

MERRICK ANDERSON

## Immorality or Immortality? An Argument for Virtue

*Abstract:* In the 5<sup>th</sup> century a number of sophists challenged the orthodox understanding of morality and claimed that practicing injustice was the best and most profitable way for an individual to live. Although a number of responses to sophistic immoralism were made, one argument, in fact coming from a pair of sophists, has not received the attention it deserves. According to the argument I call *Immortal Repute*, self-interested individuals should reject immorality and cultivate virtue instead, for only a virtuous agent can win the sort of everlasting reputation that makes a life truly admirable and successful.

Keywords: *Anonymous Iamlichi*, Prodicus, Sophistic Movement, Immoralism, Virtue

**T**he second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an exciting intellectual movement in Athens. During this time of discovery and investigation, many of the traditional Greek world-views were challenged and rejected. Even the centuries-old beliefs about the gods and morality came under intellectual fire: the text known to us as the “Sisyphus Fragment” attests to the fact that at least some 5<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals denied the existence of the traditional,

---

I would like to thank everyone who helped me while I was working on this paper. Special thanks goes to the Princeton University Center for Human Values for funding my travel to Oxford during the initial, research phase of the project. I must also acknowledge Hendrik Lorenz, Joshua Billings and Masako Toyoda, each of whom read drafts of the paper and encouraged me to continue writing. Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the editor of *Rhetorica* as well as the two anonymous referees for their critical suggestions and editorial help.

---

*Rhetorica*, Vol. XXXVII, Issue 2, pp. 97–119. ISSN: 0734-8584, electronic ISSN: 1533-8541. © 2019 by The International Society for the History of Rhetoric. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rh.2019.37.2.97>

interventionist gods.<sup>1</sup> And once the divine punishments for unjust behavior that these gods were customarily thought to dispense had been called into question, some Greeks began to wonder whether following the moral principles of their society was the most prudent way to live.<sup>2</sup> At least a few thought not. The remaining fragments of Antiphon's *On Truth* include arguments showing that breaking the laws and practicing injustice is often more beneficial than being just, provided that one's injustice is kept secret.<sup>3</sup> Similar arguments are presented by Callicles, a student of the sophist Gorgias, in the *Gorgias* and by the sophist Thrasymachus in the *Republic* – and the arguments of both these Platonic characters appear to be developments of earlier arguments made by real 5<sup>th</sup> century sophists.<sup>4</sup> It is clear that during

---

<sup>1</sup>DK88, B25. See in particular lines 11–26, where belief in the gods is said to have been mendaciously manufactured by a “clever and wise man” as a political tool to prevent people from breaking the laws and harming others. For an interesting discussion of this, see Patrick O’Sullivan’s “Sophistic Ethics, Old Atheism, and ‘Critias’ on Religion,” *Classical World* 105.2 (2012): 167–85.

<sup>2</sup>The author of the Sisyphus Fragment probably wondered this himself. Many scholars feel that this text is a clear literary expression of the dangerous, sophistic immoralism that developed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. So Charles Kahn, in his “Greek Religion and the Sisyphus Fragment,” *Phronesis* 42.3 (1997): 259, says that the Sisyphus Fragment is, “the most extreme expression of this atmosphere of moral cynicism, documented in the Antiphon fragments and caricatured in the *Clouds*.”

<sup>3</sup>See DK87, B44. *On Truth* has received a significant amount of sustained scholarly attention and many different interpretations of this very important fragment have been offered in the literature. The majority of scholars hold that Antiphon endorses the practice of intelligent injustice as profitable and rational for the self-interested individual. Others have denied that Antiphon really endorsed the practice of injustice, either on the grounds that the considerations raised in B44 are theoretical, and therefore do not suggest any sort of practical conclusions at all, or on the grounds that his account of what is profitable or rational for the individual to pursue is not – contrary to the initial appearances of the text – antithetical to justice. I cannot offer a full defense of the standard view here. I restrict myself to two observations. First, to the best of our knowledge Antiphon’s text contains the most explicit attempt by any sophist to show that just behavior is not good for the just individual. And second, it is very difficult to understand why later authors were so concerned to defend the profitability of justice if no one had seriously maintained the contrary view. For a full defense of the majority view, including an admirable discussion of the secondary literature, see Gerard Pendrick’s *Antiphon the Sophist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 315–377.

<sup>4</sup>It is now common to recognize the influence of genuine sophistic thought on Plato’s presentation of Callicles and Thrasymachus. For example, in her insightful *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article, “Thrasymachus and Callicles,” (2011), Rachel Barney suggests that Antiphon is the historical inspiration behind Plato’s two great critics of conventional morality. For a more sustained discussion of the sophistic background of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, without, however, attempting to identify any one particular sophist as the inspiration for Plato’s depiction of

this exciting period of Greek thought a number of figures argued that intelligent individuals had compelling, self-interested reasons to be unjust and immoral, because this offered them the best prospects of living the good life.<sup>5</sup>

It is also clear that other figures took it upon themselves to respond to those who endorsed the life of injustice. In the *Republic*, for example, Plato tries to show that Thrasymachus' immoralism is deeply and perniciously misguided. Plato's mouthpiece in this dialogue, Socrates, maintains that the cultivation of justice is more profitable than the cultivation of injustice – and indeed that it is indispensable for the good life – because justice produces a healthy and ordered soul, upon which the agent's well-being ultimately depends, whereas the practice of injustice corrupts the individual's soul. One of the explicitly flagged purposes of the dialogue is to offer an elaborate response to a group of unnamed advocates for the unjust and immoral life, and it is reasonable to suppose that these unnamed figures include the 5<sup>th</sup> century defenders of injustice.<sup>6</sup>

But Plato was not the first person to respond to these pernicious views. In this paper I will argue that there was an earlier, 5<sup>th</sup> century response to immoralism, in fact offered by a pair of sophists, which I call *Immortal Repute*. We possess two versions of this argument: one in the *Anonymous Iamblich* (hereafter AI) and the other in Prodicus's "Choice of Heracles" (hereafter CH). We can be confident that both versions of the argument were offered as part of a response to the views of earlier, although unnamed, opponents who had praised the immoral life and defended the practice of intelligent injustice. In order to turn potential rogues away from this immoralism, our texts argue that the moral way of life is ultimately better for the individual than

---

Thrasymachus, see my "Thrasymachus' Sophistic Account of Justice in *Republic* i," *Ancient Philosophy* 36.1 (2016): 151–172.

<sup>5</sup>I will use the terms "unjust"/"immoral" and "just"/"moral" interchangeably in this paper. It is sometimes suggested that Greeks lacked the special concept of morality that we, as moderns, are supposed to have discovered. I very much doubt that things are so simple, although I will not discuss this here. In any case, when I use just/unjust or morality/immorality I mean only to refer to the pre-theoretical concepts of propriety/impropriety or acting rightly/acting wrongly. Obviously, such concepts were available to the Greeks.

<sup>6</sup>That Plato intended the *Republic* to include a response to a group of unnamed friends of injustice is indicated by Glaucon and Adeimantus in their restatement of Thrasymachus' position at the outset of book II. The brothers announce that although they are not convinced that injustice is more profitable than justice for the individual, they cannot help but be sympathetic to this view, for this is what everyone teaches them (358c-d, 362c and 367b-c). Both stress that it is not just Thrasymachus, but *countless others* (μῦροι ἄλλοι, 358c8) who advocate immoralism. Part of Plato's purpose of in the *Republic* is to respond to these unnamed others.

the immoral way of life, because it is only through the practice of virtue that one can win a great reputation while alive and, more importantly, a posthumous fame resulting in a sort of immortality. This posthumous prize is assumed to be a significant contribution to the successful and good life, so the individual is supposed to recognize a prudential, self-interested reason to be moral and practice virtue.

Sadly, this argument has not received the attention it deserves. I suspect that this is due to the fact that scholars often rely (at least in large part) on Plato's dialogues to reconstruct the views of the sophists and that, save for one possible yet notable exception, there are no traces of *Immortal Repute* in the Platonic Corpus.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that this argument has not been more widely recognized. For if the claims of this paper are correct, *Immortal Repute* is an authentically sophistic argument which provides us with an unmediated glimpse into the workings of the 5<sup>th</sup> century sophistic movement.

In what follows, I first discuss the version of our argument found in AI. Next, I offer a novel interpretation of Prodicus's CH according to which it implies that certain uniquely virtuous individuals can become revered as deities in posterity and, in this way, achieve a great and eternal fame. I conclude by briefly evaluating *Immortal Repute*.

The AI is a short and wonderful (if understudied)<sup>8</sup> text, which has been preserved in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Iamblichus' *Protrepticus*. Little is

---

<sup>7</sup>The passage in question is *Symposium* 208d7-e1, where Socrates reports Diotima as saying:

ἀλλ' οἱμαί ὑπὲρ ἀρετῆς ἀθανάτου καὶ τοιαύτης δόξης εὐκλεοῦς πάντες πάντα ποιοῦσιν, ὅσῳ ἂν ἀμείνου ᾶσι, τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον· τοῦ γὰρ ἀθανάτου ἐρῶσιν.

I think that everyone does everything on behalf of undying virtue and the accompanying glorious reputation; and to the extent that they are better, they do this more. For they love immortality.

Although this is not stated as an explicit argument for virtue, it is easy enough to see how it might be turned into one. This is one passage that quite possibly reveals Plato's debt to the ideas that I discuss in this paper. Plato may even admit as much, I think, when he has Socrates remark that Diotima is here speaking *just like those perfect sophists* [ὥσπερ οἱ τέλει σοφισταί, 208c1]. A natural way to read "perfect sophists" is indicating that the sophists in question were morally good and not, as might have been assumed, morally depraved. If so, Socrates is presumably likening Diotima to a group of sophists who appealed to considerations of reputation to promote the morally good life. It is possible that the author of AI and Prodicus are two of the sophists to which Socrates alludes.

<sup>8</sup>I know of only three insightful, peer-reviewed articles that offer sustained discussions highlighting the significance of AI: Thomas Cole's "The Anonymous Iamblichi and His Place in Greek Political Theory," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 65 (1961): 127–63; Jacqueline de Romilly's "Sur un Écrit Anonyme Ancien et Ses Rapports Avec Thucydide," *Journal des Savants* 1 (1980): 19–34; and Michelle

known about Iamblichus' life beyond the fact that he was a Neoplatonist philosopher, who probably studied with Porphyry in either Rome or Sicily and who founded his own school in Apamea (modern-day Syria), where he worked in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Unfortunately, Iamblichus does not identify the author of the work he reproduces in the penultimate chapter of his own composition – hence its customary name. Nevertheless, the content and the style of the work betray its origin. Because the text makes much of the hallmark sophistic distinction between νόμος and φύσις and evinces a preoccupation with the looming figure of “the tyrant,” it is almost certain that our text was written near the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and quite likely that the author of AI was himself intimately familiar with the sophistic movement. Indeed, this has seemed so obvious that over the past 150 years there has been a race among preeminent classical scholars to pin the authorship of this text on virtually every known sophist.<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that any conjecture regarding authorship will ever establish itself sufficiently to win universal approval, so in the following discussion I will make no assumptions about whom Iamblichus was quoting. But the fact that he quoted this text in a *Protrepticus* is worthy of note. Standardly, a protreptic text – that is, an exhortation to philosophy – operates by arguing that the practice of philosophy contributes to the success of one's life in one way or another. That Iamblichus could so easily include AI (which was written before philosophy attained the self-identity as a way of life) in his *Protrepticus* reveals that our text is concerned to address the question of how an individual might lead a successful life.

AI's answer to this question is that such a life requires the enjoyment of certain goods, importantly including the good of being held

---

Lacore's "L'Homme D'Acier ἀδαμάντινος ἄνθρωπος De L'Anonyme De Jamblique À Platon," *Revue des Études Grecques* 110 (1997): 399–419. These papers do a fine job drawing connections between the AI and other (roughly) contemporaneous works, which is important to do because it increases our confidence that AI was written near the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Sadly, though, these authors do not spend as much time interpreting the arguments of the text on their own terms or analyzing the moral and political ideas contained within it. It is high time for more work to be done on this text.

<sup>9</sup>See *Das Recht Im Denken Der Sophistik* (Teubner: Stuttgart, 1997), 321–33, where Klaus Friedrich Hoffman devotes an entire section to the *Verfasserfrage*, which includes an extremely detailed and erudite discussion of previous attempts to identify the author of our text. His discussion concludes with the sobering, yet highly plausible result: "Diese zahlreichen Bezüge erweise den A. als selbständigen Sophisten, dessen genaue Identität ohne weitere Funde im Dunkeln bleiben muß" (332).

in high esteem by one's fellow citizens and peers. Throughout the text the author takes it for granted that his readers will be motivated by the desire to win a good reputation and that they will (rightly) consider such a reputation to be a crucial element of the good life. Thus, the initial sections of the text offer advice about how an individual must train if they hope to attain mastery in any craft without incurring the enmity of their peers (P, 95.20–97.10/DK89 B1, 1.1–2.8).<sup>10</sup> We are told, for example, that one must start training early and train often, for people are less likely to begrudge others their accomplishments if they have witnessed the long labors required for them. One other piece of advice is particularly relevant for our purposes: since people are less likely to resent those who use their talents to benefit others rather than themselves, AI informs its readers that an individual who hopes for a good reputation must work for good and noble ends (96.30–97.6/B1, 2.7). Indeed, our author later makes clear that the best way to win a good reputation is to acquire complete virtue, and then proceeds to explain how one might do this (97.25–28/B1, 3.3):

Τόν τε αὖ ἀρετῆς ὀρεγόμενον τῆς συμπάσης  
 σκεπτέον εἶναι, ἐκ τίνος ἂν λόγου ἢ ἔργου ἄριστος  
 εἴη· τοιοῦτος δ' ἂν εἴη ὁ πλείστοις ὠφέλιμος ὢν.

We must also consider the one desiring complete virtue,  
 and from what word or deed he would be most excellent.  
 He would be such if he was useful to as many people as  
 possible.<sup>11</sup>

To become virtuous, then, one must become useful to as many people as possible. And one becomes useful to as many people as possible, the text goes on to explain, by becoming a servant to the laws and to justice, since these are what hold cities together and allow for friendship among citizens (98.10–13/B1, 3.6).

Already we can detect a close connection between self-interest and moral behavior. AI's advice is that the person who hopes to win a good reputation should strive for complete virtue, where this means helping as many people as possible through the promotion of justice and the laws. Of course, living this sort of life might be quite demanding, potentially requiring an immense amount of effort and labor. The author of our text presumably senses that a number of his readers may

<sup>10</sup>I follow the Greek text of Édouard Des Place, ed., *Jamblique, Protreptique* (Les Belles Lettres: Paris, 2003).

<sup>11</sup>All translations are my own, although I have profited from consulting the editions and translations cited throughout.

have been tempted to escape the labors constitutive of the virtuous life and instead pursue a life of luxury and indulgence made possible by immoral behavior.<sup>12</sup> For, anticipating an objection from those tempted by this sort of life, the author gives his version of what I call *Immortal Repute* (99.21–100.1/B1, 5.2):

ἐπει δὲ ὑπάρχει τῷ βίῳ μηχανομένῳ τό τε γῆρας  
 κάκιον ὄν ἀνθρώποις καὶ μὴ ἀθάνατον εἶναι, [καὶ  
 ἢ] ἀμαθία ἤδη ἐστὶ μεγάλη καὶ συνήθεια πονηρῶν  
 λόγων τε καὶ ἐπιθυμημάτων, ταύτην περιποιεῖν ἐπὶ  
 δυσκλεία, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἀθάνατον ἀντ' αὐτῆς λείπεσθαι,  
 ἀντὶ θνητῆς οὔσης εὐλογίαν ἀέναον καὶ αἰεὶ ζῶσαν.

But since old age, which is quite an evil for human beings, and mortality await a prolonged life, it truly shows a great stupidity and a habituation to both wicked arguments and desires to preserve this life at the cost of infamy, but not leave instead of this mortal thing something immortal, an eternal and ever-living good repute.

It is in this passage that AI most clearly indicates that the life which is productive of an immortal repute is better and more profitable for the individual than a debased and immoral life. It would be a great stupidity, our text announces, to follow certain wicked arguments and desires when one could instead live so as to win an immortality based on praise and eternal *eulogia*. Given this commitment, the author of AI can produce a neat argument in favor of the just and virtuous life. For if the life resulting in an immortal repute is so much better than the life devoted to fulfilling wicked desires, and if the only way for an individual to leave behind an immortal reputation is to become virtuous, then the self-interested individual has good reason to pursue virtue.

This very simple argument is AI's version of *Immortal Repute*. Presuming, as it does, that a good reputation is a good thing and an immortal reputation is an exceptionally good thing, the text argues that individuals should cultivate virtue in order to win this prize. In this way, our author suggests that we should eschew immortality and pursue morality.

---

<sup>12</sup>We can be confident that the views of certain immoralists are in the background here, both because of the mention of "wicked arguments" in AI's statement of *Immortal Repute* and because the text is generally concerned to respond to immoralist sentiments. In particular, see 98.18–25/B1, 3.1 and 100.5–101.5/B1, 6.1–5. The second passage includes an argument explicitly offered in response to readers who admire the life of an unjust, adamant super-villain.

One might object that our author is making a large and unfair assumption. Why should anyone accept that no one can win a good reputation unless they are, in fact, completely virtuous and beneficial to a great number of their contemporaries? AI does not, either in the passage quoted above or while giving advice about how an individual should cultivate their talents, explicitly acknowledge – let alone argue against – the possibility that an unjust or vicious person might win a good reputation through deceptive, immoral behavior. And the fact that the author does not acknowledge this possibility poses a significant problem for the line of thought presented in the text. For precisely because immortal fame is the carrot presented as worthy of pursuit, AI would give a self-interested agent no good reason to be just or virtuous if an unjust person could avoid infamy and win an immortal reputation for virtue.

There are at least two possible responses to this objection. The author of AI could respond by conceding that although it might be possible for an unjust agent to win a reputation for virtue, one is much more likely to win such a reputation if one is actually virtuous and moral. He might then argue that it would be prudent to turn to morality, rather than immorality, because this is more likely to result in the sort of immortal fame that his readers desire. Alternatively, our author could have denied that it was possible for an unjust or immoral individual to acquire the sort of reputation that produces an immortal reputation.

Although AI never explicitly addresses the question, I believe we can say with a reasonable degree of certainty that he would have adopted the second response and denied that an unjust agent could ever win immortal repute. Our author accepted what I shall call the Bob Marley principle: “you can fool some people sometimes, but you can’t fool all the people all the time.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, he took it for granted that no unjust or vicious agent could successfully dupe all their peers into thinking that they were virtuous. According to the bleak picture of human psychology to which the author of AI subscribes, people’s default reaction is to be upset at the accomplishments of others insofar as they believe that any honor or praise credited to another’s ledger is debited from their own. The early sections of AI inform us that humans are so inherently suspicious of others that most of the time they are convinced that their peers are hunting for a good reputation through deceptive means. In order to come to recognize true virtue,

---

<sup>13</sup>One might also call this the Abraham Lincoln Principle. Lincoln reportedly said, “You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” Although somewhat less lapidary than Marley’s lyric, Lincoln’s wise words make a similar point.

these people must be forced ὑπὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης αὐτῆς to give to others the respect and honor they deserve – and still they do so only unwillingly! (96.16–19/B1, 2.3).<sup>14</sup>

We can now respond to the aforementioned objection. Given how suspicious and distrustful the author of AI takes humans to be, he would not have thought it possible for a truly vicious person to win a reputation for virtue. On the contrary, the text suggests that the truth of the individual's virtue is the necessity that will convince others to begrudgingly pay them the honor and the respect that they both hope for and deserve. Having responded to this objection, I turn now to discuss the second version of *Immortal Repute*.

We are lucky to know much more about Prodicus the sophist than the author of AI. Prodicus was born in Ceos during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, became a famous intellectual during the second half and died early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for being a teacher of rhetoric with a trademark ability to draw subtle distinctions between synonymous words, yet, much like the other sophists about whom we have significant information, he made contributions to many different fields, including anthropology, religion and ethics. The contribution that concerns us here is his "Choice of Heracles," a work which was probably written as an *epideixis*, or a display-speech, to advertise Prodicus's upstanding moral character and to offer a tantalizing glimpse into his philosophical system.<sup>15</sup> Although a number of sources attest to the fact that Prodicus composed and performed (probably on many occasions) a speech about Heracles, the only version we possess is preserved in the second book of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. In a fortunate turn of events, Xenophon takes pains to indicate that the version of the CH he presents in his own work accurately reflects the Prodician original. This permits us to mine Xenophon's version of

---

<sup>14</sup>96.16-19/B1, 2.3: Οὐ γὰρ ἤδὲ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἄλλον τινα τιμᾶν (αὐτοὶ γὰρ στερίσκεισθαι τινος ἡγούνται), χειρωθέντες δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης αὐτῆς καὶ κατὰ σμικρὸν ἐκ πολλοῦ ἐπαχθέντες ἐπαινέται καὶ ἄκοντες ὁμῶς γίγνονται.

<sup>15</sup>Scholars sometimes reflexively assume that sophists like Prodicus would not have seriously endorsed the statements or positions advanced within their public *epideixis* (see, for example, W.C.K. Guthrie's *The Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 274–280), but this is a mistake. It is better to understand these display-speeches as what David Sansone calls "teasers" – presentations which offer a tantalizing taste of what a student might expect to learn if they sign up for full-price instruction (see Sansone's "Heracles at the Y," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124 (2004): 125–42 (p. 138)). So although it is true that these *epideixis* would leave out the higher mysteries of the sophist's thought, it is wrong to think that they would not have endorsed the statements or positions advanced within them. They would have, but these would represent only one part of their more fully developed theory.

the speech as a reliable source of evidence for the views of the historical Prodicus.<sup>16</sup>

The sophist's speech takes the form of a mythological parable designed to offer moral guidance. It begins with the introduction of a budding young Heracles, who has just reached the age of independence. Having retired to a place of peace in order to consider what sort of life he should lead, he has a vision in which two women approach him and try to convince him to adopt their preferred sort of life. The first – named Vice [κακία] – represents the immoral life of hedonistic indulgence, while the second – named Virtue [ἀρετή] – represents a more traditional ideal of propriety. The speech, then, dramatizes one mythological figure's choice between following a paradigmatically moral and immoral way of life.<sup>17</sup> But it also does

---

<sup>16</sup>In fact, the speech is bookended by remarks confirming that it respects Prodicus's own composition. Xenophon has Socrates introduce the speech by noting that he is going to present the original as best he can remember it (II, 1.21/DK84 B2, 21), and he concludes his presentation with the explicit statement that, "Prodicus described the education of Heracles by Virtue in this way, although he dressed his thoughts with still more splendid words than I have now done" (II, 1.34/B2, 34). Scholars continue to question just how closely the wording used by Xenophon's Socrates reflects the wording of the original sophistic composition. David Sansone persuasively argues that, "Xenophon seems to have preserved a very close approximation of the actual words of Prodicus's display-piece. Consequently, this passage should be taken much more seriously than it has been in the past as evidence for the thought and methods of the Cean sophist" (2004): 126. Although Sansone's argument was later challenged by Vivienne Gray ("The Linguistic Philosophies of Prodicus in Xenophon's 'Choice of Heracles'?" *Classical Quarterly* 56.2 (2006): 426–435), it remains the best study on this topic. Despite Gray's challenge, its findings have been largely endorsed by later commentators (cf. Robert Mayhew's *Prodicus the Sophist* (Oxford, 2011), 201–06). Though I have no new linguistic or stylistic considerations to contribute to this discussion, I do want to offer one historical or philosophical consideration loosely supporting Sansone's view. I argue that *Immortal Repute* is best understood as one part of a larger 5<sup>th</sup> century strategy of responding to sophistic immorality. If this is right, then the philosophical ideas raised in Xenophon's presentation of CH derive from a 5<sup>th</sup> century context. This lends further, though indirect, support to the thesis that the contents of Xenophon's presentation are genuinely Prodician. I do not expect my contribution to be decisive. (Xenophon could have cherry-picked attractive 5<sup>th</sup> century ideas for his own purposes with no concern to reproduce the views of any figure). We should not, however, expect to find any decisive considerations about the authenticity of this text. All we can do is weigh the evidence available to us in order to come to an educated judgement. And the fact that the argument in Xenophon's text is best understood in a 5<sup>th</sup> century context is, I think, significant, especially since no one has successfully responded to the linguistic and stylistic considerations raised by Sansone.

<sup>17</sup>This might be resisted. Many have felt that κακία and ἀρετή were not "moral" terms at the time Prodicus wrote his speech. So Arthur Adkins, in his *Merit and Responsibility* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), maintained that the non-moral, Homeric values persisted into the sophistic period. He denies that ἀρετή

more. By having the two women engage in a debate with one another about the relative merits of morality and immorality, CH also offers philosophical instruction to its audience about how they too should live their life.

Vice approaches Heracles first and promises that if he follows her path, he will have the sweetest and easiest of lives. She offers him his fill of boys, booze and banquets, quickly adding that he will not have to work to enjoy any of these luxurious pleasures. Instead, others will work and he will cunningly – though unfairly – snatch the fruits of their labor. Once her presentation is complete, Heracles asks this champion of lazy indulgence for her name (II, 1.26/ DK84 B2, 26):<sup>18</sup>

Ἡ δέ, Οἱ μὲν ἐμοὶ φίλοι καλοῦσί με Εὐδαιμονίαν,  
οἱ δὲ μισοῦντές με ὑποκοριζόμενοι ὀνομάζουσι Κακίαν.

And she said, my friends call me Happiness, but those  
who hate me play with terms and name me Vice.

Vice's appropriation of the name "*Eudaimonia*" shows that she believes her own way of life is the best and most profitable way of life for Heracles. She thus encourages him to travel down the vicious path because, she thinks, it would be beneficial for him to do so.

Virtue's speech is clearly offered as a response to her vicious counterpart. Consider the following tirade that Virtue launches at Vice (II, 1.31/B2, 31):

Ἀθάνατος δὲ οὔσα ἐκ θεῶν μὲν ἀπέρριψαι, ὑπὸ δὲ  
ἀνθρώπων ἀγαθῶν ἀτιμάζει· τοῦ δὲ πάντων ἡδίστου  
ἀκούσματος, ἐπαίνου σεαυτῆς, ἀνήκοος εἶ, καὶ τοῦ  
πάντων ἡδίστου θεάματος ἀθέατος· οὐδὲν γὰρ πώποτε

---

was moral at this time and suggested instead that, "*aretē* is naturally linked to strength, daring and success," whereas *kakia* is naturally linked to weakness and cowardice (159). This cannot be true of *aretē* and *kakia* in Prodicus's CH. It would be absurd for Heracles to seriously deliberate about whether he should follow Virtue or Vice if one represented the life of daring and success, whereas the other represented a cowardly and weak life. Adkins (as well as those who share his view) is in the grips of what Bernard Williams has, in the process of debunking it, helpfully called the "progressivist" picture of Greek ethics, according to which *aretē* did not become a moral term until Socrates or Plato used it. (See his *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 1–20). It is clear from an unprejudiced reading of AI that the virtue under discussion is a normatively-loaded virtue. Perhaps even more obvious is that vice is presented in a highly negatively way – indeed, both in CH and AI vice is associated with *pleonexia* as well as violating the rules of one's society. These were paradigmatically unjust ways of behaving in Classical Greece.

<sup>18</sup>I follow the Greek text of Michele Bandini and Louis-André Dorion, ed., *Xénophon Mémoires* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013).

σεαυτῆς ἔργον καλὸν τεθέασαι. Τίς δ' ἂν σοι λεγούσῃ  
τι πιστεύσειε; Τίς δ' ἂν δεομένη τινὸς ἐπαρχέσειεν; ἢ τίς  
ἂν εὖ φρονῶν τοῦ σοῦ θιάσου τολμήσειεν εἶναι;

Immortal though you are, you've been cast out from the gods and dishonored by good people. Of praise of oneself – the sweetest sound of all – you're unhearing. And of the sweetest sight of all, unseeing. For you've never yet witnessed an honorable deed of your own. Who would trust anything you say? Who would assist you if you required anything? Who in their right mind would dare keep company with you?

Our personified Virtue calls her counterpart so base and ignorant that she cannot even recognize what is truly good and valuable. Her rhetorical questions imply that Vice has no place in decent society – the obvious message to Heracles (and, by extension, the members of Prodicus's audience) is that those who adopt an immoral way of life will suffer a similar fate. Prodicus does not give Vice any opportunity to respond to these allegations in his work, and this fact is important. When Virtue so vocally slanders Vice, Vice and the way of life she represents become objects of scorn and contempt for everyone listening to CH. By exploiting the structure and dramatic features of his presentation in this clever way, Prodicus is able to produce certain responses in his audience that will steer them away from Vice and the immoral life she represents.

Naturally, Virtue also tells Heracles about her own way of life. In contrast to Vice, who promised Heracles that his life could be easy and free of work, Virtue is very clear that her path will be quite demanding and may require Heracles to forgo many pleasures and indulgences. “For of the things that are really good and noble, the gods give none of them to humans without labor and diligence” (II, 1.28/B2.28). Indeed, she stresses in particular that if Heracles wishes to be loved by his friends, he must aid them (εὐεργετητέον); if he wishes to be honored by his city, he must be useful to it (ὠφελητέον); and if he wishes for all of Greece to admire his virtue, he must try to do good (εὖ ποιεῖν) to all of Greece (II, 1.28/B2, 28). *Ex nihilo nihil fit*.

Yet what an individual can hope to win through this hard work is of the greatest value. Virtue ends her speech by eulogizing those who follow her path (II, 1.33/B2, 33):

δι' ἐμὲ φίλοι μὲν θεοῖς ὄντες, ἀγαπητοὶ δὲ φίλοις, τίμιοι  
δὲ πατρίσιν· ὅταν δ' ἔλθῃ τὸ πεπρωμένον τέλος,  
οὐ μετὰ λήθης ἄτιμοι κείνται, ἀλλὰ μετὰ μνήμης τὸν  
ἀεὶ χρόνον ὑμνούμενοι θάλλουσι. Τοιαῦτά σοι, ὦ παῖ  
τοκέων ἀγαθῶν Ἡράκλεις, ἔξεστι διαπονησαμένῳ  
τὴν μακαριστοτάτην εὐδαιμονίαν κεκτῆσθαι.

Because of me they are dear to the gods, loved by their friends and honored by their fatherland. And indeed, when they come to their fated end, they do not lie dishonored and forgotten, but they blossom through memory and are sung about for all time. Oh Heracles, child of good parents, if you cultivate yourself as I have described you may win the most blessed happiness.

Those who pursue virtue can look back on their life with pride, enjoy old age and rejoice in the love they get from others. Most importantly, though, once the virtuous die they are not forgotten or slandered, but they are remembered and honored for all time. The clear implication of this passage is that this immortal memory and honor makes the life of the one who possesses it successful and supremely happy. Virtue's advice to Heracles is, then, to travel the path of morality so that he may experience a blessed happiness through winning an immortal reputation.

It must be noted that this is not just the end of Virtue's speech; it is also the end of Prodicus's whole *epideixis*. In other words, the climax of Virtue's lesson to Heracles is also the climax of Prodicus's lesson to his audience. This suggests that Prodicus endorsed Virtue's preferred way of life, accepted her understanding of the most blessed happiness and agreed that it was in an individual's self-interest to be moral. So, too, does Prodicus's use of the figure of Heracles. As every member of Prodicus's audience would have known, Heracles completed many great labors and saved Greece from many terrible miseries. And because of his benefaction, he – true to Virtue's words – continues to be remembered and honored to this very day. In this way, the sophist's choice of Heracles serves as a confirmation that those who follow the virtuous way of life can win an undying fame. As one further bit of evidence that Prodicus ultimately endorsed the position advanced by his Virtue, note that in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* Socrates uses the sophist's speech in order to exhort his interlocutor towards a moderate and moral way of life (II, 1.1). This seems to confirm that Prodicus's purpose with CH was to encourage justice rather than injustice, morality rather than immorality. Thus, we have good reason to conclude that Prodicus endorsed the account of happiness and the best life advanced by Virtue.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>This claim is at odds with the interpretation of our text found in Robert Mayhew's recent and influential book, *Prodicus the Sophist*. According to Mayhew, CH does not ultimately endorse the virtuous way of life as preferable to the vicious way of life. Instead, it offers a real choice between the path of Virtue and of Vice. Prodicus is said to hold the view that, "there are no objective moral truths and/or

There is, however, one looming objection to my claim that Prodicus ultimately endorsed the account of the most blessed happiness presented by his Virtue. Although I think it ultimately fails, I will spend some time working through the objection because doing so allows one to better understand CH and to more fully appreciate the radical nature of this text.

The objection takes its cue from the fact that in CH Virtue refers to traditional-sounding gods a number of times.<sup>20</sup> We have seen this above. Virtue tells Heracles that nothing good is given to humans from gods without hard work and care (II, 1.28/B2, 28); she says that Vice has been cast out of the immortals (II, 1.31/B2, 31); and she twice says that those who follow her way of life are dear to the gods (II, 1.32–33/B2, 32–33). This is all rather surprising since we have independent evidence that Prodicus gave a genealogical account detailing how the Greeks came to believe in the gods which likely denied their very existence.<sup>21</sup>

---

moral absolutes, by reference to which it can be said that everyone ought to pursue a life of Virtue. . . Prodicus makes a case for the life of Virtue and the life of Vice" (2011), 205.

Mayhew's book is very helpful in many ways, but I cannot accept this feature of his interpretation. It seems to me to be a serious mistake to think that Prodicus would have been concerned with the concept of objective or absolute moral truths at all. But even granting for the sake of argument that Prodicus entertained the possibility that there were such truths only to reject it, it does not follow that the path of Virtue and Vice are equally worthy of choice. Prodicus's question was not "what are the absolute moral truths?" but rather "what way of life would make me – or any other individual, for that matter – happiest?" And it seems to me clear that CH represents the virtuous life as (prudentially) better than the life of vice. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that Xenophon's Socrates employs CH in order to benefit his friend and interlocutor, Aristippus. Socrates believes that rehearsing Prodicus's speech will lead his friend towards a moral way of life, *and that he will be better off because of it* (see, in particular, *Memorabilia* II, 1.16–20).

<sup>20</sup>The essence of this objection can be found in a few scattered remarks made by Jacqueline de Romilly in *Les Grands Sophistes Dans L'Atnhènes De Périclès* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1988), 279–80.

<sup>21</sup>Our information about Prodicus's religious views comes mainly from Philodemus's *On Piety*. Unfortunately, *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker* does not contain all the relevant testimonia and their context. The evidence has been collected and translated in Mayhew (2011), under texts 70–78. The evidence shows that Prodicus held a theory according to which the Greeks came to believe in the existence of the gods by deifying various features and individuals of their primitive environment. He could not, then, have believed in the literal existence of the traditional gods. It is possible that he rejected the existence of the traditional gods but nevertheless believed in a deity of sorts – perhaps a non-anthropomorphic one – although this seems to me rather unlikely. On this last issue, see Richard Bett's helpful discussion in "Language, Gods and Virtue," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 44 (2013): 279–311.

The objection, then, is that Virtue cannot be articulating Prodicus's own account of the most blessed happiness in CH. Virtue frequently refers to traditional-sounding, interventionist gods, but Prodicus did not himself believe in the existence of these gods. This shows that there is something of a gap between their positions. Because of this gap, the objection continues, a careful interpreter should avoid identifying Prodicus's understanding of *eudaimonia* with Virtue's.

I agree completely that Prodicus could not have literally believed in the statements his Virtue makes about the gods, but I do not think it follows from this that he did not endorse her account of the best life or what is ultimately good for the individual.

Consider first that CH is an *epideixis* couched in the form of a mythological parable. Parables do not normally function by presenting stories which are literally true. Instead, they use stock characters and familiar tropes in order to convey an important moral lesson. The audience of CH was not to understand, I take it, that Heracles literally sat himself down at a rock and was visited by two apparitions who engaged in a philosophic debate over what life he should live. Was this a real event or was it imagined? The truth is that it simply does not matter.<sup>22</sup> Since Prodicus obviously did not expect his speech's allegorical framework to be understood literally, he could have endorsed the essentials of Virtue's account while nonetheless rejecting the mystical and religious details of her speech, which, in any case, are not essential to her position.

Second – and more importantly – as David Sedley has recently argued, 5<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals had to be quite careful about advertising their heretical religious commitments.<sup>23</sup> Whether one understands Prodicus to be a complete atheist or simply a radical revisionist about the gods, he certainly would have needed to exercise extreme caution in advertising his beliefs. It would have been dangerous for him to openly state his radical views and he may have welcomed the opportunity to pay lip-service to the traditional religious orthodoxies in his mythological parable. The mere fact that Virtue mentions the gods does not, then, entail that Prodicus could not have endorsed the core of her response to Vice's position or her own articulation of what makes life good.

---

<sup>22</sup>Indeed, the very language of the text emphasizes the vague or hypothetical nature of the story. The speech says that two women "appeared" to approach, using the Greek "φανήναι" with a supplementary infinitive. This construction expresses doubt about whether the appearance was in fact true (Smyth, 2143).

<sup>23</sup>See his "The Atheist Underground," in V. Harte and M. Lane, ed., *Politeia in Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 329–48.

It is entirely likely, however, that Prodicus wanted the intelligent members of his audience to think through these questions and wonder about the place of the gods in CH. For in thinking through these questions one quickly sees that CH's veneer of piety is in fact compatible with a deeper, more subversive and tantalizing interpretation.

To the best of our knowledge, the historical Prodicus maintained that the Greeks came to believe in the gods when their ancestors deified the useful features of their environment and then, after this, the individuals who bestowed great services on humankind. Robert Mayhew summarizes Prodicus's account as follows:

- (1) Primitive people came to regard certain aspects of nature – 'the nourishing and useful' (τὰ τρέφοντα καὶ ὠφελούντα) – as gods; for example, the sun, the moon, rivers and springs, trees from which they gathered fruit, or vegetation generally.
- (2) Primitive people also came to regard certain *people* (and their discoveries) as gods – those who first discovered what is nourishing and otherwise useful.<sup>24</sup>

It is the second stage that concerns us here. The woman who first discovered agriculture, for example, was called Demeter and was prayed to so that our ancestors could continue to enjoy the fruits of the field; the first man to successfully make wine was called Dionysus and had festivals named in his honor, presumably to encourage the production and consumption of further vintages. Although the

---

<sup>24</sup>Mayhew (2011), 180–81, who is developing on Albert Henrichs's groundbreaking textual work and commentary on the Prodician sections of *On Piety* (see both "Die Kritik der Stoischen Theologie im Pherc. 1428," *Cronache Ercolanesi* 4 (1974): 5–32 and "Two Doxographical Notes: Democritus and Prodicus on Religion," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975): 93–123). Although a full treatment of the evidence regarding Prodicus's fascinating theory about the origin of religious belief is beyond the scope of this essay, one important fragment of *On Piety* is sufficiently important that it deserves to be quoted here (PHerc. 1428, Col. 3.2–13, Henrichs (1975): 116):

τὰ τρέφοντα καὶ ὠφελούντα θεοὺς  
 νεινομίσθαι καὶ τετεμῆσθ[αι] πρώτων ὑπὸ  
 [Προ]δίκου γεγραμμένα, μ[ε]τὰ δὲ ταῦτα τοῦ[ς] εὐρ]όγτας  
 ἢ τροφᾶς ἢ [σ]κέπας ἢ τὰς ἄλλας τέ[χ]νας  
 ὡς Δῆμητρα καὶ Δι[όνυσσον] καὶ τριῶς Διοσκούρο[υ]ς. . .

The nourishing and beneficial things, as Prodicus wrote, first were considered and honored as gods, and after this those who discovered either nourishment or shelter or the crafts as Demeter and Dionysus and the Discuri. . .

details of this process are not at all clear, this must have happened a number of times over a long period of time. At some point humankind forgot that they were honoring the memory of mere mortals and came to regard the objects of their worship as truly divine. Finally, the Greeks started to believe in a core number of gods and these ultimately became canonized in the works of Homer and Hesiod.

What is particularly striking about this genealogical account of the development of religious belief is how well it can be mapped onto Virtue's message in CH. This, I believe, is no coincidence. Prodicus wrote CH to contain two different, yet compatible and reinforcing interpretations of his text: one superficial and easily understood, the other accessible only to the clever members of the audience who were familiar with his anthropological work.

Consider the superficial interpretation first. Those in the audience who had no knowledge of Prodicus's other works or philosophical ideas could understand Virtue to be maintaining that, upon their death, virtuous individuals might be remembered, sung about by their decedents and – perhaps if they were exceptional – by their city as well. Any audience member who accepted that winning this sort of loving memory would contribute to the success of their life and accepted that practicing virtue was the only reasonable strategy for winning this sort of memory would thereby incur a strong prudential consideration in favor of the moral life.

Now consider the deeper interpretation of CH. The few clever members of Prodicus's audience who knew something about his genealogical account of religious belief might detect a different promise made by Virtue. They might hear Virtue whispering between the lines that an individual could truly become revered as a god after their death. For if Prodicus was right and the pantheon of gods were once mortal individuals, it should in principle be possible for another individual to become revered as a god in the future. They would presumably have to be spectacularly virtuous, but the stage was set for anyone to manufacture their own apotheosis by attaining the undying esteem of posterity.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Another way to express the difference between the two interpretations of CH would be to adopt the vocabulary of "exclusive" and "inclusive" immortality developed by Bruno Currie in his provocative book, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). According to Currie, someone achieves exclusive immortality by becoming an object of memory and continual renown after their death. Inclusive immortality is a richer conception of immortality, as it combines all the features of exclusive immortality with "immortality of cult, or another form of literal immortality" (73). On what I call the superficial interpretation of CH, Virtue is promising that moral individuals can win eternal renown from their descendants and

I suspect that some readers may find this “deeper” interpretation of CH farfetched. Allow me to give a few considerations to enhance the plausibility of my interpretation. First of all, one must note that if Prodicus ever hoped to indicate in a public *epideixis* that an exceptionally virtuous individual could become revered as a god in the future, he could never have said so in so many words. This is not only because he would have risked being punished for voicing such a heretical suggestion. It is also because the Greeks who revered the gods thought they genuinely existed – and thought they existed *qua* immortal-and-living-gods not *qua* mortal-and-dead-benefactors. If Prodicus were to convince all the Greeks that his genealogical account was correct, he would at the same time destroy their belief in the existence of the gods. And this, in turn, would destroy the very possibility of anyone being revered as a god in the future.

Second, one should consider again Prodicus’s choice of Heracles for this *epideixis*. As I have already noted, Heracles would seem to be a fitting figure insofar as anyone listening to CH would have known that he had followed a virtuous way of life and achieved an immortal fame because of it. But Heracles is also a fitting figure for someone wishing to hint that the Greeks’ gods were ultimately no more than deified projections of the great mortal men and women who had once conferred a spectacular benefit to humankind.<sup>26</sup> Every member of Prodicus’s audience would surely have known that, according to the myths, Heracles was born a mortal and that it was only at the time of his death – after having been recognized as the greatest of all Greek heroes – that he was immortalized, when immolated at the peak

---

their city. This corresponds nicely to Currie’s exclusive immortality. According to my deeper interpretation, Virtue is suggesting that an exceptional individual may win, beyond eternal renown, the status of a god, who is sung about and revered by their community in posterity. This nicely corresponds to the cult aspect of inclusive immortality.

A central claim of Currie’s book is that one finds evidence in Pindar’s work showing that some ancient Greeks truly aspired to inclusive immortality. There are some problems with his argument. It is by no means obvious to me, for example, that anyone in the ancient world aspired to literal immortality (which I understand to be continued and unbroken conscious existence coupled with the ability to act as an agent). Still, Currie persuasively argues that the Greeks were familiar with a conception of immortality that went beyond merely being remembered and included other notable features, such as having shrines or temples made in one’s honor and being celebrated as a cult figure in civic rituals. This is a salutary finding for my thesis, for it is this richer understanding of immortality that Virtue appeals to in the deeper interpretation of CH.

<sup>26</sup>Currie (2005), 77, also stresses the appropriateness of the Heracles example.

of Mt. Oeta in central Greece, and elevated to the rank of a god. It seems unlikely that this is all a coincidence. Within the religious myths there existed one figure who illustrated the very truth of Prodicus's genealogical account of the belief in the gods: born a mortal, Heracles was later welcomed into the divine ranks because of the great services he rendered to his fellow Greeks. By using Heracles in his CH, Prodicus hints that this might happen again.

Third, one should note that by encouraging others to pursue a virtuous and beneficial way of life, Prodicus might well have believed that he was conferring a great benefit on all of Greece. Consequently, CH can be read as Prodicus's attempt to win blessed happiness for himself. Note that at one point in CH, Virtue confesses to Heracles, "if you were to turn to my path you would become an exceptionally good worker of noble and august deeds, and I may appear still more honored and distinguished for good things" (II, 1.27/B2, 27). By performing CH, Prodicus was himself playing the role of Virtue to his audience. Just as Virtue, the goddess, hoped that Heracles would make her more honored and distinguished, Prodicus surely hoped that he would become more distinguished by playing the role of Virtue to all of Greece. This lends further support to the view that Prodicus accepted the account of the best and happiest life given by Virtue, for CH may have been part of his own attempt to win this blessed happiness for himself.

These three considerations make the deeper reading of CH rather compelling. I conclude that Prodicus expected at least some of his audience to connect the dots and infer from his speech that mortal individuals could, in some rare circumstances, bridge the gap between the human and the divine. This surely makes CH's version of *Immortal Repute* quite powerful and extremely appealing. Very few Greeks could have denied that any person sung about for all time, remembered by future generations and honored as a god had lived a successful and happy life, if not a completely ideal life. If Prodicus's clever audience members were convinced that they might be able to win a posterity of praise for themselves through their virtuous behavior, they would have incurred a very strong consideration in favor of adopting the moral life and cultivating virtue.

It should be obvious by now how the argument presented in CH resonates with the argument found in AI. In CH Virtue tells Heracles (and, implicitly, anyone else listening) that he can be sung about and praised for all time if only he follows the virtuous path and puts in the hard work required to aid his peers and country. Similarly, AI maintains that an individual can achieve an immortal good name

after benefiting as many people as possible and acquiring complete virtue. Of course, there are differences between the two versions of the argument. According to the deeper interpretation of CH advanced here, it is in principle possible for supremely virtuous human beings to become revered as gods in posterity. I can find nothing to parallel this exciting suggestion in the AI: the author of the latter text seems content to promise virtuous individuals an undying repute of a more mundane variety. But as tantalizing as Prodicus's suggestion may be, the possibility of winning a literal apotheosis is unnecessary for the argument to succeed. The core of *Immortal Repute* is the promise of a posthumous reputation, and this is a promise Virtue makes to Heracles on any reasonable interpretation of CH.

I turn now to discuss how successful *Immortal Repute* is as an argument and what role it played in 5<sup>th</sup> century responses to immoralism. As far as I can see, there are three problems with the argument. First, the argument will only have any psychological traction on those who already care about winning a posthumous fame or, more generally, who care deeply about what happens after their death. All those who were concerned only to make the best of their time on earth, if such people really existed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, would have denied that a posthumous reputation had any impact on the success or happiness of their life. For this reason, these people would have been unmoved by *Immortal Repute*. Second, even granting the skeptical account of human psychology presupposed by the author of AI, it is probably unfair to assume that only virtuous individuals can win the sort of reputation required by the argument. We are all familiar with a few questionable and duplicitous characters who somehow manage to be held in high esteem by a great many people. Our own personal experiences make it difficult to believe that no unjust individual can win the sort of reputation that AI and CH assume is only available to genuinely virtuous agents.

Finally, it must be admitted that the short supply of reputation poses a real problem for the argument. Repute, especially in its posthumous variety, is a scarce good. It can only ever be a small minority of individuals who are crowned with the wreath of eternal fame. Neither AI nor CH could guarantee that everyone who followed their advice and cultivated virtue would win the repute that, on their account, confers a sort of immortality and makes a life successful and happy. Some of those who read or heard *Immortal Repute* presumably would have realized this, and they would have had to weigh the chances of winning an immortal reputation against the possibility that all their hard work would result in naught. A few

might reasonably have decided that their chances were so slim that they would be better off pursuing a different sort of life – perhaps even the life of ease and indulgence praised by Vice or the other champions of immoralism.

The first two problems are serious, and I do not know if the authors of CH or AI could have responded to them in a way that would satisfy readers of this journal. I suspect that both authors simply took it for granted that everyone would care about what people thought about them after they died, and I doubt that they would have had much to say to anyone who sincerely averred that they had no such cares or concerns. Similarly, I doubt that either author would have had anything to say about the second problem. Indeed, I believe it was Plato who later identified the existence of this problem when, in the *Republic*, he had Glaucon hypothesize a completely vicious agent who nonetheless appears to others as completely virtuous and wins a great reputation on account of his apparent virtue (360e-362c). Much of the philosophic work of the *Republic* is geared towards showing that even this unjust individual would be miserable, which suggests that no earlier thinker had taken the possibility of such an individual seriously.

I think, though, that our authors would have had something to say about the third problem, and we can see this by taking stock of the context in which the two versions of *Immortal Repute* were made.

The first thing to note is that AI's response to immoralism is not limited to its presentation of *Immortal Repute*. The text contains a second argument in defense of the just and moral life, according to which every member of a political community has compelling reason to respect the principles of justice because compliance with these principles is necessary for the well-functioning of the community, upon which the happiness of all citizens depends. Each act of injustice threatens to undermine the cooperative community that everyone, including the unjust agent, requires. For this reason, no one should ever be unjust. Call this argument *Political Animals*.

In AI, then, we find two different arguments for the same basic conclusion that people must reject the practice of injustice and instead embrace morality in order to live well and be happy. I suggest that neither argument was meant to stand in isolation, but that each was meant to complement and reinforce the other. Whereas *Political Animals* shows that *qua member of a larger community* everyone has reason to be just and play fair with others, *Immortal Repute* shows that *qua*

*self-interested individual* even the most capable members of society, who might otherwise reject the conventional rules of morality, have compelling reason to be just and virtuous. The cumulative effect of both arguments is more powerful than the effect of each on their own, and by making both together AI offers an impressive and serious response to the 5<sup>th</sup> century proponents of immoralism.

This is an attractive suggestion, but it raises the question of why CH does not include its own version of *Political Animals*, or in any case some other argument with a similar import, alongside *Immortal Repute*. Did Prodicus think that his version of *Immortal Repute* was sufficient to combat immoralism all on its own? Although any answer to this question must be somewhat speculative, I want to suggest that Prodicus's version of the argument was also offered only as one part of a larger response to immoralism. Consider that in the *Memorabilia* Socrates presents Prodicus's display-speech as *one part* of a larger intervention ultimately designed to convince his interlocutor, Aristippus, to moderate his pernicious desires and become a better person. This suggests that Socrates thought that the message of CH, however beneficial, needed to be reinforced or augmented through further measures.<sup>27</sup> This is one piece of indirect evidence suggesting that CH may not have been intended to succeed all on its own. It is vital to remember that Prodicus's work was only an *epideixis* and was never intended to convey everything the sophist believed. It is likely that in his full teaching he would have provided additional considerations or theories about how to live well and successfully.

I tentatively conclude, then, that the authors of CH and AI offered *Immortal Repute* as one part of a larger defense of justice, which would have included other arguments and considerations in favor of virtue. This being the case, it was no great loss if some people remained skeptical of *Immortal Repute*; the defenders of morality had other arrows in their quiver for such hold-outs.

My discussion of the problems facing *Immortal Repute* was not meant to disparage the argument. Though it is not perfect, I believe that the argument latches on to a deep and enduring feature of human psychology. Even today most of the people we know care deeply about how they will be remembered after their death, if not by the whole world then at least by their children and friends. And many of us know some people who ardently desire to be admired and

---

<sup>27</sup>In the case of Aristippus, the further measures appear to be a discussion of Hesiod's poetry and subjection to the Socratic elenchus (*Memorabilia* II, 1.1–20).

remembered for all time.<sup>28</sup> We should not look down on the sophistic attempt to harness this desire in order to combat the threat of immortality. Instead, we should regard *Immortal Repute* as an innovative and insightful argument designed to promote a noble end.

---

<sup>28</sup>I gave two versions of this paper at Princeton University and after each of the talks, at least one member of the audience confessed to desiring eternal fame for him or herself.