

# PROTAGORAS

*This is the dramatic masterpiece among Plato's 'Socratic' dialogues. It depicts Socrates debating the great sophist Protagoras, with Hippias and Prodicus, two other very famous sophists, in active attendance. An excited flock of students and admirers looks on. Plato gives us deep and sympathetic portraits of both his principal speakers—and neither comes off unscathed.*

*A sophist is an educator. Protagoras offers to teach young men 'sound deliberation' and the 'art of citizenship'—in other words, as Socrates puts it, human 'virtue', what makes someone an outstandingly good person. But can this really be taught? Is virtue—as it ought to be if it can be taught—an expertise, a rationally based way of understanding, deliberating about and deciding things for the best? Socrates doubts that virtue can be taught at all, and all the more that Protagoras can teach it. Protagoras is committed to holding that it can be—by him—and he expounds an extremely attractive myth about the original establishment of human societies to show how there is room for him to do it. But he is also deeply cautious in the practice of his educator's art—almost his first words in the dialogue are a long oration on the importance to a sophist of caution as he offers himself publicly as the teacher of a city's youth. Can he then be bold enough to answer Socrates' questions about human virtue in such a way as to articulate an account that will sustain his claims to teach it? In the protracted dialectical exchange that follows, Protagoras distinguishes several virtues, all parts of that human virtue that he teaches, and insists, against Socrates' urging, that not all of these (in particular, not courage) are to be thought of as knowledge or wisdom. That, after all, is the popular view of the matter—so, in his caution, Protagoras sticks with that, or tries to, to the bitter end, resisting as long as he can Socrates' elaborate efforts to show that courage, too, like the rest of virtue, is nothing but wisdom. But if Protagoras is right, how can virtue in general, and courage in particular, be the sort of rationally based expertise that it has to be if it can be taught? It appears that Protagoras would have done better to follow his own convictions about virtue—that all of it is teachable—riding roughshod over popular opinion where necessary to show how all the parts of human virtue are wisdom or knowledge. In fact, Socrates shows himself to be much more an ally of Protagoras on the question of the nature of human virtue than at first appears. He is deeply committed, more deeply indeed than Protagoras, to Protagoras' initial claim that virtue is a rationally based expertise at deliberation and decision. But how, then, can he have been right to doubt whether virtue is teachable? Aren't all rationally based*

expertises acquired by teaching? (In reflecting on this question, readers will want to consult also the *Meno*.)

Thus both speakers get their comeuppance—Socrates for denying that virtue is teachable, Protagoras for denying that it is wisdom. The whole matter has to be rethought. At the end, we are sent back to the beginning, to go over the old ground once more, as Socrates himself has just done in retelling the events of the day to his unnamed friend and to us readers. One thing has been established, though—precisely what Socrates set out to discover in accompanying his friend Hippocrates to Callias' house to confront Protagoras: even if virtue can be taught, no one should entrust himself to Protagoras to learn it, since he does not even have a coherent view of what it is.

This Socrates, like that of Gorgias, has more substantial theoretical commitments than the Socrates of other 'Socratic' dialogues. He does not limit himself to examining the opinions of others, but argues, as something he is committed to, however revisably, that all virtue is one, namely a single knowledge, that acting against one's own convictions—'weakness of will'—is impossible, and that our 'salvation in life' depends upon an 'art of measurement' that will overcome the power of appearance and get us to act rightly always. The dialogue invites us to ponder these theses, to work out for ourselves Socrates' reasons for holding to them—and to question whether he is right to do so.

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FRIEND: Where have you just come from, Socrates? No, don't tell me. 309  
It's pretty obvious that you've been hunting the ripe and ready Alcibiades.<sup>1</sup>  
Well, I saw him just the other day, and he is certainly still a beautiful  
man—and just between the two of us, 'man' is the proper word, Socrates:  
his beard is already filling out.

SOCRATES: Well, what of it? I thought you were an admirer of Homer, b  
who says that youth is most charming when the beard is first blooming<sup>2</sup>—  
which is just the stage Alcibiades is at.

FRIEND: So what's up? Were you just with him? And how is the young  
man disposed towards you?

SOCRATES: Pretty well, I think, especially today, since he rallied to my  
side and said a great many things to support me.<sup>3</sup> You're right, of course:  
I *was* just with him. But there's something really strange I want to tell you

Translated by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell.

1. Alcibiades (c. 450–404 B.C.), Athenian general, noted in his youth for his beauty and intellectual promise. See his encomium of Socrates in *Symposium* 215a ff. for more details on their relationship, as Plato understood it.

2. *Iliad* xxiv.348; *Odyssey* x.279.

3. See below, 336b and 347b.

- of them, as I say, used these various arts as screens out of fear of ill will. And this is where I part company with them all, for I do not believe that they accomplished their end; I believe they failed, in fact, to conceal from the powerful men in the cities the true purpose of their disguises. The
- b masses, needless to say, perceive nothing, but merely sing the tune their leaders announce. Now, for a runaway not to succeed in running away, but to be caught in the open, is sheer folly from the start and inevitably makes men even more hostile than they were before, for on top of every-
- c thing else they perceive him as a real rogue. So I have come down the completely opposite road. I admit that I am a sophist and that I educate men, and I consider this admission to be a better precaution than denial. And I have given thought to other precautions as well, so as to avoid, God willing, suffering any ill from admitting I am a sophist. I have been in the profession many years now, and I'm old enough to be the father of any of you here. So, if you do have a request, it would give me the greatest pleasure by far to deliver my lecture in the presence of everyone in the house."
- d It looked to me that he wanted to show off in front of Prodicus and Hippias, and to bask in glory because we had come as his admirers, so I said, "Well, why don't we call Prodicus and Hippias over, and their companions, so that they can listen to us?"
- "By all means!" said Protagoras.
- "Then you want to make this a general session and have everyone take seats for a discussion?" Callias proposed this, and it seemed like the only thing to do. We were all overjoyed at the prospect of listening to wise men, and we laid hold of the benches and couches ourselves and arranged
- e them over by Hippias, since that's where the benches were already. Meanwhile Callias and Alcibiades had gotten Prodicus up and brought him over with his group.
- When we had all taken our seats, Protagoras said, "Now, then, Socrates, since these gentlemen also are present, would you please say what it was you brought up to me a little while ago on the young man's behalf."
- 318 "Well, Protagoras," I said, "as to why we have come, I'll begin as I did before. Hippocrates here has gotten to the point where he wants to be your student, and, quite naturally, he would like to know what he will get out of it if he does study with you. That's really all we have to say."
- Protagoras took it from there and said, "Young man, this is what you will get if you study with me: The very day you start, you will go home
- b a better man, and the same thing will happen the day after. Every day, day after day, you will get better and better."
- When I heard this I said, "What you're saying, Protagoras, isn't very surprising, but quite likely. Why, even you, though you are so old and wise, would get better if someone taught you something you didn't happen to know already. But what if the situation were a little different, and Hippocrates here all of a sudden changed his mind and set his heart on
- c studying with this young fellow who has just come into town, Zeuxippus

of Heraclea, and came to him, as he now comes to you, and heard from him the very same thing as from you—that each day he spent with him he would become better and make progress. If Hippocrates asked him in what way he would become better, and toward what he would be making progress, Zeuxippus would say at painting. And if he were studying with Orthagoras of Thebes and he heard from him the same thing as he hears from you and asked him in what he would be getting better every day he studied with him, Orthagoras would say at flute-playing. It is in this way that you must tell me and the young man on whose behalf I am asking the answer to this question: If Hippocrates studies with Protagoras, exactly how will he go away a better man and in what will he make progress each and every day he spends with you?"

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Protagoras heard me out and then said, "You put your question well, Socrates, and I am only too glad to answer those who pose questions well. If Hippocrates comes to me he will not experience what he would if he studied with some other sophist. The others abuse young men, steering them back again, against their will, into subjects the likes of which they have escaped from at school, teaching them arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music, and poetry"—at this point he gave Hippias a significant look—"but if he comes to me he will learn only what he has come for. What I teach is sound deliberation, both in domestic matters—how best to manage one's household, and in public affairs—how to realize one's maximum potential for success in political debate and action."

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"Am I following what you are saying?" I asked. "You appear to be talking about the art of citizenship, and to be promising to make men good citizens."

"This is exactly what I claim, Socrates."

"Well, this is truly an admirable technique you have developed, if indeed you have. There is no point in my saying to you anything other than exactly what I think. The truth is, Protagoras, I have never thought that this could be taught, but when you say it can be, I can't very well doubt it. It's only right that I explain where I got the idea that this is not teachable, not something that can be imparted from one human being to another. I maintain, along with the rest of the Greek world, that the Athenians are wise. And I observe that when we convene in the Assembly and the city has to take some action on a building project, we send for builders to advise us; if it has to do with the construction of ships, we send for shipwrights; and so forth for everything that is considered learnable and teachable. But if anyone else, a person not regarded as a craftsman, tries to advise them, no matter how handsome and rich and well-born he might be, they just don't accept him. They laugh at him and shout him down until he either gives up trying to speak and steps down himself, or the archer-police remove him forcibly by order of the board. This is how they proceed in matters which they consider technical. But when it is a matter of deliberating on city management, anyone can stand up and advise them, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, merchant, ship-captain, rich man, poor

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- man, well-born, low-born—it doesn't matter—and nobody blasts him for presuming to give counsel without any prior training under a teacher. The
- e reason for this is clear: They do not think that this can be taught. Public life aside, the same principle holds also in private life, where the wisest and best of our citizens are unable to transmit to others the virtues that they possess. Look at Pericles,<sup>11</sup> the father of these young men here. He
- 320 gave them a superb education in everything that teachers can teach, but as for what he himself is really wise in, he neither teaches them that himself nor has anyone else teach them either, and his sons have to browse like stray sacred cattle and pick up virtue on their own wherever they might find it. Take a good look at Clinias, the younger brother of Alcibiades here. When Pericles became his guardian he was afraid that he would be corrupted, no less, by Alcibiades. So he separated them and placed Clinias in Aripbron's house and tried to educate him there. Six months later he
- b gave him back to Alcibiades because he couldn't do anything with him. I could mention a great many more, men who are good themselves but have never succeeded in making anyone else better, whether family members or total strangers. Looking at these things, Protagoras, I just don't think that virtue can be taught. But when I hear what you have to say, I waver; I think there must be something in what you are talking about. I consider you to be a person of enormous experience who has learned much from others and thought through a great many things for himself. So if you can clarify for us how virtue is teachable, please don't begrudge us your explanation."
- c "I wouldn't think of begrudging you an explanation, Socrates," he replied. "But would you rather that I explain by telling you a story, as an older man to a younger audience, or by developing an argument?"
- The consensus was that he should proceed in whichever way he wished. "I think it would be more pleasant," he said, "if I told you a story.
- d "There once was a time when the gods existed but mortal races did not. When the time came for their appointed genesis, the gods molded them inside the earth, blending together earth and fire and various compounds of earth and fire. When they were ready to bring them to light the gods put Prometheus and Epimetheus in charge of decking them out and assigning to each its appropriate powers and abilities.
- "Epimetheus begged Prometheus for the privilege of assigning the abilities himself. 'When I've completed the distribution,' he said, 'you can inspect it.' Prometheus agreed, and Epimetheus started distributing abilities.
- e "To some he assigned strength without quickness; the weaker ones he made quick. Some he armed; others he left unarmed but devised for them
- 321 some other means for preserving themselves. He compensated for small size by issuing wings for flight or an underground habitat. Size was itself a safeguard for those he made large. And so on down the line, balancing

11. The great Athenian statesman and general (c. 495–429).

his distribution, making adjustments, and taking precautions against the possible extinction of any of the races.

“After supplying them with defenses against mutual destruction, he devised for them protection against the weather. He clothed them with thick pelts and tough hides capable of warding off winter storms, effective against heat, and serving also as built-in, natural bedding when they went to sleep. He also shod them, some with hooves, others with thick pads of bloodless skin. Then he provided them with various forms of nourishment, plants for some, fruit from trees for others, roots for still others. And there were some to whom he gave the consumption of other animals as their sustenance. To some he gave the capacity for few births; to others, ravaged by the former, he gave the capacity for multiple births, and so ensured the survival of their kind.

“But Epimetheus was not very wise, and he absentmindedly used up all the powers and abilities on the nonreasoning animals; he was left with the human race, completely unequipped. While he was floundering about at a loss, Prometheus arrived to inspect the distribution and saw that while the other animals were well provided with everything, the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed, and it was already the day on which all of them, human beings included, were destined to emerge from the earth into the light. It was then that Prometheus, desperate to find some means of survival for the human race, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the practical arts together with fire (without which this kind of wisdom is effectively useless) and gave them outright to the human race. The wisdom it acquired was for staying alive; wisdom for living together in society, political wisdom, it did not acquire, because that was in the keeping of Zeus. Prometheus no longer had free access to the high citadel that is the house of Zeus, and besides this, the guards there were terrifying. But he did sneak into the building that Athena and Hephaestus shared to practice their arts, and he stole from Hephaestus the art of fire and from Athena her arts, and he gave them to the human race. And it is from this origin that the resources human beings needed to stay alive came into being. Later, the story goes, Prometheus was charged with theft, all on account of Epimetheus.

“It is because humans had a share of the divine dispensation that they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images. It wasn’t long before they were articulating speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and were nourished by food from the earth. Thus equipped, human beings at first lived in scattered isolation; there were no cities. They were being destroyed by wild beasts because they were weaker in every way, and although their technology was adequate to obtain food, it was deficient when it came to fighting wild animals. This was because they did not yet possess the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part. They did indeed try to band together and survive by founding cities. The outcome when they did so was that they wronged each other, because

- c they did not possess the art of politics, and so they would scatter and again be destroyed. Zeus was afraid that our whole race might be wiped out, so he sent Hermes to bring justice and a sense of shame to humans, so that there would be order within cities and bonds of friendship to unite them. Hermes asked Zeus how he should distribute shame and justice to humans. 'Should I distribute them as the other arts were? This is how the others were distributed: one person practicing the art of medicine suffices for many ordinary people; and so forth with the other practitioners. Should
- d I establish justice and shame among humans in this way, or distribute it to all?' 'To all,' said Zeus, 'and let all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these, as is the case with the other arts. And establish this law as coming from me: Death to him who cannot partake of shame and justice, for he is a pestilence to the city.'

"And so it is, Socrates, that when the Athenians (and others as well) are debating architectural excellence, or the virtue proper to any other professional specialty, they think that only a few individuals have the right

- e to advise them, and they do not accept advice from anyone outside these select few. You've made this point yourself, and with good reason, I might add. But when the debate involves political excellence, which must proceed
- 323 entirely from justice and temperance, they accept advice from anyone, and with good reason, for they think that this particular virtue, political or civic virtue, is shared by all, or there wouldn't be any cities. This must be the explanation for it, Socrates.

- "And so you won't think you've been deceived, consider this as further evidence for the universal belief that all humans have a share of justice and the rest of civic virtue. In the other arts, as you have said, if someone claims to be a good flute-player or whatever, but is not, people laugh at
- b him or get angry with him, and his family comes round and remonstrates with him as if he were mad. But when it comes to justice or any other social virtue, even if they know someone is unjust, if that person publicly confesses the truth about himself, they will call this truthfulness madness, whereas in the previous case they would have called it a sense of decency.
  - c They will say that everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that it is madness not to pretend to justice, since one must have some trace of it or not be human.

"This, then, is my first point: It is reasonable to admit everyone as an adviser on this virtue, on the grounds that everyone has some share of it. Next I will attempt to show that people do *not* regard this virtue as natural or self-generated, but as something taught and carefully developed in those in whom it is developed.

- d "In the case of evils that men universally regard as afflictions due to nature or bad luck, no one ever gets angry with anyone so afflicted or reproves, admonishes, punishes, or tries to correct them. We simply pity them. No one in his right mind would try to do anything like this to someone who is ugly, for example, or scrawny or weak. The reason is, I assume, that they know that these things happen to people as a natural

process or by chance, both these ills and their opposites. But in the case of the good things that accrue to men through practice and training and teaching, if someone does not possess these goods but rather their corresponding evils, he finds himself the object of anger, punishment, and reproof. Among these evils are injustice, impiety, and in general everything that is opposed to civic virtue. Offenses in this area are always met with anger and reproof, and the reason is clearly that this virtue is regarded as something acquired through practice and teaching. The key, Socrates, to the true significance of punishment lies in the fact that human beings consider virtue to be something acquired through training. For no one punishes a wrong-doer in consideration of the simple fact that he has done wrong, unless one is exercising the mindless vindictiveness of a beast. Reasonable punishment is not vengeance for a past wrong—for one cannot undo what has been done—but is undertaken with a view to the future, to deter both the wrong-doer and whoever sees him being punished from repeating the crime. This attitude towards punishment as deterrence implies that virtue is learned, and this is the attitude of all those who seek requital in public or in private. All human beings seek requital from and punish those who they think have wronged them, and the Athenians, your fellow citizens, especially do so. Therefore, by my argument, the Athenians are among those who think that virtue is acquired and taught. So it is with good reason that your fellow citizens accept a blacksmith's or a cobbler's advice in political affairs. And they do think that virtue is acquired and taught. It appears to me that both these propositions have been sufficiently proved, Socrates.

"Now, on to your remaining difficulty, the problem you raise about good men teaching their sons everything that can be taught and making them wise in these subjects, but not making them better than anyone else in the particular virtue in which they themselves excel. On this subject, Socrates, I will abandon story for argument. Consider this: Does there or does there not exist one thing which all citizens must have for there to be a city? Here and nowhere else lies the solution to your problem. For if such a thing exists, and this one thing is not the art of the carpenter, the blacksmith, or the potter, but justice, and temperance, and piety—what I may collectively term the virtue of a man, and if this is the thing which everyone should share in and with which every man should act whenever he wants to learn anything or do anything, but should not act without it, and if we should instruct and punish those who do not share in it, man, woman, and child, until their punishment makes them better, and should exile from our cities or execute whoever doesn't respond to punishment and instruction; if this is the case, if such is the nature of this thing, and good men give their sons an education in everything but this, then we have to be amazed at how strangely our good men behave. For we have shown that they regard this thing as teachable both in private and public life. Since it is something that can be taught and nurtured, is it possible that they have their sons taught everything in which there is no death



c penalty for not understanding it, but when their children are faced with the death penalty or exile if they fail to learn virtue and be nurtured in it—and not only death but confiscation of property and, practically speaking, complete familial catastrophe—do you think they do not have them taught this or give them all the attention possible? We must think that they do, Socrates.

d “Starting when they are little children and continuing as long as they live, they teach them and correct them. As soon as a child understands what is said to him, the nurse, mother, tutor, and the father himself fight for him to be as good as he possibly can, seizing on every action and word to teach him and show him that this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that. If he obeys willingly, fine; if not, they straighten him out with threats and blows as if he were a twisted, bent piece of wood. After this  
e they send him to school and tell his teachers to pay more attention to his good conduct than to his grammar or music lessons. The teachers pay attention to these things, and when the children have learned their letters and are getting to understand writing as well as the spoken language, they are given the works of good poets to read at their desks and have to  
326 learn them by heart, works that contain numerous exhortations, many passages describing in glowing terms good men of old, so that the child is inspired to imitate them and become like them. In a similar vein, the music teachers too foster in their young pupils a sense of moral decency and restraint, and when they learn to play the lyre they are taught the  
b works of still more good poets, the lyric and choral poets. The teachers arrange the scores and drill the rhythms and scales into the children’s souls, so that they become gentler, and their speech and movements become more rhythmical and harmonious. For all of human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony. On top of all this, they send their children to an athletic trainer so that they may have sound bodies in the service  
c of their now fit minds and will not be forced to cowardice in war or other activities through physical deficiencies.

d “This is what the most able, i.e., the richest, do. Their sons start going to school at the earliest age and quit at the latest age. And when they quit school, the city in turn compels them to learn the laws and to model their lives on them. They are not to act as they please. An analogy might be drawn from the practice of writing-teachers, who sketch the letters faintly with a pen in workbooks for their beginning students and have them write the letters over the patterns they have drawn. In the same way the city has drawn up laws invented by the great lawgivers in the past and compels them to govern and be governed by them. She punishes anyone who goes beyond these laws, and the term for this punishment in your city and  
e others is, because it is a corrective legal action, ‘correction.’

“When so much care and attention is paid to virtue, Socrates, both in public and private, are you still puzzled about virtue being teachable? The wonder would be if it were not teachable.

“Why, then, do many sons of good fathers never amount to anything? I want you to understand this too, and in fact it’s no great wonder, if what I’ve just been saying is true about virtue being something in which no one can be a layman if there is to be a city. For if what I am saying is true—and nothing could be more true: Pick any other pursuit or study and reflect upon it. Suppose, for instance, there could be no city unless we were all flute-players, each to the best of his ability, and everybody were teaching everybody else this art in public and private and reprimanding the poor players and doing all this unstintingly, just as now no one begrudges or conceals his expertise in what is just and lawful as he does his other professional expertise. For it is to our collective advantage that we each possess justice and virtue, and so we all gladly tell and teach each other what is just and lawful. Well, if we all had the same eagerness and generosity in teaching each other flute-playing, do you think, Socrates, that the sons of good flute-players would be more likely to be good flute-players than the sons of poor flute-players? I don’t think so at all. When a son happened to be naturally disposed toward flute-playing, he would progress and become famous; otherwise, he would remain obscure. In many cases the son of a good player would turn out to be a poor one, and the son of a poor player would turn out to be good. But as flute-players, they would all turn out to be capable when compared with ordinary people who had never studied the flute. Likewise you must regard the most unjust person ever reared in a human society under law as a paragon of justice compared with people lacking education and lawcourts and the pervasive pressure to cultivate virtue, savages such as the playwright Pherecrates brought on stage at last year’s Lenaeon festival. There’s no doubt that if you found yourself among such people, as did the misanthropes in that play’s chorus, you would be delighted to meet up with the likes of Eurybatus and Phrynondas<sup>12</sup> and would sorely miss the immorality of the people here. As it is, Socrates, you affect delicate sensibilities, because everyone here is a teacher of virtue, to the best of his ability, and you can’t see a single one. You might as well look for a teacher of Greek; you wouldn’t find a single one of those either. Nor would you be any more successful if you asked who could teach the sons of our craftsmen the very arts which they of course learned from their fathers, to the extent that their fathers were competent, and their friends in the trade. It would be difficult to produce someone who could continue their education, whereas it would be easy to find a teacher for the totally unskilled. It is the same with virtue and everything else. If there is someone who is the least bit more advanced in virtue than ourselves, he is to be cherished.

“I consider myself to be such a person, uniquely qualified to assist others in becoming noble and good, and worth the fee that I charge and even more, so much so that even my students agree. This is why I charge according to the following system: a student pays the full price only if he

12. Historical persons, conventional paradigms of viciousness.

wishes to; otherwise, he goes into a temple, states under oath how much he thinks my lessons are worth, and pays that amount.

- “There you have it, Socrates, my mythic story and my argument that virtue is teachable and that the Athenians consider it to be so, and that it is no wonder that worthless sons are born of good fathers and good sons of worthless fathers, since even the sons of Polyclitus, of the same age as  
 d Paralus and Xanthippus here, are nothing compared to their father, and the same is true for the sons of other artisans. But it is not fair to accuse these two yet; there is still hope for them, for they are young.”

- Protagoras ended his virtuoso performance here and stopped speaking. I was entranced and just looked at him for a long time as if he were going to say more. I was still eager to listen, but when I perceived that he had really stopped I pulled myself together and, looking at Hippocrates, barely  
 e managed to say: “Son of Apollodorus, how grateful I am to you for suggesting that I come here. It is marvelous to have heard from Protagoras what I have just heard. Formerly I used to think there was no human practice by which the good become good, but now I am persuaded that there is, except for one small obstacle which Protagoras will explain away, I am  
 329 sure, since he has explained away so much already. Now, you could hear a speech similar to this from Pericles or some other competent orator if you happened to be present when one of them was speaking on this subject. But try asking one of them something, and they will be as unable to answer your question or to ask one of their own as a book would be. Question the least little thing in their speeches and they will go on like bronze bowls that keep ringing for a long time after they have been struck and prolong the sound indefinitely unless you dampen them. That’s how  
 b these orators are: Ask them one little question and they’re off on another long-distance speech. But Protagoras here, while perfectly capable of delivering a beautiful long speech, as we have just seen, is also able to reply briefly when questioned, and to put a question and then wait for and accept the answer—rare accomplishments these.

- “Now, then, Protagoras, I need one little thing, and then I’ll have it all, if you’ll just answer me this. You say that virtue is teachable, and if there’s  
 c any human being who could persuade me of this, it’s you. But there is one thing you said that troubles me, and maybe you can satisfy my soul. You said that Zeus sent justice and a sense of shame to the human race. You also said, at many points in your speech, that justice and temperance<sup>13</sup> and piety and all these things were somehow collectively one thing: virtue.  
 d Could you go through this again and be more precise? Is virtue a single thing, with justice and temperance and piety its parts, or are the things I have just listed all names for a single entity? This is what still intrigues me.”

13. The Greek term is *sōphrosunē*. For Plato, *sōphrosunē* was a complex virtue involving self-control and moderation of the physical appetites, as well as good sense and self-knowledge.