

## II.—THE TRUTH OF PROTAGORAS.

BY C. M. GILLESPIE.

THE dictum of Protagoras, "Man is the measure of all things," was, according to Mr. Schiller, the first statement of the fundamental principle of Pragmatism, or as he prefers to call it, Humanism.<sup>1</sup> No one has ever doubted that Protagoras was a humanist in the older sense of the word: he was a sophist, and insisted perhaps more emphatically than any of his colleagues that the true aim of education is not the acquisition of learning but the training of the citizen. But Mr. Schiller asks us to believe that the greatness of Protagoras lay in his epistemology, for he held one of the positions which modern Pragmatism regards as peculiarly its own. According to the current interpretation of the *homo mensura*, Protagoras taught that the judgment of the individual is final. This, Mr. Schiller argues, is wrong. Protagoras taught that every judgment *claims* to be true, but that its *validity* depends on other conditions, according to the common way of thinking. Where he differed was in making utility for human purposes, and not correspondence with an independent archetype, the test of validity. Truth is essentially a *value*. Protagoras' theory of reality was not, as is commonly supposed, relativist, but pragmatist.

The existence of so subtle a theory at a time when epistemological investigation was in its infancy excites doubt as to the correctness of the interpretation. This doubt is intensified by an examination of the only evidence we have of any importance, the writings of Plato. The *Theætetus* is of course our chief witness, but the *Protagoras* and the *Cratylus* afford valuable corroborative evidence.

But is Plato a trustworthy witness? His good faith is not challenged by Mr. Schiller. Mr. Schiller even goes farther than many critics in allowing that the views enunciated by the *Protagoras* of the Dialogues may be attributed to the historical Protagoras.<sup>2</sup> Here I believe Mr. Schiller to be in

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Humanism*, pp. 32 ff. ; *Plato or Protagoras?* *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Plato or Protagoras?* pp. 9 ff. I do not accept Mr. Schiller's account of the circumstances which led Plato to epitomise the work. Prof. Burnet

the right. I agree with him in regarding the defence of Protagoras in *Theætetus*, 166 ff., as containing the key to the interpretation of the *homo mensura*: it is not purely imaginary nor a statement of the views of a later follower of the sophist, but an exposition of the doctrine of Protagoras as Plato understood it. That Plato had read the work seems proved by the statement of *Theætetus* that it was familiar to him (152 A). The same principle of interpretation may fairly be extended to the profession of his faith as a public teacher put into the mouth of Protagoras in the dialogue of that name: the writer's attitude in that part of the dialogue is sympathetic rather than critical: and the carefully drawn portraits of various sophists would lose point if Protagoras were not made to speak in character. But Mr. Schiller questions Plato's insight. The account given by Plato is a travesty of Protagoras' real meaning, which Plato did not understand, but which may be reconstructed out of the data furnished by Plato himself. Such a charge is obviously difficult to establish in the absence of independent evidence; the central count must be that Plato's version exhibits inner inconsistencies so great that it cannot be accepted as an adequate rendering of the original.

Mr. Schiller, together with most critics, treats the *homo mensura* as an epistemological principle of universal validity, and there can be little doubt that Protagoras meant it to be so, especially if the words in which it was stated were the opening words of his "Truth". But it is all-important to find out how he approached the question. Plato's own theory of knowledge was profoundly influenced by his mathematical studies. Was Protagoras similarly led to formulate his principle through the examination of a certain *kind* of knowledge, and, if so, what kind? The only way we can determine this point is to consider the *illustrations* of the principle given by Plato. We cannot be quite sure that Protagoras had these applications in mind in the formulation of his dictum: but if the Defence of Protagoras is substantially historical we are entitled to make use of them, and if we can show that they really throw light on the meaning of the dictum, there is a strong presumption that facts of the kind brought forward in the illustrations weighed largely with Protagoras himself.

Now the examples of the principle, which Plato treats as

(*MIND*, N.S., xviii., 422) denies that the Defence can be in substance a genuine argument of Protagoras', mainly for reasons of date. His criticism seems to me valid against Mr. Schiller's account, but not to invalidate the position taken in this paper.

asserting that *ἐστίν* is equivalent to *δοκεῖ εἶναι*, fall into two well-marked classes. The first comprises the secondary qualities of matter as perceived by the senses, cold, heat, sweet, bitter (152 B, 166 E, 171 E); the second τὰ πολιτικά (172 A), especially justice, moral and social principles and virtues. In the absence of other testimony we must accept these as prominent applications given by Protagoras himself to his own principle.

This being granted, we must next inquire what appear to be the relations of these applications to each other. In the Defence there is no doubt whatsoever: the example of the physician who substitutes a good sensation for a bad in his patient's experience is an illustrative analogy leading up to the conception of the sophist or public teacher who induces the community to accept good opinions on Justice in place of bad. At an earlier stage of the dialogue, indeed, the sensation-application appears by itself. In 152 A the assertion of Theætetus that sensation is knowledge is said by Socrates to be equivalent to the *homo mensura*, and the example of the wind that feels hot and cold to different people is adduced in illustration. But in what follows Plato is careful to show that he is not directly criticising Protagoras, but doctrines which he regards as having an affinity with the dictum. The assertion of Theætetus is correlated with (1) the dictum of Protagoras, (2) Heraclitism (152 C), by which Plato simply means the assumptions and methods of physical science such as all philosophers except Parmenides (152 E) have adopted; (3) a refined theory of sense-perception (156 A) attributed to certain *κομψότεροι*, the discussion of which develops a system of psychology without a soul. It is quite clear that in (2) and (3) Plato has in view others than Protagoras. The preliminary dialectical criticisms on Protagoras in 161 A ff. contain no reference either to the Heraclitism or to the detailed theory of sense-perception; the tone of the Defence, 166 ff., shows that the writer does not endorse these criticisms, and suggests that Plato is here condemning the polemical methods of other critics of the *homo mensura*. It appears, then, that the application of the *homo mensura* in 152 is really a peg on which to hang an account of contemporary theories starting from the same empirical point of view, and that the real importance of the sensation-application is to be obtained from the Defence, where it is subsidiary.

This leaves the only serious application of the principle in the Defence an ethical and social one. Have we any evidence to support or oppose the interpretation suggested by the Defence that this was the application which Protagoras

himself chiefly had in view? Gomperz denies this on two grounds (*Griechische Denker*, i., 362): (1) the emphatic universality of statement shows that it was meant as an epistemological principle; (2) there is no evidence that Protagoras applied it to ethics, though his followers may have done so. The second point falls altogether if the Defence is substantially the view of Protagoras himself. With regard to the first, the dictum may have been an epistemological principle of general import, and at the same time have been originally motivated by ethical interests.

Now there is conclusive evidence that the main interest of Protagoras was ethical. In *Protagoras*, 319 D, E, he is depicted as teaching only the arts of the citizen (*οἰκονομική* and *πολιτική*), and as looking with disfavour on the mathematics, astronomy and music taught by other sophists. The dialogue as a whole bears out this statement: the subject is an ethical one, "Can virtue be taught?" The positive contribution of Protagoras to the discussion is a striking discourse on the origin of society and the influence of society on the individual. The Defence of Protagoras in *Theaetetus*, 166 ff., begins and ends with an attack on captious criticism, in which we must suppose that Plato is really expressing his own views. The central section, in which Protagoras is supposed to supply the detailed meaning of his dictum (*ὧδε ἐτι σαφέστερον μάθε τί λέγω*, 166 E), is quite short and consists of two parts only. The first illustrates the principle by the case of the physician who restores his patient to normal health, whereby the wine which before tasted bitter comes to taste sweet. The second applies it to politics: that is right which seems right to the community; the orator is the physician who brings the community to a better state of health. Can there be any doubt that the former application is an analogy to illustrate the latter? The clearest proof that it is an analogy is to be found in the fact that the function of the physician here described is an accidental one: his essential aim is to restore the patient to health, not to change his perception of the wine. The trivial case of the physician and his patient is treated just so far as it seems parallel to the important case of the publicist and the state. Better health in the state is better opinions as to right and wrong, and so better health in the patient is regarded as better feelings. The Heraclitism and elaborate theories of sense-perception of the earlier passages are not alluded to. The Defence of Protagoras is substantially a vindication of his position as a moral teacher, and is in striking agreement with the profession of faith assigned to him in the *Protagoras*. We have

the same personal note; the teacher expounding the aims of his teaching; the same defence of the sophist's art on the same grounds; the sophist makes men better in the sense of being better able to transact public and private business; the same disclaiming of special knowledge.

Thus the inner evidence of the passage itself, supported by the resemblance to the *Protagoras*, leads us to seek for the real meaning of the dictum in the words which must be regarded as the climax of the Defence, but to which Mr. Schiller seems to attach little importance (see *Plato or Protagoras?* pp. 15, 16), viz.: *οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐκάστη πόλει δίκαια καὶ καλὰ δοκῇ, ταῦτα καὶ εἶναι αὐτῇ, ἕως ἂν αὐτὰ νομίσῃ* (167 C).<sup>1</sup>

Now there is no doubt whatever about the meaning of these words, taken in themselves. *Δίκαια* are the legal principles, *καλὰ* the wider social and ethical principles current in the community (see the *Dialexeis*). The *νόμος* of the community determines for it the standard of right and wrong; and when it is stated that the adviser cannot do more than substitute a good system of right and wrong for a bad one, the primary reason for this is that the distinction of right and wrong is regarded as dependent on the will of the community.<sup>2</sup> The individual as such is not the measure of right and wrong: the community is. Right and wrong imply an authority other than that of the individual. A similar insistence on the rôle of the community is found in the *Protagoras*. The myth describing the origin of society represents Justice as a social fact (322 D), and society is later treated as the great moral teacher (325 C ff.).

Thus in morals the *homo mensura* means in the first place that the community is the authority, the judge of what is right and wrong. But when Protagoras insists that *man* is the measure he means *man and not another authority commonly accepted*. What can this authority be? Something supra-human. In the then state of thought this can only mean *the gods*. The dictum must be primarily a claim for free-

<sup>1</sup> Surely Plato intends the main emphasis to fall on this sentence, the only one in the detailed defence which puts with full explicitness that identification of appearance and reality which he treats as the essence of the *homo mensura*. To me it reads underlined. Mr. Schiller takes no more notice than this: "the sage or sophist performs a similar service for cities" (*Plato or Protagoras?* p. 16); "cities often do not know their own advantage" (*ibid.*, p. 24). His interpretation of the Defence seems to throw the emphasis on the wrong words throughout.

<sup>2</sup> I have stated this in modern terms. A Greek would always say the judgment of the community where we say *will*: you act on your view of what seems good to you. The ambiguity of the verb *δοκεῖ*—appears and appears good—makes the transition from the perception of the fevered patient to the will of the community very easy.

dom of thought in ethical matters, a claim that has been conceded in physical matters. You must not, he says in effect, regard the social reformer as impious because he seeks to probe and perhaps to remove long-established usages which are regarded as having a divine sanction. All human laws and customs are made *by man*, not *for man*: *actual* morality is νόμος and not φύσει. To this extent, at least, man "makes his own reality".

But this is not all. If we look at the subject empirically, historically, we shall see that they have been made by man in the course of his pursuit of happiness. This is the teaching of the myth in the *Protagoras*. If the account there given of the origin of society is divested of its mythical trappings, it appears that a distinction is drawn between the original and the acquired capacities of men. Man is born with the capacities of the other animals, and in addition with the knowledge of the arts, based on the use of fire. But the πολιτικὴ τέχνη is a later development (321 D), prompted by the misery of the natural state of war. The law is a means adopted by men who have formed themselves into communities, a means to the end of happiness. This is the familiar convention-theory of society.<sup>1</sup> Now, says Protagoras,

<sup>1</sup> I cannot understand the persistence of the critics in holding that the myth in *Protagoras*, 320 C ff., contains the position that Justice is φύσει and not merely νόμος. See, e.g., Susemihl, *Die genetische Entwicklung der Platonischen Philosophie*, i., 46; Horn, *Platonstudien*, i., 41; Wundt, *Geschichte der griechischen Ethik*, i., 266. Their reasons seem to be two: (1) reverence and justice are given to men by Zeus, whereas the other human faculties are allotted by Prometheus, (2) Zeus instructs Hermes to distribute them among all men, not among sections like the special arts. Hence it is said that the myth represents reverence and justice as universal instincts (Susemihl, *l.c.*). Now Prometheus simply is Nature, in the sense in which Nature is contrasted with Convention. The natural man lacks the social virtues. But he tries to form societies; i.e., society is man-made, not Nature-made. And it is made in the course of the effort to avoid unhappiness (322 B). The reason why man alone tries to form society is that he has special intelligence, symbolised in the myth by his participation in the Divine nature (322 A). Zeus is a mere *deus ex machina*; his appearance in the story is due to the requirements of the myth-form, which represents all faculties as gifts to man. Justice and reverence cannot be introduced as given by Prometheus, who stands for Nature; Zeus is simply *reason*. This is made clear by the words of Zeus himself; Zeus does not pose as an all-powerful benefactor to man; he speaks as the rationalist inquirer who sees that these virtues are indispensable to the existence of the state. The myth emphasises, not their divine origin, but their essentially social character. . . . Then again the distribution to all men (322 D) has been misinterpreted. Your commentator either tries to read Platonic principles into the speech of Protagoras (Susemihl, *l.c.*) or, because it is put into the mouth of an opponent of the Platonic Socrates, is on the look-out for inconsistencies. Thus, when Protagoras in 323 D states that social virtue is not original

you must not regard the moral teacher who propounds new ideas as one who is trying to upset the established order. Rightly regarded, he is only doing what you have been doing all along, endeavouring to the best of his ability to secure human happiness. And on the other hand the teacher must not lay claim to superior wisdom: his attitude can only be this: "if you adopt my suggestions, and make them law, as you have every right to do, you will find that they will lead to your greater happiness. But I do not set up as an infallible authority; you must judge ultimately what happiness is and whether my schemes will promote it. But you must judge rationally: not under the influence of custom and tradition, but in accordance with the carefully thought-out results of your own experience." Not only *actual* moral codes are νόμος; the ultimate principles of morals are νόμος, founded on men's judgments of what is for their advantage.

Thus the dictum provides an epistemological basis for the contemporary theory that society is conventional. It establishes a human foundation for moral and political obligation. Plato took it in this sense; in *Theaetetus*, 172 A, B, he points out that many hold that Justice is by convention but the Good by nature, whereas Protagoras teaches that both are by convention (*cf. Republic*, vi., 505 A). This view accords well with the general standpoint from which Protagoras must have regarded his problems. The theory that the state originated in a social compact and the closely allied account in the myth of the *Protagoras* treat society as progressive, in

but acquired by the individual, he is said by Horn (*l.c.*) to be contradicting the earlier statement that social virtue is given by the gods to all men. There is no contradiction. We need not resort to the device of saying that Zeus gave the capacity for virtue to all men, but that training is also necessary for its development. It is never stated that Hermes gave it to all men without exception; the actual words of Zeus, "and lay down a law that he who cannot partake of reverence and justice shall be slain as a plague to the state" (322 D), contemplate the existence of individuals devoid of these virtues. Protagoras is not arguing that the social virtues are universal instincts; he is looking at the whole question from the side of the state, not from the side of the individual, and maintains that the state cannot stand unless the social virtues are widespread and therefore capable of acquisition by the normal man. There is no question of instincts; the virtues are treated throughout as accomplishments. Thus the whole Zeus episode is simply the statement of the position that justice and obedience are social virtues. In 323 C ff. Protagoras proceeds to show that in actual societies the community itself is the higher power that instils these virtues into the individual mind; Zeus really is the collective experience of the race, practical reason engaged in securing the general happiness. Remove the mythical dress, and the account is closely akin to J. S. Mill's utilitarian description of the origin of morality. Note that the doctrine that punishment is essentially preventive (324 A) is pure utilitarianism.



direct opposition to the poetical conception of a Golden Age. They are substantially an application to human society of the principles long accepted in the interpretation of the physical history of the world—from Anaximander to Anaxagoras—and reflected in the historical methods of Thucydides. Protagoras is strongly imbued with the spirit of the physical science of the day. The methods of empirical science are patent alike in the development of the *homo mensura* and in the theory of the origin of society assigned to him in the *Protagoras*. That his general starting-point was that of empirical science is implied by the fact that Plato brackets his dictum with Heraclitism in the *Theatetus*. There are indications that he was much influenced by Atomism. The subjectivist treatment of sensation has a closer affinity with this than with any other of the physical systems. His sceptical attitude to religion accords with the position of Democritus, and is in marked opposition to the efforts of Diogenes of Apollonia and others to reconcile science and religion.

I do not think that we can regard the dictum as primarily directed against Parmenides from the standpoint of empirical science. The only direct evidence for this interpretation is a citation from Porphyry in Eusebius (*Diels*, FVS. 537). Porphyry states that he has come across a work by Protagoras on Being, which contains detailed arguments against the Eleatic position. Was this work the same as the *Truth*? Even if we grant that this work on Being was genuine, we need not suppose that the main object of Protagoras was the refutation of Eleaticism. Plato and Aristotle do not bring the dictum into close connexion with the Parmenidean principle. The *Theatetus* treats it as a corollary from the assumptions of physical science, not as a justification of these assumptions, and Aristotle follows suit in the *Metaphysics* (1009 b, 1 ff.). As we have seen, the chief application in the *Theatetus* is to ethics, which we have no reason to believe specially interested the Eleatics. Moreover, the wording of the dictum does not suggest that it was directed against Parmenides; the *ἀνθρώπος* is pointless, for Parmenides and Zeno might reply that in their system human reason is the measure of reality. Protagoras would have to argue on the lines of the Gorgian paradoxes, that there is no human faculty capable of apprehending the Eleatic Being. We have no evidence of his having argued on these lines. Again the plural *τῶν ὄντων* suggests that Protagoras is assuming, not proving, the plurality of being, i.e. the empirical standpoint. Moreover, the examples tending to prove that you cannot say



what the wind and the wine are in themselves have no force against Parmenides, who denies the reality of the wind and the wine; they follow the same line of thought as that which led Democritus to his physical doctrine of the secondary qualities of matter. I cannot, therefore, admit that the dictum was primarily directed against the Eleatics, though Protagoras may have argued against them incidentally or in another connexion.

Further, there is evidence that Protagoras was specially interested in theological questions. The list of works attributed to him by Diogenes Laertius (ix., 55, *Diels*, FVS. 526) contains the names of a treatise *περὶ θεῶν* and another *περὶ τῶν ἐν Αἴδου*. The famous passage expressing scepticism about the gods is quoted by Eusebius (*Diels*, FVS. 537) as from the beginning of the former work. There is reason to believe that this treatise was the second part of the work called οἱ *Καταβάλλοντες*, of which the first part was ἡ *Ἀλήθεια*. Plato cites the *homo mensura* as from the beginning of the *Truth* (*Theat.*, 161 C), Sextus Empiricus (adv. math., vii., 60, *Diels*, FVS. 536) as from the beginning of the *Καταβάλλοντες*. Now Euripides' *Bacchæ*, 199-203, contains a reference to the Protagorean scepticism about the gods, in which occurs the phrase οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος, which suggests that the scepticism was expressed in the *Καταβάλλοντες*. And why the plural? Were there three parts of the *Καταβάλλοντες*, the *Truth* (perhaps with the sub-title "On Being"), *Concerning the Gods*, and *Concerning Hades*? The title of the last-named work is not well attested:<sup>1</sup> but it would be quite in accordance with the doctrines of Protagoras to deny that there is any retribution or reward for men in an after-life. Was the whole book the *μέγας λόγος* of Anecd., Par. (*Diels*, FVS. 537)?

Prof. Burnet (*MIND*, N.S., xviii., 423) conjectures that Protagoras "had merely intended to attack the mathematical and astronomical science of his day" and especially the infinite divisibility of space. The dictum would thus be primarily connected with the sensationist critique of the geometers alluded to in Aristotle, *Metaph.*, 997 b, 32. This would explain the use of the word "measure". But in the absence of direct testimony that the dictum was ever so understood in antiquity, Prof. Burnet's reasons seem insufficient. As far as I can understand the meaning of his remarks, he classes Protagoras and the Atomists together as

<sup>1</sup> It appears only in the list of Diogenes, which contains some titles apparently derived from misunderstandings of passages in Plato; and *Diels*, *l.c.*, suggests a confusion with a work attributed to Democritus.

opponents of the new mathematical science of Western Greece, instancing the Atomist view of the earth as disc-shaped, as showing that Atomism stands nearer to immediate experience than the Pythagorean view of the earth as spherical. What has the latter to do with the doctrine of infinite divisibility? Does not Atomism itself notoriously transcend the sensation point of view? So far as antiquity is concerned the dictum is interpreted as fatal alike to the atoms of Leucippus and the points of the Pythagoreans. Again, I cannot see how the account of the researches of Theætetus into the theory of square roots in the introductory part of the *Theætetus* would convey to a reader of the dialogue the original application of the *homo mensura*, viz.: its attack on incommensurables, of which there is no direct suggestion in the whole course of the dialogue. This account is introduced *prima facie* as an example of logical method, and there is no obvious reason for connecting it more closely with the discussion of one definition of knowledge than with that of another.

It seems to me that several difficulties in connexion with the *homo mensura* are easily solved by this interpretation of it as being primarily ethical.

First, the connexion of truth and "value". Mr. Schiller regards the subsumption of truth under the concept of utility as the central doctrine of Protagoras, and holds that Plato is mistaken in making its essence to be subjectivism. I submit that there is no evidence in the Defence or elsewhere for Mr. Schiller's view; that the only reasonable interpretation is that Protagoras taught that man alone determines what is good and useful. Mr. Schiller has to admit that in Plato's account Protagoras does not say that the better is the truer: the sophist who induces in his public a "better" opinion in place of a "worse" does not substitute a "truer" for a "less true": in fact Protagoras is made to assert degrees of value and deny degrees of truth. But Mr. Schiller treats this as merely a technical divergence from the pragmatist principle (*Plato or Protagoras?* p. 17). I hold, on the contrary, that Protagoras subsumes the *right* (just) under the *useful* (good), and that the association of truth with utility is secondary and accidental. He draws a distinction between the Just, law and custom, and the Good, human welfare. This distinction is a commonplace of Greek ethical discussion from the outset. Early ethical thought assumes that men must be just, obey the common moral code of their state, and inquires what is the best kind of life subject to this condition. The thinkers

of the Enlightenment first raised the question whether this condition was binding, by analysing the grounds of moral and political obligation. We know from Plato that many found the claims of the state (justice) and those of the individual (happiness) to be irreconcilable. Hence the doctrine that might is right and the glorification of tyranny. But these are not the views of Protagoras. His political ideal is the free democratic state. His ideal of private life is that of the citizen of such a state. He accepts the right of the community to coerce the individual in its own interests.<sup>1</sup> For the law is a necessary means to the good of the whole. So far as the Just is concerned, man is the measure, for the community is the authority. The object of the teacher is to show that if the community will accept new—not truer—conceptions of justice, it will tend to their welfare, be better for them. But here again the *homo mensura* comes in, for it is implied (1) that the teacher forms some judgment of what is to the public advantage, (2) that the public forms a similar judgment. Thus from first to last, what is right, i.e. useful, and what is good, is determined by some human judgment.

If it be objected that the association of truth with utility is asserted in the *Theaetetus* universally, and not merely in connexion with morals, I reply : (1) it is not universally asserted, but only in connexion with the teacher (166 D) and the physician (167 B); (2) the application to the physician is not independent, but an analogy to illustrate the application to the teacher; (3) the *Protagoras* proves that Protagoras openly professed to teach nothing but the principles of public and private conduct; the contents of the Defence show that the immediate subject of discussion is the principles professed by Protagoras as a teacher. If, therefore, we can find a simple explanation of the association of truth with utility, by assuming that ethical truth is meant, an explanation in accordance alike with known tendencies of ethical thought in the fifth century and with Plato's interpretation of the dictum as asserting the identity of seeming and being, we are justified in accepting it.

Another difficulty is easily explained on these lines. Did Protagoras mean man as such or each individual man? Both. In his *general* statement of the dictum he did not distinguish, because the distinction was irrelevant to his purpose. If he was arguing for the *right* of men to solve their social problems in their own way and in view of their own happiness, it was not to the point to draw a distinction between men in general and individual men. Hermogenes in

<sup>1</sup> *Protagoras*, 322 D.

the *Cratylus* (384 C, D) in stating the case for the theory that names are *συνθήκη* allows both private and public names: if names are arbitrary, not fixed for man by Nature, every man has a right to give any name he pleases to any thing; from this point of view it is not a matter of principle, though convenient for purposes of communication, that individuals should use the same names for the same things. In the same way a naturalistic utilitarianism regards society and the observance of public rules by individuals as means to the happiness of individuals.

Another feature of the Protagorean doctrine is most easily accounted for on the principle that the dictum is primarily connected with the *νόμος* theory of society. The Platonic treatment implies that on Protagorean principles not only is the judgment true for the maker, *but it does not claim to be true except for the maker*. The standpoint is empirical and naturalistic. Man (as in the myth of the *Protagoras*) is a part of Nature and differs from the other animals mainly in respect of his capacity for social life. What is good and useful for one creature is not necessarily good and useful for another (*Protagoras*, 334 A, B). Social judgments about right and wrong are the ways by which man adapts himself to the attainment of his own good. If we consider the variety of customs and of moral judgments, we shall see that in passing judgments of right and wrong, useful and hurtful, good and bad, men do not really mean to assert their objective validity beyond the limits of their own society and their own conditions of life. Right and wrong, good and bad are always *τινί*. If I assert this is right, I must qualify with "for an Athenian, for a Spartan". And the judgment is always *by* an Athenian or a Spartan. Humanity is composed of a number of groups, each of which passes judgments claiming validity only for itself, and having no higher authority. Hence their beliefs are true so long as they continue to hold them. Within the group there may be individual variations of opinion, but society is banded together to suppress these. Teachers and reformers there are, but their function is confined to changing public beliefs.

Again, this interpretation gives point to the retort, "How can you on your own principles lay claim to wisdom?" For Protagoras was a professed teacher of the principles of practical conduct. If in his treatise on the Truth he laid special emphasis on the point that all moral judgments are equally true, the question at once arose, what were his claims to be a teacher? He had an easy answer. In a free community of educated men he laid no claim to superior

wisdom: he only asked them to listen to one who had thought on these matters more than most, and to consider for themselves what he had to say. He claimed the attention due to the *φρόνιμος*, not the obedience exacted by the *σοφός* or expert.<sup>1</sup> His colleague the physician is not the judge whether the wine tastes well or ill to his patient; for this he must rely on the statement of the patient himself; but he is able to make it taste well. So the sophist claims that if his hearers will only listen to him, he can make them come round to his way of thinking. Yes, replies Plato in the *Republic*, but that is just because the sophist really takes his principles from his public.

I should maintain that the Humanism of Protagoras has a naturalistic rather than a pragmatist tinge. Moral truth is resolved into beliefs, treated objectively as means of adaptation to circumstances, like the protective fur and wool of other animals. The superiority of the teacher is ultimately his power to change beliefs; as man is assumed to be always animated by a desire for his own advantage, this power shows itself in his ability to convince his audience that it will be to their advantage to adopt new measures, new ideas of right and wrong. Progress implies a struggle between ideas.

I may be asked: if the examples from sense-perception were in essence illustrations supporting a theory of the moral judgment, why did Protagoras choose them? Several reasons may be given. Whether or no the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities of matter had been explicitly drawn by the time Protagoras wrote, the scientific investigations into the conditions of sense-perception must have called attention to the variability of certain kinds of sense experience. As the examination of knowledge as knowledge began with the investigation of perception and the perceptual judgment, one of the first discrepancies to be noticed would be that between the judgment of sensation "it feels cold, tastes sweet" and the judgment of perception "it (the wind) is cold, it (the wine) is sweet". The latter claims an objective validity which the former does not. To a writer anxious to get simple illustrations for the principle that the Just and the Fair are valid only for the community which adopts them and not for other communities, the parallel of the judgments of sensation and perception is apt. As a matter of fact, Plato's real ground for rejecting Pro-

<sup>1</sup> Compare the argument that every man's judgment has value in politics (*Protagoras*, 323 A, B).

tagoreanism in the *Theatetus* is that he regards it as reducing all judgments to the level of these judgments of sensation. There is another reason for the choice: cold, warm, bitter, sweet are intrinsically good or bad. Cold and bitter are *per se* unpleasant, so that the change from bitter to sweet sensations is a change from bad to good experience, of which the individual is the sole judge. This is the point: the individual is sole judge both of the sweetness and of the pleasantness. We must assume that the individual, whether man or community, desires the good, i.e. what *seems* to him good: and there is no good for man except the seeming good. If, therefore, the sophist convinces the public that its customs are bad, we must suppose that it will try to change them.

The real history of the *homo mensura* I take to be this. It was enunciated by Protagoras not as an epistemological principle in the abstract but as embodying the fundamental assumptions of the new school of ethical thought. The words "man" and "all things" had a special polemical reference. That human reason is the ultimate judge of truth is a principle acted on by the scientific inquirers who have been working out a scheme of material reality, and the claim has not been seriously disputed in respect of Nature. But popular thought has hitherto refused to recognise the claim in regard to human institutions. Vaguely and unreflectively it has looked on laws and customs as of divine or semi-divine origin, and resisted attempts at scientific analysis and rational reform on this ground. Wrongly. For it must be recognised that in every sphere man is the ultimate judge. The dictum declares the right of free inquiry into all problems of conduct.

Taken in itself the dictum means man in general. But in the working out of his principle Protagoras, under the influence of the empirical, historical methods derived from the *φυσικοί*, gave to it an interpretation which implied that each man (and state) is his own judge. This interpretation is part and parcel of the νόμος theory of society. The laws and customs of a society determine for that society what is just and fair. But the law contains the experienced judgment of a society working out its own salvation on its own lines. The good of one society is not necessarily the good of another. The free community is in the last resort responsible for its ideas of what is best for it. Hence the community is the ultimate judge both of the end—its own good—and of the means—moral rules.

Now this doctrine implied a restriction of the validity of the moral judgment. The moral judgment does not *claim*

to be valid beyond the sphere of the social group which forms it; popular thought is merely mistaken in supposing that it does. In the next generation, when epistemological questions came to be discussed more on their own merits, and not merely as subsidiary to other problems, the work of Protagoras was found to contain the principle that every judgment is relative. Protagoras himself had had the moral judgment chiefly in mind, but had also illustrated his principle from the region of sense-perception. So the principle that to be is to seem to be became associated with his name. Plato's objection to the principle really is this, that Protagoras did not understand the nature of a judgment. When he treats *homo mensura* as equivalent to the identification of knowledge with sensation, and couples it with Heraclitism, he is in effect saying that if you approach the subject of knowledge from what is virtually the standpoint of physiological psychology and regard the arousing of a passing sensation by a physical stimulus as the typical fact of knowledge, you cannot but misunderstand the whole question. This is what Protagoras has done: instead of examining the judgment from the inside, he has merely transferred to it the characters of sensation: hence his failure to see that the judgment claims a universal validity. And so Plato dismisses Protagoras and the Heracliteans, i.e. the physical inquirers, and passes on to the consideration of the judgment (*Theat.*, 184 B ff.). That Protagoras had not specially examined the judgment and probably mistook its nature seems in accordance with what is known of the history of psychology and logic: (1) the early inquirers seem to have confined their psychological investigations to the physical conditions of sensation; (2) the examination of the judgment itself followed the growth of dialectic, chiefly in the Socratic schools, and the numerous *ἀπορίαι* to which it gave rise show that the analysis of the judgment presented great difficulties: indeed, it would seem that only the Academy succeeded in formulating any satisfactory account of it.

Let us now turn to the question whether the *Theaetetus* contains any refutation of Protagoras, and whether there are any important discrepancies between the Defence and the rejoinder of Socrates. I do not attach the same importance as Mr. Schiller does to the rejoinder itself, because, as I have said, Plato's chief objections are to be found in the form of the dialogue as a whole. But a word of protest must be entered against Mr. Schiller's methods. An essential part of his case is this: the rejoinder shows that Plato has



misunderstood his opponent; he has treated the dictum as meaning the relativity of truth to the individual, whereas it really meant that utility validates the claim of the judgment to be true. What is the evidence? Mr. Schiller's interpretation is based entirely upon the short statement in the Defence, a statement *made by Plato himself*. There is not a word of independent evidence for it. The rejoinder of Socrates is directed entirely against the relativism of the dictum. But Mr. Schiller does not use the rejoinder to confirm his interpretation; he simply argues that the rejoinder is all wrong and irrelevant, because it does not agree with his interpretation, and then uses this supposed irrelevance to confirm his interpretation. But Mr. Schiller is not entitled to use a supposed discrepancy as independent confirmatory evidence, because there is no real discrepancy unless his interpretation of the Defence is correct. He must rest his case entirely on the Defence.<sup>1</sup>

Now (1) he has no right to use the Defence as evidence entirely independent of the rejoinder, because even though we assume that it substantially reproduces the views of Protagoras, these are obviously stated in Plato's own words. Hence such criticisms as those on page 23 of his *Plato or Protagoras*? that Socrates illegitimately substitutes *ὀφειλὴν* and *συμφέροντα* for *χρησά* are merely captious. Mr. Schiller is driven by the exigencies of polemic to treat the Defence as if it contained the *ipsissima verba* of Protagoras. The rejoinder must be used to confirm the reading of the Defence, and small variations of language cannot be pressed.

(2) Mr. Schiller's reading of the Defence emphasises the element of utility and makes the relativism quite secondary; hence the accusation of irrelevancy in the rejoinder. But another, and, I believe, a more correct reading makes the relativism primary. If Plato in his defence of Protagoras treated the element of utility as being secondary and ignored it in his reply, we have no right, in the absence of independent evidence, to regard it as primary.

(3) Mr. Schiller admits (*ibid.*, p. 17) that there is a difference between the views of Protagoras expounded in the Defence and modern Pragmatism, but treats it as merely a technical difference. Pragmatism teaches that every belief is as such true to the believer: this "formal claim" to truth is distinguished from the validity of the belief; validity is what

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Schiller really finds a dual personality in Plato: the writer of the Defence is intelligent enough to understand Protagoras, the writer of the rejoinder of Socrates is unable to do so. See his remarks at the foot of page 23 of his *Plato or Protagoras*?

ordinary people call truth'; for the pragmatist a valid belief is simply a belief that ought to be held: and the only justification for holding it is that it has value, in other words is useful. Hence "value" is a bridge connecting "truth," i.e. belief, and "validity," i.e. truth in the common use of the word. Now Protagoras draws a distinction between a belief and its value: so do we all: this is no discovery of the pragmatist. Does the Protagoras of the Defence state that its value gives to it another sort of truth, or validity? Not at all: he seems to distinguish truth and utility as conceptions with no point of mutual contact. He recognises no such distinction as that between the claim and the validity of a belief. The patient believes and ought to believe that he has feelings of bitter and unpleasant, they are guaranteed by his immediate experience. The other experience of sweetness is better but not in any sense truer: I am the sole judge of both. So in the example of the state and its moral beliefs. What is believed right and what ought to be believed right are identical. The *de facto* law is the law. Claim and validity are identified. If it is desirable to change our beliefs, it is because we form another belief—of which again we are the sole judges—concerning utility. If Mr. Schiller can regard this as merely a technical deviation from Pragmatism, it is because Pragmatism is content to claim Relativism as a brother. Mr. Schiller's own account of the formation of the temple of truth (*l.c.*, p. 17) is the purest relativism. I form a belief (claim): I see its value: therefore I hold that it ought to be believed (validity): I persuade others of its superior advantages: they adopt it and hold that it ought to be believed (objective validity): hence "the validity of a claim to truth is neither logically nor etymologically other than its strength". Put in the relation to the individual (*τινί*) which the ancients always supposed Protagoras to insist upon as qualifying both "claim" and "validity," and the Relativism is absolute.

(4) There is much resemblance between Relativism and Pragmatism for the very good reason that the latter is a development of the former, necessary, perhaps, to save Relativism from mere scepticism. An attack on the relativist basis of Pragmatism would be relevant, as against Pragmatism. And if the "pragmatism" of Protagoras was only an incident in his doctrine of relativity, then Plato's rejoinder would be very much to the point. Suppose that Protagoras argued for the relativity of truth, i.e., what is believed is true, and denied any outside authority. Suppose that in answer to the question, "Do you draw any distinc-

tion between what is believed and what ought to be believed?" he said, "Yes. You ought to believe what is useful to you, and you are the sole judge of what is useful." In that case Plato would be quite justified in neglecting the utility altogether—the pragmatism—as being quite subsidiary to the relativism. The rejoinder shows that this is how Plato interpreted the doctrine, and I have tried above to show how such a doctrine might arise, not "as a freak of irresponsible subjectivism" but as an expression of a well-authenticated tendency of thought in the fifth century. Mr. Schiller gives no explanation how the doctrine as he understands it arose, and can give no explanation of the confusion of which he accuses Plato except an intellectualist bias.

The rejoinder consists of two parts. The first (170 A-171 C) is the well-known *περιτροπή*, which seeks to prove that Protagoras must on his own principles deny the truth of his dictum. Mr. Schiller is indignant with Plato for criticising Protagoras without making use of the Defence (*l.c.*, p. 19). But the second part of the rejoinder does deal with the points raised in the Defence (171 D, E). The first part is a dialectical argument against the abstract principle that the individual is the only authority for his truth (170 A). I cannot see that Mr. Schiller is justified in saying that the argument involves a confusion between the claim of a judgment to be true and its actual validity (*Studies in Humanism*, pp. 145-146); Plato is arguing against a doctrine which he understands as identifying claim and validity. The remarks on page 20 of *Plato or Protagoras?* are so wide of the mark that they hardly require refutation. The argument is a dialectical one in which the *ἔνδοξον* of the πολλοί is set against the *θέσις* of a σοφός. In 170 A Socrates does *not* "insist on treating the difference between the authority and the fool as merely one in *knowledge*, despite the protest in 167 A". He is simply stating the popular *ἔνδοξον* which regards the difference of the wise man and the fool as meaning that the opinions of the one are true and those of the other false. His object is merely to establish the point that commonsense is opposed to the dictum. Throughout the argument he is careful to keep the Protagorean position as he understands it: he makes no appeal to any objective standards of truth: he merely assumes Protagoras holding one opinion and the rest of mankind holding the opposite. The argument turns on the application of another popular *ἔνδοξον*, which seems to be implied in all discussion, *viz.*, that one man has a right to challenge the truth of another's statement (172 D). According to popular

usage, the many have a right to call the Protagorean principle false, as conflicting with the first *ἐνδοξον*. Now Protagoras may do one of two things. He may either deny or allow the claim of one man to call another's judgment false: if he denies it, he identifies "claim" and "validity," if he allows it, he draws a distinction between them. In any case, he cannot consistently allow any other test of truth than the judgment of some man or men. But if he denies the claim, then he must admit that for the majority *their own* proposition is true that man is not the measure of all things; if he grants it, then he admits that *his* proposition that man is the measure of all things is false for the majority. But if no one believes it except himself, then, on the assumption that belief determines truth, it follows that the contradictory is true for (virtually) everybody. The argument is clearly directed against a doctrine which seemed to treat the claim of a judgment to truth and its actual truth or validity as equivalent. Mr. Schiller's Protagoras can escape by saying that his dictum is true even though he alone believes it, because a judgment is not validated merely by being believed: but Plato's Protagoras cannot escape thus, because belief and validity are the same, according to Plato's account of the dictum. Hence the relevance of the proof depends on our interpretation of the dictum. I think that Protagoras himself could have replied, not that his doctrine is misrepresented in the way Mr. Schiller makes out, but that he never held the doctrine of relativity in the extreme form which it here assumes. I suspect, indeed, that this extreme form of the principle, like the propositions of Jansenius condemned by the authorities, did not appear in the actual writings of the author to whom it was currently attributed. It is not to be found in the statement of the dictum itself. Generalised from some more qualified statement it probably became a catch-word of discussion. And Plato's own language seems to show that he was quite aware of this: the words of Socrates in 169 E show Plato's good faith: he has made Protagoras in his defence protest against captious dialectical criticism of an abstract principle: in 169 E he is merely saying that this is a dialectical argument directed against the abstract principle and requiring to be supplemented by an argument dealing with the matter of Protagoras' doctrine; this is done in the second part of the rejoinder. In 171 C the proof is said to be provisional, and it is stated that if Protagoras came to life he might declare it to be folly: in 179 B this proof is given a secondary position.

The second argument, then, is the one on which Plato relies (171 C-172 B, resumed 177 C-179 C). It examines the

material account of the dictum given in the Defence, and especially the relation between the true and the good there expounded. Mr. Schiller's accusation that Plato has ignored the matter of the Defence in his reply has not the least foundation in fact (*Plato or Protagoras?* p. 19). Like the first proof it is dialectical.<sup>1</sup> It starts from the popular *ἔνδοξον* that there is a difference between the wise and the ignorant, an assumption which is universal and accepted by Protagoras himself. But this immediately passes into the *ἔνδοξον* of certain σοφοί other than Protagoras, but whose general attitude is that of Protagoras himself. The method is that of setting the *ἔνδοξον* of one σοφός against the *θέσις* of another. The σοφοί to whom appeal is made are those who explain the world on the principles of empirical science (Heraclitism in the sense of 152 E, described as τοὺς τὴν φερομένην οὐσίαν λέγοντας, 177 C), and apply these principles to the explanation of human society. Their *ἔνδοξα* are set against that of Protagoras, with the object of showing that the *homo mensura* cannot be asserted in the unqualified manner in which it was advanced by Protagoras, because those inquirers who work out a theory of human society on this line do not really accept it unconditionally. *A fortiori*, it cannot be accepted by those who deny his premisses.

If we examine the views of these σοφοί we find that they accept part of the Protagorean doctrine, but reject another part. They agree that the patient is the sole judge for the nature of his feelings, the state the sole authority for the law. Here they are followed by many whose philosophic standpoint is quite different (172 B). But they do not really accept the Protagorean position that the superiority of the σοφός lies only in his power to change the opinions of the individual or the state. They admit an intrinsic difference between greater and less knowledge.

After stating this point Socrates goes off into the digression on the comparative values of the philosophic and the practical life, and on resuming (177 B) proceeds to carry out the implications of the *ἔνδοξον*. Protagoras had reduced the superiority of the wise to superiority in power. Socrates shows that this power rests on superiority in knowledge: and this difference in knowledge implies a difference between appearance and reality. The wise teacher is never regarded merely as one who can make his hearers adopt new opinions, but as one who can show them their *real* advantage. Here

<sup>1</sup> ἀλλ' ἡμῖν ἀνάγκη, αἶμαι, χρῆσθαι ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς, ὅποιοι τινὲς ἐσμεν, καὶ τὰ δοκούντα δεῖ ταῦτα λέγειν, 171 D. These words seem to imply that the views stated in the argument are those of contemporary science.

is implied a realism inconsistent with the unqualified relativism of the dictum. An enlightened commonsense, which has reflected on the investigations of science, will allow that man is the ultimate judge of reality (1) in the case of sensation, where the individual is the sole judge of his own immediate experience; (2) in case of moral laws, where the community is the measure, because it is the author, of the laws. But it will deny that man is the measure of the *good*, whether of the body or of the community, because commonsense is realist, and recognises the existence of independent conditions, over which man has not complete control. In the words of the *Cratylus*, men believe that "things have some permanent nature of their own; that they do not exist merely in relation to us, twisted hither and thither by us and our ideas, but independently maintaining the proper relation to their own nature". Or, as the *Republic* puts it (505 D), "Do we not see that many are willing to do or to have or to seem to be what is just and honourable without the reality; but no one is satisfied with the appearance of good—the reality is what they seek; in the case of the good, appearance is despised by every one". Hence Plato's answer to Protagoras may be expressed as follows: "first you deny any distinction between appearance and reality; then you resolve the difference between the wise man and the *ignoramus* into one of better and worse; but experience, as expressed in commonsense, shows that the distinction between the better and the worse implies a difference between appearance and reality; therefore in assuming that you can teach, you are assuming the fundamental principle that you deny".

On this argument we may remark (1) that it confirms the reading of the dictum as being primarily ethical in its scope; what Plato is specially attacking is the identification of the good and the apparent good. (2) There is no indication that Plato felt any difficulty in replying to Protagoras; the reply is clear and confident: "if you are going to substitute utility for truth as the goal of human effort, your success must depend on the degree of mastery you have over reality; once allow that reality is not entirely in your power, and utility is dependent on the degree of your knowledge". (3) It is quite clear that for Plato subjectivism was the essence of the Protagorean doctrine, and was to be met by some form of realism. His argument is directed throughout against a view which seems to him to make man the complete *magister natura*. As against the doctrine that man has no *interpretes naturæ* except himself, the argument has, of course, no force.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> So far I agree with Mr. Schiller and Prof. Burnet that Plato has not answered Protagoras.

Whatever may be said of the cogency of the reasoning, it is intelligible, relevant, and shows no discrepancies with the account of the *homo mensura* in the Defence. Mr. Schiller's criticisms are vitiated by his inability to recognise the dialectical character of the argument. Thus he objects to Socrates making a distinction of which nothing was said in the Defence: "a division of territory whereby the sphere of perception would be left to the dictum, while that of good and evil, and of health and disease would be assigned to the control of authority" (p. 22). Socrates *establishes* this point *against* Protagoras dialectically; Plato understands Protagoras to deny any difference of authority for the sensation and the good. I cannot understand the remarks on page 23. Socrates says nothing about "allowing states to judge as they please about the just and the moral". What he does say is that educated opinion goes with Protagoras in regarding the just (the *many* "justs") and the moral as being determined by the *νόμοι* of the state. Actual morality is widely treated as *νόμος* by people who insist that the good is *φύσει*.

We must bear in mind, in this connexion, the prominence of the conception of causation in all the ethical thought of the Greeks. All action is regarded as means to the realisation of some end or ends which have value in themselves. Conduct so far as rational involves two distinct judgments, (1) that a certain possible end has value, (2) that this act will cause the realisation of the end. Hence it is assumed that in acting you do what appears to you likely to promote your advantage. But error is possible; what seems to you advantageous may not be advantageous. If you act upon your judgment of what seems likely to be profitable, your judgment is infallible only on the impossible condition that you are the cause not only of your own act but of all its circumstances as well. And this is just what Plato seems to be contending for. He shows that if you allow the common view that there is an independent reality conditioning human activity, man cannot be regarded as the sole arbiter of his destiny. So far as the Protagorean principle that man is the measure meant that in dealing with the problems of life we must ultimately rely on our judgments concerning things, this is obviously no answer. But if it is interpreted in an anti-scientific sense; if it is brought into opposition to the feeling which inspires the scientific investigator, the feeling that reality contains a vast unexplored region, then one of the chief motives to research will be removed, and the principle becomes thoroughly pernicious. Men can only become masters of Nature by recognising that the mastery implies a process requiring every effort of which they are



capable. If, again, it is interpreted in an anti-moral sense ; if it comes to mean that man may do what he pleases, that his welfare depends on the satisfaction of the desires he himself forms and not also on the human nature which he inherits, it may easily lead to Calliclean developments. It is against such applications of the dictum that Plato is arguing here.

To sum up. The leading idea of Protagoras was relativity, subjectivity, as it was always supposed to be in antiquity. The *homo mensura* was first enunciated with a specific ethical purpose. In its general statement it meant man in general, but in the working out, owing to Protagoras' empirical, developmental treatment of the social question, it came also to mean the individual, community in one context, man in another. In this working out Protagoras taught that the moral judgment is valid only for the community interested, and claims no further validity, illustrating his point from the phenomena of sensation. From this was extracted a catchphrase like the Universal Flux, "appearance is reality," which was treated as the essence of the Protagorean doctrine. This abstract principle was made game of by some among the dialecticians, whom Plato cites in *Theatetus*, 161 C ff., and rebukes in the Defence in the person of Protagoras, adding what he regards as the real meaning of the dictum. He himself supplies three answers. (1) In the first part of the rejoinder he gives a *dialectical* refutation of the abstract principle that every judgment is true (validity) because it is true (claim) to the maker. (2) In the second part he attacks the *moral* application: granting (provisionally) the arbitrary nature of actual moral codes he denies that the Good is arbitrary on the ground that welfare depends on objective conditions. (3) But his main objection is to be found in his treatment of the *homo mensura* as a doctrine which makes knowledge and sensation equivalent terms: the *psychology* of Protagoras is at fault: he has failed to see the fundamental difference between the claims of the sensation and the judgment to objective validity: if he had seen the difference he could not have drawn so close a parallel between sensation and the moral judgment.

I conclude that there is no justification whatever for the view that Protagoras taught that truth is a "value" or any similar Pragmatist doctrine, and that we must not read any epistemological meaning into the idea of ability as it appears in Plato's account of the dictum, its presence being due to the predominance of the ethical and social interests in the theory of Protagoras.