Plato, Protagoras, and Predictions

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ABSTRACT Plato's *Theaetetus* discusses and ultimately rejects Protagoras's famous claim that "man is the measure of all things." The most famous of Plato's arguments is the Self-Refutation Argument. But he offers a number of other arguments as well, including one that I call the 'Future Argument.' This argument, which appears at *Theaetetus* 178a–179b, is quite different from the earlier Self-Refutation Argument. I argue that it is directed mainly at a part of the Protagorean view not addressed before, namely, that all beliefs concerning one's own future sensible qualities are true. This part of the view is found to be inconsistent with Protagoras's own conception of wisdom as expertise and with his own pretenses at expertise in teaching.

KEYWORDS Plato, Protagoras, future, perception, knowledge, relativism, wisdom

1. INTRODUCTION

NEARLY EVERY STUDENT OF PLATO knows of his Self-Refutation Argument (SRA) against Protagoras. And although it is the most famous, two of the other three major arguments in this section of the *Theaetetus*—the argument against flux (181c–183c) and the discussion of perception (184b–186e)—have also received a fair amount of attention. But the argument at 178a–179b, which I will call the 'Future Argument' (FA), has not. In 1990, Myles Burnyeat lamented the lack of a "sustained philosophical analysis" of this "extremely important argument."[1] This lack of attention is plainly not due to the argument's lack of philosophical interest. Although the SRA and the argument against flux both mention wisdom in their conclusions,[2] the FA is the *Theaetetus*'s only anti-Protagorean argument that deals explicitly with Protagoras's view of wisdom. Wisdom in general is an important but relatively neglected theme of the *Theaetetus*, and the dialogue's discussion of it centers on vaguely relativistic views and the question of whether and how Protagoras

[1] Myles Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 246.
[2] At 171d6–7 and 183b8–9.

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can sustain the position that some people, including Protagoras himself, are wiser than others. Nor is the lack of attention due to the argument's weakness—not if we take our cue from Theodorus, at least, who praises it. Aristotle also mentions the argument approvingly, whereas his attitude toward the SRA is more ambivalent.[3] And despite the relative lack of attention, the FA enjoys a high reputation among recent scholars. Chappell calls it "the best argument Plato produces against Protagoras." Sayre and Bostock also praise it, the former calling it "perspicuous and conclusive," the latter describing it as an "entirely satisfactory refutation of Protagoras." Sedley calls it the "decisive knockout blow against Protagoras."[4] Seeing as many scholars find fault with the SRA and think that the historical Protagoras was not committed to any doctrine of flux, the *Theaetetus*'s other major anti-Protagorean argument deserves a hearing. It is time the FA's tale were told.

A few preliminaries. The guiding epistemological view in the *Theaetetus*'s discussion of Protagoras is the Measure Doctrine: "Man is the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." This is quoted by Socrates (152a1–4), and then just after (152a6–8), it is given its standard interpretation, which I shall call—no doubt at some risk of complaint—'personal relativism.' The basic idea is that whatever appears or seems to a person *is* (or comes to be) as it seems for that person. But the dialogue contains another general interpretation of the measure doctrine important for our purposes: the view that *poleis*, cities or communities, are also the measures of their own truths. I shall call this view—no doubt at an even higher risk of complaint—'cultural relativism.'[5] In a defense of both types of relativism, Socrates also develops a conception of wisdom that he associates with Protagoras: the ability to improve people, communities, and even plants. Both types of relativism and Protagoras's conception of wisdom finally come to a head in the FA.

I shall argue that, in the FA, Socrates points out an inconsistency between some of the conditions necessary for wisdom and a restricted version of personal relativism such that we are all measures of our own perceptual qualities, including

[3]Though he also expresses approval of the SRA, Theodorus says Protagoras's *logos* is "chiefly caught out" (μάλιστα ἁλίσκεσθαι ὁ λόγος) by the FA (179b6–9). Aristotle, who mentions both the FA (*Metaphysics* Γ.5, 1010b11–14) and something like the SRA (*Metaphysics* Γ.8, 1012b13–18), praises unambivalently only the former. He describes the SRA as "θρυλούμενον," which seems here to mean "repeated again and again" and might suggest dismissiveness.

[4]See Timothy Chappell, *Reading Plato's* Theaetetus, 131; Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method*, 90; David Bostock, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 94; and David Sedley, *Midwife*, 87. Although the commentators on the *Theaetetus* always mention it, there is, I believe, still no sustained treatment, with Burnyeat's own discussion being one of the most extensive. See also John Cooper, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 85–87; Francis Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 89–92; Zina Giannopoulou, *Second* Apology, 101–5; Gregory Kirk, *Pedagogy*, 146–47; Mi-Kyoung Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras*, 171; John McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 177–79; Ronald Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge*, 148–53; Paul Stern, *Knowledge and Politics*, 187–91; and Robin Waterfield, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 179–81.

[5]As for relativism, for the moment I have simply adopted the most common terminology. Whether the view is best understood as a sort of relativism, or subjectivism, or infallibilism, or something else entirely is not a question I pursue in detail here (but see sect. 5 below). By relativism about *x* I mean just that all judgments or appearances or perceptions of *x* are equally authoritative and should count as true (for the one to whom it appears or the one who judges).

which perceptions we will have in the future.[6] More specifically, to be wise in the Protagorean sense, one must be able to predict with some accuracy what other people *will* perceive. And this is inconsistent with the view that each person is the criterion of all her future perceptions. I begin with this conception of wisdom and Socrates's initial challenge to it, then turn to a passage just after the SRA that advances restricted relativism. Having described and motivated the Protagorean views in question, I turn finally to the FA, which (I argue) attacks the compatibility of this account of wisdom with restricted relativism. Along the way, I will make a few remarks on the connections and differences between the FA and the SRA.

2. PROTAGOREAN WISDOM AND RELATIVISM

The very first challenge the *Theaetetus* brings against Protagoras involves wisdom.[7] What was Protagoras playing at in beginning his book with "*man* is the measure of all things"? If he had said pig is the measure, or baboon, or some other strange animal that perceives, he could have had a nice joke, patronizing all of us who look up to him as a god for his wisdom (ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ) (161c4–9). On the Protagorean view, after all, everyone is equally knowledgeable—equal also to other animals and even gods. Given that it is man's power of perception, a power not limited to humans, that makes him the measure, why single out human beings as having this special status? Even the great sophist himself, Socrates concludes, is "no better in wisdom [εἰς φρόνησιν[8]] than a tadpole, let alone any other human being" (161c9–d1).[9] And the boy, Theaetetus, is found to have a wisdom equal to that of any other human, or even any god (162c3–6). What was Protagoras getting at in propounding such a view, except maybe to make fun of those of us who took him and his dictum so seriously?[10] And how can he be considered an *expert*, the same person who in the *Protagoras* argues that he is worthy of his large fees because he improves his students by teaching them virtue and the political craft?

You might have noticed a flaw in Socrates's reasoning: he identifies wisdom with knowledge. From Protagoras's express view that there are no differences in knowledge, Socrates moves immediately to the conclusion that there are no differences in wisdom, and that we are all self-sufficient in wisdom.[11] But although

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[6] I will also discuss cultural relativism, but for reasons that will become clear later, I will give pride of place to personal relativism.

[7] Plato has already begun to prepare us for issues involving Protagoras's claims to wisdom at 152b1, where Socrates says that they must follow him up, as a wise man (σοφὸν ἄνδρα) would not talk nonsense.

[8] As far as I can tell, the *Theaetetus* uses φρόνησις and σοφία interchangeably.

[9] Unless noted otherwise, translations of the *Theaetetus* are taken from Rowe, Theaetetus *and* Sophist. For Plato's other works, I follow those found in John Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson's *Complete Works*.

[10] The same challenge is found in the *Cratylus*, though it is not pursued there: "if wisdom [φρονήσεως] exists and foolishness [ἀφροσύνης] likewise, then Protagoras cannot be telling the truth. After all, if what each person believes to be true *is* true for him, no one can truly be wiser than anyone else" (*Cratylus* 386c6–d1). See also *Theaetetus* 161d2–e3 and Evans, "Making the Best," 64–67, for a discussion of the Tht. passage, focusing on the issues of dialectic and assertion.

[11] See also 169d5–9, where Socrates and Theodorus agree to examine a question they brought up earlier: whether they were right to complain that he made everyone self-sufficient (αὐτάρκη) in wisdom, and whether, as Protagoras claimed, some people are superior when it comes to better and worse, these being the wise.

Socrates has already provided a perfunctory argument for this identification and will return to the issue later, Protagoras will not accept it.[12] He answers the challenge at 166a–168c in his Apology, whose basic strategy for avoiding Socrates's criticism is to separate wisdom from knowledge. Whereas everyone's beliefs and appearances are equally true and so everyone is equally knowledgeable, wisdom is to be found only in those few people able to change the states and appearances of others so as to better them.

Protagoras begins his defense in earnest by repeating his claim that each of us is the measure of what is and is not for us (166d1–2). Even so, since different things appear to different people and, so, *are* for different people, there is a myriad of differences between people. One of these differences has to do with wisdom: we are not all equally wise. But wisdom is not a matter of having better access to the truth, nor even of having better appearances, beliefs, or states of the body or soul. An ill person might taste a wine as bitter while a healthy person might taste it as sweet. Neither appearance is any truer than the other; nor is the ill person more ignorant than the healthy one because of what he thinks (166e4–167a2). Still, the healthy person's states and appearances are *better*. What characterizes the expert is that he is adept at *producing* better appearances and states (ἕξεῖς [167a3]) in others. The expert is the one able to effect a change in someone to whom bad things appear and are, making it so that good things appear and are for him (166d5–7). So wisdom, for Protagoras, is to be found just where we might expect: in human experts like Protagoras who, as a sophist who educates others, improves them.[13] Whereas the doctor improves the patient's body with drugs, the sophist improves the patient's soul with speeches (λόγοι).[14] And since the soul judges what is akin to it, improving the soul's states will improve its appearances (167a5–b4; cf. *Protagoras* 316c6–d1). Protagoras is here revealed to be the soul doctor mentioned at *Protagoras* 313e2. This, then, is Protagoras's explanation for why personal relativism is compatible with differences in wisdom: while our appearances and beliefs are all equally true, they are not all equally good. Wisdom or expertise is just the ability to improve the states and appearances of one's patients.

Protagoras extends his relativism also to communities (πόλεις). Whatever a community takes to be just and fine (167c4–6) *is* so for that community. But just as a wise sophist or doctor improves her patients, the wise and good orator (ῥήτορ) improves his community by "making beneficial things seem just to it instead of harmful ones" (τὰ χρηστὰ ἀντὶ τῶν πονηρῶν δίκαια δοκεῖν εἶναι ποιεῖν [167c2–4, my

[12]See 145d7–e9, whose conclusion is "ταὐτὸν ἄρα ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία." See also R. Hackforth's note on this passage, "Notes on Plato's *Theaetetus*," 128. He claims that σοφία does not mean wisdom here but expertise, citing Aristotle, *EN* VI.7, 1141a9. There, Aristotle discusses the meaning of σοφία as excellence in craft (ἀρετὴ τέχνης [*EN* VI.7, 1141a11–12]). A. T. Cole follows Hackforth's suggestion. Cf. also 170a6–b1 and the pseudo-Platonic *Minos* 314c.

[13]His view, therefore, does not have the consequence that we are all just as wise as gods or beasts. Gods are to be entirely excluded from discussion (162d6–e2); and beasts are, by implication, not wise as they do not benefit anyone. "[F]ar from reducing wise people to frogs, I call them doctors if they deal with human bodies; farmers if they deal with plants" (167b4–7); see also 166c7–9.

[14]The comparison between speeches and their effects on the soul to drugs and their effects on the body also appears in Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*, 14. This suggests a Gorgian background for Protagoras's Apology.

translation]).[15] Protagoras, in addition to personal relativism, thus also endorses a kind of cultural relativism—the view that each city or community is the measure of its truths—and claims that it too is consistent with the existence of experts. Just as there are medical experts and expert teachers, so too are there political experts. At the Apology's end, the two forms of relativism are mentioned in the same breath: "we assert that . . . things are for each, individual and city, what they seem to each to be" (168b4–6; cf. *Cratylus* 385a4).

The figure of the sophist provides a link between the individual and city. He not only improves his patient's soul, but he is also able to train future orators. The sophist capable of educating his students *in this way* (οὕτω)—in how to benefit the community—is wise and deserving of his fee (167c7–d2). Here, Protagoras indicates that part of the sophist's role is to teach his students how to persuade cities to establish beneficial laws, thereby establishing the political importance of sophists. Protagoras's sophist thus has a dual, positive role: first to improve individuals directly through speeches, and second to improve communities indirectly by training would-be orators.[16] Summarizing his defense, he says that "this is how it can be *both* that some people are wiser than others *and* that no one has false beliefs . . . the conjunction of the two things preserves that thesis of mine" (167d2–5).[17]

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[15]There are two ways of understanding the change the expert brings about: he either replaces bad things with things that are better for the patient, or he makes the same things appear better. As Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 25–27, points out, following McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 167, the Apology's examples do not decide this question. Nothing turns on our answer to it, so I will leave the question open. A closely related question—whether the patient's improvement is to be judged by an objective standard or is simply up to each patient—is also left open by the Apology, though the example of the orator suggests that here at least the improvement is objective. In one of the most comprehensive discussions of Protagoras's Apology, Cole, "The Apology of Protagoras," 110–12, argues that while the doctor's expertise is just to replace what the patient deems onerous with appearances the patient deems good, the skillful orator must produce what is genuinely better for the city—and not just what the city takes to be better. (See also Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 24–28, who agrees with the assessment and adds that the example of plants is indeterminate.) Cole thus finds two different lines of approach in the Apology, one subjectivist (and original to Protagoras), the other utilitarian (and not original to him). The former, he claims, is consistent with Protagoras's measure doctrine, while the latter is not ("The Apology of Protagoras," 114–15). Cole goes on to argue that 171d–172c (along with 169d6–8) finds Plato misinterpreting the subjectivist model along the lines of the un-Protagorean utilitarian one. I return to these issues below, 638–40 and 650.

[16]In the *Protagoras*, he claims to improve his students every day by teaching them good judgment (εὐβουλία) in both household and political affairs. In political affairs, the student will become "highly effective in actions and speech" (δυνατώτατος ἂν εἴη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν: 318e5–319a2). One might think that Protagoras's view of expert orators is in tension with what he says at *Protagoras* 322e2–323c5, but that is not so. There he says that everyone is a teacher of virtue (especially justice), each to his own ability. That is consistent with saying that there are some people who stand out as better able to *persuade* others of what is advantageous. He does not claim in the *Protagoras* that everyone is equally beneficial to the city. On the contrary, he himself is especially beneficial. The fact that everybody has some notion of how community life should be organized does not show that no one is better at putting those plans into action—any more than Aristotle's admission that everyone has some grasp of the truth eliminates the possibility of scientific experts or philosophers.

[17]Many scholars have concluded that the Apology of Protagoras is not genuinely Protagorean because the view of wisdom set out there seems to conflict with the measure doctrine. These include Gregory Vlastos, *Introduction*, xxi–xxiin47; Cole, "The Apology of Protagoras," 111; McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 167; Glidden, "Physis," 218–19; Waterfield, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 168–71; Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 24–25; Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge*, 122–25; Sedley, *Midwife*, 56; A. A. Long, "Refutation," 30–33; Chappell, *Reading Plato's* Theaetetus, 105–7; Ian McCready-Flora, "Protagoras and

3. THE PROTAGOREAN VISION REFINED

If we are to judge from his Apology, Protagoras initially takes personal and cultural relativism to be perfectly compatible with his view of wisdom as a skill. But this is no longer the case when we reach 171d–172c, just after the SRA. In this section, I will discuss retrenched versions of relativism that appear in this passage and attempt to explain why one might find it necessary and desirable to restrict relativism. For the most part, the passage is a recapitulation of the views laid down in the Apology. In the political realm, whatever seems just or fine or pious to a community *is* so for that community, for as long as it is collectively held to be so (172b5–6). And determining what is advantageous for a community and setting it down in law are not things that every community or advisor is competent to do well. All this is familiar from the Apology. But unlike in the Apology, where we are told that no one has a false belief, here certain communities' assessments or beliefs (δόξαν) of what is beneficial will be superior to others' *with respect to truth* (πρὸς ἀλήθειαν [172a8]). This is an exception to cultural relativism. Wise advisors help communities establish laws that will genuinely benefit them (172a5–8), and no one would have the temerity to claim that whatever a city maintains as beneficial will always turn out to be so (172a8–b2; 177d2–5). This also introduces a retreat from unrestricted personal relativism. An incompetent advisor might think that a certain law will benefit the community, whereas it in fact turns out not to. Similarly, with respect to what is or will be beneficial to one's health, not all these beliefs are equally true: not just any woman, child, or animal is capable of recognizing what is conducive to its health and of curing itself (171e3–8).

Contrast this with the most prominent feature of the refined position of 171d–172c: a renewed focus on perception and on perceptual qualities as relative to each individual and, so, always true. While "everybody would agree . . . that one person can be wiser or more ignorant than another" (171d5–7), "*most* things are for each individual as they seem to him—hot, dry, sweet, everything of that type" (171e1–3, emphasis added). The first claim, involving wisdom, reflects the commonly held view (see 170a6–9) coupled with Protagoras's claim that wisdom is expertise. Although he has a different idea of what wisdom amounts to, Protagoras joins the many in thinking that it is not equally distributed.[18] But he now admits that when it comes to what is beneficial for a community and what benefits a person's

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Plato," 92n37 and 97; and Giannopoulou, "Objectivizing," 74–83 (although Giannopoulou says that the conception of wisdom portrayed here is something "*Protagoras himself* would find acceptable," 81–82). Against this opinion, see Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 72; and Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 172n1. Guthrie claims that while the Apology was not written by Protagoras it is unlikely that it "departs from the sense of what he taught." I remain neutral on the issue, though I would add, first, that any inconsistency might have escaped Protagoras's notice or might not have concerned him. Second, we ought to distinguish in this context between Protagoras's complaints about his treatment at the hands of Socrates—that it has been unjust and that one should use dialogue rather than speeches—and his positive view of wisdom. The former is more clearly Socratic and might well be a rhetorical device that Plato uses. It in effect aligns Protagoras against sophists like those in the *Euthydemus* and with Socrates. But this does not imply that the latter could not be a friendly attempt to reconstruct what Protagoras must have (or could have) actually thought. Nothing in the Apology's conception of wisdom would be out of place in the *Protagoras*. See here Giannopoulou, "Objectivizing"; and Long, "Refutation."

[18]The many think that wisdom is true thought and ignorance false belief (οὐκοῦν τὴν μὲν σοφίαν ἀληθῆ διάνοιαν ἡγοῦνται, τὴν δὲ ἀμαθίαν ψευδῆ δόξαν [170b9–10]).

health, wisdom in these matters requires a cognitive achievement (γιγνῶσκον ἑαυτῷ τὸ ὑγιεινόν [171e6–7]) not shared by all. So on the refined Protagorean position, wisdom requires having some true beliefs not shared by others. The second claim is a refinement of personal relativism and an announcement that from now on the discussion of personal relativism will focus on perceptual qualities. But Socrates phrases the point carefully to include *beliefs* about perceptual qualities. Hot things, sweet things, and so on are for each person as they are *judged* to be: "ὡς τὰ μὲν πολλὰ ᾗ δοκεῖ, ταύτῃ καὶ ἔστιν ἑκάστῳ" (171e1–2).[19] So both personal and cultural relativism now admit exceptions: not every community is the measure of what will be advantageous to it, and not every individual is the measure of what will heal him. But what every community *does* get right are questions of what is just, pious, and fine—in a word, moral matters.[20] And what every individual gets right are his perceptions and beliefs about perceptual qualities—what is hot, dry, sweet, and so on. Socrates will attack both of these revised relativistic claims in what follows.

What precipitated the retreat to these refined versions of personal and cultural relativism? For cultural relativism, the official answer is that no one would dare to claim that whatever a community thinks will benefit it actually will turn out to do so and that even many who are not prepared to go all the way with Protagoras think that what is just, pious, and so on is up to each community (172b2–8). So one explanation for why Socrates treats what is beneficial for a community as something objective is the simple fact that no one, not even Protagoras, thinks otherwise.[21] And if whether some outcome is beneficial or not is an objective matter of fact, beliefs corresponding to that matter of fact will be absolutely true, those not corresponding to it false.

What about personal relativism? Why does the passage retreat from unrestricted personal relativism to focus on beliefs and perceptions of perceptual qualities? Part of the answer is the SRA. After the SRA, Socrates does not (*yet*: see 183b–c) suggest abandoning any Protagorean view: not personal relativism, not cultural relativism, and not Protagoras's view of wisdom as a skill. Still, as Theodorus says later about the SRA, Protagoras's view "is caught out in that it gives authority to other people's beliefs, when these turned out to treat the things he says as not true at all" (179b6–9, translation modified). Now, the SRA, at 171a6–c7, attacks Protagoras's commitment to a wide interpretation of personal relativism, such that *all* beliefs are true for the one who holds them. But what is at issue in the SRA are beliefs about whether the measure doctrine is true or not. And these beliefs are far removed from perception. The SRA is silent on the status of perceptions and of judgments about perceptual qualities, which can still be up to each individual. It therefore contributes nothing to the refutation of retrenched personal relativism. Given these limitations, it makes good sense after the SRA to outline a retrenched version of personal relativism. And perceptual qualities seem like a sensible hill

[19]Cf. Sayre, *Plato's Analytic Method*, 91.

[20]Though for simplicity's sake I will say that it applies to moral matters or the moral virtues, the exact scope of Protagoras's cultural relativism is nowhere made clear. See 172b2–5, which seems to suggest that it applies only to the moral realm, as these are the only examples given.

[21]This might explain why, even in the Apology, what benefits a community seems to be treated as something objective, not determined by each community. See below, 650.

for Protagoras to make his stand on. After all, the focus on perceptual qualities, which McDowell calls a "modified Protagorean doctrine,"[22] is in large part a return to the way Socrates and Co. first sketched out the position for Protagoras (cf. 171d9–e3 with 152d4–6).

So, 171d–172c sets out a retrenched position relying, in part, on the conclusion of the SRA.[23] I will say a bit more about the SRA below, but for now we can say that 171d–172c does not abandon but rather refines personal and cultural relativism as well as reintroduces Protagoras's conception of wisdom as a skill. Refined cultural relativism will take its stand on the moral virtues, and refined personal relativism on perceptual qualities, including, crucially, our beliefs about them. Limiting the scope of both sorts of relativism also has the side advantage of eliminating certain worries about conflicts. For what should an advocate of unrestricted personal and cultural relativism say when a religious dissident disagrees with her community's stance on what is, say, pious? On unrestricted personal relativism, her belief will be true for her. But on cultural relativism, it will be false for her community, and so we might be tempted to say it is false for her.[24] But if we restrict personal relativism to perceptual qualities, and thereby exclude piety as something up to each individual, the conflict disappears. By focusing on a community's ability to measure its own moral qualities and an individual's ability to measure her own perceptual qualities, awkward questions like that will not arise.

4. THE FUTURE ARGUMENT IN OUTLINE

Protagoras initially advocated an unrestricted personal and cultural relativism alongside his claim that wisdom is a skill. But that position was shown to be unsustainable. A doctor's ability to heal, for instance, involves some cognitive achievement, and a layman has some false beliefs about what will heal a patient. The position at issue is no longer an unrestricted personal or cultural relativism. But still in play is a refined core of personal relativism such that we are the measure of our own perceptual qualities, including our beliefs about them.

At 178a–179b, Socrates argues that even this refined position is unsustainable, as it is inconsistent with the demands of Protagorean wisdom. To see what the argument is meant to show, let us begin at the FA's conclusion. There Socrates and Theodorus provide a retrospective of what has been established by the FA and the SRA. Both arguments catch out Protagoras's *logos* that "any belief anyone has is true" (179c2). This focus on beliefs might seem odd, as Socrates has indicated

[22]McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 172.

[23]Something similar might also be the case regarding cultural relativism. The retrenched cultural relativism position at 171d–172c might be partially a result of the first few lines of the SRA, 171a1–5, which can be taken as dealing with communities. But as in the rest of the SRA, the focus is on beliefs about the measure doctrine itself, not with what is advantageous or with moral qualities. What explains the retrenched position here too is the fact that a natural position to retreat to is that a community's moral beliefs and decisions are all true.

[24]172b5–6 suggests that a community's beliefs are those held in common, presumably by some number of its citizens. It does not, of course, follow from this that a community's truths determine those of the individuals of that community. But this worry would not even arise on the restricted versions of relativism at issue here.

that his principal target is perceptual qualities. But as we will soon see, the FA focuses on a specific subset of beliefs: those that involve perceptual qualities. By admitting that not every belief is true, Protagoras is also forced to admit that "one person is wiser than another, and that it is that sort of person who is the measure" (179b1–2). Taking our cue from these conclusions, we should understand the argument as dealing with both wisdom and the view that every belief is true.[25]

The argument points out an incompatibility between Protagoras's measure doctrine (both personal and cultural relativism) and his theory of wisdom. Roughly, the argument goes like this. It begins with the hypothesis that we are all measures of our future perceptual qualities and asks if this is compatible with Protagorean wisdom. Wisdom, as we saw, is the ability to improve others. But this ability requires at least what Socrates at one point calls "better beliefs," beliefs that are more likely to turn out correct (see 179a3). And the beliefs in question are mostly to do with perceptual qualities. So if he is to maintain his conception of wisdom, Protagoras must accept some epistemic differences between beliefs about perceptual qualities: some of them will be false. But refined personal relativism claims that there are no epistemic differences between such beliefs, all of them being true. The conclusion is that Protagoras must abandon or further refine refined personal relativism.[26]

As in the SRA,[27] the main target of the FA is Protagoras himself. Socrates addresses him directly three times (at 178b4, 178b9–c1, and 178e4), as if he were there. This shows that Plato is at least trying to take seriously Protagoras's entreaties in his Apology that he will be refuted only if the person responding on his behalf responds as he himself would have. And just as in the SRA, the FA turns on Protagoras's own beliefs, or at least those Plato attributes to him—in this case, refined versions of personal and cultural relativism and his conception of wisdom as a skill. After the digression of 172c–177c, Socrates returns to the main line of argument. Recall that for Protagoras, the wise are able to improve individuals or their communities. Socrates now tells us that questions of health and benefit often implicitly point to the future. When a city legislates, it does so with an eye toward what *will* lead to its betterment. When a doctor predicts that without the prescribed treatment a patient will take a fever, he is saying something about what *will* occur. But in all such cases, there are mistakes. Cities often fail to legislate well, and people, especially laymen, frequently predict wrongly.[28] Let us now look, Socrates says, at the whole form under which the beneficial (ὠφέλιμον) falls: what is going to be (178a6–7). Protagoras and his ilk say that within each individual is the means for judging white, heavy, light, all this sort of thing. "When he thinks them to be as he experiences them he is thinking things that are true for him, and that are" (178b6–7). So far, so good. But, Socrates asks, "Does he also have in himself the means [κριτήριον] for judging things that are *going* to be? If someone thinks things are going to be like this or that, do they actually turn out that way for the person who thought it?" (178b9–c2). If a wine tastes sweet to me,

[25]Pace Hackforth, "Notes on Plato's *Theaetetus*," 134, who holds that the argument refutes Protagoras's claim that we are all measures but not that all beliefs are true.

[26]Socrates opts to further refine rather than abandon personal relativism: see 179c5–d1 and below.

[27]SRA: see 170c2, 170e7, 171b10, and 171c1.

[28]Cf. *Hippias Major* 284d–e.

it is sweet for me for as long as it seems so. But if I predict that a wine will taste sweet to me tomorrow, will it necessarily turn out so? According to refined personal relativism, the answer is yes. Socrates will now argue that this is incompatible with the existence of Protagorean experts.

> Soc: When one person thinks, as a layman, that he is going to get a fever, and that there will be this hotness in him, while a second person, who is a doctor, thinks the opposite, are we to say that the future will turn out to accord with what the first believes, or the second? Or will it turn out in accordance with what both of them believe, so that for the doctor the patient won't become hot, or fevered, whereas for himself he will become both?
>
> Theod: That would be quite ridiculous.
>
> Soc: And when the question is whether a wine is going to be sweet or dry, I suppose it is the farmer's belief [δόξα], not the cithara player's, that will be authoritative [κυρία]?
>
> Theod: Of course.
>
> Soc: Nor again, when it comes to whether something is going to be out of tune or well-tuned, would a gymnastic trainer judge better [ἂν βέλτιον δοξάσειεν] than a musician as to what will in the event seem well-tuned, even to the gymnastic trainer himself.
>
> Theod: Certainly not.
>
> Soc: Or suppose someone is going to attend a feast, and lacks culinary skills: if the banquet is still being prepared, his judgement [κρίσις] about the pleasure to come will have less authority [ἀκυροτέρα] than the cook's. (178c3–d10, translation modified)

This passage includes four examples; I will begin with the first. We have already seen that the argument does not involve present perceptions but *predictions* about them, that is, judgments about how things will turn out perceptually. All these examples follow this pattern. The first example also contains some other important subtleties. First, the view under examination is one in which each person is the criterion of *her own experiences*. In the first example, we have a layman who thinks that *he himself* will take a fever. Second, Socrates's examples stay true to the refined core of personal relativism such that each of us is the measure of our *perceptual qualities* (see 171e2–3 and 178b4–5).[29] The first example involves heat: whether the patient will *feel hot*.[30] The next three examples follow suit. Will a wine *taste* sweet or dry? Will an instrument or song *sound* in tune? Will a meal *taste* pleasant?[31] Third and finally, Socrates initially respects Protagoras's qualifier strategy. In the doctor example, the patient thinks he will get hot, while the doctor disagrees. Socrates then goes on to ask not how things will turn out, full stop; instead, he raises two possibilities. First, that the future will turn out to accord with the belief held by one or the other: either the layman's belief (against the doctor's), or the doctor's

[29]See also 161d1–e3, where each individual is said to judge authoritatively and correctly how his own experiences will be. The same passage also toyed with the idea that individuals are authoritative in their judgments *based on perception*.

[30]The exact connection between having a fever and feeling hot is not specified, but presumably feeling hot is a necessary condition for having a fever.

[31]Although the Levett-Burnyeat translation obscures the point, the last example also involves a perceptual quality: pleasure. See also 175e3–4, where Socrates gives sweetening a sauce and giving flattering speeches as examples of things the philosopher looks foolish trying to do. And cf. *Timaeus* 64a–65b.

(against the layman's). He then asks if the future will turn out both ways. Plato here adds the Protagorean qualifiers 'for *S*' to each judgment.[32] The prediction that the patient will or will not get hot is initially qualified for each of the two people judging: the patient will get hot *for himself* but not *for the doctor*. We shall see shortly that Theodorus rejects this option, but it is important to notice that Plato raises this possibility, as he has done from the beginning of the discussion.[33]

The FA, then, addresses the following formulation of personal relativism: all beliefs a subject *S* has about how things will appear perceptually to *S* are true *for S*.[34] This formulation involves beliefs, but only beliefs about what each of us will ourselves experience perceptually.[35] It also, crucially, includes the Protagorean qualifier 'for *S*.' It is this version of personal relativism that is rejected as incompatible with the existence of Protagorean experts. What Socrates will argue is that if there are wise people in the Protagorean sense—those able to improve the appearances of others—then restricted personal relativism is false. In order to improve a layman's appearances, the expert must be able to predict more accurately than the layman what the layman will experience perceptually. The expert must have correct beliefs, and not just correct *for the expert*, whereas the layman will have, in certain cases, *false* beliefs about his own future perceptual qualities. And this is inconsistent with restricted personal relativism. To see this, we need to look more closely at Protagoras's strategy of adding qualifiers to beliefs to shield them from conflict.

5. CONFLICTS AND QUALIFIERS

If Protagoras is able to add qualifiers to each of the predictions, he would seem to have a way to escape conflict and, therefore, the possibility of false beliefs. But as we saw, despite Socrates's initially adding the Protagorean qualifier, he and Theodorus accept that there is a genuine conflict between the doctor and the patient's beliefs. The doctor "thinks the opposite" (ἀντοιηθῇ [178c5]) of what the patient thinks will occur. They accept that someone, most likely the patient, has a false belief. While the FA's other examples do not mention conflicting beliefs, they do speak of better beliefs or beliefs with more authority. (More on this below.) The same basic strategy—forcing Protagoras to recognize conflicting and therefore false beliefs—is also at work in the SRA.[36] In the case of the SRA, the parties

[32]The example in the original: "οἷον θερμή: ἆρ' ὅταν τις οἰηθῇ ἰδιώτης αὐτὸν πυρετὸν λήψεσθαι καὶ ἔσεσθαι ταύτην τὴν θερμότητα, καὶ ἕτερος, ἰατρὸς δέ, ἀντοιηθῇ, κατὰ τὴν ποτέρου δόξαν φῶμεν τὸ μέλλον ἀποβήσεσθαι, ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἀμφοτέρων, καὶ τῷ μὲν ἰατρῷ οὐ θερμὸς οὐδὲ πυρέττων γενήσεται, ἑαυτῷ δὲ ἀμφότερα;" (178c3–7).

[33]Cf. 152a6–8 with "When he thinks [perceptual qualities] to be as he experiences them he is thinking things that are true *for him*, and that are" (178b6–7, emphasis added), and "Our question is about what's going to seem and be for each individual, and whether each is the best judge of that *for himself*" (178e2–3, emphasis added).

[34]Pace Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 40, who claims that the argument attacks a "completely general relativism." On my reading, the FA attacks principally the retrenched view that all *perceptual* appearances (including predictions about them) are true.

[35]We will see below that the argument is not restricted *only* to predictions about perceptual qualities, but this is its main focus.

[36]Cf. ἀντιδοξάζοντες at 170d8–9.

disagree about the truth of Protagoras's belief in the measure doctrine. In the FA's first example, when the question is raised if things could turn out such that the patient is hot *for himself* but at the same time not hot *for the doctor*, Theodorus replies that this would be ridiculous (γελοῖον [178c8]). He thereby accepts on Protagoras's behalf that there is a genuine conflict between the patient's and the doctor's beliefs. But nowhere do we get an explanation of why such a thing would be ridiculous, and in the subsequent examples the qualifier is quietly dropped.[37]

But why must a Protagorean accept that there is a genuine conflict here? Why can he not say that the patient will be hot for herself while cool for the doctor, thereby giving Protagoras a way out of disagreement? This suggestion becomes clearer if we focus on a single spot, say the patient's forehead. The patient's forehead, we are supposing, will be hot for her at the same future time that it is cool for the doctor. In this way, we treat the patient's forehead as an external object. This is just what we have in the other examples, where the objects in question (a wine, a song, a meal) are all external to the perceivers. And these examples are similar to the wind case of 152b, which is the paradigm of how Protagoras would respond to apparent disagreement. So has Protagoras's qualifier strategy neutralized yet another alleged counterexample?

We should start by noticing that when, at 178c6–7, Socrates raises the possibility that the patient will take a fever and become hot for the patient but not for the doctor, this possibility should not be understood in terms of either private worlds or radical flux. Private worlds says, roughly, that the *objects* of a person's appearances and beliefs are accessible only to that person.[38] Radical flux says, roughly, that as soon as one has an appearance or makes a judgment about an item, both the item and the judger have changed. The possibility Socrates raises should not be taken in terms of flux because flux has the consequence that a person cannot even make predictions about her own future: the person about whom the prediction was made no longer exists. A doctor would not be able to make any prediction about whether Socrates will feel hot, as "Socrates" is in constant flux and does not persist through time. (I return to this below.) And it should not be taken in terms of private worlds because taking it this way has the consequence that no one can make a prediction about the experiences of another person, as each experience is accessible only to the one who has it.[39] In neither case would it be possible

[37]There is an enormous literature on the Protagorean qualifier and how it might or might not allow Protagoras to avoid disagreement, most of it directly related to assessing the SRA. (Fine's "Protagorean Relativisms" is a rare exception.) Roughly, scholars have identified three sorts of position attributed to Protagoras in the dialogue: relativism (especially relativism about truth, but also perceptual relativism and other sorts), flux, and private worlds. Here, too, Fine is an exception: she has argued that Protagoras's position is best understood not as relativism about truth but as infallibilism, such that all beliefs are true *simpliciter*—a position she couples with flux. (See her "Relativism and Self-Refutation.") However, these positions are often thought to overlap or not to have been clearly distinguished by Protagoras or Plato. For private worlds, see (among others) Burnyeat, "Protagoras and Self-Refutation"; and Michael Wedin, "Animadversions." These issues are raised especially in the *Theaetetus*'s discussion of the so-called Secret Doctrine, which most scholars read mainly in terms of flux. For discussion, see, among many others, Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras*, esp. 86–92; and van Eck, "Moving Like a Stream."

[38]For more on private worlds, see 153e–154a, 160c, 166a–168c, and *Cratylus* 385e.

[39]Private worlds is also difficult to reconcile with Protagoras's claim to be able to predict what speeches will persuade others.

for an alleged expert now to have access to the future perceptual qualities of a layman, still less accurate access to those future perceptual qualities. Flux makes the present the only time in which it makes sense to talk about a certain person's having an appearance; private worlds makes it such that each of us only has access to our own appearances.

If flux and private worlds are off the table, what about relativism? Notice, first, that Socrates does not here deny the possibility that one person experiences her forehead as hot and another person experiences it as cool in the present. When this occurs, Protagoras can say that the object is hot for the one and cool for the other. Socrates recognizes this when he says, immediately after the passage quoted above, "Let's not fight it out between us, at this stage, about what is now pleasant to each individual, or has been in the past; our question is about what is going to seem [δόξειν] and be for each individual, and whether each is the best judge of that for himself" (178d10–e3).[40] The issue has to do not with present or past perceptions, but with apparently conflicting judgments about future perceptions. Why does Protagoras not say that these judgments are indexed to each individual and so true for each of them?

The possibility at issue here has to do with relative truth, such that each subject *S*'s judgments are true *for S*. To switch now to the second example, suppose I am an ignoramus about wine, but *V* is an expert vintner. I believe that some wine *w* will taste dry to me at some future time t_1. *V*, however, believes that wine *w* will taste sweet to me at t_1. According to the strategy of relative truth we are now pursuing, my belief that *w* will taste dry to me at t_1 guarantees that *w will* taste dry to me at t_1 *for me*. And *V*'s prediction that *w* will taste sweet to me at t_1 guarantees that *w will* taste sweet to me at t_1 *for her*. The two beliefs do not conflict because their truth-values are each indexed to a different subject, and neither of us has a false belief. But although we are both measures of my future appearances, *V* has not changed my appearances in any way. It continues to be true *for me* that *w* will taste dry to me at t_1, just as I predicted. So *V* cannot be considered an expert vintner. But Protagoras thinks there are experts. He, conspicuously, is one of them. And according to him, the expert is the one who can, in her particular field of expertise, improve the appearances of others. So assuming that a change from dry to sweet is an improvement in my taste appearance, *V* must be able to make it true for me that *w* tastes *sweet* to me at time t_1.[41] *V* need not manage always to improve everyone's wine appearances to count as an expert. But she must be able to do this for many people and many wines.[42] How could she do this?

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[40]See also 179c2–d1 and 167a7–8.

[41]Alternatively: recommend that I drink a different wine, which will taste sweet to me. This is the difference, mentioned in our discussion of the Apology, between making things appear better and making better things appear. Plato's example seems to be about a particular wine, but with minor alterations we could change the example to be about wines in general. Or we could switch to another example.

[42]One might worry that an ambiguity crops up here with respect to what is better. As we saw, in the Apology, Protagoras accepts that there are better appearances and beliefs, but all of them are equally true. A better belief, state, or perception is one that is preferred. In contrast, Socrates, in the FA, means by better beliefs those that are more likely to be confirmed as true. What Socrates is arguing, in effect, is that in order to produce what is better in the Protagorean sense (i.e. preferred), the expert must have better beliefs in the Socratic sense (i.e. more likely to be true).

Perhaps she can improve the appearances of others *directly*, just by believing it. Could *V*'s belief, then, guarantee what will be the case *for me*? No. For first, this would be rather ad hoc. Why should *V*'s belief have this power over my now ineffectual belief, rather than my own belief's having the power to bring about my appearances, or even the power to bring about *V*'s appearances? Or suppose that another vintner agrees with me and predicts that the wine will taste dry. Why would this other vintner's belief not guarantee how the wine will in fact taste to me, rather than *V*'s belief? More importantly, if *V*'s belief were to guarantee what will be the case for me, then I would have a false belief. My belief that *w* will taste dry to me at t_1 would be false *for me*. It would turn out that despite my supposedly being a measure of my own future appearance (and therefore how *w* will taste to me), this belief of mine will not be vindicated. So I would not be in this instance a measure of my own future appearances, and restricted personal relativism would be false.

If *V* cannot improve my appearances directly, can she *indirectly* make it the case that her belief—that *w* will taste sweet to me—turns out true for me? Suppose she persuades me toward her point of view on the wine.[43] The idea is that by changing my opinion, she can, by means of my *new* opinion, bring it about that her prediction turns out true for me. It would then seem to be the case that my predictions about how a wine will taste to me do indeed guarantee how that wine will taste to me, and *V* will have managed indirectly to improve my appearances of wine. But here, too, I have a false belief. My original prediction was that the wine will taste dry to me, and this turns out not to be the case for me. There is no reason to think that my later belief overrides my former one—such that only my later prediction should determine what experiences I will have. And even if it did, I would still have had a false belief. My original prediction that *w* will taste dry to me will turn out to be false for me. The fact that this is a belief I only used to have but have been persuaded out of is not relevant: restricted personal relativism says that *all* of our beliefs about our own future experiences are true (171e1–3; 178b3–5), even those we have since rejected. So in this case, too, I am not a measure of my future experiences, and restricted personal relativism is false.

It follows either that *V* is no expert or that someone has a false belief, both outcomes being unacceptable to Protagoras. Since this kind of reasoning can be repeated for any alleged expert and any alleged expertise, it follows that Protagorean expertise is incompatible with the Protagorean view that there are no false beliefs. And since the false beliefs in question include beliefs about our own future appearances, restricted personal relativism is shown to be incompatible with Protagoras's theory of wisdom. Even if Protagoras is allowed recourse to his qualifiers, they are of no use to him here.[44]

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[43] Persuasion seems the likeliest answer to what Protagoras had in mind at 167a–b in saying that the sophist improves his students' souls (and thereby, their appearances) by means of *logoi*. For more on persuasion, see 178e3–179a3, discussed in sect. 5.1 below.

[44] There has been little discussion of the way the FA deals with qualifiers. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, 92, comments only that the doctor and patient "are disagreeing about the same fact, which is not at the moment part of the private experience of either, so that he might claim to be the only possible judge." Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 40, formulates a version of the doctor example that includes qualifiers but then simply assumes that the patient's and the doctor's beliefs conflict.

5.1. Protagoras's Own Wisdom

Socrates then turns to Protagoras's own pretensions at wisdom, arguing that his expert abilities would be in jeopardy if each of us can accurately predict what we will find persuasive.

> Soc: [Our question is] whether you, Protagoras, will be better than any layman whatever at predicting [βέλτιον ἂν προδοξάσαις] at any rate what sorts of speech each of us is going to find persuasive in a law-court.
>
> Theod: Yes, indeed, Socrates, he used to claim vehemently to be superior to anyone else in that!
>
> Soc: Zeus! He certainly did, my friend. Or else no one would ever give large sums of money to talk to him; that is, if he actually tried to persuade the people who came to him that in relation to how things are *going to* be, too, and *going to* seem, neither a seer nor anyone else will be a better judge [ἄμεινον κρίνειεν] than a person is for himself. (178e3–179a3)

This last sentence is a bit convoluted, and the right manuscript reading is questionable.[45] But the basic point is clear: Protagoras's own expertise precludes that each of us is the measure of how all things are going to seem and to be for us. In this case, the beliefs in question are not about future perceptual experiences. Although such beliefs feature in the first four examples and are clearly Socrates's main focus, the FA is therefore not restricted only to them.[46] Sophistic expertise, recall, is the ability both to improve students' souls and to train would-be orators (see again 167a–d). If a juror's prediction about what he will find persuasive always turns out correct *for the juror*, and Protagoras's prediction about what the juror will find persuasive also turns out correct *for Protagoras*, then his opinion about what will persuade the jury will be no better than the jury's. But if Protagoras is no better judge than anyone else about what will be found persuasive in court—if everyone's opinion about what will persuade a jury is equally correct—then by what right does he train would-be orators?[47] Protagoras can hardly claim to be

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Giannopoulou, *Second* Apology, 102, baldly states that the ability to predict entails an objective state of affairs to measure the prediction against, and that the prediction will be true for the layman as well as for the expert. Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras*, 171, says, "each person may be equally authoritative about what is pleasant . . . for him now and in the present, but not when making predictions about how things will be in the future." McDowell, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 177: "only the expert in a given field is authoritative on the question of what is going to happen." Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge*, 149: "what will actually turn out to be the case tests the truth or falsity of the expert's or layman's present opinions about what will come to be." Sedley, *Midwife*, 87: "if you think you are about to get feverish while your doctor thinks you are not, it would be absurd to suggest that you are both equally right about *that*." Cooper is the lone exception. But he too simply assumes that when the time comes for the prediction to be verified, some standard (the doctor's or the patient's) will prevail: "Future-tense judgments cannot be declared true on principle . . . because they necessarily find their validation in some present-tense judgment at a later time and not in anything contemporaneous with themselves or private to the man who makes them at the time when he makes them" (Cooper, *Plato's* Theaetetus, 86). See also Stern, *Knowledge and Politics*, 188.

[45] I have followed Rowe's translation and his reading of the text, which is also that of McDowell. Levett-Burnyeat follow the Oxford Classical Texts's reading.

[46] We saw this already at 171d–172c. Certain expertises require the expert to make more accurate predictions about future nonperceptual experiences as well.

[47] Or why should he be cherished as "preeminently qualified to assist others in becoming noble and good" and deserving of his fee or, as his students think, even more? [διαφερόντως ἂν τῶν ἄλλων ἀνθρώπων ὀνῆσαί τινα πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι]" (*Protagoras* 328b1–5). Cf. *Theaetetus* 167c7–d2.

an expert on persuasive speeches—even charging a fee to teach people how to construct them—if he is not better than other people at predicting correctly which speeches these people will find persuasive.

Protagorean expertise, then, requires some cognitive ability that is not shared by everybody. The ability to improve others' appearances and states requires correct predictions about what will occur, predictions that (in some cases) conflict with what those other people think will occur. We also see this in the *Protagoras*, which confirms that rhetorical expertise requires what Protagoras himself takes to be knowledge. In one of the few hints we get of Protagoras's teaching method, he tells us that the most important part of a man's education is to be skilled (δεινός) at poetry. This requires (a) recognizing (συνιέναι) in the words of the poets what has and has not been correctly composed, and (b) knowing how to analyze (ἐπίστασθαι διελεῖν) a poem and to give an account of it when asked (*Protagoras* 338e6–339a3).[48] The apparently standard requirements for rhetorical expertise, accepted by Protagoras, were natural endowment (φύσις), knowledge (ἐπιστήμῃ), and practice (μελέτη).[49] When the Protagoras of the *Protagoras* trains would-be orators, he teaches what he himself takes to be a field of knowledge.

Of course, arguments of the sort given in the FA do not apply in every imaginable case. If I, recognizing my oenological ignorance, have no opinion beforehand about how *w* will taste to me, then *V* might be able to convince me that *w* will taste sweet to me, thereby bringing it about that *w* does taste sweet to me. In this case no one will have a false opinion. The problematic cases for Protagoras are those that involve conflicting predictions. This sort of case is very common, as is the idea that expertise requires the ability to predict with some degree of accuracy what will occur. (An engineer who is completely unable to say whether a certain bridge will be able to withstand the weight of cars would be a rather unsuccessful engineer.) Although we can question whether this ability amounts to *wisdom*, it is just a truism to say that many skills require some cognitive ability amounting to more accurate beliefs. And this cognitive ability, which Protagoras accepts is unequally distributed, is inconsistent with restricted personal relativism. So the FA, like the SRA, is ad hominem: it attacks the consistency of Protagoras's own views about (a) the nature and existence of wisdom and (b) restricted personal and cultural relativism. But what restricted personal relativism precludes is that anyone has a superior cognitive ability that allows him more accurately to predict what will occur perceptually. The FA thus has relevance outside the context of Protagoras's idiosyncratic theory of wisdom.

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[48]See also *Protagoras* 312d and 318e, where Protagoras explicitly denies teaching most of the other subjects the other sophists teach, viz. arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music, presumably because he considers them useless for domestic and political success. (The Lombardo-Bell translation adds poetry to the list of subjects Protagoras avoids, but it does not appear in the Greek.) See also *Phaedrus* 267c.

[49]See *Phaedrus* 269d4–5 and Protagoras fragments DK 80B3 and DK 80B10. The former fragment mentions natural endowment and practice, the latter τέχνη and practice. Isocrates too (*Against the Sophists*, 14–18) speaks of natural endowment and practice, and also of learning from experts the knowledge of the elements of discourses. See Mary Louise Gill, "Socrates' Critique of Writing in Plato's Phaedrus," 162.

We now see why when Socrates raises the possibility of indexing each of the predictions as true *for S*, Theodorus says that this would be absurd, and the qualifiers are dropped. If Protagoras wishes to maintain the existence of experts, he must accept that we do often have false beliefs about our own future appearances, because predicting the future appearances of others is a necessary part of expertise. And even a single false belief about one's own future perceptions is inconsistent with restricted personal relativism. Of course, insisting on adding the qualifiers in these cases would indeed ensure that no one has a false belief. But then everyone's prediction about how a wine will taste will turn out to be true for *S*, and the alleged expert will in no way improve the appearances of others.

6. POSSIBLE PROTAGOREAN RESPONSES

How could a Protagorean respond? Let us first return to flux. Could an advocate of radical flux avoid the conclusion of the FA? It has already been suggested, at 166b1–4, that flux can explain away a worry about memory.[50] The thought there is that the content of a current memory is of a different sort from that of the original experience. The same sort of response is now being suggested, only with respect to the future. The thought is that all of my predictions can be true for me now, since they now strike me as true, yet something different could strike me as true at a later time and therefore be true for me at that time. There would be no conflict since I am in constant flux and so do not persist through time. Each of these appearances or judgments relativizes to a different subject, so no one has a false belief.[51] Can this sort of strategy help a committed Protagorean? Take *V* again, our vintner. If she is a genuine expert, then on Protagoras's own view of expertise, she must be able to improve some people's wine experiences. And this requires that she predict with some accuracy what sorts of wine appearances people will have under certain conditions. A flux in which there is no identity through time would seem to preclude such predictions. In order to be an expert, *V* would presumably have to predict that this very same Socrates who stands before her will experience *w* at t_1 in a certain way. Since on flux, Socrates is constantly changing, flux destroys any possibility of Protagorean expertise.[52] And even if we suppose that *V can* make predictions about some future Socrates's wine experiences, the same difficulty discussed above returns. For if she *can* make accurate predictions, then there will be cases in which those predictions conflict with those made by an earlier Socrates. Here too the result is that Socrates has a false belief about his own future perceptual experiences.

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[50] The worry is that a person who remembers something knows that thing (i.e. remembers it) but at the same time does not know it (i.e. does not perceive it) (163d–164b).

[51] See here Burnyeat, *The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 40–42. He suggests that on certain interpretations of flux, there is no problem if my prediction on Monday about how a wine will taste to me on Tuesday is not shared by my Tuesday self, as people do not persist through time. "Monday's present does not become Tuesday's past" (*The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 41). Burnyeat neither endorses nor rejects the suggestion.

[52] See here also Chappell, *Reading Plato's* Theaetetus, 131–32; Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge*, 149; and Giannopoulou, *Second* Apology, 103. The latter two argue that flux would make prediction impossible. Flux is discussed and rejected later, at 181c–183c, but there the focus is on perceptions themselves and not predictions.

Or should we imagine that *V* can predict a future Socrates's wine experiences while present Socrates is unable to do so? That would conflict with the FA's starting-point that we all possess within us the criterion for what will be for us (178c). That is not an accidental starting-point. It is merely an application of the Measure Doctrine that we are measures of *all* things. If he were to reject this, Protagoras would have given up the game from the very beginning, and the FA would be redundant. We can conclude that radical flux is no help to a Protagorean who accepts expertise and holds that each of us is the measure of our future perceptual experiences.

A different response would be to argue that Plato has not taken seriously the idea of relative benefit. We saw that in Protagoras's Apology the examples given of the benefit brought about by an expert point in different directions, with the benefit that wise orators bring to communities apparently of an objective sort. For this reason, many scholars have concluded that the Apology is not genuinely Protagorean. Protagoras, they argue, would have insisted that each individual (and community) is self-sufficient to determine whether she has been benefited or not.[53] But this response also fails. For the examples in the FA respect the idea of relative benefit. They all involve predictions of what the layman himself will perceive. In the case of the vintner, it is enough for her to improve the layman's perceptions in a way that the layman *himself* takes to be an improvement. So it can still be up to each individual what counts as an improvement. This respects even the most charitable reading of the theory of wisdom from the Apology, where there is no objective benefit. We saw that, assuming the layman initially disagrees with the expert, the expert cannot bring about what even the layman considers an improvement *without the layman's having a false belief*. To be a Protagorean expert, one must have beliefs about the future perceptions of other people that are more likely to be correct than the predictions of those other people themselves. Socrates's claim throughout the FA that experts require better beliefs—where here 'better' means more likely to be correct—is vindicated. This result does not depend on foisting on Protagoras any notion of absolute benefit. Even an understanding of benefit in which the patient herself determines whether or not she has been benefited is incompatible with restricted personal relativism.[54] Neither flux nor the notion of relative benefit provides Protagoras any help, and he must reject what he hoped to salvage in his Apology: that although we are not all equally wise, all our beliefs are equally true. Socrates's initial criticism, that if relativism is true then Protagoras is no better in wisdom than anyone else (161c–d), is vindicated.[55]

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[53]See Burnyeat's formulations of relative improving and relative experts (*The* Theaetetus *of Plato*, 24). Protagoras allowed his students to choose either to pay his normal fee, or to pay however much they think his lessons were worth (see *Prot.* 328c). Evans, "Making the Best," 100, makes use of this unique fee structure to argue that Protagoras can hold that someone else would be better off believing something she does not currently believe without committing Protagoras to the absolute truth of anything. This is correct as far as it goes, but as I have argued, in some cases an alleged expert would have no way to bring about better appearances or beliefs without there being false beliefs. For a recent attempt to tease apart what is genuinely Protagorean in the Apology from what is not, see Giannopoulou, "Objectivizing."

[54]I am not the first to make this sort of point: see Bostock, *Plato:* Theaetetus, 93–94; and Evans, "Making the Best," 81–82.

[55]As for cultural relativism, we saw that Socrates has already foisted upon Protagoras the notion of objective benefit when it comes to improving a community. Cultural relativism is also briefly mentioned in the FA, but only to repeat the conclusion already reached at 172a–b, that legislation will inevitably lead to some failures to produce beneficial results.

7. RESULTS OF THE FUTURE ARGUMENT

If I am right that the FA shows that restricted personal relativism is incompatible with Protagoras's theory of wisdom, Protagoras has two choices. He can either drop or further restrict personal relativism or drop or modify his theory of wisdom. At the argument's conclusion, Socrates and Theodorus express their confidence in it and also indicate their next move in the discussion. Protagoras must accept that "one person is wiser than another, and that it is that sort of person that is the measure" (179b1–2). But the truth of our present experiences themselves might still be unassailable (ἀνάλωτοι) and count as knowledge (179c5–7). Socrates takes the Protagorean's next move, therefore, to be a further restriction of personal relativism, such that all present perceptions (but not all beliefs about future perceptions) are true.[56] The FA, thus, seems to leave in place both this highly refined version of personal relativism, such that present perceptions are always true, and Protagoras's theory of expertise. The dialogue's next main move is against flux, after which comes, at 184b–186e, a direct attack on the highly refined version of personal relativism in which all present perceptions are true. And although I have referred to Protagoras's view of experts indifferently as a theory of wisdom, expertise, or skill, this view has already been rejected as a theory of *wisdom*, in the Digression.

A discussion of the Digression would take us too far afield, but the FA itself contains some indications that Protagorean expertise should not count as genuine wisdom. First, two of its examples feature the predictions of experts pitted against one another. The vintner makes better, more accurate predictions about whether a wine will taste sweet to a cithara player, and an expert musician makes better predictions than a gymnastic trainer about what will sound in tune, even to the gymnastic trainer himself. Implicit here is that even an expert's opinion is not always authoritative, not when the prediction concerns something outside of the expert's field of expertise. Just as Theodorus's opinions about Theaetetus's unattractiveness should not be taken as gospel—unless of course he is found to be an expert at portrait painting (144e8–145a2)—the cook's opinions about politics, say, are no more likely to be correct than anyone else's. Expertise in one field is no guarantee of expertise in another. There is no unity of Protagorean wisdom. Rather, wisdom comes in many forms. I take it, however, that for Plato in the *Theaetetus* there is only one sort of truly wise person: he who recognizes that the best and most godlike life is to become as just and good as possible (176b7–c5).

> Soc. Surely, then, legislation anywhere, and the beneficial, both have to do with what is going to be, and everyone would agree that a city that is legislating will necessarily often fail to achieve what is most beneficial.
>
> Theod. Very much so. (179a5–9, translation modified)

This might seem inadequate, given the retrenched cultural relativism position reached at 172a–b, where only the moral virtues are relative. But the claim that the moral virtues are relative is rejected in the Digression, where Socrates also makes some points against the Protagorean theory of wisdom.

[56] "[I]f one sticks to what each individual experiences in the immediate present [τὸ παρὸν πάθος], from which his perceptions and the corresponding beliefs derive, it is harder to convict these of not being true" (179c2–5). I discuss this passage in "*Pathos* in the *Theaetetus*."

Second, for Socrates, wisdom, whatever it turns out to be, must be a kind of knowledge. In a passage about genuine wisdom and what it requires, we would therefore expect knowledge talk. Instead, we get opinion talk. Protagorean experts can be experts just by having better, more accurate, beliefs. The doctor's belief (δόξαν) is more likely to turn out correct. The vintner's belief (δόξα) about wine is more authoritative than the cithara player's. A musician will have better beliefs (ἄν βέλτιον δοξάσειεν) about what will seem well-tuned to a gymnastic trainer. And Protagoras is better at predicting (βέλτιον ἄν προδοξάσαις) what kind of speeches each of us will find persuasive in court. The doxastic language of the passage indicates that we are not dealing with full-fledged knowledge or wisdom at all. Anyone looking to this passage for a discussion of the relationship between knowledge-how and knowledge-that is bound to be disappointed.[57] When Socrates concludes the FA by saying that only the wise man is a measure, he is excluding Protagorean experts. At the argument's end, Socrates accepts that Protagorean expertise requires more accurate beliefs, but he rejects the characterization of this expertise as any kind of wisdom. The FA, therefore, concludes by rejecting *both* restricted personal relativism *and* the Protagorean theory of wisdom.

8. CONCLUSION

We have seen that the FA highlights a genuine inconsistency between restricted personal relativism and the conception of wisdom as professional expertise. According to this view of expertise, the doctor is the one better able to heal the patient, that is, able to improve the patient's bad states and appearances. Someone is an expert insofar as he is better able than a layman to effect change in his area of expertise. But this is inconsistent with restricted personal relativism, Socrates argues, since in some cases the patient has already predicted what will occur. Even if it is the patient herself who gets to determine whether she has been improved, restricted personal relativism would leave the expert with no way to improve the patient's appearances. Socrates concludes that not every individual is the measure of his own future perceptions. Even Theodorus's teacher, Protagoras, must concede that at most the wise person is the measure (179a10–b5).[58]

Could a different sort of Protagorean, one not so interested in expertise or in his own reputation, resist Socrates's conclusion? Of course. Protagoras could just reject his conception of wisdom and admit that, like knowledge, wisdom, too, is equally distributed. He would be throwing his own expertise out with the bath water, but this is clearly a possibility. Depending upon one's assessment of the *Theaetetus*'s other anti-Protagorean arguments, this might allow him to reinstate flux or private

[57]This also explains why Socrates does not conclude that we are not measures of our own present perceptions, which were already predicted to be different by a Protagorean expert. Even experts cannot, in these fields, predict with complete accuracy.

[58]I take it that Plato would respond in much the same way to an implicit challenge raised by Evans, "Making the Best." He argues (see esp. 99–103), though not without considerable hesitation, that Protagoras can maintain that (a) in some cases people are better off believing what they do not currently believe; and (b) neither person in a dialectical exchange is any less correct than the other. I have argued that the process of improving someone requires the ability to predict and to bring about what the other person will take as an improvement. This implies some incorrect beliefs.

worlds as general ways to avoid disagreement. The FA is not a final and definitive refutation of relativism, any more than the SRA was. Still, while the SRA is a test case for the measure doctrine, it deals with what is in some respects a less central case than that of the FA. For the SRA, even if successful, requires Protagoras to reject the measure doctrine only for beliefs unrelated to perception—beliefs that are arguably rather peripheral to Protagoras's core view. The FA, however, deals with a more central case, for as we saw it deals in large part with judgments about perceptual qualities.

I have not offered an analysis of the SRA. But if you think, as many scholars do, that it fails against a Protagoras who advocates relativism about truth, then those with anti-relativist sentiments ought to look more seriously at the FA, for it (I have argued) *is* successful against a Protagoras who advocates relative truth. This is assuming, of course, that Protagoras is committed to something like the account of expertise given in the Apology. This account, if understood merely as what is required for professional skill and not identified with wisdom, is a very natural one, and one that Protagoras is deeply wedded to, both in the *Theaetetus* and the *Protagoras*. If I am right, and the FA shows that it is inconsistent with personal relativism, then the FA has a good case to supplant the SRA in importance.[59]

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