or the more recently celebrated Herodikos, now of Selumbria and formerly of Megara, who is a first-rate Sophist. Your own Agathokles pretended to be a musician, but was really an eminent Sophist; also Pythokleides [of Keios]; and there were many others; and all of them, as I was saying, adopted these arts as veils or disguises because they were afraid of the [bad reputation] which they would incur.

But that is not my way, for I do not believe that they [accomplished] their purpose, which was to deceive [the rulers of their cities], who were not blinded by them; and as [for ordinary] people, they have no understanding, and only repeat what their rulers tell them. Now to run away, and to be caught in running away, is the very height of folly, and also greatly increases the exasperation of mankind; for they regard him who runs away as a rogue, in addition to any other objections which they have to him; and therefore I take an entirely opposite course, and acknowledge myself to be a Sophist and instructor of mankind; such an open acknowledgement appears to me to be a better sort of caution than concealment. Nor do I neglect other precautions, and therefore I hope, as I may say, by the favor of heaven that no harm will come of the acknowledgment that I am a Sophist. And I have been now many years in the profession—for all my years when added up are many: there is no one here present of whom I might not be the father. Wherefore, I should much prefer conversing with you, if you want to speak with me, in the presence of the company.

As I suspected that he would like to have a little display and glorification in the presence of Prodikos and Hippias, and would gladly show us to them in the light of his admirers, I said: But why should we not summon Prodikos and Hippias and their friends to hear us?

Very good, he said.

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3 In Ancient Greece, a hierophant (ἱερόφαντες – ‘those who show the holy’) was a person who initiated acolytes into the secrets of a religious system like the Eleusinian Mysteries.
Suppose, said Kallias, that we hold a council in which you may sit and discuss. This was agreed upon, and great delight was felt at the prospect of hearing wise men talk; we ourselves took the chairs and benches, and arranged them by Hippias, where the other benches had been already placed. Meanwhile Kallias and Alkibiades got Prodikos out of bed and brought in him and his companions.

**Protagoras’ Curriculum**

When we were all seated, Protagoras said: Now that the company are assembled, Socrates, tell me about the young man of whom you were just now speaking.

I replied: I will begin again at the same point, Protagoras, and tell you once more the purport of my visit: this is my friend Hippokrates, who is desirous of making your acquaintance; he would like to know what will happen to him if he associates with you. I have no more to say.

Protagoras answered: Young man, if you associate with me, on the very first day you will return home a better man than you came, and better on the second day than on the first, and better every day than you were on the day before.

When I heard this, I said: Protagoras, I do not at all wonder at hearing you say this; even at your age, and with all your wisdom, if any one were to teach you what you did not know before, you would become better no doubt: but please answer in a different way—I will explain how by an example. Let me suppose that Hippokrates, instead of desiring your acquaintance, wished to become acquainted with the young man Zeuxippus of Heraclea, who has lately been in Athens, and he had come to him as he has come to you, and had heard him say, as he has heard you say, that every day he would grow and become better if he associated with him: and then suppose that he were to ask him, "In what shall I become better, and in what shall I grow?"

Zeuxippus would answer, "In painting."

And suppose that he went to Orthagoras the Theban, and heard him say the same thing, and asked him, "In what shall I become better day by day?" He would reply, "In flute-playing."

Now I want you to make the same sort of answer to this young man and to me, who am asking questions on his account. When you say that on the first day on which he associates with you he will return home a better man, and on every day will grow in like manner—In what, Protagoras, will he be better, and about what?

When Protagoras heard me say this, he replied: You ask questions fairly, and I like to answer a question which is fairly put. If Hippokrates comes to me he will not experience the sort of drudgery with which other Sophists are in the habit of insulting their pupils; who, when they have just escaped from the arts, are taken and driven back into them by these teachers, and made to learn calculation, and astronomy, and geometry, and music (he gave a look at Hippias as he said this); but if he comes to me, he will learn that which he comes to learn. 319 And this is prudence in affairs, private as well as public; he will learn to order his
own house in the best manner, and he will be able to speak and act for the best in the affairs of the city.

Do I understand you, I said; and is your meaning that you teach the art of politics, and that you promise to make men good citizens?

That, Socrates, is exactly the [claim] which I make.

Can Virtue be Taught?
Then, I said, you do indeed possess a noble art, if there is no mistake about this; for I will freely confess to you, Protagoras, that I have a doubt whether this art is capable of being taught, and yet I know not how to disbelieve your assertion. And I ought to tell you why I am of opinion that this art cannot be taught or communicated by man to man. I say that the Athenians are a [well informed] people, and indeed they are esteemed to be such by the other Greeks.

I observe that when we [meet] together in the assembly, and the matter in hand relates to building, the builders are summoned as advisers; when the question is one of shipbuilding, then the shipwrights; and the like of other arts which they think capable of being taught and learned. And if some person offers to give them advice who is not supposed by them to have any skill in the art, even though he be good-looking, and rich, and noble, they will not listen to him, but laugh and hoot at him, until either he is clamored down and retires of himself; or if he persist, he is dragged away or put out by the constables at the command of the prytanes. This is their way of behaving about professors of the arts. But when the question is an affair of state, then everybody is free to have a say—carpenter, tinker, cobbler, sailor, passenger; rich and poor, high and low—any one who likes gets up, and no one reproaches him, as in the former case, with not having learned, and having no teacher, and yet giving advice; evidently because they are under the impression that this sort of knowledge cannot be taught.

And not only is this true of the state, but of individuals [as well]; the best and wisest of our citizens are unable to impart their political wisdom to others: as for example, Perikles, the father of these young men, who gave them excellent instruction in all that could be learned from masters, in his own [area] of politics neither taught them, nor gave them teachers; but they were allowed to wander at their own free will in a sort of hope that they would [discover] virtue [on their own]. Or take another example: there was Kleiniias the younger brother of our friend Alkibiades, of whom this very same Perikles was the guardian; and he being in fact under the apprehension that Kleiniias would be corrupted by Alkibiades, took

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4 A Prytaneis (prutaneis) was a quasi-religious political office responsible for calling to order, and keeping order in the Athenian assembly (ekklesia). Since Athens was a direct democracy, all citizens were expected to participate in debate and vote on matters of public policy. This was accomplished through representatives of each “tribe” of Athens who were randomly selected to serve for one-tenth of each year. The prytanes were elected by the representatives to serve as executive committee members for each term of the assembly.

5 Perikles (c. 495-429 BCE) was widely thought to be the greatest political leader of Athens during the Classical period. He is responsible for rebuilding the city after it was destroyed during the second Persian War. His vision of a fully engaged citizenry also led him to enact political reforms that shifted power away from the old aristocratic families making Athens a genuine democracy.
him away, and placed him in the house of Ariphron to be educated; but before six months had elapsed, Ariphron sent him back, not knowing what to do with him.

And I could mention numberless other instances of persons who were good themselves, and never yet made any one else good, whether friend or stranger. Now I, Protagoras, having these examples before me, am inclined to think that virtue cannot be taught. But then again, when I listen to your words, I waver; and am disposed to think that there must be something in what you say, because I know that you have great experience, and learning, and invention. And I wish that you would, if possible, show me a little more clearly that virtue can be taught. Will you be so good?

That I will [gladly do], Socrates. But what would you like? Shall I, as an elder, speak to you as younger men in a myth, or shall I argue out the question?

To this several of the company answered that he should choose for himself.

Well, then, he said, I think that the myth will be more interesting.

\textit{Protagoras’ Myth of Creation}\footnote{The characters in Protagoras’ myth are all derived from older poets, most notably Hesiod. You can read Hesiod’s poem and the most popular Greek creation myth, \textit{Theogony} (“birth of the gods”) on my website: (http://www.mesacc.edu/~barsp59601/text/201/notes/text/theogeny.html).}

Once upon a time there were gods only, and no mortal creatures. But when the time came that these also should be created, the gods fashioned them out of earth and fire and various mixtures of both elements in the interior of the earth; and when they were about to bring them into the light of day, they ordered Prometheus\footnote{The names ‘Prometheus’ and ‘Epimetheus’ were generally understood to mean “forethought” and “afterthought” from the Greek prefixes \textit{pro} and \textit{epi} during the Classical period. It is clear from the context of Protagoras’ myth that this is his understanding of the names’ meaning.} and Epimetheus to equip them, and to distribute to them severally their proper qualities. Epimetheus said to Prometheus: "Let me distribute, and do you inspect." This was agreed, and Epimetheus made the distribution. There were some to whom he gave strength without swiftness, while he equipped the weaker with swiftness; some he armed, and others he left unarmed;\footnote{321} and devised for the latter some other means of preservation, making some large, and having their size as a protection, and others small, whose nature was to fly in the air or burrow in the ground; this was to be their way of escape. Thus he compensated them [to prevent] any [species] from becoming extinct. And when he had provided against their destruction by one another, he contrived also a means of protecting them against the seasons of heaven; clothing them with close hair and thick skins sufficient to defend them against the winter cold and able to resist the summer heat, so that they might have a natural bed of their own when they wanted to rest; also he furnished them with hoofs and hair and hard and callous skins under their feet. Then he gave them varieties of food-herb of the soil to some, to others fruits of trees, and to others roots, and to some again he gave other animals as food. And some he made to have few young ones, while those who were their prey were very prolific; and in this manner the race was preserved.
Thus did Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give—and when he came to [humans], who [were] still unprovided, he was terribly perplexed. Now while he was in this perplexity, Prometheus came to inspect [his brother’s] distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that [humans] alone [were] naked and shoeless, and had neither beds, nor [means] of defence.

The appointed hour was approaching when [humans] in [their] turn [were] to go forth into the light of day; and Prometheus, not knowing how he could [save humanity], stole the [wisdom] of Hephaestus and Athena, and fire with [it] ([it] could neither have been acquired nor used without fire), and gave them to [humanity]. Thus [humans] had the wisdom necessary to [sustain] life, but [they did not have knowledge of politics]; for that was in the keeping of Zeus. Prometheus did not have the power to enter the citadel of heaven, where Zeus dwelt, who moreover had terrible sentinels. [Instead, he entered] by stealth into the workshop of Athena and Hephaestus, in which they used to practice their favorite arts, and carried off Hephaestus' art of working by fire, and also the art of Athena, and gave them to [human kind]. And in this way [humanity] was supplied with the means of life. But Prometheus is said to have been afterwards prosecuted for theft, [because of] the blunder of Epimetheus.

Now [humanity], having [some] of the divine attributes, was at first the only one of the animals who had any gods, because he alone was of their [nature]; and he would raise altars and images of them. He was not long in inventing articulate speech and names; and he also constructed houses and clothes and shoes and beds, and drew sustenance from the earth. Thus provided, mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities. But the consequence was that they were destroyed by the wild beasts, for they were utterly weak in comparison of them, and their art was only sufficient to provide them with the means of life, and did not enable them to carry on war against the animals: food they had, but not as yet the art of government, of which the art of war is a part.

After a while the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities; but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they [treated] one another [wickedly], and [the cities fell to] destruction. Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliation. Hermes asked Zeus how he should impart justice and [awareness of shame] among men—should he distribute them as the arts are distributed; that is to say, to a favored few only, one skilled individual having enough of medicine or of any other art for many unskilled ones?

"Shall this be the manner in which I am to distribute justice and [moral awareness] among men, or shall I give them to all?"

"To all," said Zeus; "I should like them all to have a share; for cities cannot exist, if a few only share in the virtues, as in the arts. And further, make a law by my order, that he who

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8 The ‘wisdom’ of Hephaestus and Athena is generally understood to be technology, or tool making.
has no part in [moral awareness] and justice shall be put to death, for he is a plague of the [city]."

And this is the reason, Socrates, why the Athenians and mankind in general, when the question relates to carpentering or any other mechanical art, allow but a few to share in their deliberations; and when any one else interferes, then, as you say, they object, if he be not of the favored few; which, as I reply, is very natural. But when they meet to deliberate about political virtue, 323 which proceeds only by way of justice and [political virtue], they are patient enough of any man who speaks of them, as is also natural, because they think that every man ought to share in this sort of virtue, and that [cities] could not exist if this were otherwise. I have explained to you, Socrates, the reason of this phenomenon.

**Protagoras’ Argument that Virtue is Knowledge**

And that you may not suppose yourself to be deceived in thinking that all men regard every man as having a share of justice and of every other political virtue, let me give you a further proof, which is this: In other cases, as you are aware, if a man says that he is a good flute-player, or skillful in any other art in which he has no skill, people either laugh at him or are angry with him, and his relations think that he is mad and go and admonish him. But when [justice] is in question, or some other political virtue, even if they know that he is dishonest, yet, if the man comes forward publicly and tells the truth about his dishonesty, then, what in the other case was held by them to be good sense, they now deem to be madness. They say that all men ought to profess honesty, whether they are honest or not. And [a person must be out of their mind to publically confess wrongdoing]. Their notion is, that [people] must have some degree of honesty, and if [not, they] ought not to be in the world. 9

I have been showing that they are right in admitting every man as a counselor about this sort of virtue, as they are of opinion that every man is a partaker of it. And I will now endeavor to show further that they do not conceive this virtue to be given by nature, or to grow spontaneously, but to be a thing which may be taught; and which comes to a man by taking pains. No one would instruct, no one would rebuke, or be angry with those whose calamities they suppose to be due to nature or chance; they do not try to punish or to prevent them from being what they are; they [just] pity them. Who is so foolish as to chastise or instruct the ugly, or the diminutive, or the feeble? And for this reason, because he knows that good and evil of this kind is the work of nature and of chance; whereas if a man is wanting in those good qualities which are attained by study and exercise and teaching, and has only the contrary evil qualities, other men are angry with him, and punish and reprove him—of these evil qualities one is impiety, another injustice, 324 and they may be described generally as the very opposite of political virtue.

In such cases any [person] will be angry with another, and reprimand him—clearly because he thinks that by study and learning, the virtue in which the other is deficient may be

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9 Protagoras’ point seems to be that since everybody agrees that we ought to be truthful, it is better to appear to be truthful in other people’s eyes, i.e., lie when you can get away with it, than to be caught and punished for not being truthful. There are two important points here: 1) the line between appearance and reality is, for Protagoras, a matter of interpretation, and 2) morality is relative to the individual and is not based on an objective standard.
acquired. If you will think, Socrates, of the nature of punishment, you will see that in the opinion of mankind virtue may be acquired; no one punishes the wicked under the notion, or for the reason, that he has done wrong, only the unreasonable fury of a beast acts in that manner. But he who desires to inflict rational punishment does not retaliate for a past wrong which cannot be undone; he has regard to the future, and desires that the man who is punished, and he who sees him punished, may be deterred from doing wrong again. He punishes for the sake of prevention, thereby clearly implying that virtue is capable of being taught. This is the notion of all who retaliate upon others either privately or publicly. And the Athenians, too, your own citizens, like other men, punish and take vengeance on all whom they regard as evil doers; and hence, we may infer them to be of the number of those who think that virtue may be acquired and taught. Thus far, Socrates, I have shown you clearly enough, if I am not mistaken, that your countrymen are right in admitting the tinker and the cobbler to advise about politics, and also that they deem virtue to be capable of being taught and acquired.

There yet remains one difficulty which you raised about the sons of good men: why do good men not teach their sons the knowledge which is gained from teachers, and make them wise in that, but do nothing towards improving them in the virtues which distinguish themselves? And here, Socrates, I will leave the myth and resume the argument.

Please consider: is there or is there not some one quality of which all citizens must partake, if there is to be a city at all? In the answer to this question is contained the only solution of your difficulty; there is no other. For if there is any such quality, and this quality or unity is not the art of the carpenter, or the smith, or the potter, but justice and temperance and piety and, in a word, human virtue—if this is the quality of which all men must be partakers, and which is the very condition of their learning or doing anything else, and if he who is lacking in this, whether he be a child only or a grown-up man or woman, must be taught and punished, until by punishment he becomes better, and he who rebels against instruction and punishment is either exiled or condemned to death under the idea that he is incurable—if what I am saying is true, good men have their sons taught other things and not this, consider how they think virtue can be taught and cultivated both in private and public. And, notwithstanding, they have their sons taught lesser matters, ignorance of which does not involve the punishment of death: but greater things, of which the ignorance may cause death and exile to those who have no training or knowledge of them—yes, and confiscation as well as death, and, in a word, may be the ruin of families—those things, I say, they are supposed not to teach them—not to take the utmost care that they should learn. How improbable is this, Socrates!

Education and admonition commence in the first years of childhood, and last to the very end of life. Mother and nurse and father and tutor are vying with one another about the improvement of the child as soon as ever he is able to understand what is being said to him: he cannot say or do anything without their setting forth to him that this is just and that is unjust; this is honorable, that is dishonorable; this is holy, that is unholy; do this and abstain from that. And if he obeys, well and good; if not, he is straightened by threats and blows, like a piece of bent or warped wood.
At a later stage they send him to teachers, and enjoin them to see to his manners even more than to his reading and music; and the teachers do as they are desired. And when the boy has learned his letters and is beginning to understand what is written, as before he understood only what was spoken, they put into his hands the works of great poets, which he reads sitting on a bench at school; in these are contained many admonitions, and many tales, and praises, and [tributes] of ancient famous men, which he is required to learn by heart, in order that he may imitate or emulate them and desire to become like them.

Then, again, the teachers of the lyre take similar care that their young disciple is temperate and gets into no mischief; and when they have taught him the use of the lyre, they introduce him to the poems of other excellent poets, who are the lyric poets; and these they set to music, and make their harmonies and rhythms quite familiar to the children's souls, in order that they may learn to be more gentle, and harmonious, and rhythmical, and so more fitted for speech and action; for the life of man in every part has need of harmony and rhythm.

Then they send them to the master of gymnastic, in order that their bodies may better minister to the virtuous mind, and that they may not be compelled through bodily weakness to play the coward in war or on any other occasion. This is what is done by those who have the means, and those who have the means are the rich. Their children begin to go to school soonest and leave off latest. When they have done with masters, the [city] compels them to learn the laws, and live after the pattern which they furnish, and not after their own fancies; and just as in learning to write, the writing-master first draws lines with a style for the use of the young beginner, and gives him the tablet and makes him follow the lines, so the city draws the laws, which were the invention of good lawgivers living in the olden time; these are given to the young man, in order to guide him in his conduct whether he is commanding or obeying; and he who transgresses them is to be corrected, or, in other words, called to account, which is a term used not only in your country, but also in many others, seeing that justice calls men to account. Now when there is all this care about virtue private and public, why, Socrates, do you still wonder and doubt whether virtue can be taught? Cease to wonder, for the opposite would be far more surprising!

But why then do the sons of good fathers often turn out ill? There is nothing very perplexing in this; for, as I have been saying, the existence of a state implies that virtue is not any man's private possession. If so—and nothing can be truer—then I will further ask you to imagine, as an illustration, some other pursuit or branch of knowledge which may be assumed equally to be the condition of the existence of a state. Suppose that there could be no state unless we were all flute-players, as far as each had the capacity, and everybody was freely teaching everybody the art, both in private and public, and reproving the bad player as freely and openly as every man now teaches justice and the laws, not concealing them as he would conceal the other arts, but imparting them— for all of us have a mutual interest in the justice and virtue of one another, and this is the reason why every one is so ready to teach justice and the laws—suppose, I say, that there were the same readiness and liberality among us in teaching one another flute-playing. Do you imagine, Socrates, that the sons of good flute players would be more likely to be good than the sons of bad ones? I think not. Would not their sons grow up to be distinguished or undistinguished according to their own natural capacities as flute-players, and the son of a good player would often turn out to be a bad one,
and the son of a bad player to be a good one, all flute-players would be good enough in comparison of those who were ignorant and unacquainted with the art of flute-playing? In like manner I would have you consider that he who appears to you to be the worst of those who have been brought up in laws and humanities, would appear to be a just man and a master of justice if he were to be compared with men who had no education, or courts of justice, or laws, or any restraints upon them which compelled them to practice virtue—with the savages, for example, whom the poet Pherekrates exhibited on the stage at the last year's Lenaean festival. If you were living among men such as the man-haters in his Chorus, you would be only too glad to meet with Eurybates and Phrynondas, and you would sorrowfully long to revisit the rascality of this part of the world. You, Socrates, are discontented, and why? Because all men are teachers of virtue, each one according to his ability; and you say, Where are the teachers? You might as well ask, “Who teaches Greek?” Of that too there will not be any teachers found. Or you might ask, “Who is to teach the sons of our artisans this same art which they have learned of their fathers?”

He and his fellow-workmen have taught them to the best of their ability—but who will carry them further in their arts? And you would certainly have a difficulty, Socrates, in finding a teacher of them; but there would be no difficulty in finding a teacher of those who are wholly ignorant. And this is true of virtue or of anything else; if a man is better able than we are to promote virtue ever so little, we must be content with the result.

A teacher of this sort I believe myself to be, and above all other men to have the knowledge which makes a man noble and good; and I give my pupils their money's worth, and even more, as they themselves confess. Therefore, I have introduced the following mode of payment: When a man has been my pupil, if he likes he pays my price, but there is no compulsion. If he does not like, he has only to go into a temple and take an oath of the value of the instructions, and he pays no more than he declares to be their value.

Such is my myth, Socrates, and such is the argument by which I endeavor to show that virtue may be taught, and that this is the opinion of the Athenians...

Protagoras ended, and in my ear

So charming left his voice, that I the while
   Thought him still speaking; still stood fixed to hear.

At length, when the truth dawned upon me, that he had really finished, not without difficulty I began to collect myself, and looking at Hippokrates, I said to him: O son of Apollodoros, how deeply grateful I am to you for having brought me hither; I would not have missed the speech of Protagoras for a great deal. For I used to imagine that no human care could make men good; but I know better now.

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10 From Homer’s Iliad, the herald of the Hellenic forces. Symbolically, the herald of war.
11 A well known bad character. In contemporary culture, one might use Mr. Burns from “The Simpsons,” or Cartman from “Southpark.”
Yet, I have still one very small difficulty which I am sure that Protagoras will easily explain, as he has already explained so much.

If a man were to go and consult Perikles or any of our great speakers about these matters, he might perhaps hear as fine a discourse; but then when one has a question to ask of any of them, like books, they can neither answer nor ask; and if any one challenges the least particular of their speech, they go ringing on in a long harangue, like brazen pots, which when they are struck continue to sound unless some one puts his hand upon them; whereas our friend Protagoras cannot only make a good speech, as he has already shown, but when he is asked a question he can answer briefly; and when he asks he will wait and hear the answer; and this is a very rare gift.

Now I, Protagoras, want to ask of you a little question, which if you will only answer, I shall be quite satisfied. You were saying that virtue can be taught—that I will take upon your authority, and there is no one to whom I am more ready to trust. But I marvel at one thing about which I should like to have my mind set at rest. You were speaking of Zeus sending justice and [piety] to men; and several times while you were speaking, justice, and temperance, and [piety], and all these qualities, were described by you as if together they made up virtue. Now I want you to tell me truly whether virtue is one [thing], of which justice and temperance and holiness are parts, or whether all these are only the names of one and the same thing: that is the doubt which still lingers in my mind.

There is no difficulty, Socrates, in answering that the qualities of which you are speaking are the parts of virtue, which is one [thing].

And are they parts, I said, in the same sense in which mouth, nose, and eyes, and ears, are the parts of a face; or are they like the parts of gold, which differ from the whole and from one another only in being larger or smaller?

I should say that they differed, Socrates, in the first way; they are related to one another as the parts of a face are related to the whole face.

And do men have some one part and some another part of virtue? Of if a man has one part, must he also have all the others?

By no means, he said; for many a man is brave and not just, or just and not wise.

You would not deny, then, that courage and wisdom are also parts of virtue?

Most undoubtedly they are, he answered; and wisdom is the noblest of the parts.

And they are all different from one another? I said.

Yes.
And has each of them a distinct function like the parts of the face—the eye, for example, is not like the ear, and has not the same functions; and the other parts are none of them like one another, either in their functions, or in any other way? I want to know whether the comparison holds concerning the parts of virtue. Do they also differ from one another in themselves and in their functions? For that is clearly what the simile would imply.

Yes, Socrates, you are right in supposing that they differ.

Then, I said, no other part of virtue is like [wisdom], or like justice, or like courage, or like temperance, or like holiness?

No, he answered.

Well then, I said, suppose that you and I enquire into their natures. And first, you would agree with me that justice is of the nature of a thing, would you not? That is my opinion: would it not be yours also?

Mine also, he said.

And suppose that some one were to ask us, saying, "O Protagoras, and you, Socrates, what about this thing which you were calling justice, is it just or unjust?"—and I were to answer, just: would you vote with me or against me?

With you, he said.

Thereupon I should answer to him who asked me, that justice is of the nature of the just: would not you?

Yes, he said.

And suppose that he went on to say: "Well now, is there also such a thing as holiness? "we should answer, "Yes," if I am not mistaken?

Yes, he said.

Which you would also acknowledge to be a thing—should we not say so?

He assented.

"And is this a sort of thing which is of the nature of the holy, or of the nature of the unholy?" I should be angry at his putting such a question, and should say, "Peace, man; nothing can be holy if holiness is not holy." What would you say? Would you not answer in the same way?

Certainly, he said.
And then after this, suppose that he came and asked us, "What were you saying just now? Perhaps I may not have heard you rightly, but you seemed to me to be saying that the parts of virtue were not the same as one another." \(^{331}\) I should reply, "You certainly heard that said, but not, as you imagine, by me; for I only asked the question; Protagoras gave the answer." And suppose that he turned to you and said, "Is this true, Protagoras? and do you maintain that one part of virtue is unlike another, and is this your position?"—how would you answer him?

I could not help acknowledging the truth of what he said, Socrates.

Well then, Protagoras, we will assume this; and now supposing that he proceeded to say further, "Then holiness is not of the nature of justice, nor justice of the nature of holiness, but of the nature of unholliness; and holiness is of the nature of the not just, and therefore of the unjust, and the unjust is the unholy": how shall we answer him? I should certainly answer him on my own behalf that justice is holy, and that holiness is just; and I would say in like manner on your behalf also, if you would allow me, that justice is either the same with holiness, or very nearly the same; and above all I would assert that justice is like holiness and holiness is like justice; and I wish that you would tell me whether I may be permitted to give this answer on your behalf, and whether you would agree with me.

He replied, I cannot simply agree, Socrates, to the proposition that justice is holy and that holiness is just, for there appears to me to be a difference between them. But what matter, if you please I please; and let us assume, if you will I, that justice is holy, and that holiness is just.

Pardon me, I replied! I do not want this "if you wish" or "if you will" sort of conclusion to be proven, but I want you and me to be proven: I mean to say that the conclusion will be best proven if there be no ‘if’.

Well, he said, I admit that justice bears a resemblance to holiness, for there is always some point of view in which everything is like every other thing; white is in a certain way like black, and hard is like soft, and the most extreme opposites have some qualities in common; even the parts of the face which, as we were saying before, are distinct and have different functions, are still in a certain point of view similar, and one of them is like another of them. And you may prove that they are like one another on the same principle that all things are like one another; and yet things which are like in some particular ought not to be called alike, nor things which are unlike in some particular, however slight, unlike.

And do you think, I said in a tone of surprise, that justice and holiness have but a small degree of likeness?

\(^{332}\)Certainly not; any more than I agree with what I understand to be your view.

Well, I said, as you appear to have a difficulty about this, let us take another of the examples which you mentioned instead. Do you admit the existence of folly?
I do.

And is not wisdom the very opposite of folly?

That is true, he said.

And when men act rightly and advantageously they seem to you to be temperate?

Yes, he said.

And temperance makes them temperate?

Certainly.

And [those] who do not act rightly act foolishly, and in acting thus [they] are not temperate?

I agree, he said.

Then to act foolishly is the opposite of acting temperately?

He assented.

And foolish actions are done by folly, and temperate actions by temperance?

He agreed.

And that [which] is done strongly is done by strength, and that which is weakly done, by weakness?

He assented.

And that which is done with swiftness is done swiftly, and that which is done with slowness, slowly?

He assented again.

And that which is done in the same manner, is done by the same; and that which is done in an opposite manner by the opposite?

He agreed.

Once more, I said, is there anything beautiful?

Yes.

To which the only opposite is the ugly?
There is no other.

And is there anything good?

There is.

To which the only opposite is the evil?

There is no other.

And [in sounds] there is the [high pitched]?

True.

To which the only opposite is the [low pitched]?

There is no other, he said, but that.

Then every opposite has one opposite only and no more?

He assented.

Then now, I said, let us recapitulate our admissions. First of all we admitted that everything has one opposite and not more than one?

We did so.

And we admitted also that what was done in opposite ways was done by opposites?

Yes.

And that which was done foolishly, as we further admitted, was done in the opposite way to that which was done temperately?

Yes.

And that which was done temperately was done by temperance, and that which was done foolishly by folly?

He agreed.

And that which is done in opposite ways is done by opposites?

Yes.
And one thing is done by temperance, and quite another thing by folly?

Yes.

And in opposite ways?

Certainly.

And therefore by [rule of] opposites—folly is the opposite of temperance?

Clearly.

And do you remember that folly has already been acknowledged by us to be the opposite of wisdom?

He assented.

And we said that everything has only one opposite?

Yes.

Then, Protagoras, which of the two assertions shall we renounce? One says that everything has but one opposite; the other that wisdom is distinct from temperance, and that both of them are parts of virtue; and that they are not only distinct, but dissimilar, both in themselves and in their functions, like the parts of a face. Which of these two assertions shall we renounce? For both of them together are certainly not in harmony; they do not accord or agree: for how can they be said to agree if everything is assumed to have only one opposite and not more than one, and yet folly, which is one, has clearly the two opposites wisdom and temperance? Is not that true, Protagoras? What else would you say?

He assented, but with great reluctance.

Then temperance and wisdom are the same, as before justice and holiness appeared to us to be nearly the same. And now, Protagoras, I said, we must finish the enquiry, and not faint. Do you think that an unjust man can be temperate in his injustice?

I should be ashamed, Socrates, he said, to acknowledge this.

And shall I argue with them or with you? I replied.

I would rather, he said, that you should argue with the many first, if you will.

Whichever you please, if you will only answer me and say whether you are of their opinion or not. My object is to test the validity of the argument; and yet the result may be that I who ask and you who answer may both be put on our trial.
Protagoras at first made a show of refusing, as he said that the argument was not encouraging; at length, he consented to answer.

Now then, I said, begin at the beginning and answer me. You think that some men are temperate, and yet unjust?

Yes, he said; let that be admitted.

And temperance is good sense?

Yes.

And good sense is good counsel in doing injustice?

Granted.

If they succeed, I said, or if they do not succeed?

If they succeed.

And you would admit the existence of good [things]?

Yes.

And is the good that which is [beneficial] for man?

Yes, indeed, he said: and there are some things which may be [harmful], and yet I call them good.

I thought that Protagoras was getting ruffled and excited; he seemed to be setting himself in an attitude of war. Seeing this, I minded my business, and gently said:

When you say, Protagoras, that things inexpedient are good, do you mean [harmful] for humans only, or [harmful] altogether? Do you call the latter good?

Certainly not the last, he replied! For I know of many things—meats, drinks, medicines, and ten thousand other things, which are [harmful] for man, and some which are [beneficial]; and some which are neither [beneficial] nor [harmful] for humans, but only for horses; and some for oxen only, and some for dogs; and some for no animals, but only for trees; and some for the roots of trees and not for their branches, as for example, manure, which is a good thing when laid about the roots of a tree, but utterly destructive if thrown upon the shoots and young branches; or I may instance olive oil, which is mischievous to all plants, and generally most injurious to the hair of every animal with the exception of man, but beneficial to human hair and to the human body generally; and even in this application (so various and changeable is the nature of the benefit), that which is the greatest good to the outward parts of a man, is a very great evil to his inward parts: and for this reason physicians always forbid
their patients the use of oil in their food, except in very small quantities, just enough to extinguish the disagreeable sensation of smell in meats and sauces.

When he had given this answer, the company cheered him!

And I said: Protagoras, I have a wretched memory, and when any one makes a long speech to me I never remember what he is talking about. As then, if I had been deaf, and you were going to converse with me, you would have had to raise your voice; so now, having such a bad memory, I will ask you to cut your answers shorter, if you would take me with you.

What do you mean, he said: how am I to shorten my answers? Shall I make them too short?

Certainly not, I said.

But short enough?

Yes, I said.

Shall I answer what appears to me to be short enough, or what appears to you to be short enough?

I have heard, I said, that you can speak and teach others to speak about the same things at such length that words never seemed to fail, or with such brevity that no one could use fewer of them. Please therefore, if you talk with me, to adopt the latter or more compendious method.

Socrates, he replied, many a battle of words have I fought, and if I had followed the method of disputation which my adversaries desired, as you want me to do, I should have been no better than another, and the name of Protagoras would have been nowhere.

I saw that he was not satisfied with his previous answers, and that he would not play the part of answerer any more if he could help; and I considered that there was no call upon me to continue the conversation; so I said: Protagoras, I do not wish to force the conversation upon you if you had rather not, but when you are willing to argue with me in such a way that I can follow you, then I will argue with you. Now you, as is said of you by others and as you say of yourself, are able to have discussions in shorter forms of speech as well as in longer, for you are a master of wisdom; but I cannot manage these long speeches: I only wish that I could. You, on the other hand, who are capable of either, ought to speak shorter as I beg you, and then we might converse. But I see that you are disinclined, and as I have an engagement which will prevent my staying to hear you at greater length (for I have to be in another place), I will depart; although I should have liked to have heard you.

Thus I spoke, and was rising from my seat, when Kallias seized me by the right hand, and in his left hand caught hold of this old cloak of mine. He said: we cannot let you go, Socrates, for if you leave us there will be an end of our discussions: I must therefore beg you
to remain, as there is nothing in the world that I should like better than to hear you and Protagoras discourse. Do not deny the company this pleasure....

349a And I should like once more to have my memory refreshed by you about the questions which I was asking you at first, and also to have your help in considering them. If I am not mistaken the question was this: Are wisdom and temperance and courage and justice and holiness five names of the same thing? Or has each of the names a separate underlying essence and corresponding thing having a peculiar function, no one of them being like any other of them?

And you replied that the five [terms] were not the names of the same thing, but that each of them had a separate [end], and that all these [ends] were parts of virtue, not in the same way that the parts of gold are like each other and the whole of which they are parts, but [like] the parts of the face are unlike the whole of which they are parts and one another, and have each of them a distinct function. I should like to know whether this is still your opinion; or if not, I will ask you to define your meaning, and I shall not take you to task if you now make a different statement. For I dare say that you may have said what you did only in order to make trial of me.

I answer, Socrates, he said, that all these qualities are parts of virtue, and that four out of the five are to some extent similar, and that the fifth of them, which is courage, is very different from the other four, as I prove in this way: You may observe that many men are utterly unrighteous, unholy, intemperate, ignorant, who are nevertheless remarkable for their courage.

Stop! I said; I should like to think about that. When you speak of brave men, do you mean the confident, or another sort of nature?

Yes, he said. I mean the [fearless], ready to go at that which others are afraid to approach.

In the next place, you would affirm virtue to be a good thing, of which you yourself [are] a teacher.

Yes, he said; I should say the best of all things, if I am in my right mind.

And is it partly good and partly bad, or wholly good?

Wholly good, and in the highest degree!

350 Tell me then; who are they who have confidence when diving into a well?

I should say, divers.

And the reason [for] this is that they have knowledge [of diving into wells]?
Yes, that is the reason.

And who have confidence when fighting on horseback—the skilled [riders] or the unskilled?

The skilled.

And who when fighting with light shields—the peltasts or the nonpeltasts?

The peltasts. And that is true of all other things, he said, if that is your point: those who have knowledge are more confident than those who have no knowledge, and they are more confident after they have learned than before.

And have you not seen persons utterly ignorant, I said, of these things, and yet confident about them?

Yes, he said, I have seen such persons far too confident.

And are not these confident persons also courageous?

In that case, he replied, courage would be a [bad] thing, for the men of whom we are speaking are surely [crazy].

Then who are the courageous? Are they not the confident?

Yes, he said, to that statement I adhere.

And those, I said, who are thus confident without knowledge are really not courageous, but [crazy]; and in that case the wisest are also the most confident, and being the most confident are also the bravest, and upon that view again wisdom will be courage.

[No], Socrates, he replied! You are mistaken in your [memory] of what [I said]. When you asked me, I certainly did say that the courageous are confident; but I was never asked whether the confident are courageous. If you had asked me, I should have answered, "Not all of them!" What I did [say has] not proved to be false, although you proceeded to show that those who have knowledge are more courageous than they were before they had knowledge, and more courageous than others who have no knowledge. [We] were then led on to think that courage is the same as wisdom.

But in this way of arguing you might come to imagine that strength is wisdom. You might begin by asking whether the strong are [capable], and I should say, "Yes". And then you might ask whether those who know how to wrestle are not more able to wrestle than those who do not know how to wrestle, and more able after than before they had learned. And [again I would agree]. And when I had admitted this, you might use my admissions in such a way as to prove that upon my view wisdom is strength; whereas in that case I should not have admitted, any more than in the other [case], that the [capable] are strong, although I have admitted that the strong are [capable].
strength; the former is given by knowledge as well as by madness or rage, but strength comes from nature and a healthy state of the body. [Similarly] I say of confidence and courage, that they are not the same; and I argue that the courageous are confident, but not all who are confident are courageous. For confidence may be given to men by art, and also, like ability, by madness and rage. But courage comes to them from nature and the healthy state of the soul.

I said, You would admit, Protagoras, that some men live well and others ill?

He assented.

And do you think that a [person] lives well who lives in pain and grief?

He does not.

But if he lives pleasantly to the end of his life, will he not in that case have lived well?

He will.

Then to live pleasantly is a good, and to live unpleasantly an evil?

Yes, he said, if the pleasure [is] good and honorable.

And do you, Protagoras, like the rest of the world, call some pleasant things evil and some painful things good? For I am rather disposed to say that things are good in as far as they are pleasant, if they have no consequences of another sort, and in as far as they are painful they are bad.

I do not know, Socrates, he said, whether I can venture to assert in that unqualified manner that the pleasant is the good and the painful the evil. Having regard not only to my present answer, but also to the whole of my life, I shall be safer, if I am not mistaken, in saying that there are some pleasant things which are not good, and that there are some painful things which are good, and some which are not good, and that there are some which are neither good nor evil.

And you would call pleasant, I said, the things which participate in pleasure or create pleasure?

Certainly, he said.

Then my meaning is, that in as far as they are pleasant they are good; and my question would imply that pleasure is a good in-itself.

According to your favorite mode of speech, Socrates, "Let us reflect about this," he said; and if the reflection is to the point, and the result proves that pleasure and good are really the same, then we will agree; but if not, then we will argue.
And would you wish to begin the enquiry?

I said; or shall I begin?

You ought to take the lead, he said; for you are the author of the discussion.

May I employ an illustration? I asked.

Suppose someone who is enquiring into the health or some other bodily quality of another—he looks at his face and at the tips of his fingers, and then he says, “Uncover your chest and back to me that I may have a better view”—that is the sort of thing which I desire in this speculation.

Having seen what your opinion is about good and pleasure, I am minded to say to you: Uncover your mind to me, Protagoras, and reveal your opinion about knowledge, that I may know whether you agree with the rest of the world.

Now the rest of the world are of opinion that knowledge is a principle not of strength, or of rule, or of command. Their notion is that a man may have knowledge, and yet that the knowledge which is in him may be overmastered by anger, or pleasure, or pain, or love, or perhaps by fear—just as if knowledge were a slave, and might be dragged about anyhow. Now, is that your view? Or do you think that knowledge is a noble and commanding thing, which cannot be overcome, and will not allow a man, if he only knows the difference of good and evil, to do anything which is contrary to knowledge, but that wisdom will have strength to help him?

I agree with you, Socrates, said Protagoras; and not only so, but I, above all other men, am bound to say that wisdom and knowledge are the highest human attributes.

Good, I said; and true!

But are you aware that the majority of the world [do not agree with us]? [[People] commonly [think it is possible] to know the things which are best [for them], and [at the same time] not do them when they [could]]?

And most [people] whom I have asked [to explain] this have said, that when men act contrary to knowledge they are overcome by pain, or pleasure, or some of those affections which I was just now mentioning.

Yes, Socrates, he replied. That is not the only point about which mankind are in error.

Suppose, then, that you and I endeavor to instruct and inform them what is the nature of this affection which they call "being overcome by pleasure," and which they affirm to be the reason why they do not always do what is best. When we say to them: Friends, you are mistaken, and are saying [something that is false].
They would probably reply, “Socrates and Protagoras, if this affection of the soul is not to be called *being overcome by pleasure*, pray, what is it, and by what name would you [call] it?”

But why, Socrates, should we trouble ourselves about the opinion of the many, who just say anything that happens to occur to them?

I believe, I said, that they may be of use in helping us to discover how courage is related to the other parts of virtue. If you are disposed to abide by our agreement, that I should show the way in which, as I think, our recent difficulty is most likely to be cleared up, do you follow; but if not, never mind.

You are quite right, he said; and I would have you proceed as you have begun.

Well then, I said, let me suppose that they repeat their question,

“What account do you give of that which, in our way of speaking, is termed *being overcome by pleasure*?” I should answer thus: Listen, and Protagoras and I will endeavor to show you. When men are ‘overcome’ by eating and drinking and other sensual desires which are pleasant, and they, knowing them to be evil, nevertheless indulge in them, would you not say that they were ‘overcome’ by pleasure?

They will not deny this.

And suppose that you and I were to go on and ask them again: "In what way do you say that they are evil—in that they are pleasant and give pleasure at the moment, or because they cause disease and poverty and other like evils in the future? Would they still be evil, if they had no attendant evil consequences, simply because they give the consciousness of pleasure of whatever nature?"

Would they not answer that they are not evil on account of the pleasure which is immediately given by them, but on account of the consequences—diseases and the like?

I believe, said Protagoras, that the world in general would answer as you do.

“And in causing diseases do they not cause pain? And in causing poverty do they not cause pain?” They would agree to that also, if I am not mistaken?

Protagoras assented.

Then I should say to them, in my name and yours: “Do you think them evil for any other reason, except because they end in pain and rob us of other pleasures?”

There again, they would agree?

We both of us thought that they would.
And then I should take the question from the opposite point of view, and say: "Friends, when you speak of goods being painful, do you not mean remedial goods, such as gymnastic exercises, and military service, and the physician's use of burning, cutting, drugging, and starving? Are these the things which are good but painful?"

They would assent to me?

He agreed.

"And do you call them good because they occasion the greatest immediate suffering and pain; or because, afterwards, they bring health and improvement of the bodily condition and the salvation of states and power over others and wealth?"

They would agree to the latter alternative, if I am not mistaken?

He assented.

"Are these things good for any other reason except that they end in pleasure, and get rid of and avert pain? Are you looking to any other standard but pleasure and pain when you call them good?"

They would acknowledge that they were not?

I think so, said Protagoras.

"And do you not pursue after pleasure as a good, and avoid pain as an evil?"

He assented.

"Then you think that pain is an evil and pleasure is a good: and even pleasure you deem an evil, when it robs you of greater pleasures than it gives, or causes pains greater than the pleasure. If, however, you call pleasure an evil in relation to some other end or standard, you will be able to show us that standard. But you have none to show."

I do not think that they have, said Protagoras.

"And have you not a similar way of speaking about pain? You call pain a good when it takes away greater pains than those which it has, or gives pleasures greater than the pains: then if you have some standard other than pleasure and pain to which you refer when you call actual pain a good, you can show what that is. But you cannot."

True, said Protagoras.

Suppose again, I said, that the world says to me: "Why do you spend many words and speak in many ways on this subject?"
“Excuse me, friends,” I should reply; “but in the first place there is a difficulty in explaining the meaning of the [phrase] overcome by pleasure; and the whole argument turns upon this. And even now, if you see any possible way in which evil can be explained as other than pain, or good as other than pleasure, you may still retract.”

“Are you satisfied, then, at having a life of pleasure which is without pain? If you are, and if you are unable to show any good or evil which does not end in pleasure and pain, hear the consequence: If what you say is true, then the argument is absurd which affirms that a man often does evil knowingly, when he might abstain, because he is seduced and overpowered by pleasure. [Similarly], when you say that a man knowingly refuses to do what is good because he is overcome at the moment by pleasure. And that this is ridiculous will be evident if only we give up the use of various names, such as pleasant and painful, and good and evil. As there are two things, let us call them by two names: first, good and evil, and then pleasant and painful.

Assuming this, let us go on to say that a man does evil knowing that he does evil. But some one will ask, “Why?” Because he is ‘overcome’, is the first answer. “And by what is he overcome?” the enquirer will proceed to ask. And we shall not be able to reply "By pleasure," for the name of pleasure has been exchanged for that of good. In our answer, then, we shall only say that he is overcome.

"By what?" he will reiterate.

“By the good,” we shall have to reply; indeed we shall. No, but our questioner will rejoin with a laugh, if he [is] one of the swaggering sort.

"That is too ridiculous, that a man should do what he knows to be evil when he ought not, because he is overcome by good. Is that,” he will ask, “because the good was worthy or not worthy of conquering the evil?"

And in answer to that we shall clearly reply, “Because it was not worthy; for if it had been worthy, then he who, as we say, was overcome by pleasure, would not have been wrong.

"But how," he will reply, "can the good be unworthy of the evil, or the evil of the good? Is not the real explanation that they are out of proportion to one another, either as greater and smaller, or more and fewer?"

This we cannot deny.

“And when you speak of being overcome—what do you mean," he will say, "but that you choose the greater evil in exchange for the lesser good?"

Admitted.
And now substitute the [terms] ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ for ‘good’ and ‘evil’, and say, not as before, that a man does what is evil *knowingly*, but that he does what is painful knowingly, and because he is ‘overcome’ by pleasure, which is unworthy to overcome. What measure is there of the relations of pleasure to pain other than excess and defect, which means that they become greater and smaller, and more and fewer, and differ in degree? For if any one says: “Yes, Socrates, but immediate pleasure differs widely from future pleasure and pain—To that I should reply: “And do they differ in anything but in pleasure and pain?”

There can be no other measure of them.

“And do you, like a skillful weigher, put into the balance the pleasures and the pains, and their nearness and distance, and weigh them, and then say which outweighs the other. If you weigh pleasures against pleasures, you of course take the more and greater; or if you weigh pains against pains, you take the fewer and the less; or if pleasures against pains, then you choose that course of action in which the painful is exceeded by the pleasant, whether the distant by the near or the near by the distant; and you avoid that course of action in which the pleasant is exceeded by the painful. Would you not admit, my friends, that this is true?”

I am confident that they cannot deny this.

He agreed with me.

“Well then,” I shall say, “if you agree so far, be so good as to answer me a question: Do not the same magnitudes appear larger to your sight when near, and smaller when at a distance? They will acknowledge that. And the same holds of thickness and number; also sounds, which are in themselves equal, are greater when near, and lesser when at a distance.”

They will grant that also.

“Now suppose happiness to consist in doing or choosing the greater, and in not doing or in avoiding the less, what would be the saving principle of human life? Would not the art of *measuring* be the saving principle; or would the power of appearance? Is not the latter that deceiving art which makes us wander up and down and take the things at one time of which we repent at another, both in our actions and in our choice of things great and small? But the art of measurement would do away with the effect of appearances, and, showing the truth, would fain teach the soul at last to find rest in the truth, and would thus save our life.”

Would not mankind generally acknowledge that the art which accomplishes this result is the art of measurement?

Yes, he said, the art of measurement.

Suppose, again, the salvation of human life to depend on the choice of odd and even, and on the knowledge of when a man ought to choose the greater or less, either in reference to themselves or to each other, and whether near or at a distance; what would be the saving principle of our lives? Would not knowledge—a *knowledge of measuring*, when the question
is one of excess and defect, and a knowledge of number, when the question is of odd and even? The world will assent, will they not?

Protagoras himself thought that they would.

Well then, my friends, I say to them; seeing that the salvation of human life has been found to consist in the right choice of pleasures and pains—in the choice of the more and the fewer, and the greater and the less, and the nearer and remoter, must not this measuring be a consideration of their excess and defect and equality in relation to each other?

This is undeniably true.

And this, as possessing measure, must undeniably also be [a skill] and [a kind of knowledge]?

They will agree, he said.

“The nature of that [skill] or [knowledge] will be a matter of future consideration; but the existence of such a science furnishes a demonstrative answer to the question which you asked of me and Protagoras. At the time when you asked the question, if you remember, both of us were agreeing that there was nothing mightier than knowledge, and that knowledge, in whatever existing, must have the advantage over pleasure and all other things; and then you said that pleasure often got the advantage even over a man who has knowledge; and we refused to allow this, and you rejoined: O Protagoras and Socrates, what is the meaning of being overcome by pleasure if not this?—tell us what you call such a state—if we had immediately and at the time answered, ‘Ignorance’, you would have laughed at us. But now, in laughing at us, you will be laughing at yourselves: for you also admitted that men err in their choice of pleasures and pains; that is, in their choice of good and evil, from defect of knowledge; and you admitted further, that they err, not only from defect of knowledge in general, but of that particular knowledge which is called measuring. And you are also aware that the erring act which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance.

This, therefore, is the meaning of being overcome by pleasure—ignorance, and that the greatest. And our friends Protagoras and Prodikos and Hippias declare that they are the physicians of ignorance; but you, who are under the mistaken impression that ignorance is not the cause, and that the art of which I am speaking cannot be taught, neither go yourselves, nor send your children, to the Sophists, who are the teachers of these things—you take care of your money and give them none; and the result is, that you are the worse off both in public and private life—Let us suppose this to be our answer to the world in general: And now I should like to ask you, Hippias, and you, Prodikos, as well as Protagoras (for the argument is to be yours as well as ours), whether you think that I am speaking the truth or not?

They all thought that what I said was entirely true.
Then you agree, I said, that the pleasant is the good, and the painful evil. And here I would beg my friend Prodikos not to introduce his distinction of names, whether he is disposed to say pleasurable, delightful, joyful. However, by whatever name he prefers to call them,

I will ask you, most excellent Prodikos, to answer in my sense of the words.

Prodikos laughed and assented, as did the others.

Then, my friends, what do you say to this? Are not all actions honorable and useful, of which the tendency is to make life painless and pleasant? The honorable work is also useful and good?

This was admitted.

Then, I said, if the pleasant is the good, nobody does anything under the idea or conviction that some other thing would be better and is also attainable, when he might do the better. And this inferiority of a man to himself is merely ignorance, as the superiority of a man to himself is wisdom.

They all assented.

And is not ignorance the having a false opinion and being deceived about important matters?

To this also they unanimously assented.

Then, I said, no man voluntarily pursues evil, or that which he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil to good is not in human nature; and when a man is compelled to choose one of two evils, no one will choose the greater when he may have the less.

All of us agreed to every word of this.

Well, I said, there is a certain thing called fear or terror; and here, Prodikos, I should particularly like to know whether you would agree with me in defining this fear or terror as expectation of evil.

Protagoras and Hippias agreed, but Prodikos said that this was fear and not terror.

Never mind, Prodikos, I said; but let me ask whether, if our former assertions are true, a man will pursue that which he fears when he is not compelled? Would not this be in flat contradiction to the admission which has been already made, that he thinks the things which he fears to be evil; and no one will pursue or voluntarily accept that which he thinks to be evil?

That also was universally admitted.
Then, I said, these, Hippias and Prodikos, are our premises; and I would beg Protagoras to explain to us how he can be right in what he said at first. I do not mean in what he said quite at first, for his first statement, as you may remember, was that whereas there were five parts of virtue none of them was like any other of them; each of them had a separate function. To this, however, I am not referring, but to the assertion which he afterwards made that of the five virtues four were nearly akin to each other, but that the fifth, which was courage, differed greatly from the others. And of this he gave me the following proof. He said: You will find, Socrates, that some of the most impious, and unrighteous, and intemperate, and ignorant of men are among the most courageous; which proves that courage is very different from the other parts of virtue. I was surprised at his saying this at the time, and I am still more surprised now that I have discussed the matter with you. So I asked him whether by the brave he meant the confident. Yes, he replied, and the impetuous or goers.

(You may remember, Protagoras, that this was your answer.)

He assented.

Well then, I said, tell us against what are the courageous ready to go—against the same dangers as the cowards?

No, he answered.

Then against something different?

Yes, he said.

Then do cowards go where there is safety, and the courageous where there is danger?

Yes, Socrates, so men say.

Very true, I said. But I want to know against what do you say that the courageous are ready to go—against dangers, believing them to be dangers, or not against dangers?

No, said he; the former case has been proved by you in the previous argument to be impossible.

That, again, I replied, is quite true. And if this has been rightly proven, then no one goes to meet what he thinks to be dangers, since the want of self-control, which makes men rush into dangers, has been shown to be ignorance.

He assented.

And yet the courageous man and the coward alike go to meet that about which they are confident; so that, in this point of view, the cowardly and the courageous go to meet the same things.
And yet, Socrates, said Protagoras, that to which the coward goes is the opposite of that to which the courageous goes; the one, for example, is ready to go to battle, and the other is not ready.

And is going to battle honorable or disgraceful? I said.

Honorable, he replied.

And if honorable, then already admitted by us to be good; for all honorable actions we have admitted to be good.

That is true; and to that opinion I shall always adhere.

True, I said. But which of the two are they who, as you say, are unwilling to go to war, which is a good and honorable thing?

The cowards, he replied.

And what is good and honorable, I said, is also pleasant?

It has certainly been acknowledged to be so, he replied.

And do the cowards knowingly refuse to go to the nobler, and pleasanter, and better?

The admission of that, he replied, would belie our former admissions.

But does not the courageous man also go to meet the better, and pleasanter, and nobler?

That must be admitted.

And the courageous man has no base fear or base confidence?

True, he replied.

And if not base, then honorable?

He admitted this.

And if honorable, then good?

Yes.

But the fear and confidence of the coward or foolhardy or madman, on the contrary, are base?

He assented.
And these base fears and confidences originate in ignorance and uninstructedness?

True, he said.

Then as to the motive from which the cowards act, do you call it cowardice or courage?

I should say cowardice, he replied.

And have they not been shown to be cowards through their ignorance of dangers?

Assuredly, he said.

And because of that ignorance they are cowards?

He assented.

And the reason why they are cowards is admitted by you to be cowardice?

He again assented.

Then the ignorance of what is and is not dangerous is cowardice?

He nodded assent.

But surely courage, I said, is opposed to cowardice?

Yes.

Then the wisdom which knows what are and are not dangers is opposed to the ignorance of them?

To that again he nodded assent.

And the ignorance of them is cowardice?

To that he very reluctantly nodded assent.

And the knowledge of that which is and is not dangerous is courage, and is opposed to the ignorance of these things?

At this point he would no longer nod assent, but was silent.

And why, I said, do you neither assent nor dissent, Protagoras?

Finish the argument by yourself, he said.
I only want to ask one more question, I said. I want to know whether you still think that there are men who are most ignorant and yet most courageous?

You seem to have a great ambition to make me answer, Socrates, and therefore I will gratify you, and say, that this appears to me to be impossible consistently with the argument.

My only object, I said, in continuing the discussion, has been the desire to ascertain the nature and relations of virtue; \(^\text{361}\) for if this were clear, I am very sure that the other controversy which has been carried on at great length by both of us—you affirming and I denying that virtue can be taught—would also become clear. The result of our discussion appears to me to be singular. For if the argument had a human voice, that voice would be heard laughing at us and saying:

"Protagoras and Socrates, you are strange beings; there are you, Socrates, who were saying that virtue cannot be taught, contradicting yourself now by your attempt to prove that all things are knowledge, including justice, and temperance, and courage—which tends to show that virtue can certainly be taught; for if virtue were other than knowledge, as Protagoras attempted to prove, then clearly virtue cannot be taught; but if virtue is entirely knowledge, as you are seeking to show, then I cannot but suppose that virtue is capable of being taught. Protagoras, on the other hand, who started by saying that it might be taught, is now eager to prove it to be anything rather than knowledge; and if this is true, it must be quite incapable of being taught."

Now I, Protagoras, perceiving this terrible confusion of our ideas, have a great desire that they should be cleared up. And I should like to carry on the discussion until we ascertain what virtue is, whether capable of being taught or not, lest haply Epimetheus should trip us up and deceive us in the argument, as he forgot us in the story; I prefer your Prometheus to your Epimetheus, for of him I make use, whenever I am busy about these questions, in Promethean care of my own life. And if you have no objection, as I said at first, I should like to have your help in the enquiry.

Protagoras replied: Socrates, I am not of a base nature, and I am the last man in the world to be envious. I cannot but applaud your energy and your conduct of an argument. As I have often said, I admire you above all men whom I know, and far above all men of your age; and I believe that you will become very eminent in philosophy. Let us come back to the subject at some future time; at present we had better turn to something else.

\(^{362}\) By all means, I said, if that is your wish; for I too ought long since to have kept the engagement of which I spoke before, and tarried because I could not refuse the request of the noble Kallias.

So the conversation ended, and we went our way.
What is a Sophist?
Sokrates and Hippokrates

309 FRIEND: Where do you come from, Socrates? And yet I need hardly ask the question, for I know that you have been in chase of the fair Alkibiades. I saw the day before yesterday; and he had got a beard like a man—and he is a man, as I may tell you in your ear. But I thought that he was still very charming.

SOCRATES: What of his beard? Are you not of Homer's opinion, who says:

Youth is most charming when the beard first appears?

And that is now the charm of Alkibiades.

FRIEND: Well, and how do matters proceed? Have you been visiting him, and was he gracious to you?

SOCRATES: Yes, I thought that he was very gracious; and especially today, for I have just come from him, and he has been helping me in an argument. But shall I tell you a strange thing? I paid no attention to him, and several times I quite forgot that he was present.

FRIEND: What is the meaning of this? Has anything happened between you and him? For surely you cannot have discovered a fairer love than he is; certainly not in this city of Athens.

SOCRATES: Yes, much fairer.

FRIEND: What do you mean—a citizen or a foreigner?

SOCRATES: A foreigner.

FRIEND: Of what [polis]?

SOCRATES: Of Abdera.

FRIEND: And is this stranger really in your opinion a fairer love than the son of Kleinias?

SOCRATES: And is not the wiser always the fairer, sweet friend?

FRIEND: But have you really met, Socrates, with some wise [person]?

SOCRATES: Say rather, with the wisest of all living men, if you are willing to accord that title to Protagoras.

FRIEND: What! Is Protagoras in Athens?

SOCRATES: Yes; he has been here two days.
FRIEND: And do you just come from an interview with him?

SOCRATES: Yes; and I have heard and said many things.

FRIEND: Then, if you have no engagement, suppose that you sit down tell me what passed, and my attendant here shall give up his place to you.

SOCRATES: To be sure; and I shall be grateful to you for listening.

FRIEND: Thank you, too, for telling us.

SOCRATES: That is thank you twice over. Listen then: Last night, or rather very early this morning, Hippokrates, the son of Apollodoros and the brother of Phason, gave a tremendous thump with his staff at my door; some one opened to him, and he came rushing in and bawled out: “Socrates, are you awake or asleep?”

I knew his voice, and said: Hippokrates, is that you? Do you bring any news?

Good news, he said; nothing but good.

Delightful, I said; but what is the news and why have you come hither at this unearthly hour?

He drew nearer to me and said: Protagoras is come.

Yes, I replied; he came two days ago: have you only just heard of his arrival?

Yes, by the gods, he said; but not until yesterday evening.

At the same time he felt for the bed, and sat down at my feet, and then he said: Yesterday quite late in the evening, on my return from Oenoe whither I had gone in pursuit of my runaway slave Satyrus, as I meant to have told you, if some other matter had not come in the way—on my return, when we had done supper and were about to retire to rest, my brother said to me: Protagoras [has] come [to Athens].

I was going to you at once, and then I thought that the night was far spent. But the moment sleep left me after my fatigue, I got up and came hither direct.

I, who knew the very courageous madness of the man, said: What is the matter? Has Protagoras robbed you of anything?

He replied, laughing: Yes, indeed he has, Socrates, of the wisdom which he keeps from me.

But, surely, I said, if you give him money, and make friends with him, he will make you as wise as he is himself.
Would to heaven, he replied, that this were the case! He might take all that I have, and all that my friends have, if he pleased. But that is why I have come to you now, in order that you may speak to him on my behalf; for I am young, and also I have never seen nor heard him; (when he visited Athens before I was but a child) and all men praise him, Socrates; he is reputed to be the most accomplished of speakers. There is no reason why we should not go to him at once, and then we shall find him at home. He lodges, as I hear, with Kallias the son of Hipponikos: let us start.

I replied: Not yet, my good friend; the hour is too early. But let us rise and take a turn in the court and wait about there until daybreak; when the day breaks, then we will go. For Protagoras is generally at home, and we shall be sure to find him; never fear.

Upon this we got up and walked about in the court, and I thought that I would make trial of the strength of his resolution. So I examined him and put questions to him. Tell me, Hippokrates, I said, as you are going to Protagoras, and will be paying your money to him, what is he to whom you are going and what will he make of you?

If, for example, you had thought of going to Hippokrates of Kos, the Asclepiad, and were about to give him your money, and some one had said to you: You are paying money to your namesake Hippokrates, O Hippokrates; tell me, what is he that you give him money? How would you have answered?

I should say, he replied, that I gave money to him as a physician.

And what will he make of you?

A physician, he said.

And if you were resolved to go to Polycleitus the Argive, or Pheidias the Athenian, and were intending to give them money, and some one had asked you: What are Polukleitos and Pheidias, and why do you give them this money? How would you have answered?

I should have answered, that they were sculptors.

And what will they make of you?

A sculptor, of course.

Well now, I said, you and I are going to Protagoras, and we are ready to pay him money on your behalf. If our own means are sufficient, and we can gain him with these, we shall be only too glad; but if not, then we are to spend the money of your friends as well.

Now suppose, that while we are thus enthusiastically pursuing our object some one were to say to us: Tell me, Socrates, and you Hippokrates, what is Protagoras, and why are you going to pay him money—how should we answer? I know that Pheidias is a sculptor, and
that Homer is a poet; but what appellation is given to Protagoras? How is [Protagoras] designated?

They call him a ‘Sophist’, Socrates, he replied.

Then we are going to pay our money to him in the character of a Sophist?

Certainly!

312But suppose a person were to ask this further question: And how about yourself? What will Protagoras make of you, if you go to see him?

He answered, with a blush upon his face (for the day was just beginning to dawn, so that I could see him): Unless this differs in some way from the former instances, I suppose that he will make a Sophist of me.

By the gods, I said, and are you not ashamed at having to appear before the Greeks in the character of a Sophist?

Indeed, Socrates, to confess the truth, I am.

But you should not assume, Hippokrates, that the instruction of Protagoras is of this nature: may you not learn of him in the same way that you learned the arts of the grammarian, musician, or trainer, not with the view of making any of them a profession, but only as a part of education, and because a private gentleman and freeman ought to know them?

Just so, he said; and that, in my opinion, is a far truer account of the teaching of Protagoras.

I said: I wonder whether you know what you are doing?

And what am I doing?

You are going to commit your soul to the care of a man whom you call a Sophist. And yet I hardly think that you know what a Sophist is; and if not, then you do not even know to whom you are committing your soul and whether the thing to which you commit yourself be good or evil.

I certainly think that I do know, he replied.

Then tell me, what do you imagine that he is?

I take him to be one who knows wise things, he replied, as his name implies.

And might you not, I said, affirm this of the painter and of the carpenter also: Do not they, too, know wise things? But suppose a person asked us: In what are the painters wise? We should answer: In what relates to the making of likenesses, and similarly of other things.
And if he were further to ask: What is the wisdom of the Sophist, and what is the manufacture over which he presides—how should we answer him?

How should we answer him, Socrates? What other answer could there be but that he presides over the art which makes men eloquent?

Yes, I replied, that is very likely true, but not enough; for in the answer a further question is involved: Of what does the Sophist make a man talk eloquently? The player on the lyre may be supposed to make a man talk eloquently about that which he makes him understand, that is about playing the lyre. Is not that true?

Yes.

Then about what does the Sophist make him eloquent? Must not he make him eloquent in that which he understands?

Yes, that may be assumed.

And what is that which the Sophist knows and makes his disciple know?

Indeed, he said, I cannot tell.

Then I proceeded to say: Well, but are you aware of the danger which you are incurring? If you were going to commit your body to some one, who might do good or harm to it, would you not carefully consider and ask the opinion of your friends and kindred, and deliberate many days as to whether you should give him the care of your body? But when the soul is in question, which you hold to be of far more value than the body, and upon the good or evil of which depends the well-being of your all—about this never consulted either with your father or with your brother or with any one of us who are your companions. But no sooner does this foreigner appear, than you instantly commit your soul to his keeping. In the evening, as you say, you hear of him, and in the morning you go to him, never deliberating or taking the opinion of any one as to whether you ought to entrust yourself to him or not—you have quite made up your mind that you will at all hazards be a pupil of Protagoras, and are prepared to expend all the property of yourself and of your friends in carrying out at any price this determination, although, as you admit, you do not know him, and have never spoken with him: and you call him a Sophist, but are manifestly ignorant of what a Sophist is; and yet you are going to commit yourself to his keeping.

When he heard me say this, he replied: No other inference, Socrates, can be drawn from your words.

I proceeded: Is not a Sophist, Hippokrates, one who deals wholesale or retail in the food of the soul? To me that appears to be his nature.

And what, Socrates, is the food of the soul?
Surely, I said, knowledge is the food of the soul; and we must take care, my friend, that the Sophist does not deceive us when he praises what he sells, like the dealers wholesale or retail who sell the food of the body; for they praise indiscriminately all their goods, without knowing what are really beneficial or hurtful: neither do their customers know, with the exception of any trainer or physician who may happen to buy of them. In like manner those who carry about the wares of knowledge, and make the round of the cities, and sell or retail them to any customer who is in want of them, praise them all alike; though I should not wonder, O my friend, if many of them were really ignorant of their effect upon the soul; and their customers equally ignorant, unless he who buys of them happens to be a physician of the soul. If, therefore, you have understanding of what is good and evil, you may safely buy knowledge of Protagoras or of any one; but if not, then, O my friend, pause, and do not hazard your dearest interests at a game of chance. For there is far greater peril in buying knowledge than in buying meat and drink: the one you purchase of the wholesale or retail dealer, and carry them away in other vessels, and before you receive them into the body as food, you may deposit them at home and call in any experienced friend who knows what is good to be eaten or drunken, and what not, and how much, and when; and then the danger of purchasing them is not so great. But you cannot buy the wares of knowledge and carry them away in another vessel; when you have paid for them you must receive them into the soul and go your way, either greatly harmed or greatly benefited; and therefore we should deliberate and take counsel with our elders; for we are still young—too young to determine such a matter. And now let us go, as we were intending, and hear Protagoras; and when we have heard what he has to say, we may take counsel of others; for not only is Protagoras at the house of Kallias, but there is Hippias of Elis, and, if I am not mistaken, Prodikos of Keios, and several other wise men.

To this we agreed, and proceeded on our way until we reached the vestibule of the house; and there we stopped in order to conclude a discussion which had arisen between us as we were going along; and we stood talking in the vestibule until we had finished and come to an understanding. And I think that the doorkeeper, who was a eunuch, and who was probably annoyed at the great inroad of the Sophists, must have heard us talking. At any rate, when we knocked at the door, and he opened and saw us, he grumbled: “They are Sophists—he is not at home,” and instantly gave the door a hearty bang with both his hands.

Again we knocked, and he answered without opening: “Did you not hear me say that he is not at home, fellows?”

But, my friend, I said, you need not be alarmed; for we are not Sophists, and we are not come to see Kallias, but we want to see Protagoras; and I must request you to announce us. At last, after a good deal of difficulty, the man was persuaded to open the door.