INTRODUCTION

1. THE SOPHISTS, PROTAGORAS AND THE *PROTAGORAS*

These days, the term 'sophist' is used solely as a term of disdain, for those who hope to get away with shoddy reasoning. It was not always thus. Our term 'sophist' derives from a Greek term σοφιστής; and in the fifth century BC, when that term was first used, σοφισταί were men to be reckoned with.

The first σοφισταί were so called because of some expertise or σοφία. In principle, any expert might be given the name σοφιστής. We hear, for example, of those who were given the name because they were experts in poetry, statecraft or ritual (311e4n.). In practice, the main bearers of the name were men like three of the characters in the *Protagoras*: Protagoras of Abdera himself, Hippias of Elis and Prodicus of Ceos. Among the better documented of the others like them were Gorgias of Leontini, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon and Antiphon of Athens.[1] These men did not all make claim to exactly the same expertise (312d9–e1n.): for example, Prodicus had a special flair for distinguishing between words of very similar meaning (337a1–c4); Hippias cultivated a special mnemonic technique that enabled him to repeat a list of fifty names after hearing it just once (*Hp. Ma.* 285e; cf. 318e3n.); and Protagoras won so special a reputation for his understanding of how institutions can be managed (318e4–319a6) that he was commissioned to devise the constitution for a new Panhellenic settlement at Thurii (DK 80 A 1.50). Sophists did, however, have one important thing in common: whatever else they did or did not know or claim to know, they characteristically had a great understanding of what words would entertain or impress or persuade an audience (315c6n.).

Whether as calculated self-promotion, or from simple exuberance in their own virtuosity, or sometimes even because they had managed to persuade themselves, sophists loved to argue for the unsettling and the improbable. Among the unsettling conclusions for which Protagoras himself argued were theories of religion and morality that, without ever quite debunking them outright, suggested that there was less in them than people might suppose (320d1n. on θεοὶ μὲν ἦσαν, 322b5–c1n.); among the improbable conclusions for which Protagoras argued was a theory whereby Greek had misassigned some nouns to grammatical genders (349b4n.; cf. 342b1n. on improbable conclusions for which other sophists

[1] Kerferd (1981) and Guthrie (1971) discuss all these, and some lesser sophists. DK 79–90 collects much of the evidence. The rest of the evidence consists, in most cases, in representations of these sophists in the dialogues of Plato and of Xenophon. In the case of Antiphon, there is also a body of speeches that survives under his name; and his case is further complicated by the suggestion that there were two Antiphons, who both 'operated as sophists [σοφιστεύσαντες]' (Hermogenes *De Ideis* 399.18–22 Rabe).

argued). Protagoras called arguing for such conclusions 'making the weaker argument stronger [τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν]' (DK 80 A 21). At their most extreme, sophists would argue for conclusions that were not merely unsettling or improbable, but downright inconsistent. For example, each of Antiphon's *Tetralogies* contains speeches for both prosecution and defence in an imaginary lawsuit; and something similar may have been true of Protagoras' two books on *Contradictions* (DK 80 A 1.55; cf. 328c1–2n. for a Protagorean lawsuit in which each side had a compelling argument). Protagoras also taught people how they might both commend and condemn the same man (DK 80 A 21). More generally, he maintained the thesis that it is always possible to contradict whatever another says; and – in keeping with that thesis, even if not consistently with it – he maintained the rival thesis that contradiction is never possible (DK 80 A 19–20, B 6a). Both theses amounted to the same thing in the end: whatever you assert, I can always deny, with equal correctness; but my denial can never be so correct as to rule out your assertion. And Protagoras invented various devices to substantiate both theses; most notorious of these devices was a version of relativism whose slogan was 'Man is the measure of all things [πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος]' (356d3–4n.; cf. also 331d3–e3, 334a1–3n.).

These argumentative extravaganzas led eventually to the current meaning of 'sophism'. In their original context, however, such extravaganzas flaunted a severely practical ability. To get anywhere in the public life of Athens, or any other democratic city, people needed to be able to talk persuasively to gatherings of their fellow citizens. And in Athens, even people without political ambitions might have need of persuasive powers. The Athenians were particularly litigious (324c2–3); and if you were prosecuted, there were no professional advocates whom you could hire to speak on your behalf. Hence, even if you never attempted to address the assembly, you might well nevertheless find yourself brought before a court, where your livelihood, or even your life, would depend on your being able to talk more persuasively than your prosecutor. In 399, this happened to Socrates.

Not everyone who had a flair for words was called a σοφιστής. This name was never given to the great statesman Pericles, whose magisterially compelling oratory won him the nickname 'Olympian' (Ar. *Ach.* 530; cf. *Phdr.* 269e–270a), who was renowned for his σοφία (*Meno* 94b, Isoc. 15.111 and 16.28), who had 'bandied tricky arguments [ἐσοφιζόμεθα]' for unsettling theories about law and justice (Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.46), and who freely associated with those called σοφισταί, Protagoras among them (315a1–2n., DK 59 A 17). Those called σοφισταί earned the name because of a special use of their skills, not to participate directly in public life (cf. DK 37 A 4 on Damon the sophist, and Arist. *EN* 1180b35–1181a1 on sophists generally), but to earn money by equipping others to participate (310d7–8n., 316d1–8n.). Protagoras was the first to earn money in this way (349a1–4); by the dramatic date of the *Protagoras* (309a3n.), he was an old man who had been earning money in this way for many years (317c2–4).

Sophists earned lots. 'Protagoras has, all by himself, made more from this expertise,' claims Socrates in *Meno* 91d, 'than Pheidias, who made such conspicuously beautiful statues [311c5n.], and ten other sculptors put together.' Admission to even the cheapest of Prodicus' lectures would cost a drachma (three times the daily subsistence allowance for an Athenian juror), and admission to the most electrifying would cost fifty (*Cra.* 384b–c, Arist. *Rh.* 1415b16). Euenus of Paros – who was hardly the most celebrated of sophists – was able to charge five minas (= 500 drachmas, and what Xen. *Oec.* 2.3 estimates as the value of Socrates' entire estate) for what was presumably an entire course of instruction 'in human and political virtue' (*Ap.* 20b; cf. 318e4–319a4). For the celebrated, the rewards could be even greater. 'I once went to Sicily,' Hippias of Elis boasts, 'and even though Protagoras was also there at the time, and had a fine reputation, and was far older than me, nevertheless I, who was far his junior, managed to make, in a very short time, much more than 150 minas – and more than twenty minas from one single tiny little spot, Inycum' (*Hp. Ma.* 282d–e). The host of the sophists whom we meet in the *Protagoras* is Callias, whose father had been the richest man in Greece (311a2n.). There can have been few others rich enough to have simultaneous visits from Protagoras, Prodicus and Hippias.

Those who command high fees for a highly valued service are not always liked. So it was with sophists: even as they attracted adulation from some, they attracted also disdain, and worse, from others. Protagoras speaks of the resentment aroused when young men forsook their native mentors to associate instead with travelling sophists like himself (316c5–d2). No doubt this was important; for unless he belonged to the largest of cities, an ambitious and talented sophist would find his own city too small to offer him enough scope, and so would travel, and so might meet xenophobia. Even so, travel was no essential part of what made a sophist, or of what made a sophist objectionable (cf. 313c5–6n.). Anytus, who was to prosecute Socrates, wants cities generally to expel all sophists 'whether local or foreign' (*Meno* 92b); this is because sophists are uniformly damaging to those who consort with them (*Meno* 91c), and because, if Meno 'goes to any decent Athenian, there is not one who won't make more improvements in him than the sophists would, so long as he is willing to do as he is told' (*Meno* 92e). Here is Thucydides 8.68.1 on the attitude of the Athenians to a sophist who shared their citizenship: 'Antiphon was, of all the Athenians of his day, second to none in virtue; he had also the greatest capacity for thinking and for expressing his knowledge; he never addressed the assembly or – unless he was forced to – any other venue in which issues are contested [ἀγῶνα; cf. 335a4], but the masses viewed him with suspicion because of his reputation for cleverness [διὰ δόξαν δεινότητος; cf. 312d6–e8, 341a8n.]; not but what, when people had issues to contest [ἀγωνιζομένους], whether before the assembly or in a court of law, he was the man best able to help whoever consulted him on anything.' In short, sophists were too clever by half; they used their excessive cleverness to help the rich escape justice, and mislead the assembly; and they taught those foolish enough to pay

their fees nothing worthwhile that could not have been learnt much more cheaply from ordinary decent people. Thus democracy viewed with suspicion those who supplied the education for which it had created such a demand.

Part of the brilliance of Protagoras was the way that he addressed this suspicion. In 320d1–328d2, he presents a beautiful and plausible explanation both for why knowledge of justice and statecraft must be as widespread as democracy presumes, and for why nevertheless there is room for paid experts – σοφισταί – like himself: when Protagoras teaches his customers how to manage the affairs of their community, he teaches them subtleties and refinements of a virtue or virtues that people must already practise, and practise pretty well, if there is to be a community with affairs for Protagoras' customers to manage.

Unfortunately, a beautiful and plausible explanation is not therefore the correct explanation. And we might summarise the *Protagoras* by saying that it presents a test of Protagoras and his explanation. The test asks what exactly is the virtue or virtues which ordinary people already practise well, and of which Protagoras teaches the refinements. After a prolonged resistance, and many detours, Protagoras is finally forced to say that there is only one virtue. This one virtue has many names – among them 'justice', 'temperance', 'holiness' and 'courage'. All these are names for a single piece of knowledge. The subject of this piece of knowledge may be given any of several equivalent descriptions: the good and the bad, the pleasant and the painful, the scary and the emboldening. If you have this knowledge, you will assess accurately the merits and demerits of all the possible courses of action open to you; moreover, you will unfailingly act on this assessment, and do what is, all things considered, the best possible thing for you to do. Such would be the knowledge sold by Protagoras if Protagoras deserves his income. At least, this is what Protagoras is eventually forced to concede. Perhaps there can be no such knowledge, as the *Protagoras* sometimes hints (333b5n., 337c2n., 351c5–6n., 352b7–c1n., 359d4n.); or perhaps there can, but in an unexpected form and from an unexpected source, as the *Protagoras* also sometimes hints (329c7–d1n., 345e1–2n., 352c4–6n., 354c8n., 357e2–3n.); either way, Protagoras' change of mind indicates that not even the doyen of all sophists is quite such an expert on these subjects as he pretends.

2. SOCRATES THE SOPHIST?

'You put Socrates the sophist to death,' said Aeschines (1.173) to the citizens of Athens in 345. He meant our Socrates, the Socrates who in the *Protagoras* describes an encounter with Protagoras, the Socrates who in 399 was executed on the charges that 'he does wrong by not accepting the gods whom the city accepts, but introducing strange supernatural beings instead, and he does wrong also by corrupting the young' (*Ap.* 26b, Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.1). Aeschines' view that Socrates was a sophist may have been also the view of the jurors who sentenced him to death. Such a view was certainly taken in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, a play

written and set in the mid 420s, which is more or less the dramatic date of the *Protagoras* (309a3n.). A man who wants to cheat his creditors is getting his son to join a school supposedly run by Socrates: 'The people here teach anyone who'll give them the money how to be victorious when he speaks, however just or unjust his cause may be [λέγοντα νικᾶν καὶ δίκαια κἄδικα]. . . . They say they've got both the arguments, both the stronger, on whatever subject, and the weaker [ἄμφω τὼ λόγω, | τὸν κρείττον', ὅστις ἐστί, καὶ τὸν ἥττονα; cf. DK 80 A 21], and they say that one of these two arguments, the weaker one, is victorious when it speaks, even though its cause is less just. So if you please learn this one, the unjust argument, I won't have to repay any of the debts that you've been running up, not one obol to anybody' (Ar. *Clouds* 97–8, 112–18). In the *Protagoras*, however, when Callias' doorkeeper takes Socrates for a sophist, he denies it (314d3–e1).

Which is correct: Aeschines' affirmation that Socrates was a sophist, or Socrates' denial? The *Protagoras* is only one of several works in which followers of Socrates addressed this question by showing Socrates dealing with sophists. Plato also shows him dealing with Gorgias and Polus in the *Gorgias*, with Hippias in both the *Hippias Major* and the *Hippias Minor*, with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in the *Euthydemus*, and with Thrasymachus in the *Republic*. Xenophon shows Socrates dealing with Hippias in *Memorabilia* 4.4 and with Antiphon in *Memorabilia* 1.6. Crito presumably showed Socrates dealing with Protagoras in his now lost *Protagoras* (fr. 42 *SSR*). Those who approved of Socrates, but disapproved of sophists, had good reason for so often returning to how Socrates dealt with sophists. For the difference between the sophists and Socrates, or between the other sophists and Socrates, was not as easy to discern as they might wish. And if we can now see a clear difference between people like Protagoras and people like Socrates, and label it as the difference between sophists and philosophers, then that is due to the efforts of Socrates' followers in the generation or so after his death (311e4n., 335e1n.).

Unlike normal sophists, Socrates charged no fees for his wisdom. As we have seen, Aristophanes' *Clouds* says otherwise; but it is hard to believe that this or any comedy cared much about the precise differences between one intellectual and another. Plato and Xenophon, who certainly cared and were in a position to know, both assert quite directly that Socrates took no payment (310d7–8n.). And in some ways more compelling than any direct assertion that Socrates took no payment is the evidence of this anecdote about Aristippus (fr. 3 *SSR*) and the consensus which it presupposes: 'Someone criticised him once for taking money even though he was a pupil of Socrates. "Absolutely," he said. "For Socrates too, when people sent him food and wine, used to take a bit before sending the rest back. This was because he had the most prominent men in Athens to be his stewards, whereas I have my slave Eutychides."'

Even if Socrates charged no fees, he still had quite as much flair for words as any of those who were incontestably sophists. He does indeed make much of his preference for conversation, διαλέγεσθαι, instead of the long speeches

that the sophist Protagoras likes to deliver (314c4n.). But incontestable sophists were versatile enough with words to do more than simply produce long speeches (315c6n., 329b2–3n., 335b6–c1; cf. 338b1–2n.); and even sources that lay most stress on Socrates' preference for conversation make it clear that he was quite capable of producing long speeches himself (e.g. 342a6–347a5, *Grg.* 523a–527e). As we have seen, sophists might sometimes use or misuse their talent for words in frivolous entertainments, and also in apparently earnest arguments for unsettling and subversive conclusions about gods or politics. So might Socrates: admirers with every wish to distinguish him from sophists nevertheless represented him in frivolous mood as expatiating on the intellectual interests of the Spartans (342a6–343b4) and as arguing that his snub nose and pop eyes make him look beautiful (Xen. *Smp.* 5.2–8); they also represented him in earnest mood as arguing that, whatever the family structures and democratic institutions of Athens might presume to the contrary, young people should obey expert strangers rather than inexpert parents on questions about education (Xen. *Ap.* 20), and that we should all follow a single expert rather than many fools on questions about justice (*Cri.* 46c–48a; cf. 319b3–e1).

Socrates, unlike a Pericles, did not make public life the main place where he employed his flair with words. Quite the contrary: he participated in the public life of Athens as little as a citizen decently could. He did indeed have one notorious term in high office, during which he presided over a particularly contentious meeting of the assembled citizens (338a7–b1n.). Moreover, he does seem to have claimed occasionally that his own apparently inactive life constituted a profound engagement with politics. Hence *Grg.* 521d 'I suppose that there are few other Athenians, if any, who undertake the genuine art of politics [ἐπιχειρεῖν τῇι ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικῇι τέχνηι], and that I am the only one around nowadays to engage in political activity [πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ μόνος τῶν νῦν]'; and Xen. *Mem.* 1.6.15 'How would I have the greater engagement in political activity [μᾶλλον τὰ πολιτικὰ πράττοιμι]? By engaging in it all by myself? Or by taking care that there be as many people as possible who are fit to engage in it [ὡς πλείστους ἱκανοὺς εἶναι πράττειν αὐτά]?' However, Socrates' term in high office came to him through the luck of the draw, rather than because of any skill in speaking. And if someone lives so apparently inactive a life as Socrates, then any claim of his to be engaged in politics would itself be so paradoxical as to suggest that he is indeed a sophist.

The difficulty goes deeper. If Socrates made people fit to engage in politics, would this not mean teaching people the skills and virtues that a political career demands? In particular, would it not mean teaching them something of his own skill with words? In which case, what remains to distinguish him from a sophist, apart from the fact that he never took payment for this teaching?

Certainly, Socrates made a profound intellectual impression on many with whom he dealt. We can tell this, not only from the extant writings about him of Plato and of Xenophon, but also from the scraps that now survive of what was

once a vast mass of writing by other followers and associates.[2] But is teaching the only way to make a profound intellectual impression? Perhaps not. At any rate, teachers seem to have, or at least to need and claim, some intellectual authority over their pupils, some knowledge which the teachers have, and then impart to the pupils. Yet no such authority is claimed when proceeding 'conversationally', by asking questions and getting answers, as Socrates did in preference to delivering lectures or writing books (314c4n.). Moreover, no such authority is even needed for 'conversations' to benefit intellectually those to whom the questions are put. For example, when Socrates' questions lead Hippocrates to confess his ignorance of what a sophist is (312e8), Hippocrates learns a useful lesson about his need for intellectual caution, but he does not learn it by relying on the authority of Socrates. Or again, when Socrates' questions lead Protagoras first to affirm (349b2–d8), and then to deny (360e1–5), that courage is distinct from the rest of virtue, Protagoras learns a useful lesson about his need for intellectual humility; yet those who can benefit from lessons in intellectual humility are hardly going to learn them by relying on the authority of anybody else. Nor are the intellectual benefits of Socratic conversation confined to lessons about the limits of our knowledge. A Socratic conversation can actually improve our understanding of its subject matter if there is the slightest truth in any of the various explanations given in Plato for how Socrates can improve people intellectually, not by teaching them, but by, for example, reminding them of what in some sense they know already, or acting as an intellectual midwife to help them bring their own ideas to birth (312d9–e1n.).

3. PLATO AND THE EXAMPLE OF SOCRATES

Plato was born in Athens around 428 and died there in 348. He came to maturity in turbulent times. Before he reached thirty, Athens had lost a major war, and all its empire; the Athenian democracy had been twice overthrown and twice restored; and Socrates had been tried, condemned and executed.[3]

Plato was of an aristocratic family, and a kinsman of Critias (316a4–5n.) and Charmides (315a2n.). His origins were therefore similar to those of many ambitious young men who hired sophists to teach them how to make their way in public life. As it was, however, he remained faithful to the example set by Socrates, and

[2] Much of this material is collected in *SSR*, a book whose title says that it contains remnants of Socrates and his followers. *SSR* does not, however, contain the material related to Critias (316a4–5n.). This material is collected in DK 88, a book whose title says that it contains fragments of Socrates' predecessors. The explanation of this bibliographical curiosity may be some embarrassment that admirers of Socrates continue to feel about his connection with Critias: if Critias is classed as a predecessor, not a follower, then Socrates, so far from being blamed for how Critias turned out, can be presented as making a decisive shift for the better in the history of philosophy.

[3] The best account of the entire period remains the *History* of Thucydides, together with its continuation by Xenophon's *Historia Graeca*.

never took direct part himself in the public life of Athens. Any ambitions he might once have had to the contrary he apparently decided to abandon for good after the death of Socrates; and he must have felt his decision confirmed by his later experiences of political practice, when entangled by court intrigues in Syracuse.[4]

Not all participation in public life needs to be direct. As we have seen, Socrates' own life could be taken to show, not only how and why to avoid speaking in assemblies and law courts, but also how to contribute to public life nevertheless, by educating people who were to participate directly. Plato himself perhaps intended to make indirect contributions of this kind in two of what might seem to be his most sophistic and least Socratic activities: his Academy; and his writings.

Like many of the institutions that have subsequently been called after it, the Academy that Plato founded was a sort of school. In ordinary schools, small boys were taught literacy, playing the lyre, and gymnastics (312b1–2n.). The Academy was out of the ordinary, in several ways. The original Academics were, if not all fully adult, at least adolescent: we know that Aristotle, for example, was seventeen years old when he joined the Academy, and that he stayed for twenty years (Philochorus *FGH* 328 fr. 223, Apollodorus *FGH* 244 fr. 38). Such instruction as Academics gave was not confined to members of the school: Aristotle had a favourite anecdote of how Plato baffled the general public with an abstrusely mathematical lecture advertised as being 'On the good' (Aristoxenus *Elements of harmonics* 39.8–40.4). Nor was giving and receiving instruction the only activity of Academics within their school. Academics sometimes engaged in collaborative discussions: a charming passage from a contemporary comedy (Epicrates fr. 10 *PCG*) describes Plato as the insistent but gentle leader of a seminar in which he has the Academy's young men (μειράκια; see 315d7n. on νέον τι ἔτι μειράκιον) debate how to classify cucumber; the young men proceed by 'delimiting [ἀφορίζειν]' and 'dividing [διαιρεῖν]', like the characters in Plato's *Sophist* 218e–221c, when they hone their skills by finding a definition of angling. Academics also engaged in research on austerely technical subjects: Plato sparked some very sophisticated astronomy by setting them the problem 'What uniform and determinate movements can be hypothesised that would save the phenomena concerning the movements of the planets?' (Eudemus fr. 148 Wehrli; cf. 356c5–6n.).

It may seem improbable that Plato could have intended the education offered in his Academy to fit people for an active life in politics. However, in *Republic* 521d–540b, he has Socrates propose that future rulers be given an education that is, if anything, even more abstruse. Furthermore, there are persistent reports of political activity by members of the Academy: for example, Plutarch *Against Colotes*

[4] In the seventh of the *Letters* that have come down under his name, Plato, or someone making a well-informed attempt to pass for him, tells the story, from his adolescent ambitions (*Ep.* 7, 324b–c 'I had the same experience as many others: I thought I would immediately enter public life, as soon as I came of age') down to the late 350s.

1126c–d lists associates of Plato whose political activities were for the good, while Athenaeus 11.508d–509b claims, with many names and much circumstantial detail, that 'most of his pupils turned out to be pretty tyrannical'. In having such controversial effects upon practical politics, the education offered in the Academy was like the uninstitutional education offered by Socrates himself.

Writing philosophical works, like organising a philosophical school, was liable to seem out of keeping with the 'conversational' (314c4n.) style of philosophy favoured by Socrates. At any rate, when Socrates' predecessors and contemporaries philosophised in writing, they uniformly adopted genres in which the writer presents himself as an authority, possessed of some philosophical truth which he proclaims to docile readers. Consider, for example, the bold proclamations at the start of works by Heraclitus (quoted in 346e2–3n.), Hippias (quoted in 337c7–d1n.) and Protagoras (quoted in 320d1n. on θεοὶ μὲν ἦσαν, and in 356d3–4n.); even bolder was Empedocles, who started his *Purifications* with the announcement that 'in me you now have an immortal god, mortal no longer, going about among you, honoured by all' (DK 31 B 112.4–5). With such models before him, it is no surprise that Socrates himself never wrote a word of philosophy.

To combine writing with the conversational style of philosophy, Socrates' followers invented a new literary genre: written accounts of conversations – dialogues – between Socrates and others, or Σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι (Arist. *Rh.* 1417a21, *Poetics* 1447b11). Like most of Plato's works, the *Protagoras* belongs to this genre.

Someone who writes an account of a conversation does not vouch for the accuracy of anything said in the conversation. Or at least, that applies to most cases; the exceptions are dialogues where the writer takes part in the conversation, and where, like Cicero's *De divinatione* and unlike Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 1.3.8–15, there is no suggestion that the writer has learnt better since taking part. It certainly applies to every one of Plato's dialogues, the *Protagoras* included; for Plato never represents himself as speaking in any of them, and could not, without intolerable anachronism, represent himself as speaking in the *Protagoras*, which he sets around the date of his birth (309a3n.).

Plato does not even include in the *Protagoras* a character to be his spokesman, as Philonous is spokesman for Berkeley in the *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. For no character apart from Socrates might conceivably be Plato's spokesman; yet what writer would have as his spokesman a character who makes two opposite pronouncements on whether virtue is teachable (361a2–b6), who speaks as if it is entirely proper to test people by putting falsehoods to them (341b4–d9, 349d1–2), who indulges in whimsically elaborate praise of concision (342a6–343b4), who pleads a transparently fictive prior engagement (335c5n.), and who recounts from memory a long conversation in which he spoke of his poor memory (334d1n.)? No doubt Plato did believe many of the things that he had Socrates say; but he also took great care to thwart the lazy inference from 'This is what Plato has Socrates say' to 'This is what we are to believe, on the authority of Plato.'

None of this means that Plato's own philosophical views are kept wholly concealed. On the contrary, in the *Protagoras* he expresses a clear view about deference to intellectual authority on philosophical questions, not indeed by stating that view himself or through a spokesman, but by the very act of writing a dialogue in which he abstains from such statements. And perhaps there are more views of Plato's to be gleaned from how he marshals the various things done and said in the *Protagoras* (see e.g. 310d3n., 337c2n., 342b3–5n., 358e1n.). But we face difficulties if we wish to philosophise by taking on trust the views that we can glean in this way. For example, what view are we to glean from complaints in a book that books are intellectually inert (329a2–4), and complaints in a work of literature that works of literature are too inscrutable for them to be authorities on anything (347c3–348a5)? The view that discussing works of literature is at best a stimulus to, and certainly no substitute for, philosophising of our own? That may well have been Plato's view. We may well come to share it, as a result of reading the *Protagoras*. But that cannot be because we take it on trust from Plato; it can only be because the *Protagoras* has nudged us into seeing it for ourselves. And if this is how the *Protagoras* affects us, then in writing it, Plato remained faithful to Socrates' example of philosophising in conversation.

4. EVIDENCE FOR THE TEXT

The text presented in this edition depends, for the most part, on printed reports of what survives of four manuscript copies of the entire *Protagoras*. The reports were printed in the twentieth century;[5] the manuscripts were copied at various times from the third century to the eleventh century AD. Occasionally the direct evidence supplied by these manuscripts is supplemented by indirect evidence: quotations in other ancient works of passages from the *Protagoras*. In many passages, this evidence presents variant readings. In some passages, the variations are serious: that is, it makes a difference which we choose, and the choice is not obvious. In some passages – and this includes some passages where the evidence attests to only one reading – there is reason to think that what Plato actually wrote differs from any reading to which the evidence attests. Some of the evidence is reported in the notes at the foot of the text. The notes use these signs:

D a reading attested in every manuscript, or fragment of manuscript, that in this passage supplies direct evidence for the text, even if one of those manuscripts attests also another reading as a correction or annotation.
d a reading attested, but not unanimously, in our direct evidence.
i a reading attested in our indirect evidence.
c a reading attested in neither our direct nor our indirect evidence.

[5] They are Burnet (1903), Croiset and Bodin (1923), and, for the surviving fragments of the third-century manuscript, the edition of them in Tulli (1999).