

## Lecture 3: Ancient Greek Philosophers

### I. The Sophists

#### ✓ Protagoras (490 – 420 B.C.)

- Sources of information: Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes
- Protagoras' doctrines:
  - Orthoepia
  - Man-Measure statement
  - Agnosticism (*Agnostic* – 'a person who is not sure whether God exists or not' from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary)

#### ✓ Prodicus, Gorgias, Cratylus, Hippias, etc.

### II. Socrates (470 – 399 B.C.)

#### The Sophists

The meaning of the word **sophist** (Gr. *sophistes* meaning "wise-ist," or one who 'does' wisdom, i.e. who makes a business out of wisdom; cf. *sophós*, "wise man", cf. also *wizard*) has changed greatly over time. Initially, a sophist was someone who gave *sophia* (wisdom) to his disciples. It was a highly respectful term, applied to early philosophers such as the Seven Wise Men of Greece.

In the second half of the 5th century B.C., and especially at Athens, "sophist" came to be applied to a number of highly respected thinkers/traveling teachers who employed debate and rhetoric to teach public speaking, grammar, linguistic theory, moral and political doctrines, doctrines about god and nature and the origins of man, literary analysis and criticism, mathematics, and physical theories of the universe, etc. Due to the importance of such skills in the *litigious* (quick to argue or sue in court) social life of Athens, practitioners of such skills often commanded very high fees.

*Protagoras* is generally regarded as the first sophist. Other prominent Sophists were *Prodicus*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias*, *Antiphon*, *Cratylus*, etc. Many sophists held a *relativistic* view on *cognition* (the act of learning) and knowledge. Their philosophy questioned the validity of religion, law and ethics. The Sophists' practice of taking fees, and their perceived lack of moral principles, eventually led to a loss of respect for the Sophists.

Unfortunately, most of the Sophists' original texts have not survived: we know about them and their ideas from Plato's writings. Now, Plato's teacher, Socrates, was critical of the Sophists, so we should take Plato's accounts with a pinch of salt (they may not be accurate). Eventually, the Sophists were accused of immorality by the state.

Let us now take a brief look at what we know of what a few of them: **Protagoras**, **Prodicus**, **Gorgias**, **Antiphon**, and **Hippias** thought (and taught) about Language.

The first great Sophist was **Protagoras (c. 490-420 BC)**. He was more modest than some of the later Sophists, and is treated respectfully by **Plato** in his dialogues. He is credited with being the first to distinguish *sentence types*: 4, according to some sources (prayer, question, answer, and command), and 7, according to others (narration, question, answer, command, report, prayer and invitation). He also, according to Aristotle, distinguished *grammatical genders* and *tenses*.

Protagoras is most famous for the doctrine that "**man is the measure of all things**" - probably a generalization from the fact that success in public speaking depends on the reaction of others. **Plato** claimed that Protagoras believed all sensory perceptions to be true for the person who feels them. This doctrine is known as "**Protagorean relativism.**"

The earlier Greek philosophers made a clear distinction between **sense** and **thought**, between **perception** and **reason**, and had believed that the truth is to be found, not by the senses, but by **reason**. The teaching of Protagoras rests on **denying** this distinction.

Protagoras is also known for his **agnosticism** (the claim that we cannot know anything about the gods): *"Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not or of what sort they may be. Many things prevent knowledge including the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life."*

**Prodicus**, a disciple of Protagoras, was born c. **450 BC**, and is known as the "precursor of Socrates" (he was still living in 399 BC, when Socrates died). His main contribution was in semantics, on how to distinguish synonyms from true synonyms (real or apparent synonyms).

**Gorgias (c. 485-380 BC)**, like Protagoras, is treated respectfully by Plato (see the *Gorgias*). He had a very polished style of speaking that made him very popular. He was among the first to recommend and use **figures of speech** (i.e., **antithesis, assonance, analogy, repetition, metaphor, pun**, etc.) in writing and narrative. He did not like the term sophist, he preferred to be called a rhetorician. He taught his disciples the art of persuasion, "to give them such absolute readiness for speaking, that they should be able to convince their audience independently of any knowledge of the subject." So Gorgias presented **language**, not as a means of grasping reality, but as a **tool for persuading and manipulating others**: *"The power of speech has the same relation to the order of the soul as drugs have to the nature of bodies. For as different drugs expel different humors from the body, and some put an end to sickness and others to life, so some words cause grief, others joy, some fear, others render their hearers bold, and still others drug and bewitch the soul through an evil persuasion . . ."* (*Praise of Helen*)

**Gorgias' philosophy** can be summed up with:

**1. Nothing Exists:**

If anything is, it must have had a beginning.

Its being must have arisen either from being, or from not being.

If it arose from being, there is no beginning; if it arose from not being, this is impossible, since something cannot arise out of nothing.

Therefore, nothing exists.

**2. If anything existed, it could not be known**

Sense perception differs in different people and even in the same person.

Therefore, the object as it is in itself cannot be known.

**3. If anything did exist, and could be known, it could not be communicated**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> proposition follows the same identification of knowledge with sensation, since sensation "cannot be communicated."

Gorgias reportedly starved himself to death.

Another important Sophist was **Antiphon (c. 480-411 BC)**. He opposed **nomos** (human law or custom) to **phusis** (nature). He claimed that many laws and unwritten customs, such as honoring those of noble birth, are "contrary to nature." He also argued that it is more beneficial for oneself (though not necessarily for others!) to obey nature rather than human law, provided one knows how to defend oneself well in the law-courts (and that is when mastery of language and logic comes in)!

**Hippias** was born about the **middle of the 5th century BC** and was thus a younger contemporary of Protagoras. He was a man of great versatility and won the respect of his fellow-citizens. He knew

Socrates and other leading thinkers. He claimed to be an authority on all subjects, and lectured (always for a lot of money!) on poetry, grammar, history, politics, archaeology, mathematics and astronomy. He boasted that he was more popular than Protagoras, and was prepared at any moment to deliver an impromptu address on any subject to the assembly at Olympia.

Certainly, he was an able orator, but it is also known that he was superficial. His aim was not to give knowledge, but to provide his pupils with the weapons of argument.

However, it is true that Hippias did a real service to Greek literature by insisting on the *meaning of words, the value of rhythm and literary style*. He also made a detailed study of the *sound system of the Greek language*. He forms the connecting link between the first great sophists, Protagoras and Prodicus, and the innumerable eristics who brought their name into disrepute.

### **Conclusion:**

**The Sophists** were at first widely admired. Eventually they came into disrepute because of their high fees and the radical nature of what many of them taught. People were particularly suspicious of their claim to be able to teach a student how **"to make the weaker argument stronger"** (Protagoras).

Though Sophists did not agree on everything, all their ideas seem to revolve around the idea that there is no Absolute Truth. Every man has his own truth. This probably has something to do with Plato and Aristotle giving them a bad name. They said that Sophists were not genuine seekers of the truth and called them quibblers and cheats in arguments. This general belief is responsible for the meanings of "sophist" and "sophistry" today.

**Socrates (June 4, 469 – May 7, 399 B.C.)** was perhaps the first philosopher to significantly challenge the Sophists.

According to ancient manuscripts, Socrates' father was a sculptor, and his mother - a midwife. He was married to *Xanthippe*, traditionally considered a shrew, and had three sons, all quite young at the time of his death. It is unclear what exactly Socrates did for a living. He did not work, and devoted himself only to discussing philosophy, which he thought to be the most important art and occupation. Some alleged, that Socrates was paid by his students, and that he was even running a school of sophistry with a friend of his. Plato, however, wrote that Socrates never accepted money for teaching (unlike the Sophists). Socrates did not charge for his teaching, or claim to be wise. He would engage men in conversation about justice. Socrates claimed to have a daimonion, a small daimon that warned him against mistakes but never told him what to do or coerced him into following it. He claimed that his daimon exhibited greater accuracy than any of the forms of divination practised at the time. It is also possible that Socrates survived off the generosity of his wealthy and powerful friends.

Socrates lived during the time of the transition from the height of the Athenian Empire to its decline after its defeat by Sparta and its allies in the Peloponnesian War. At a time when Athens was seeking to stabilize and recover from its humiliating defeat, the Athenian public court was induced by three leading public figures to try Socrates for impiety and for corrupting the youth of Athens. The Greeks at that time thought of gods and goddesses were protectors of particular cities. Athens, for instance, is named after its protecting goddess Athena. The defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War was interpreted as Athena judging the city for not being pious. Socrates, who was called "Gadfly" because he questioned everything (including the gods), was blamed for the defeat in the war (the last thing Athens needed was more punishment from Athena for one man inciting its citizens to question her or the other gods).

In the *Apology*, Socrates insists that this is a false charge. According to the version of his defense speech presented in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates' life as the "gadfly" of Athens began when his friend Chaerephon asked the oracle at Delphi if anyone was wiser than Socrates; the Oracle responded negatively. Socrates, interpreting this as a riddle, set out to find men who were wiser than he was. He questioned the men of Athens about their knowledge of good, beauty, and virtue. Finding that they knew nothing and yet believing themselves to know much, Socrates came to the conclusion that he was wise only in so far as **he knew that he knew nothing**. Socrates' superior intellect made the prominent Athenians he publicly questioned look foolish, turning them against him and leading to accusations of wrongdoing. Socrates was accused at his trial, according to Plato, of being a Sophist (this may have made Plato so anti-Sophists). Despite Socrates' brilliant and moving defence speech, he was found guilty, and sentenced to death by drinking a cup of hemlock.

### The Socratic Method

Perhaps his most important contribution to Western thought is Socrates' dialectic method of inquiry, known as the Socratic Method, which he largely applied to the examination of key moral concepts such as the Good and Justice, concepts used constantly without any real definition. It was first described by Plato in the *Socratic Dialogues*. In this method, a series of questions are posed to help a person or group to determine their underlying beliefs and the extent of their knowledge. The Socratic method is a *negative* method of hypothesis elimination, in that better hypotheses are found by steadily identifying and eliminating those which lead to contradictions. It was designed to force one to examine one's own beliefs and the validity of such beliefs. In fact, Socrates once said, "I know you won't believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others"

Socrates seems to have often stated that he "knew only that he knew nothing." Socrates may have believed that wrongdoing was a consequence of ignorance, that those who did wrong knew no better. The one thing Socrates consistently claimed to have knowledge of was "the art of love" which he connected with the concept of "the love of wisdom", i.e., philosophy. He never actually claimed to be wise, only to understand the path that a lover of wisdom must take in pursuing it.

Socrates matched those who were unsuited for philosophy with Sophists. For his part as a philosophical interlocutor, he led his respondent to a clearer conception of wisdom, although he claimed that he was not himself a teacher. His role, he claimed, was that of a *midwife*, explaining that he was himself barren of theories, but that he knew how to bring the theories of others to birth and determine whether they are worthy or mere "wind eggs." He pointed out that midwives are barren due to age, and women who have never given birth are unable to become midwives; a truly barren woman would have no experience or knowledge of birth and would be unable to separate the worthy infants from those that should be left on the hillside to be exposed. To judge this, the midwife must have experience and knowledge of what she is judging.

We will learn more about Socrates and some of the sophists through reading excerpts of Plato's dialogues later this week.

### References

Prof. Otto Nekitel's Lecture Notes (14.4129 Survey of Linguistic Theories) – 2001.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sophist>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prodicus>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippias>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates>

## Appendix

*Cratylus* (Κρατυλος) is the name of a dialogue by Plato, written in approx. 360 BC. In the dialogue, Socrates is asked by two men, Cratylus and Hermogenes, to tell them whether names are "conventional" or "natural", that is, whether language is a system of arbitrary signs or whether words have an intrinsic relation to the things they signify. In doing this, *Cratylus* became one of the earliest philosophical texts of the Classical Greek period to deal with matters of etymology and linguistics.

When discussing how a word would relate to its subject, he compares the original creation of a word to the work of an artist. An artist uses colour to express the essence of his subject in a painting. In much the same way, the creator of words uses letters containing certain sounds to express the essence of a word's subject. There is a letter that is best for soft things, one for liquid things, and so on. He comments, "This would be the most perfect state of language."

The counter argument is that names have come about due to custom and convention. They do not express the essence of their subject, and so they can be swapped with something unrelated if those who use the word were to agree upon it.

The line between the two perspectives is often blurred. During more than half of the dialogue, Socrates makes guesses at Hermogenes' request as to where names and words have come from. These include the names of the Olympian gods, personified deities, and many words that describe abstract concepts. Many of the words which Socrates uses as examples may have come from an idea originally linked to the name, but have changed over time. Those of which he cannot find a link, he often assumes have come from foreign origins or have changed so much as to lose all resemblance to the original word. He states, "**names have been so twisted in all manner of ways, that I should not be surprised if the old language when compared with that of now in use would appear to us to be a barbarous tongue.**"

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cratylus\\_\(dialogue\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cratylus_(dialogue))

### The Sophists on Correct Speech

#### Michael Gagarin -- University of Texas

The issue of "correctness," in language, (or put differently, the status of established norms of usage) has been a concern of all who think about language down to the present day. The first people to raise this issue were the sophists. This is well known, and several studies have surveyed the sophists' writings on this topic (e.g. Classen, Kerferd), but there is much more to say on the topic. My specific concern is to try to understand how thinkers like Protagoras, Prodicus and Antiphon used concepts of "correctness" (*orthos*, *orthotês*) to mediate between an absolute standard corresponding to some sort of natural essence of things (*physis*) -- which is sometimes opposed to established practice (*nomos*) -- and a more relativistic approach which acknowledges that the correctness of any *logos* can only be determined by human beings and is thus negotiable.

I plan to begin by setting the background with a very brief survey of the range of writings by different sophists that are relevant to this issue and also by looking very briefly at uses of *orthos* in other fifth-century texts. I will then focus on a few particularly illustrative examples -- Protagoras' attempts to

determine *orthos logos* in light of his specific criticisms of Homer, Antiphon's reflections on judging between opposed *logoi* in the Second Tetralogy, and the discussion of the natural basis of language in Plato's *Cratylus* (and elsewhere), that clearly echoes work of the sophists.

I hope to bring out the complexity of the sophists' views on these issues, and if I have time, I will very briefly suggest how their views set the groundwork for later work of Plato, Aristotle and beyond.

<http://www.camws.org/meeting/2004/abstracts2004/gagarin.html>

***Kata Ton Orthotaton Logon:*** Correct Argument in the Sophists and Early Orators  
Michael Gagarin

Rethymno, October 29, 2004

Like many of you, I'm sure, in my teaching I sometimes confront new standards of language use among my students. I was taught grammar as a matter of right and wrong. "Between you and me" was right; "between you and I" was simply wrong. Such rules, I understood, were absolute and non-negotiable. We all know, of course, that the rules change over time, and that the authority of grammatical rules waxes and wanes. Today in the US, the attitudes seem to be set by our President, whose ignorance of and lack of concern for correct speech actually appeals to a substantial segment of the population. And increasingly my students question how I can insist that a certain usage of theirs is wrong. I find myself beginning to feel sympathy for traditionalists in Greece who reacted with outrage at the questioning of common rules and assumptions about language by the new intellectuals in the second half of the fifth-century. Many who listened to the Older Sophists must have accepted without question, and probably without thinking, that certain ways of speaking were simply right, and others wrong. The sophists were out to change that.

As in so many other areas, the sophists were the first to offer an explicit challenge to traditional rules about *logos*. I want to look carefully at this challenge, and in particular, I want to see why they fastened on a standard of *orthotês*, or correctness, how they used that standard, and how others reacted to it. As we shall see, the standard of correctness sometimes found itself in competition ... with a standard of truth, though the two could coexist in the orators. Let me begin, then, by considering the use of *orthos* among the sophists.

The various uses of *orthos* are well illustrated in a well-known scene in Plato's *Protagoras*. After an intermission midway through the dialogue, Protagoras resumes the discussion by questioning Socrates about poetry. He prefaces his questions by stating,

"I think the greatest part of education for a man is to be clever about poems; by that I mean he is able to grasp which of a poet's lines are composed correctly (*orthôs*), and which are not, he knows how to distinguish them, and he can give a reason when questioned" (338e7-339a1).

Protagoras then quotes the opening of a poem of Simonides and asks whether Socrates thinks it was composed "well and correctly" (*kalôs kai orthôs*). "Very well and correctly," answers Socrates. But Protagoras then cites lines from later in the poem which appear to contradict the earlier lines and concludes that either the opening of the poem or the later stanza must be incorrect (*ouk orthôs*). In desperation, Socrates asks Prodicus to find a correction (*epanorthôma*) using his special *mousikê* or talent with language. Prodicus' *mousikê technê* is, of course, his ability to distinguish correctly

between near synonyms. Moreover, when Prodicus' correction turns out to produce a worse error than the one that needed correcting in the first place, Socrates, in an obvious parody of Prodicus' special expertise, proposes that Simonides is criticizing Pittacus for distinguishing the meanings of words incorrectly (*ouk orthôs*, 341c). When this line of argument also fails, Socrates gives his final interpretation, which shows, among other things, that the word "truly" is in its correct place in the sentence.

This discussion illustrates some of the many ways in which the new intellectuals had begun to use the term *orthos* and its compounds in connection with language. Of course, Plato may be misrepresenting the arguments of Protagoras or Prodicus or Socrates, but the general historical accuracy of the arguments and positions represented in the scene is supported by other evidence that both Protagoras and Prodicus were interested in correct speech. Plato tells us elsewhere (*Crat.* 384b, *Euthyd.* 277e), that Prodicus taught the correct use of words (*onomatôn orthotês*), and the speech that Plato puts in his mouth earlier in *Protagoras* 337a-c, distinguishing four pairs of close synonyms, would hardly have a point if the historical Prodicus had not done something of the sort.

Protagoras' interest in correct speech is also well attested elsewhere in Plato, for instance in *Cratylus* 391c where his interests are said to have included *orthotês* [ i.e. *tôn onomatôn*] and in *Phaedrus* 267c where he is said to have written on *orthoepia*. We also have a report in Plutarch (*Pericles* 36.3), citing the fifth-century "historian" Stesimbrotus, that "When an athlete unintentionally struck Epitimus the Pharsalian with a javelin and killed him, Protagoras spent an entire day with Pericles puzzling over whether one should believe that the javelin or the javelin-thrower or those who arranged the contest were more to blame, according to the most correct account (*kata ton orthotaton logon*)." Interestingly, Antiphon treats what is apparently the same case in his Second Tetralogy. I'll come back to Antiphon later, but first I want to look more closely at the sophists' use of *orthos*: Why did Protagoras and Prodicus use this word to describe correct speech? And what does their use of the term reveal about their views on language and linguistic orthodoxy?

First, some background. From Homer on, *orthos* is the most common adjective for "straight." The adverb *ithy* is sometimes used in the sense of "straight forward, straight ahead," but if a person stands straight or a line or a path is straight, the word is *orthos*. By the fifth century, however, metaphorical uses of *orthos* have begun to predominate. For Pindar, a messenger can be *orthos* -- "accurate" or "true" (*O.* 6.90); surgery can make a man's body *orthos*, or "sound" (*P.* 3.53); and a mind (*noos*) can be *orthos*, or "upright" (*P.* 10.68). Metaphorical uses are especially common in tragedy and Herodotus. The latter speaks of the Delphians being *orthos* ("correct") in their ascription of a vase to Theodorus of Samos (1.51) and Croesus being *ouk orthos* ("wrong") in blaming Apollo (1.91). The dative *orthôi logôi* means "in truth" -- as when Demaratus asks his mother, "Who is my father *orthôi logôi*?" -- that is, "tell me straight who my father is" (6.68). In this sense, an *orthos logos* is a statement of fact that is correct, true, or accurate, and the standard of correctness or accuracy is for the most part objective. Herodotus implies that Demaratus' mother knows as a matter of objective fact who his father is. Note, however, that there is already a tendency here for *orthos* to refer to some kind of speech act -- a message, an ascription, blame, or information.

There is one passage in Herodotus where we can see even broader possibilities for expanding the meaning of *orthos*. This comes in the story of Deioces, the first king of the Medes. Before becoming king, Deioces devoted himself to justice (*dikaiosynê*) and gained a reputation as the best settler of disputes for the villagers in his area. He did this by judging *kata ton orthon* -- correctly, rightly, justly. From everything we know about Greek judicial procedure, it is clear that Deioces' superiority did not

lie primarily in his ability to discern or state the true facts of a case or to quote laws accurately; rather, his talent lay in finding a fair or just resolution to a dispute, one that was perceived to be fair by the community. *Kata ton orthos* must then refer to Deioeces' judgment -- his decisions were just or fair in that they were generally accepted or recognized as fair by the disputants and the rest of the community. Now, there is a precedent for this use in the metaphorical use of *ithys* -- "straight-forward" in epic. The main example comes in the trial scene on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18. Here two litigants plead before a group of elders and an award is given to the elder who "speaks his judgment most straightforwardly, most correctly" (*dikên ithyntata eipoi*, 18.508). Here too, just as with Deioeces' judging *kata ton orthon*, settling a dispute *ithyntata* is a matter of fairness or correct judgment, not simply factual truth. In these legal contexts, both *orthos* and *ithys* designate a negotiable and problematic standard of justice that is to some extent subjectively determined by the community. At the same time, both terms imply that this standard is also in some sense an objective standard of straightness or correctness.

Another indication that this standard of correctness must have an element of subjectivity is the fact that the Greeks spoke of some judgments as most correct (*ithyntata, orthotatos*). This suggests that in any given situation, a correct verdict was a relative concept: one verdict could be more correct than another, or could even be the most correct. Thus, in a legal context, correctness is a more complex standard than it is, say, in determining who is truly Demaratus' father. We see then, that by the time of the sophists, *orthos* had already developed a broad range of meaning, from objective accuracy to subjective good judgment. And it was this broad range (I believe) that made the term particularly appealing to the sophists, and particularly to Protagoras.

It's not clear which sophist first applied the term to a linguistic matter, but my guess is that it was **Prodicus**. Even though he was a generation younger than Protagoras, linguistic concerns seem to play a larger role in Prodicus' work, and he seems to have adhered closely to an objective sense of *orthos*. In *On the Correctness of Names* he distinguished between near synonyms, and the examples of this skill reported by Plato's (*Protagoras* 337a-c) appear reasonably objective: impartially does differ from equally, debating from quarreling, esteem from praise, and enjoyment from pleasure in the ways Prodicus explains, and his judgment on these matters seems essentially objective. To be sure, Socrates later (341c) leads Prodicus to conclude that difficult (*chalepon*) means bad (*kakon*), which is patently absurd, but when challenged, Socrates quickly rescinds his proposal, calling it a joke. In the end, this false definition only reinforces the view that Prodicus' definitions accord with what "all of us know," as Protagoras puts it (341d). Thus, Prodicus' judgments were essentially objective, and the broader, problematic uses of *orthos* were the work of Protagoras.

We do not know the contents of Protagoras' work on *Correct Speech (Orthoepeia)*, but it probably included discussion of the **proper gender of nouns**, which is parodied in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, and of the **proper use of moods**. Protagoras developed his views on these subjects through criticism of Homer. According to Aristotle (*Soph. Elench.* 173b), he said that "wrath" (*mênis* -- the first word of the *Iliad*) was masculine and that it was wrong to use a feminine adjective, *oulomenên*, to modify it, as Homer does in line 2 of the poem. According to Aristotle (*Poetics* 19), Protagoras also criticized Homer because in the same sentence he gives a command to the Muse ("Sing, Muse") when he thinks he is uttering a prayer. If, as is likely, Protagoras used *orthos* in criticizing Homeric usage, he probably wanted to suggest that grammatical issues like these are objective, factual matters. He was undoubtedly aware, however, that his assertions about correctness and incorrectness were not only not objective, but would provoke strong objections from many (if not most) in his audience. This raises the question how seriously he took these assertions about Homer, and what his purpose was in making them.



We find a broader sense of *orthos*, though still grounded in objectivity, when Protagoras criticizes Simonides' poem by arguing that two stanzas are contradictory, and therefore one of them must be incorrect. Objectively, a poet cannot truly make contradictory assertions. But since the points that are judged to be contradictory are concerned with human virtue and its attainment, the discussion also quickly moves to broader, moral issues that go beyond the specific question of logical contradiction. Using *orthos* for these issues, too, suggests that standards of moral judgment, which would normally be considered subjective, are in some sense reducible to objective rules of logic.

The broadest use of *orthos* we find in Protagoras is the report that he and Pericles spent a day arguing about who was responsible for the accidental death of someone hit by a javelin, "according to the most correct account" (*kata ton orthotaton logon*). This expression, used here in a quasi-judicial context, recalls Herodotus' *kata ton orthon* and Homer's *dikên ithyntata*. As I noted in those two examples, finding the straightest account or judgment in a legal situation involves negotiating issues of fairness and good judgment, not the mere ascertainment of factual truth, though the word "straight," whether *ithys* or *orthos*, also suggests that a straight judgment is in some sense objectively correct. So when Protagoras used the expression *kata ton orthotaton logon* in this context, he, too, probably intended to suggest that in this case matters of fairness or justice could be correctly (or more correctly) decided by some objective standard. The story also suggests that a straighter, more correct judgment is one that is reached through a process of discussion or debate. And we actually have an example of just such a debate on this same issue in the Second Tetralogy composed by another contemporary sophist, *Antiphon*.

**Antiphon's Second Tetralogy** consists of four speeches, two on each side. The prosecution accuses the thrower of the javelin of what we might call negligible homicide, but the defense blames the victim for causing his own death through negligence. Both litigants appeal to a standard of truth (*alêtheia*), not straightness or correctness. The defense insists that although the accused "did throw [the javelin], he did not kill anyone according to the truth of what he did" . . . . The plaintiff responds by asserting that the facts are clear, and asking the jurors not "to think that the truth of what was done is really false" . . . . Interestingly, in its final speech, the defense claims that this apparently **objective "truth of what was done" can only be discovered through words, *logoi***. And he adds that the jurors, "must examine the facts (*ta prachthenta*) impartially (*isôs*), for their truth is only discernible from what has been said" (3.4.1-2). Antiphon thus establishes truth rather than correctness as the standard of judgment in this case, but like Protagoras' correctness, Antiphon's truth is also problematic: though both sides try to make it appear objective, here, too, truth can only be determined through a process of verbal negotiation, here involving opposed *logoi*.

Thus, Antiphon argues for "the truth of what was done" as the standard of judgment, as distinct from Protagoras' standard of correct argument. The two approaches are only slightly divergent, but the difference is significant. In late-fifth-century texts, *orthos* is almost always used of the realm of *logos* . . . , to include not just speech and argument, but thoughts, beliefs, decisions, and the like. *Alêthês*, on the other hand, is generally used of facts, actions, events -- the realm of *erga* or *pragmata*. One could talk of speaking correctly or speaking the truth, *t'alêthes*, but the former directs the listener's attention to the speech or argument itself -- is he speaking correctly? -- whereas the latter directs it to the content of the speech -- is what is being said true?

To illustrate the difference, consider the sentence in the same defendant's speech that follows the last statement I just quoted about the truth only being discernible from what has been said. He continues, "for my part, if I have said anything false (*pseudos*) about anything, I agree that whatever I have said

correctly (*orthôs*) can also be discredited as unfair; but if I have spoken the truth (*alêthê*) but with subtlety (*lepta*) and precision (*akribê*), then it is only fair that any hostility that results should be directed not at me, the speaker, but at him (i.e. the boy) who acted” (3.4.2). Now, Antiphon, you may recall, was suspect among the Athenians for his *deinotês*, and his defendant’s case here would certainly be seen as confirming this cleverness. From the beginning, therefore, the defendant takes pains to play down his skill in argument. He apologizes ahead of time for the subtlety of his case. Clearly, he wants to turn attention away from his speaking ability, and if he claimed that his *logos* was correct (*orthos*), this would draw attention to the skill with which he constructed his case.

**Protagoras**, on the other hand, clearly did want to draw attention to the construction of arguments. He taught how to argue different sides of a case and especially how to make **“a weaker *logos* stronger.”** When several *logoi* could be constructed for a case, one could then try to decide which was *orthotatos*. And the skill in speaking he promoted became perhaps the notorious aspect to the sophists’ teaching. In Plato’s *Protagoras*, the young Hippocrates, when pressed to say what he thought Protagoras, as a sophist, would teach him, answered, “the science of making a person clever at speaking” (312d). Thus, *orthos*, as a standard of skillful speech, became closely associated with the new intellectualism of the sophists, an association that the orators understandably wished to avoid.

That Protagoras developed a standard of correctness, not truth, is particularly interesting in light of the fact that like Antiphon, he also wrote a work entitled *Truth*, the opening sentence of which was his famous assertion that **“man is the measure (*metron*) of all things.”** We will never know the precise meaning of this claim, or how Protagoras advised that things be measured, but the fact that there was a measure that could somehow be applied to things suggests that Protagoras envisaged a quasi-objective standard of truth, perhaps along the lines of the hedonistic calculus that Socrates develops in the last part of *Protagoras*. And the idea that things could be quantified and measured, and that *logos* could similarly be judged correct (as well as weak or strong) is reflected in the teachings offered to Strepsiades when he enters Socrates’ *phrontistêrion* in the *Clouds*.

The figure of Socrates in the *Clouds* certainly has some attributes of the historical Socrates, but he also represents an amalgam of sophistic ideas and personal characteristics. In particular, the influence of Protagoras is evident throughout. The *phrontistêrion* teaches, among other things, how to measure very precisely -- the length of a flea’s jump is one example -- and the correct genders of nouns, such as the nouns for rooster and hen. If we make allowance for the element of parody, the play clearly implies that the sophists’ teachings emphasized objective and scientific measurement. Thus, Aristophanes is tapping into the popular conception of sophistic teaching, and especially Protagorean teaching, as a scientific measurement whose results (as he parodies them) range from trivial to absurd. And straightness or correctness was part of this public perception of sophistic teaching. The word *orthos* occurs eight times in the play, five times spoken by Socrates while he is teaching Strepsiades (228, 251, 659, 679, 742); once by the chorus of *Clouds* speaking to the audience in the *parabasis* (616), once by Pheidippides showing off his new learning (1186), and once by Strepsiades, ironically thanking Hermes of correct advice as he proceeds to burn down the *phrontistêrion*. Thus, *orthos* is always connected with the new learning. By contrast, *alêthês* is used five times, four times by Strepsiades when he is outside the context of the Thinking School, and once by the Chorus when they pledge to the audience that they will tell the truth at the beginning of the *parabasis*.

This connection with the new learning would explain why Antiphon is wary of *orthos* language. Not that he avoids it entirely. In fact, in the Tetralogies *orthos* is slightly more common than *alêthês* (15 occurrences versus 13). These works contain a good bit of what I have called metadiscourse --

discussion of the nature and validity of various arguments and of the verdict, which is commonly characterized as correct or not. But in Antiphon's three court speeches there are only 21 occurrences of *orthos* (which is proportionally fewer than in the much shorter Tetralogies), and a large majority of these come at the beginning and end of the speeches. In Antiphon 5, for example, *orthos* occurs twelve times -- twice in the prologue (1-7), six times in the epilogue (85-96) and only four times in the body of the speech. By comparison, *alêthês* occurs thirty-five times in this speech, mostly in the central arguments, and is common in Antiphon 1 and 6 too. Finally, in all the works, *orthos* most often qualifies speech, sometimes the verdict and occasionally a plan or a law. But twice it is used of acting correctly (*orthôs prattein*), both times when correct action is being contrasted with correct speech (5.5, 5.75). The pattern in Andocides is similar. *Orthos* occurs seven times in the three genuine speeches, always in the realm of *logos*, whereas *alêthês* occurs nineteen times, all but one of them in his speech *On the Mysteries*. In both orators, moreover, and in other texts of the period, to assert that an argument is correct normally implies that its content is true, and vice versa. But the connotations of the two standards remained different. The orators had to be sensitive to these, and so they used *orthos* only sparingly.

Protagoras, on the other hand, made *orthotês* the primary standard for many different areas of inquiry concerning *logos*. We have already seen his use of *orthos* in discussions of gender and syntax, poetic criticism, and legal argumentation. It is also quite possible that he contributed to (or perhaps even originated) the fifth-century debate about the origin of names -- whether words have a natural origin or a conventional origin -- and that *orthotês* had a place in this discussion too. As the debate is presented in Plato's *Cratylus*, it clearly has Protagorean roots, since Hermogenes' position that names are conventional contains clear echoes of Protagoras and is explicitly connected with Protagoras' man-measure declaration. This is not to say that Protagoras ever argued that "whatever each person says is the name of something, for him, that is its name," as Plato reports Hermogenes saying in *Cratylus* 385d (a clear echo of Protagoras), but he may perhaps have proposed something along the lines that the meanings of words have their origin in the community that uses them and whatever meaning a community gives to a word is that word's correct meaning.

But the most reliable sources for Protagoras' work in these areas suggest that he was best known for making highly provocative observations, aimed at stimulating others to question traditional views. Assertions such as that Homer made grammatical mistakes, that Simonides contradicted himself, or that the javelin itself could have been responsible for someone's accidental death, may have been in large part heuristic, intended to lead to further thinking about correctness in these and related areas. It is possible, therefore, that Protagoras did not develop his own views on any of these matters, and that whatever he said about the origin of names took the form of provocative observations, for example that different people use different words for the same thing or the same word for different things, to which he may have added comments on correctness, for example that Homer was wrong to call something X because its true name is Y.

Barring the discovery of Protagoras' actual works, we will never be able to ascertain whether he developed positive views on correct *logos*, but we can be quite certain that he raised the question of correctness in these areas, and was the first to discuss explicitly the issue of rules or standards in language. And by choosing *orthos* as the primary descriptive for correct *logos*, and by exploiting the broad range of objective and subjective meanings of this word, he established a basis for the scientific study of both grammar and rhetoric. For by posing questions about the correct rules of argument in the same terms as he questioned the correct rules of gender, Protagoras suggested that both areas were subjects for similar intellectual discussion and scientific study. In raising these issues, Protagoras

directed his audience's attention not to what is really the case, but rather to what is correctly said or thought to be the case. This shift allowed him to adopt a subjective position but give it the appearance of objectivity that was probably very effective in stimulating debate. The orators, not surprisingly, were wary of relying on this slippery notion of correctness and put greater emphasis on truth as the standard of judging the facts of the case.

## Socrates in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*

<http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/GrPhil/Socrates.htm>

Induction stands in contrast this with deductive reasoning, which is the reverse procedure: the reasoning from the general to the specific. Instead of reasoning from particulars by means of abstraction to a general conclusion, one reasons from the general (a major premise) to the specific; that is, one subsumes a less general category under a more general category, and understands the former as an instance of the latter (a species belonging to a genus). In deductive reasoning, one already knows the essence (ti estin) of a collection of things, what they all share in common, and this serves as the major premise in the syllogism. So you may reason: 1. Paper burns; 2. A file folder is made of paper; 3. Therefore, a file folder burns. To use more proper terminology, the above is an example of a categorical syllogism: the major premise states that something is true about a class or genus (the essence of that class), the minor premise identifies something as a member of that class or genus and the conclusion is the attribution of what is true about the class or genus to that which is identified as belonging to that class or genus. Thus file folders are identified as belonging to the class or genus of things made of paper, so that what is true of the latter is necessarily true of the former: file folders are combustible.

Now the question that arises is whether there is anything about the Platonic Socrates that resembles Aristotle's depiction of one who reasoned inductively? The impression that one receives from the Socrates of Plato's dialogues is of someone who asks many questions on the pretense of ignorance (Socratic irony). He asks questions in order to come to an understanding of something (e.g.'s, the nature of piety, knowledge, courage, temperance, justice, etc.). When he receives an answer to a question, Socrates usually commends his interlocutor (ironically), and then asks for clarification of a few points; in other words, he asks further questions that arise from the answer to the previous question. This process continues until Socrates' interlocutor either admits his ignorance of the subject, contrary to his original claim, or becomes extremely annoyed with Socrates and cuts short the dialectical process. This method of inquiry is known as the dialectical method: the asking of a series of interlocking and progressive questions.

What Aristotle describes as induction seems to be this dialectical method. Socrates' dialectical method is inductive reasoning, insofar as he begins with a question about the essence of something and tries to organize the experiential data as an answer to that question; in other words, he tries to abstract general truths from experience. His aim is to define something, to understand and state its essence (ti estin); in so doing, he answers the original question. So, for example, Socrates notices that people speak about the beautiful,

and seeks to understand what beauty is (*Symposium*); from all data pertaining to beauty derived from his questioning, he attempts to determine what beauty is, what all beautiful things have in common so that they all can be called beautiful.

### THE TEACHER AS MIDWIFE

One of the classic metaphors for the teacher is to be found in this short section from Plato's *Theaetetus* (148e-151d, translated by F. N. Cornford). Socrates is questioning the young man Theaetetus about what constitutes "knowledge." Theaetetus is not certain he can provide sensible answers. The dialogue is set in the year 299 B.C., it was probably written about 257 B.C.

---

THEAETETUS: But I assure you Socrates, I have often set myself to study (the problem of defining knowledge) when I heard reports of the questions you ask. But I cannot persuade myself that I can give any satisfactory solution or that anyone has ever stated in my hearing the sort of answer you require. And yet I cannot get the question out of my mind.

SOCRATES: My dear Theaetetus, that is because your mind is not empty or barren. You are suffering the pains of travail.

THEAETETUS: I don't know about that, Socrates. I am only telling you how I feel.

SOCRATES: How absurd of you, never to have heard that I am the son of a midwife, a fine buxom woman called Phaenarete!

THEAETETUS: I have heard that.

SOCRATES: Have you also been told that I practice the same art?

THEAETETUS: No, never.

SOCRATES: It is true, though, only don't give away my secret. It is not known that I possess this skill; so the ignorant world describes me in other terms as an eccentric person who reduces people to hopeless perplexity. Have you been told that too?

THEAETETUS: I have.

SOCRATES: Shall I tell you the reason?

THEAETETUS: Please do.

SOCRATES: Consider, then, how it is with all midwives; that will help you to understand what I mean. I dare say you know that they never attend other women in childbirth so long as they themselves can conceive and bear children, but only when they are too old for that.

THEAETETUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: They say that is because Artemis, the patroness of childbirth, is herself childless, and so, while she did not allow barren women to be midwives, because it is beyond the power of human nature to achieve skill without any experience, she assigned the privilege to women who were past childbearing, out of respect to their likeness to herself.

THEAETETUS: That sounds likely.

SOCRATES: And it is more likely, is it not, that no one can tell so well as a midwife whether women are pregnant or not?

THEAETETUS: Assuredly.

SOCRATES: Moreover, with the drugs and incantations they administer, midwives can either bring on the pains of travail or allay them at their will, make a difficult labor easy and at an early stage cause miscarriage if they so decide.

THEAETETUS: True.

SOCRATES: Have you also observed that they are the cleverest matchmakers, having an unerring skill in selecting a pair whose marriage will produce the best children?

THEAETETUS: I was not aware of that.

SOCRATES: Well, you may be sure they pride themselves on that more than on cutting the umbilical cord. Consider the knowledge of the sort of plant of seed that should be sown in any given soul. Does not that go together with skill in tending and harvesting the fruits of the earth? They are not two different arts?

THEAETETUS: No, the same.

SOCRATES: And so with a woman; skill in the sowing is not be separated from skill in the harvesting?

THEAETETUS: Probably not.

SOCRATES: No. Only because there is that wrong and ignorant way of bringing together man and woman which they call pandering, midwives, out of self-respect, are shy even of matchmaking, for fear of falling under the accusation of pandering. Yet the genuine midwife is the only successful matchmaker.

THEAETETUS: That is clear.

SOCRATES: All this, then lies within the midwife's province, but her performance falls short of mine. It is not the way of women sometimes to bring forth real children, sometimes mere phantoms, such that it is hard to tell the one from the other. If it were so, the highest and noblest task of the midwife would be to discern the real from the unreal, would it not?

THEAETETUS: I agree.

SOCRATES: My art of midwifery is in general like theirs; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth. And the highest point of my art is the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man's thought is a false phantom, or instinct with life and truth. I am so far like the midwife that I cannot myself give birth to wisdom, and the common reproach is true, that, though I question others, I can myself bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in me.

The reason is this. Heaven constrains me to serve as a midwife, but has debarred me from giving birth. So of myself I have no sort of wisdom, nor has any discovery ever been born to me as the child unintelligent, but, as we go further with our discussions, all who are favored by heaven make progress at a rate that seems surprising to others as well as to themselves, although it is clear that they have never learned anything from me. The many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within. But the delivery is heaven's work and mine.

The proof of this is that many who have not been conscious of my assistance but have made light of me, thinking it was all their own doing, have left me sooner than they should, whether under others' influence or of their own motion, and thenceforward suffered miscarriage of their thoughts through falling into bad company, and they have lost the children of whom I had delivered them by bringing them up badly, caring more for false phantoms than for the true. And so at last their lack of understanding has become apparent to themselves and to everyone else. Such a one was Aristides, son of Lysimachus, and there have been many more. When they come back and beg for a renewal of our intercourse with extravagant protestations, sometimes the divine warning that comes to me forbids it; with others it is permitted, and these begin again to make progress.

In yet another way those who seek my company have the same experience as a woman with child; they suffer the pains of labor and, by night and day, are full of distress far greater than a woman's, and my art has power to bring on those pangs or to allay them. So it fares with these, but there are some, Theaetetus, whose minds, as I judge, have never conceived at all. I see that they have no need of me and with all good will I seek a match for them. Without boasting unduly I can guess pretty well whose society will profit them. I have arranged many of these matches with Prodicus, and with other men of inspired sagacity.

And now for the upshot of this long discourse of mine. I suspect that, as you yourself believe, your mind is in labor with some thought it has conceived. Accept then, the ministrations of a midwife's son who himself practices his mother's art, and do the best you can to answer the questions I ask. Perhaps when I examine your statements I may judge one or another of them to be an unreal phantom.

If I then take the abortion from you and cast it away, do not be savage with me like a woman robbed of her first child. People have often felt like that toward me and been positively ready to bite me for taking away some foolish notion they have conceived. They do not see that I am doing them a kindness. They have not learned that no divinity is ever ill-disposed toward man, nor is such action on my part due to unkindness; it is only that I am not permitted to acquiesce in falsehood and suppress the truth.

So, Theaetetus, start again and try to explain what knowledge is. Never say it is beyond your power; it will not be so, if heaven wills and you take courage.