

Socrates Philosopher

Plato's *Sophist* "signal(s) that (Plato's) own portrayal of Socrates and the sophists leaves the boundaries between the concepts of the philosopher and the sophist unclear, and that in that portrayal Socrates himself is presented as both a philosopher and in some respects a sophist..." (Taylor 2006). Students of the *Protagoras* may examine this issue from the perspective of the converging and diverging representations of Socrates and the self-proclaimed arch-sophist (cf. Corradi 2018). The divergences are evident in Protagoras's paid professionalism, his view of the relation of the virtues to one another and to ἀρετή, his explicit commitment to agonistic competition, and his preference for macrology and set speeches. On the other hand, we find Protagoras conducting his own brief but highly effective ἔλεγχος (339a-d), while Socrates for his part delivers a startling Great Speech of his own (342a-347a). There is as well this further convergence: the seriously flawed discussions of the cardinal virtues. Protagoras's cavalier treatment of the virtues is evident. But while Socrates' treatment is certainly much more thoughtful, it is sometimes marred by fallacies, a number of which are simply too patent to be accidental (Klosko 1979 and many others). When we consider as well the occasional hints of Socratic eristic (e.g. 360e), we are left with the sense that Socrates may be "fighting sophistry with sophistry." At the very least, the dialogue does "(seem to leave) the boundaries between the concepts of the philosopher and the sophist unclear."

Nowhere is the convergence more explicit than at the very end of the dialogue, when both Protagoras and Socrates are seen to have embraced the other's original position on the teachability of ἀρετή. This last convergence is most striking, since it at the very same time marks the point of their greatest divergence.

Let us imagine that we were totally satisfied with Socrates' final proof for the unity of courage and wisdom (and with it, the unity of the virtues). We would regard it the overall "take-away" of the dialogue. But the *real* take-away, as the personified ἔξοδος τοῦ λόγου says, is that, in flipping positions, Socrates and Protagoras have only made matters worse. That is why Socrates proposes that they scrap everything they have said and start all over, from a better starting point.

With these considerations in mind, I undertake first to explicate the divergences and convergences that threaten to obscure the boundaries of the dialogue's "sophist" and its "philosopher." Thereafter, I suggest how Socrates himself sees our problem being resolved. The first of these undertakings relies on analysis of the substantive paradoxes concerning the virtues and ἀρετή, fallacious argumentation, and such formal and methodological features as epideictic display and macrology and brachylogy. The second relies on our understanding of Socrates' fanciful account of Spartan sophist-philosophers (342a-343b). To briefly anticipate: Socrates is like the Spartan sophists of his account, devoted to the pursuit, called φιλοσοφία, that is concealed behind their wise Laconicisms (cf. Morgan 2009). In the present dialogue, this same pursuit lurks behind such apparent maxims as "no one does wrong willingly," "virtue is knowledge," "virtue is one." Like the Spartan sophists, Socrates is the crypto-philosopher. Though his relish for paradox, eristic ἔλεγχος, brachylogy, macrology, epideictic display, and opportunistic fallacy may mislead us to liken him to the sophists in Callias's home, his sincere hidden interests make him no ordinary sophist. We do nonetheless catch a glimpse of the philosophic pursuit behind his lapidary paradoxes when, at the very end of the dialogue, Socrates urges Protagoras to join him in an attempt to determine "the truth about ἀρετή, and especially

what it is itself" (360e). Only then will they, as philosophers, fully apprehend the meaning of the pithy and memorable maxim where their thinking has converged: διδακτὸν ἀρετῆ.

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