Protagoras and the Measure of all Things

[This paper is designed to be Chapter 5 of a book on Protagoras; my apologies for the many questions that are deferred to other chapters. The paper is overlong as it is, for which I also apologize: in case you want to read selectively, section I sets up the problem of our evidence for 'Protagoras the relativist' and his famous Measure Thesis (MT); section II discusses in detail the presentation of MT in the *Theaetetus*; section III speculates briefly about Protagoras' book *Truth*; and section IV attempts to reconstruct a reading of the Measure Thesis which is independent of Plato.]

"Except for the occasional cooperative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good. The philosophers who get called ‘relativists’ are those who say that the grounds for choosing between such opinions are less algorithmic than had been thought.... If there were any relativists, they would, of course, be easy to refute. One would merely use some variant of the self-referential arguments Socrates used against Protagoras. But such neat little dialectical strategies only work against lightly-sketched fictional characters. The relativist who says that we can break ties among serious and incompatible candidates for belief only by "nonrational" or "noncognitive" considerations is just one of the Platonist or Kantian philosopher's imaginary playmates, inhabiting the same realm of fantasy as the solipsist, the skeptic and the moral nihilist" -- Richard Rorty

I. The Two Protagoras

So far I've argued for a picture of Protagoras as, above all, inventor and master of the art of argument. In the contest of speeches [*agôn logôn*], he can refute any thesis his opponent presents; as solo performer, he can convince you on both sides of the question [*antilogikê*]. He has an argument for every position and every occasion; but that does not mean that he takes all arguments to be equal. For his art is not only agonistic, but also a method of reflection, critique,

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and deliberation. His profession as a teacher of virtue rests on the claim that what he teaches is sufficient for successful decision-making in both private and public life.

This is the Protagoras who is portrayed in Plato's Protagoras, and whose 'firsts' as a founder of dialectic and rhetoric are catalogued in Diogenes Laertius' biography (IX.50-6). We catch glimpses of him in a number of other ancient sources, and he may well lie behind some important unattributed fifth-century texts. But in other sources, and most modern accounts, he is obscured by a very different character: Protagoras the relativist. This is the Protagoras we meet in Sextus Empiricus, in Aristotle's Metaphysics, and above all in Plato's Theaetetus: an epistemological theorist famous for the portentous and still-controversial Measure Thesis (MT):

"Man is the measure of all things: of the things that are that they are, of the things that are not that they are not." (DK80B1)

In the Theaetetus, this is immediately glossed with the appears-is principle: as things appear to a person, so they are for that person. Using the principle, Socrates translates MT into the already canonical framework of the appearance-reality distinction, casting it as a version of relativism.

2 Including the Dissoi Logoi, the Anonymus Iamblichus, and perhaps the Hippocratic On the Art.
3 For a concise and very helpful review of our sources for MT, and the ancient doxographic and philosophical engagement with it, see Notomi 2013. I will not attempt to survey, let alone engage with, the vast range of modern scholarly interpretations: in the words of Fernanda Decleva Caizzi: "Non è certo possibile, né forse avrebbe senso, passare in rassegna tutte le interpretazioni di B 1" (12, n. 7, cf. "vastissima bibliografia", 25) -- and that was in 1978. Decleva Caizzi's article includes a valuable review of the question up to that time. Among the profusion of more recent interpretations, I have learned the most from Farrar 1988, Lee 2005, Corradi 2007, Bonazzi 2010, and van Berkel 2013.
4 I translate anthrôpos 'man', in of course the now-old-fashioned gender-neutral usage, purely for alliterative reasons. It is in fact important that anthrôpos means a human being as such; the Great Speech of the Protagoras gives us some reason to suppose that Protagoras’ ethical thought was gender-neutral (cf. Chapter IV).
5 Following tradition, I here use 'relativism' for the position articulated at Theaetetus 152a-e on the basis of the appears-is principle, however we might further interpret it. Fine (1998) has argued that the Theaetetus position is properly a kind of 'infallibilism' (all beliefs are true simpliciter) rather than relativism (all beliefs are true for the person who holds them). Since I am going to argue that the appears-is principle is already Platonic rather than Protagorean, the question will be irrelevant for our purposes. Moreover both infallibilism and relativism entail some version of the inerrancy claim, and it is this above all which is impossible to reconcile with
Its crucial corollary is universal inerrancy: since all beliefs are true, at least for the person who holds them, none is ever false simpliciter and no one is ever simply wrong about anything. Socrates goes on to identify Protagoras' position with the 'secret doctrine' (SD) he attributes to Homer, Heraclitus, and a whole army of the wise, according to which nothing is any one thing and all things are in flux. Both theories are mustered as part of his activity of midwifery, to explain and support Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception.

We have no reason to doubt Socrates' presentation of MT as a direct quotation from Protagoras' work; and later ancient accounts repeat MT with very little variation, either citing or presupposing the appears-is principle. Three of these later sources are of particular note: 6 Aristotle's engagement with Protagoras in Metaphysics Book IV.4-6 and two passages of Sextus Empiricus. 7 Each has its distinctive emphases and concerns. Aristotle uses 'the logos of the rest of our evidence for Protagoras: so the problem of the two Protagorases looms either way. I take later reports attributing to Protagoras the claim 'all appearances are true' to be versions of or corollaries to the infallibilist reading of MT: see also n. 6 below.

6 I here set aside a fourth candidate source, the ancient report that Democritus argued against MT understood as the claim that all appearances are true (DK68A114 = SE M 7.389). This is very much Aristotle's infallibilist reading in Metaph. IV, and so looks like evidence that this reading must be older than and independent of Plato. However, our evidence for Democritus' engagement with Protagoras is complex and confusing, and includes no real fragments; Sextus' report looks like a doxographic power move, designed to pre-empt Plato by claiming that Democritus was the first to offer a peritropê argument against MT. Plutarch rather differently presents Democritus as arguing against MT understood as a version of the ou mallon thesis that nothing is any more this than that (DK68B156=Adv. Col. 1108F-1109A). I do not think we can claim with confidence anything more precise than that Democritus, who is placed in a diadochê relation to Protagoras by several (conflicting) sources (see Notomi 2013, 19-20, n. 30-31), argued against MT. To be clear about the broader point in question: I take 'all appearances are true', 'all things are relative', and 'nothing is any more this than that' -- the three principal metaphysical-epistemological theses attributed to Protagoras in the later tradition -- all to be glosses on MT as already glossed by the appears-is principle, and thereby converted into an exceptionless, univocal epistemological theory (in contrast to, for instance, my Gomperzian reading of MT in section IV). And I argue in section II that the appears-is principle is clearly marked in the Theaetetus as an interpretation. Whether Democritus preceded Plato in that line of interpretation seems to me unknowable; what is important for my purposes is not to identify its authorship but to get clear about its status and relation to Protagoras' own text. But contrast Lee 2005 and Notomi 2013.

7 On Aristotle's Protagoras, see Corradi 2012. By far our most important post-Platonic source for Protagoras is Diogenes' Laertius biography (IX.50-6): but Diogenes has nothing of interest to say about MT. He quotes it, as the start of a book, adding, "He said that there is no soul beyond
Protagoras’ as a foil for his discussion of the principle of non-contradiction. He presents it as the thesis that all appearances are true -- i.e., all beliefs are true, with no relativization to a judging subject -- and thus as a denial of the law of non-contradiction (*Metaph.* IV.4, 1007b22, IV.5, 1009a6). Sextus discusses MT twice (*PH* I.216-9 and *M* 7.60-64). In *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* his concern is to explain how Protagoras is different from, albeit adjacent to, the Pyrrhonian sceptics. He depicts Protagoras as claiming that all things are relative, and so resembling the sceptic; but also as holding that differing appearances are to be explained by the ‘flow’ of matter (evidently a reframing of SD in Hellenistic terms), which the sceptic must reject. In *M* 7, apparently working from two conflicting doxographical traditions, Sextus says that according to 'some people' Protagoras abolished the criterion (*M* 7.60, 64) -- a very useful position for his purpose of depicting philosophical *diaphônia* on the question. However, most of his discussion here of Protagoras' position -- as in *PH* I, a terminologically reworked collage from the *Theaetetus* -- presents the Measure Thesis as, on the contrary, making a criterion of *every* human being (*M* 7.61-3).

How far these major later accounts accord with the *Theaetetus* and with each other is a difficult and important question. But for the purposes of understanding Protagoras himself, what matters most is whether they display any ultimately independent access to his thought. Is there anything in them that *could not* be explained as philosophically motivated repurposing (in Sextus' case, over a complex doxographic tradition) of the relativism of the *Theaetetus*? Though I cannot argue the question fully here, so far as I can see the answer is no. Their philosophical sense-perceptions, just as Plato says in the *Theaetetus*, and that all things are true" (IX.51). The interest of Diogenes' account lies wholly elsewhere: in addition to a booklist and biographical materials, he presents an extraordinary inventory of thirteen 'firsts' or discoveries [*heurêmata*], depicting Protagoras as the inventor of many aspects of rhetoric and philosophical dialectic -- not to mention a shoulder pad for porters. Decleva Caizzi (1992) discusses this *protos heurétéς* material, exploring the plausible hypothesis that it comes to Diogenes via Favorinus.

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8 By a *diaphônia* argument I mean one which uses the opposing views of two (individual or collective) subjects A and B as the materials to argue for both P and ~P. Such arguments are a central technique of Sextus' scepticism, and I take the form to have been central to Protagoras' *Antilogiai* as well (though not all *antilogiai* need be *diaphôniai*).

9 Cf., for Aristotle, the arguments of McCready-Flora 2015. Note too that the argument of the next section effects the probabilities here: if I am right that the appears-is formula is a Platonic creation, all the later discussions which presuppose it should be placed under the banner of the *Theaetetus* tradition, even if contamination from other sources cannot be ruled out.
divergences from Plato's presentation of MT are easily intelligible in terms of their own concerns and philosophical frameworks, and none inspires confidence as a conduit to Protagoras' own text. All three major later accounts are vague in the extreme; none quotes anything beyond MT itself, or offers an explanation of it presented as being Protagoras' own.  

And though Sextus knows an alternative title for Protagoras' book there is no sign that he or his sources have read it. More generally, where post-Aristotelian sources for Protagoras have clearly non-Theatetetan sources, it is because they focus on something other than MT -- his fragment on the gods (DK80B4), for instance, or his dialectical innovations as reported in Diogenes Laertius, or biographical material -- and they show no concern as to how those other topics might be related to it. Meanwhile our later sources for MT seem to be unconstrained by and indifferent to Protagoras' other views.

10 So far as I can see, the only post-Platonic source who purports to quote Protagoras' own explanation of MT is the very late papyrus fragment attributed to Didymus the Blind; and Didymus, or his source, is pretty clearly making stuff up. The fragment (not in Diels-Kranz) reads: "In support of another opinion, those around Protagoras -- he was a sophist -- says [legei, sic] that being [to einai], for things that are, consists in their being apparent [phainesthai]. He says: 'To you, who are present, it is apparent that I am sitting; to one who is not present, however, I do not so appear; it is non-evident [adêlon] whether I am sitting or not sitting.' And they say that all the things that are consist in appearance. For instance, I see the moon, but another person does not see it; it is unclear whether it exists or not. I, who am healthy, have a perception [antilêpsis] of honey, that it is sweet; but another person, when they are feverish, have a perception of it as bitter. So it is non-evident whether it is bitter or sweet. And in this way they want to dogmatically affirm [dogmatizein] the ungraspability [akatalepsia] <of things>.

For discussion, see Mejer 1972 and Woodruff 1985. Woodruff makes heroic attempts to find philosophical and evidentiary value in the fragment but admits: "A survey of Didymus' references to ancient philosophy show that his acquaintance with the subject was broad; but it does not justify much confidence in his sources... He frequently cites Aristotle... but he often uses Hellenistic or patristic vocabulary in what purports to be quotation" (484) -- as here with e.g. dogmatizein and akatalepsia. That this very late, very peripheral, and very unscholarly source would have unique access to otherwise unknown passages in Protagoras' text is not really credible.

11 So for instance in their brief biographical accounts of Protagoras, neither Philostratus nor Hesychius even mentions MT, though both refer to his views on the gods and to the Protagoras (DK80A2, A3).

12 To be clear, I am not here claiming that the post-Platonic authors who discuss MT had no access to Protagoras' own works (beyond a few titles and famous dicta in doxographic circulation) -- but that is a possibility, at least for those after Aristotle. The scantiness and repetitiveness of our later evidence is striking, and the possibility that they simply have nothing else to work with is brought into chilling relief by the story, which goes back at least as far as Timon (SE M 9.57=5D; see Clayman, 88-9), that Protagoras' books were burnt at Athens (DL IX.52) (though the historical accuracy of this story is inevitably controversial). Sometimes book-
If this is on the right track, then it is at least plausible [εἰκος] that all the ancient evidence for 'Protagoras the relativist' can ultimately be traced back to Plato's *Theaetetus*. Moreover, there is a chasm between the tradition which begins with the *Theaetetus* and everything else. For the Protagoras of the rest of our evidence does not seem to be a relativist, and is definitely not a believer in universal human inerrancy. In Plato's own *Protagoras*, he has all sorts of substantive ethical and political beliefs, and there is no sign that he holds these in anything other than the normal way which entails holding rival views to be false. On the contrary, he is resoundingly snarky about the wrongness of other people: “I think people say a lot of other things incorrectly [ουκ ορθός] too, Socrates" (352e, cf. 353a). There is no saving clause here, no hint that the deprecated views are still ‘true’ in some relativized or otherwise qualified way. Indeed ‘incorrectly’ [ουκ ορθός] rules that out. And correctness seems to have been a Protagorean buzzword: he is associated with debates about the 'most correct account' (DKA10), and a theory of correctness in speech [ορθηπεία] (DK80A26), and Diogenes Laertius even lists a work with the wonderful title *On Things Done Incorrectly By Human Beings* (IX.55). Moreover, the other burning works. Perhaps this is one reason Plato emphasises the ties of Theodorus and Theaetetus to Protagoras: in keeping with the nostalgic, commemorative project of the dialogue, we are to realize that Theaetetus was the final reader of Protagoras' book.

13 And a parallel passage in the *Cratylus*: but see section II.

14 See Gomperz for a vivid contrast between Plato's two Protagoras, together with a compelling argument that he intends us to opt for the *Protagoras* rather than the *Theaetetus* as historically accurate (1901, vol. 1, 457-8). Cf. also Levi (1940) 286.

15 It might be objected that inerrancy does not commit Protagoras to the view that all beliefs are equal, or prohibit him from deprecating the views of others. For later in the *Theaetetus*, in the famous passage known as 'the Defence' or 'Apology' of Protagoras, he is presented as retorting to Socrates that he can indeed hold that some views are better than others, and so too that some people (those able to change the views of others for the better) are wiser. However, this is insufficient to license Protagoras to hold some beliefs to be incorrect. Correctness [ορθοτές] is a more general norm than truth, applying equally to well-chosen actions (e.g. *Prot*. 356e6, 7e6); but in both the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus* it is taken as obvious and uncontroversial that in the case of statements and beliefs, truth is what correctness consists in (see *Prot*. 353a3, *Theaet*. 161d6-7, e8, cf. *Cratylus* 430d5-7). The picture of sophistic wisdom presented in the Defence is philosophically attractive, and plausibly some nucleus of it goes back to Protagoras himself; but it also incorporates not only Plato's relativistic gloss on MT, but SD as well (166b-c, 168b). So the Protagoras who rises from the dead to articulate it is a kind of Platonic Frankensophist, not the historical figure himself. Moreover the Defence is still committed to universal inerrancy, and so can do little to bridge the gap between our two Protagoras. In Chapter VI I suggest some ways in which the Defence might nonetheless help us to think about Protagoras' own project.
important verbatim quotation from Protagoras' work to have survived, the fragment in which he suspends judgement about the existence and appearance of the gods (DK80B4), adopts a sceptical stance rather than the relativistic one which would be the obvious alternative. Finally, we should not conflate the Metaph. IV discussion with the evidence of Aristotle as a whole. For Aristotle's reports elsewhere tell strongly against Protagoras the relativist. He reports various critical and refutative moves hard to square with inerrancy, including criticisms of Homer (DK80A28, A29) and of the geometers (DKB7); he even frames one of the former as a distinction between apparent and real solesisms (DK80A28= Sophistici Elenchi 14, 173b17) -- exactly the contrast the appears-is principle rules out. Above all, in discussing 'measure' in Metaph. I.1, Aristotle retails a deflationary interpretation of MT on which it 'says nothing extraordinary, while appearing to do so'. Since the combination of relativism and inerrancy is very extraordinary indeed (so much so that, as Rorty notes, it is unlikely that anyone has ever seriously held it), this amounts to flagging his own use of MT in Metaph. IV as exegetically

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16 This is said to have been the opening of his Peri Theôn, and reads: "Concerning the gods I am not in a position to know, either that they are or that they are not, or what they are like in appearance. For many are the obstacles to knowledge: the question is non-evident, and human life is short." (DK80B4: περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἐξω εἰδέναι, οὐθ’ ὥς εἰσίν οὐθ’ ὥς οὐκ εἰσίν οὐθ’ ὁποῖοι τινες ἱερὰν πολλὰ γάρ τὰ κολύοντα εἰδέναι ἡ τ’ ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχίς ἄν ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. For text, sources and discussion, see Mansfeld 1981 or *.) If as seems likely Protagoras is motivated in part by conflicting conceptions of the gods, along the lines of Xenophanes B14-16, then his suspension of judgement is markedly an alternative to relativism: a relativist would instead infer that the Thracians are right about the Thracian gods, the Ethiopians about their own, and so forth. Cf. also n. 20 below.

17 "Protagoras says that a human being is the measure of everything, as if he were to say the knower or the perceiver is. And he says that they are so because they have perception in the one case and knowledge in the other, which we say are measures of underlying things. So they are saying nothing extraordinary [peritton], while appearing to do so." (Πρωταγόρας δ’ ἀνθρώποιν φησὶ πάντων εἶναι μέτρουν, ὡσπερ ἂν εἰ τὸν ἑπιστήμονα εἰπών ἢ τὸν αἰσθανόμενον· τούτους δ’ ὅτι ἔχουσιν ὁ μὲν αἰσθησίν ὧ δὲ ἑπιστήμην, ἃ φαμεν εἶναι μέτρα τῶν ὑποκειμένων. οὐθὲν δὴ λέγοντες περιττὸν φαίνονται τι λέγεν.) I here follow Ian McCready-Flora (2015), who has convincingly argued that this passage is incompatible with the account of MT in Metaph. IV, and independent of the Theaetetus. (An alternative construal of the last sentence, taking the peritton with the ti, would be: "While saying nothing, they seem to be saying something extraordinary". But the preceding sentence has expounded MT in terms that are neither nonsensical nor obviously wrong, as the charge of 'saying nothing' [ouden legein] implies.) The surrounding passage is confusing, and makes it difficult to extract much of use for the interpretation of Protagoras himself: but the idea seems to be simply that knowledge and perception can both be seen as kinds of 'measurements' of things in the world, which fits comfortably with my non-Platonic reading of MT in section IV.
superficial. And this in turn makes it striking that his references in Book IV are both to the *logos Protagorou*, the *doctrine* of Protagoras, and not to the man himself (*Metaph.* IV.4, 1007b22, IV.5, 1009a6). That phrasing comes, as we will see, directly from the *Theaetetus.*

So we are faced with two incompatible Protagorases. Which is the real Protagoras, and which one merely apparent? Or is there a way to read MT which would bridge the gap between the two? Many scholarly discussions of Protagoras have evaded the problem by the unsatisfactory expedient of dealing only with one face of the evidence, or by segregating it into disconnected chapters. In doing so most have given priority to 'Protagoras the relativist', if only by giving pride of place to the (presumably foundational) epistemological and metaphysical theorizing of MT. A few have made heroic attempts to bridge the chasm by finding relativism somehow lurking behind the ethical views of Protagoras in the *Protetagoras.* An alternative interpretive tradition, going back to antiquity, has sought to get rid of 'Protagoras the relativist' in favour of a more tractable figure, by rereading MT and the appears-is principle as restricted to the realm of sense-perception. This gives us 'Protagoras the radical empiricist': one who holds that everything is for each of us as we *perceive* it to be, and that only what is perceived exists.

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18 See section II. This phrase 'logos [name of philosopher X in the genitive]' in Plato and Aristotle deserves some consideration. There are many ways to refer to the ideas and arguments of philosophers, and this one is not so much the default as we might expect. Strikingly, so far as I can tell, it does not occur in the historical survey of *Metaph.* A, where Aristotle often is concerned with niceties of exegesis and historical accuracy. Aristotle's repeated use of it in relation to Protagoras (at *Metaph.* 1047a6 as well as twice in Book IV) is thus marked; likewise his references to the *logos* of Heraclitus (1012a24-5, 34) and of Parmenides (1001a32-3) in similar polemical contexts. It might be going too far to say that the phrase gives a warning about the attribution in question, but it does perform a kind of reification which opens up a gap between the theory to be discussed and the figure named. So it would clearly be intelligible and in order to ask Aristotle: do you think that Protagoras really believed, or even ever uttered, the *logos Protagorou*?

19 See e.g. Kerferd; Decleva Caizzi traces this tendency back to Zeller (14).


21 Cf. Cornford 1934, Mansfeld 1981; Bonazzi 2010 discusses this plausibly as a Platonic "frutto di interpretazione polemica, legittima filosoficamente, ma non storicamente attendibile" (28). The reading goes back to ancient times: it seems to be what Didymus is trying to spell out, and cf. also DK80A16. Since the principal appeal of this reading is that it renders the appears-is principle far more defensible, but I hold that we should drop that principle anyway as a Platonic invention, I will not have much to say about it. The radical empiricist reading may also get some
philosophical advantages of this option are real: for one thing, its restriction of the appears-is principle blocks Socrates' two major refutations of MT in the *Theaetetus*, the *peritropê* and the argument from prediction, both of which depend on unrestricted inerrancy. But there is no real positive textual support for 'Protagoras the radical empiricist', and he is not much easier to square with Protagoras the dialectician and ethical thinker than 'Protagoras the relativist' is.

There is a simpler way to bridge the chasm, and it runs in the other direction: Protagoras was not a relativist. This counts as a bridge, rather than simply a choice, because it does not in fact require us to reject the evidence of the *Theaetetus*. On the contrary: for a unified picture of Protagoras' thought, we need only read Plato much more carefully. In the next section I argue, in tedious detail, that in the *Theaetetus* Socrates from the beginning presents 'the doctrine of Protagoras' [*logos Protagorou*] as his own construction. In particular, the all-important appears-is principle is not Protagoras' own, but is offered as Plato's own interpretive proposal. I then argue in section III that if we reflect a bit on what Protagoras' book *Truth* is likely to have been like, we can see how that interpretive proposal is both a philosophically legitimate response to such a text (we need not accuse Plato of unfairly creating a straw man) and, if our purpose is to recover the thought of Protagoras himself, to be firmly rejected. Nor is it hard to see why, once

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appeal from DKB4, but if there is an underlying empiricism here it is of the wrong kind: Protagoras can hardly mean to say that the gods only exist when we observe them, and contra the influential Mansfeld 1981 (42), I doubt that he assumes direct acquaintance would be the only rational basis for forming judgements about them. The fact that the shortness of human life is specified in B4 as an obstacle to our knowledge of the gods strongly suggests that the knowledge in question is of the kind which requires *historiê*, the laborious collection and assessment of complex evidence -- compare the Hippocratic lament, *ars longa vita brevis* -- and not (or not just) direct perceptual acquaintance. It would be a bit bizarre for Protagoras, or anyone, to think that their chances of meeting a Greek deity would be algorithmically increased by a longer lifespan. And direct perceptual acquaintance is uniquely unhelpful here anyway, since the Homeric gods can look like anything they want.

22 Note also that Aristotle's evidence tells against it: the 'nothing extraordinary' reading of MT is careful to specify that both perception and (presumably non-perceptual) knowledge are ways of being a 'measure'.

23 I will be working throughout with a somewhat simple-minded contrast between what is semantically close to or 'in' or 'from' the text (paraphrase, reporting) on the one hand, and what belongs to interpretation (exegesis, gloss, construction) on the other. Obviously this can be problematized in various ways; and we cannot assume that ancient authors would have conceived the distinction in the same way. I am, with some unease, setting aside these complexities as unlikely to make a difference to the outcome of my argument.
devised by Plato, 'Protagorean relativism' would come to be entrenched in the philosophical canon. It is a worthy object of study and foil for many kinds of philosophical inquiry, ancient and modern -- a philosophical programme of perennial fascination and deep heuristic value. What it is not is a theory anybody has ever held.

Getting rid of 'Protagoras the relativist' will free us to begin afresh and ask: what did the Measure Thesis really say, when Protagoras himself said it? In section IV, I argue that in stripping MT of Platonic encrustations we should also liberate it from the misleading role or status thrust on it by the *Theaetetus*. It is not the axiomatic foundation of any epistemological theory. Rather it is a pensée, an aphorism, a wise ('gnomic') utterance in a distinctively archaic Greek mould. And an aphorism says *many* things. I will outline, speculatively and *exempli gratia*, a sequence of five claims or proposals I think we can hear unfolding in MT, proposing that Protagoras intended all of them.

**II. The Measure Thesis in the *Theaetetus*:**

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24 Thus I agree with Gisela Striker: "we do not need to see in Protagoras' treatise an early essay in systematic epistemology" ("Methods of Sophistry", in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 3-21 at 18). As Striker says, we should see the sophists as "people who were indeed engaged in philosophical activity as dialecticians, but who were not in the business of developing and defending doctrines in the way expected of philosophers from Plato on" (18). Striker also notes that this argumentative activity should suffice for us to count the sophists as philosophers by our standards today, if not by the now-old-fashioned one that makes the production of systematic doctrines a *sine qua non*. (On Protagoras as both sophist and philosopher in the ancient context, cf. also Notomi 2013.) To the extent that the sophists *did* go in for doctrine-production, the agonistic and disputatious character of their professional activity implies that those doctrines must have been more conflicting than not. Thus see R. Bett, "Is there a Sophistic Ethics?" (*Ancient Philosophy*, 22:2 (2002), pp. 235-262) for a convincing argument that the answer is No; and his "The Sophists and Relativism" (*Phronesis*, 34:2 (1989), pp. 139–169) for the point that relativism was certainly not a doctrine common to the sophists as a group. So if, as I am going to argue, Protagoras himself was not a relativist, then nobody was; and Rorty's talk of imaginary playmates is in this case correct (though this is not necessarily a criticism of the philosophers who enjoy their company).
So let's turn to the *locus classicus* for 'Protagoras the relativist', *Theaetetus* 152. Here is the key passage in which MT is first expounded (parenthetical numbers and headings my own):\(^{25}\)

"[1. *MT*] Moreover, it's likely that it's no shabby theory [*logon ou phaulon*] that you've stated about knowledge, but the one Protagoras himself used to say [*elegen*]. He has said [*eirêke*] the very same things, but in a different way. For he says [*phêsi*] somewhere that a human being is "the measure of all things, of the ones that are, that they are; and of the ones that are not, that they are not". I suppose you've read that?
-- I have read it, a number of times.

[2. *The Appears-Is Principle*] So does he mean [*legei*] more or less this: that such as each thing appears to me, so it is for me; and such as it appears to you, so too it is for you, you and I both being 'a human being'?
-- He does mean [*legei*] it that way.

[3. *The Follow-Up*] Moreover it seems likely [*eikos*] that a wise man isn't talking nonsense. So let's follow up with [*epakolouthêsômen*] him. Isn't it the case sometimes that when the same wind is blowing, one of us shivers with cold, and another not? And that one person does so mildly, and another vehemently?
-- Very much so.

So shall we say then that the wind in itself is cold or not cold? Or shall we be persuaded by [*peisometha tôi*] Protagoras that it is cold for the one who shivers, and not for the one who doesn't?
-- So it seems.

[4. *The Equations*] So indeed [*kai*] it 'appears' to each one this way?
-- Yes.

And the 'appears' is 'is perceived'?
-- Yes it is.

Therefore being-appeared-to and perception are the same thing in matters of heat and all the like. And therefore\(^{26}\) such as each person perceives things, so they are also likely to be [*kindineuei*] for him.

\(^{25}\) Translations from the *Theaetetus* are drawn largely from the excellent Rowe (2015), with revisions.
-- So it seems.

Therefore perception is always of what is and unerring, since it is knowledge.

-- So it appears.

[5. The Secret Doctrine] Now by the Graces, was Protagoras a kind of complete sage [pan-sophos], and did he pose this for us as a riddle to the mob, while he used to state the truth to his students in secret [en aporrētôi]?

-- What then Socrates do you mean [legeis] by this?

I will tell you, and it's really not a shabby theory [ou phaulon logon]... " (151e8-2d2)

Almost all readers sense that with [5], his mock-esoteric transition to the Secret Doctrine (SD), Socrates changes gear and turns to something new -- and no longer Protagorean.²⁷ So let's zero in on what comes before: on [1]-[4] above, in which MT is introduced and first explained. MT itself is presented a direct quotation, later said to be from the opening of his book Truth (161c); there is no reason to doubt its reliability.²⁸ The question then is: at what point in the discussion do we part ways with paraphrase of what Protagoras said, close enough to the explicit content of the Truth to be accepted as uncontroversially part of his views? Working back from the end, the later phases of the exposition are clearly a matter of Socratic construction, engineered for the philosophical agenda at hand. The Equations [4] establish that shivering or being cold is a case

²⁶ Accepting Robinson's emendation, as cited in the new OCT ad loc.
²⁷ The great exception in recent times is Brancacci 2011, which argues that the SD accurately represents Protagoras' dottrina riservata. The problem with Brancacci's maximalist reading is that even if Protagoras did teach some kind of dottrina riservata to his students, Socrates, who was certainly never a student of Protagoras, could hardly be in a position to expound it. Coming from Socrates, the presentation of SD as Protagoras' private teaching can only be something of a joke, and Socrates' esotericist tone seems intended to signal as much.
²⁸ This is an oversimplification. As can be seen from [1] in the citation above, MT is introduced with a rather long wind-up, involving three verbs of saying [elegen, eirêkê, and phēsi]: because the last of these introduces an indirect-discourse construction, with the verb 'to be' in the infinitive, MT as presented at 152a2-4 cannot strictly speaking be entirely a direct quotation. Thus Rowe has: "His claim, I think, is that the 'measure of all things' is a human being, 'of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.'" Like Rowe, I take it to be a verbatim report of the text with that one change. As to the introductory verbs, I take the change of verb to be mere varietio, and understand the shifting tenses as follows: the imperfect [elegen] marks the claim as habitual (Protagoras 'used to say' this -- perhaps, intriguingly, a nod to the use of MT in performance contexts), the perfect [eirêkê] as twisting the reference to a specific text ('he once said'), and the present [phēsi] as then giving its content in a timeless way ('he says').
of 'being appeared to', so that the wind example in the Follow-up [3] is covered by the appears-is principle [2]. So we may substitute 'perceives' for 'appears' in the principle: whatever each person perceives, also is for them. Applying the principle, it follows that perception is 'always of what is, and unerring', just as it must be if it is to be identified with knowledge: so Theaetetus' definition is confirmed. Obviously this deductive procedure would be unnecessary if Protagoras had said any such thing himself.

Moving back to [3] The Follow-Up, we may seem to come much closer to Protagoras' text: it is plausible enough that his Truth did include perceptual antilogiai along these lines.29 Still, the wind example is presented in direct discourse, not as something taken from Protagoras.30 And Socrates' talk of the eikos confirms this distance from the text.31 It indicates that what follows will be an attempt to give a reasonable sense to Protagoras' startling views -- an exercise in what we would now call interpretive charity, and 'rational reconstruction'.

Does that signal that what precedes is directly taken from Protagoras himself? Here we come to the all-important appears-is principle [2], which as I noted earlier does the heavy lifting for the construction of 'Protagorean relativism'. Perhaps because it is so regularly found in our other ancient sources, in very consistent wording, the principle is standardly accepted as genuinely

29 Note that though interpreters sometimes lapse into presenting the disagreement as one about whether the wind is cold or hot, it is rather between is cold and is not cold (152b7). This is a clue that we are here in the realm of antilogikê: MT's antithesis between things that are and those that are not thus foreshadows the antilogiai to come in the rest of Protagoras' book. By contrast, Presocratic natural science did tend to work with pairs of opposites, such as the hot and the cold, as their preferred explanatory framework.

30 Nor does his talk of being 'persuaded' by Protagoras signal a close relation to the text. In the Republic Socrates says we should ‘be persuaded by Homer’ [peisometha] to give honours to courageous young men; but the Homeric passage in view says only that Ajax was given a cut of meat (468c-d).

31 The eikos makes an intriguing reappearance later on when Protagoras speaks up from the dead in the Defence passage (162d-3a, 165e-8c), and accuses Socrates of relying on the eikos (162e5, e9). His explicit reference is to Socrates' sarcastic, rabblerousing claim at 161c-2a that Protagoras might as well allow that a cow must be a measure. But it may be significant that the whole reading is here placed under the sign of the eikos by Socrates himself.

32 For the useful concept of 'rational reconstruction' in the history of philosophy, see Rorty 1984.
Protagorean -- if not a direct quotation, then close paraphrase. However, it is a familiar fact and source of confusion that legein can mean 'mean' just as easily as 'say' -- for instance, as above in the commonplace query Pòs legeis, 'What do you mean?'. At the end of the quoted passage above. And if that is its sense here then Socrates is on the contrary flagging the principle as his own exegetical contribution.

So the claim of 'Protagorean relativism' to historicity turns out to hinge on the interpretation of a single word. Which interpretation of legei should we prefer? Translators who represent legei as introducing a quotation or close paraphrase (either by translating 'says' or using quotation marks) rarely have much to say in defence of that decision: but some, including Cornford, cite the parallel passage in Plato's Cratylus (385e-6a). So let us turn there:

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33 Cornford 1934 notes the ambiguity of legei, but takes the repetition of the principle in the Crat. as evidence that the principle is a quotation; likewise McDowell, though he cautiously translates 'means'. Chappell and Waterfield both use quotation marks (though the latter also translates as 'means'). Rowe as usual deploys the progressive to nicely track the surface ambiguity of the original: "Well, isn't he saying something like this..." Fowler, admirably accurate here as in the Cratylus, has "Well, is not this about what he means?". Cf. also n. 45 below.

34 That this could occasionally be a source of confusion to the Greeks themselves is suggested by the argy-bargy between Polemarchus and Cleitophon over what Thrasymachus said/meant at Rep. 340b. For an example of legei as unambiguously 'mean', see Rep. 568b1.

35 To be clear, what hinges on the interpretation of legei is whether we should hold that Plato means to present the appears-is principle (1) as close paraphrase of something in Protagoras' book, or (2) as merely (via Socrates) his own interpretive gloss on MT. If (1), we would still need to consider whether his presentation should be accepted, or rejected as deceptive or distorting. But I will argue for (2); and if that is right, we can simply set it aside without prejudice. There is of course the possible objection or intermediate possibility that Plato means to present it as an authoritative interpretation, or that we should in any case accept it as correct: in section III I will briefly give reasons not to do so.

36 The strongest case I know of for taking legei as 'says' runs along rather different lines, and is made by Lee 2005 (12). Lee argues that, though the immediate context leaves the question open, Socrates' back-references to Protagoras' views later on, in the context of the peritropê, leave us no choice but to take legei as 'says'. She cites three moments of the text: (1) At 169e8, Socrates says they should proceed to argue against Protagoras "from his own words" (Lee's translation of ek tou ekeinou logou); (2) at 170a3-4, he repeats the appears-is principle introduced by phêsi, 'he says'; and (3) at 171b8, he reaffirms that his results come "from the things he has written". However, to begin with (3), the point of emphasising Protagoras' writings here is not to stress any adherence to the letter of the text, but simply to set aside the earlier round of dialectical concessions made on his behalf. As for (1) and (2), I will here argue that both Protagoras' logos - better understood as his theory or doctrine -- and what he says or claims [phêsi] are openly
"Come then, Hermogenes, and let's see whether it also appears to you this way with the things which are, [1] that their being is private to each of us, [2] just as [hősper] Protagoras meant [elegen] [3] by saying [legôn] that man is the measure of all things: [4] that actually [hős ara] if objects appear a certain way to me, they are so for me, and if they appear a certain way to you, they are so for you. Or does it seem to you that they have a certain stability of being of their own?" (385e4-6a4)

Clearly Protagoras is here being interpreted in very much the same way as in the *Theaetetus*. But the presence of the appears-is principle here is no evidence for taking it at *Theaetetus* 152a as paraphrase or quotation: Plato is perfectly capable of repeating his own interpretation from one dialogue to the next. And in fact, closely read, the *Cratylus* points strongly in the other direction. In the quotation above, though the syntax is a bit awkward and puzzling, the important point for our purposes is clear: the *elegen* (imperfect) and the *legôn* (present participle) cannot both be presented as very much the product of Socrates' interpretive labour. A more telling back-reference is 155d6: "from what we're claiming our friend Protagoras means [phamen legein] -- if *legein* here could be translated as 'says', Socrates' framing of it in terms of his own claim would be odd and otiose.

37 'That actually...': *hős ara* [ός ἄρα] seems to be a rather specialised Platonic idiom, in which the ὄς introduces indirect speech (so favouring a reading on which *elegen* governs the clause in [4]) and the ἄρα (in a rare non-inferential use in Plato) introduces a sometimes sarcastic note of (as Tad Brennan has put it) portentous revelation. This is very striking at *Theaetet*. 152d2 where it is used as a drumroll for the introduction of the Secret Doctrine; cf. *Apol*. 40e6, *Phdo* 97c1 (for Anaxagoras' theory of Nous), 107d6, *Republic* 414d5 (the Noble Lie), 439e10 (the story of Leontius), *Theaetetus* 176b4, and *Statesman* 285a1 (for the Protagorean-sounding thesis that all things can be measured).

38 ΣΩ. Φέρε δὴ ἰδωμεν, ὁ Ἐρμόγενες, πότερον καὶ τὰ ὅντα οὕτως ἔχειν σοι φαίνεται, ἵδια αὐτῶν ἡ οὐσία εἶναι ἐκάστῳ, ὡσπερ Πρωταγόρας ἔλεγεν λέγων “πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον” εἶναι ἄνθρωπον—ὁς ἄρα οἱ μὲν ἄν ἐμοί φαίνηται τὰ πράγματα [εἶναι], τοιαῦτα μὲν ἐστιν ἐμοί· οἷα δ’ ἂν σοι, τοιαῦτα δὲ σοί—ἡ ἔχειν δοκεῖ σοι αὐτὰ ἄντων τινα βεβαιότητα τῆς οὐσίας;

39 The *hős ara* clause [4] is grammatically superfluous and rather loosely attached to what precedes, as if added spontaneously in a spirit of further explication (a fact Burnet's text marks with a dash). But if any verb is to govern it, even loosely, it must be the *elegen*; given the lack of any 'and'-like connective after MT, the principle cannot be a second thing governed by *legôn*. So read, [4] is adduced as something Protagoras *meant* by MT. And if [4] is instead just a syntactically disconnected gloss on both [1] and [3], the upshot is the same: if the appears-is principle is to provide a bridge between MT and the highly abstract theory of 'private being' presented in [1], it must be by explaining what the former really *meant*.
translated by forms of 'say'. Just as in English, 'Y, as he said when he said X' is confusing and wrong. But all becomes clear when we replace one of the 'says' with a 'means'. In such redoubled locutions, one of the locutions, X, lies near the semantic surface, a close paraphrase of the text. It is usually not hard to tell which one, and here there is no ambiguity since the participle introduces a partially direct quotation of MT. Meanwhile Y is presented as being extracted by interpretation as its underlying meaning. In English we naturally turn to a progressive tense for the latter: Y is 'what he was saying' or even 'what he was trying to say' when he said X. Plato uses the imperfect in much the same way.

This pattern -- that is, a division of labour between the said and the meant, which is clear enough even though a form of legein is used for both -- is sometimes very stark. We find it again in later in the Theaetetus itself, when Socrates is discussing the revived version of the mysterious 'Dream' theory of knowledge (206e-7a):

"Well now, let's not too easily condemn the one who stated <the account of> knowledge as what we're now investigating, as having said nothing <i.e., being completely wrong>. For perhaps the one who said it [ho legôn] didn't mean this [ou touto elegen], but rather that <knowledge is for> the one who is asked a question to be able to answer the questioner by going through the elements."  

Here, 'the one saying this didn't say it' would be nonsense. Rather, the participial ho legôn identifies the person saying X, while the imperfect elegen introduces Y as what he meant by it. 

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40 Not all close redoublings of 'say' are impossible. For instance: 'what we said just now when we said... was not true' (Parm. 144d5-6, cf. Charm. 156d7). The problematic cases are ones in which semantic content is supplied twice in two radically different forms for a single utterance, or where what is 'said' is both attributed and denied. Here the listener must be expected to figure out that one version is quotation or close paraphrase, the other more remote and offered as an interpretation of it.

41 Μὴ τοῖνοι ρᾷδίως καταγγέλλουμεν τὸ μηδὲν εἰρηκέναι τὸν ἀποφημόμενον ἑπιστήμην τὸ γών σκοποῦμεν. Ἰσως γὰρ ὁ λέγων οὐ τοῦτο ἔλεγεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐρωτηθέντα τί ἐκαστὸν δυνατὸν εἶναι τὴν ἀπόκρισιν διὰ τῶν στοιχείων ἀποδοῦναι τῷ ἐρομένῳ. 

42 Other examples include Crat. 434e5-8 and Charm. 172a4. The exception that proves the rule is Rep. 588b11, where, to finally wrap up the argument against the advocate of injustice, Socrates says, "let's make an image of the soul in words, so that the person who says these things [ho
And finally, consider Aristotle's presentation of Protagoras' position in *Metaphysics* K.6 (1062b12-15):

"The saying of Protagoras is like the views we have mentioned; he said that man is the measure of all things, meaning simply that that which seems to each man assuredly is." 43

Here the dictum is once again spelled out by the canonical one-two of MT and the appears-is principle in close succession; and *here* most translators have no hesitation about using 'means' for the latter. (Moreover Ross's 'simply' here undertranslates the circumlocution *ouden heteron*, 'nothing other than that': this serves as a bit of a drum-roll, flagging the principle as a (firmly confident) interpretive move.)

Returning now to *Theaetetus* 152a, we can see that the underlying pattern is really the same as in these other texts. It is just obscured here by Plato's slower, full-dress presentation. Thanks to Socrates' pause for a confirmatory question and response, the appears-is principle gets its own sentence, introduced with 'So... in some such way as this' [*oukoun houtô pôs*].44 But though this framing does not subordinate it grammatically to MT, it also does not present the principle paratactically (i.e. as a distinct *second* thing Protagoras said), as an 'and' or 'also' would do. This is why translations which avoid taking *legei* as 'means' are necessarily a bit confusing. Cornford and Levett-Burnyeat both have recourse to a somewhat evasive construction with 'puts': "Then you know that he puts it something like this... (Levett-Burnyeat); "He puts it in this sort of way, doesn't he?..." (Cornford). This sounds natural but on reflection makes no sense at all: MT has

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43 *Metaph.* K.6, 1062b13-15 (Ross trans.) Ποραπλήσιον δὲ τοῖς εἰρημένοις ἔστι καὶ τὸ λεχθὲν ύπὸ τοῦ Πρωταγόρου· καὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ἔφη πάντων ἐννὶα χρημάτων μέτρον ἂνθρωπον, οὐδὲν ἔτερον λέγων ἢ τὸ δοκοῦν ἐκάστῳ τούτῳ καὶ εἶναι παγίως· Cf. also Tredennick, Hope...*

44 For *houtô pôs*, cf. 182a5: 'we were saying that they claim something along the following lines' [*houtô pôs elegomen phanai*. Houtô(s) by itself means 'in this way'; the *pôs* adds a handwave (lit. 'somehow'), undercutting the relation to a specific text which the *houtôs* would otherwise indicate.
just been presented \textit{in a direct quotation}; so what can it mean to say that it was \textit{put}, i.e. phrased, in some \textit{other} way? In short, the principle cannot intelligibly be taken as \textit{closer} to Protagoras' text than MT; the lack of parataxis shows that it is not a \textit{second} thing Protagoras said; so it can only be \textit{further} away, an explication of what MT means according to Socrates himself.

In sum, the Protagorean relativism which fascinates Plato in the \textit{Theaetetus} is his own creation, and indeed is quietly but clearly marked as such. We can see this confirmed, and get a better sense to what Plato is up to here, if we look at the broader context. Socrates' elaboration of MT at 152 is his point of departure in constructing the \textit{logos Protagorou}, the Protagorean doctrine. And this is part of his performance of 'midwifery', in support and explication of Theaetetus' definition of knowledge as perception. As such it is one of a pair: his much longer and more elaborate development of the 'Secret Doctrine' of Homer and Heraclitus (SD) is designed to do the same thing. So we have a control case of Socratic interpretation, helpfully provided in the immediate neighbourhood: and with SD it is easy to see that Socrates is engaged in an enterprise of highly creative and speculative exegesis. Its key interpretive moves are introduced by \textit{legein}:

"On this account of things we may take it that all the wise in succession, apart from Parmenides, are agreed: not just Protagoras, but Heraclitus and Empedocles, and among the poets, the top representatives of both genres, Epicharmus for comedy and, for tragedy, Homer, who in composing the line 'Ocean, begetter of the gods, and Tethys their mother' made everything the offspring of flux and change. Or don't you think that's what he means \textit{[legei]}? -- I do." (152e1-10; cf. 153d6-7)

As Socrates' own citation shows, Homer never \textit{said} 'all things are in motion' or anything semantically close to it, but only made a mythological claim which could be allegorically interpreted as broadly equivalent.\textsuperscript{45} And there is no chance that Socrates is in some way confused

\textsuperscript{45} The distinction can be obscured by the fact that English is closer to Greek than it might at first seem: that is, 'says', like \textit{legei}, is often used to mean \textit{means}, with the disambiguation supplied by the context and often flagged by the use of a progressive tense. (For example: "When Trump says 'Build the wall!' what he is saying is that immigrants have no place in America." ) Thus Rowe often translates \textit{legei} as 'is saying', cleverly reproducing the superficial ambiguity (here,
about the extent of his own contribution here: that this is a bravura intellectual display in a recognised genre is part of the point. When later, in the peroration of SD, he presents the 'dual birth' theory of perception, it again is wildly remote from anything that Homer and the rest literally or explicitly say; and Socrates notes as much when he refers to it as an explanation of 'their mysteries' (156a). And yet he repeatedly uses both legein and phanai to explicate the theory being developed on their behalf. 47

Socrates' construction of the Protagorean logos is a quicker and simpler business; but it is governed by the same purposes and likewise intended to produce a logos which can then take on a life of its own. 48 (It is in fact the logos itself, not Protagoras, which Socrates engages with at least at some points in his refutation.) 49 And when Aristotle takes up the logos Protagorou in

181c2, 182c2, etc.). I take this to be compatible with my reading, on which Socrates in these passages is supplying the product of his own interpretative work.

46 Cf. Derveni Papyrus, Snell on Hippias...*

47 There is a clear division of labour between legein and phanai in SD, sufficient for us to get a basic grip on their respective semantics: legein is used for attributions of meaning and phanai for what the logos so constructed states, claims or asserts. The latter can introduce a thesis or position at a considerable remove from the surface of the text, as we see when Socrates asks whether the wise claim [phate] that everything is changing in both of the senses he has just distinguished (181e2ff.), and attributes to them claims for which he has had to coin the new term poiotēs (182a5-6). (Note that after all this, he reverts to legein to allow that his whole reading might be contested: "Well, let's leave to one side whether they mean it in this way or another [eite allōs eite houtōs legousin]" (182c1-2).) So phanai does not here mean 'say' in any sense which implies a literal report or close paraphrase. True, it differs from legein by not having a semi-distinct sense of 'mean', and it can be used contrastively when the latter has that sense (e.g. at 181c2, 182a5-6). But the difference is not that phanai hews more closely to the text. Rather its distinctive role is to emphasise the assertoric, doctrinal nature of what it introduces: the content of an author's theory, i.e. a systematic set of claims from which we can determine what is true according to [kata] it and to him (170a3-4, 170d5). The complete logos is the product of substantive interpretative labour, framed in terms of legei: it includes not only 'readings', often innovative or allegorical, but the teasing out of implicit commitments, consequences, and responses to questions and distinctions which could never have occurred to the author in question. So the order is the reverse of what Lee (2005, 12) assumes: it is only after we have figured out what a text legei that we can say what it phanai.

48 Indeed, whether these are to be seen as one logos or two seems to fluctuate depending on the focus of the argument. Quite often Socrates does not present there as being any real boundary between the two: note that elements of the flux-theory recur in Protagoras' 'Defence' (166b-c, 168b), and Protagoras is not 'dismissed' until the flux theory has been refuted (183b-c).

49 At 170a3-4 it is not at all clear whether it is Protagoras or the logos personified which is doing the speaking; it is the logos which is cornered at 170d1-2; and when Socrates shifts to discussion
Metaph. IV he is continuing the debate where Plato left off, even if he tweaks the position in order to bring out still worse consequences. His phrasing signals as much, and confirms that, as with Socrates' midwifery, what will be important is the intrinsic interest of the doctrines in question and their potential contribution to the dialectic at hand -- not the accuracy of their historical attribution.

In sum, the *Theaetetus* gives us no evidence for attributing relativism to the historical Protagoras: Plato himself never does so. And if there is no evidence for Protagoras-the-relativist in the *Theaetetus*, there is no evidence for him anywhere. The recycling and repurposing of MT and the *logos Protagorou* in so many later ancient authors speaks to its endless fascination as a terrain for diverse philosophical concerns and debates, not to its historical credentials. Its usefulness as a philosophical reference point is such that it seems fair say that if Protagoras-the-relativist had not existed, the ancient Greek philosophical tradition would have had to invent him. And so that is what it did.

**III. Plato, Protagoras and the Truth:**

This argument invites an immediate rejoinder or objection. Even granted that Plato presents Protagorean relativism as his own interpretive construct, should we not still accept it as an accurate and authoritative one? After all, Plato himself in the *Theaetetus* presents the relativistic interpretation of Protagoras as unproblematic. It is not just that Socrates' presentation is confident, and ignores any alternatives: Theaetetus accepts it without hesitation, and we are told that he has read Protagoras' book repeatedly (152a5). Moreover, he is studying with Theodorus, who was Protagoras' friend; and Theodorus never objects to the relativistic *logos* either. Granted, Theaetetus is eager to the point of malleability, easily whipsawed in dialectic (eg 162c8-d2) and equally happy to agree with the wild flights of the Secret Doctrine (cf. 152e,

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of the 'new formulation', it is the *logos* (not Protagoras himself) with which these quasi-Protagoreans go along with only so far (172b7-8). Cf. also 170c with the vaguifying 'those around Protagoras' [*hoi amphi Prôtagoran*], and 170d5.

50 I owe this objection to the participants at the NYU-Wellfleet Conference 2019, and in particular *
quoted above, and 153d7). And while Theodorus is presented as tied to Protagoras personally (161b9-10, 162a4, 171c8-9), he stays out of the argument as much as he possibly can, and excuses his detachment by explaining that he moved away rather quickly from 'bare logos' -- a rather contemptuous way of describing his old friend's intellectual project (165a). So there is no suggestion that he, any more than Theaetetus, is exerting any real quality control on the proceedings. Still, Plato's emphasis on these characters' proximity to Protagoras and his text must be intended to signal some kind of legitimation, if not authority.

This seems to me a fair point. Plato plausibly invokes the familiarity of Theaetetus and Theodorus with Protagoras' work to signal that there is nothing glaringly wrong here -- nothing to which educated and sympathetic readers, as modeled by those characters, might be expected to object. We can infer at least that there was no other more standard reading of Protagoras available. But that is a long way from saying that the interpretation of MT which Socrates does present is authoritative, or obvious, or even to be accepted. In fact there can be no authoritative or obvious here: for Plato also emphasises, repeatedly, that Protagoras' text and thought are riddling. Like an oracle, MT is enigmatic and mysterious, at once demanding interpretation and baffling it (152c, 155d-e, 162a). We should take that seriously too, and accept that Plato flags his interpretation as being of a particularly speculative and contestable kind.

This combination of confidence and uncertainty makes sense if we turn to the text to which Plato was responding. We know remarkably little about Protagoras' book Truth. It is not even attested under that title in the booklist of Diogenes Laertius; and paradoxically, this absence may be a helpful clue. Sextus Empiricus tells us that MT was an incipit or exordium, coming at the beginning of Protagoras' Kataballontes (M 7.60): the obvious explanation is that both titles were used for the same work, perhaps even being intended as complementary. (Alêtheia is a rather generic title, attributed to other early philosophical works as well; Kataballontes -- 'down-throws' in wrestling -- is more informative, more distinctive -- and sounds like a lot more fun). Now scholars have long suspected that the Kataballontes was the same work as the Antilogiai -- a two-'book' work which is listed in Diogenes Laertius. Since antilogia is the name of Protagoras' work

51 What follows is very much indebted to the convincing reconstruction of Lee (2005), 21-29. I discuss our evidence for Protagorean antilogikê, including the Dissoi Logoi, in Chapter II.
characteristic argument form, namely, argument on both sides of the question (DL IX.51, 55), it would be natural for books of them to be given some additional, less generic name, just as one might do with a set of musical or poetic compositions in some genre. Moreover, thinking about titles can also give us at least a glimmer as to what these antilogiai were about. Lee notes that Protagoras infamous On the Gods [Peri Theôn] does not appear in Diogenes' list either; that too would be explained if it were a subset of the Antilogiai. And this possibility in turn recalls the list of topics given by Plato in his enumeration of sophistic areas of (purported) wisdom in the Sophist: the gods, being and not-being, the natural world, questions of justice and politics, and the crafts (232b-e). Scholars since Untersteiner have seen this, plausibly, as a kind of inventory of the topics covered not just by sophistic antilogikê in general, but by Protagoras' Antilogiai in particular. If the Antilogiai followed this ordering, it would have begun with the On the Gods as a kind of 'Part I'. That means that MT would have segued immediately to Protagoras DKB4, which would at once confirm it and proclaim the results of the first set of arguments to come.

In sum, MT was plausibly the exordium of Protagoras' Antilogiai. Its role was to introduce an encyclopedic tour de force of opposed arguments on the whole range of topics which might be used to ground a claim to wisdom, from theology to the crafts. Some of those arguments were perhaps obviously fallacious, some not; some but not all must have been based on diaphônia; some would have been clearly contradictory in their results, others more vaguely 'opposed' and paradoxical in upshot. They argued (say) that the gods are both known to all and unknowable, and that they present a range of conflicting appearances; that being is one and many; that all things are both in motion and unchanging; that the cosmos is generated and eternal; that justice is harmful and beneficial; that the fine everywhere is the same and different; that pleasure is and is not the good; that the virtues are one and many; that the wise do and do not know all things; that the poets and the practitioners of technê are and are not wise; and that the objects of various technai do and do not exist. In all of this they propounded nothing in the way of general epistemic or logical principles, still less any epistemological or metaphysical theory. Instead, I take it, Protagoras suavely abandoned the reader to make whatever sense of the results he might.

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52 2005, 24-26
53 On Protagoras and the technai, see Fait (ms, forthcoming) and Lee (2005), 38-41, though I doubt that Protagoras' purpose can have been to generally discredit them.
This picture is of course highly speculative, but it fits with a number of our texts, and can help us to make sense of what Plato is doing. For it reveals that his 'interpretation' of Protagoras's book in the *Theaetetus* is a very special kind of enterprise. It is not just a matter of paraphrase, summary, or gloss, even of a tendentious kind; nor is he simply resolving ambiguities or teasing out implications. Rather, in constructing the *logos Protagorou*, Plato is accepting a challenge which Protagoras himself laid down: replacing questions with answers, puzzles with solutions, conflicts with resolutions, and blurry-edged paradigm case arguments with general theoretical principles. All that is a legitimate form of interpretive engagement with a philosophical text: at any rate it seems fair to demand of an enigmatic and untheoretical thinker, *On the basis of what general assumptions could all the arguments you present be sound?* But it is also necessarily transformative, a fundamental misrepresentation of the spirit of the original. Plato is offering Protagoras the best epistemological theory he can; but Protagoras meant to have no such thing. His practice of *antilogikê* depended on the freedom to argue and refute *any* position; if anything (as I will argue in Chapter VI), it expressed a bias against the very enterprise of metaphysical and epistemological theorizing. In dealing with him, Plato is like the entomologist pinning down a butterfly, or the archeologist who stabilizes a crumbling stone ruin by shoving in cement blocks and steel girders. If our interest is in Protagoras himself we need to identify where the Platonic superstructure begins, and, as carefully as we can, slide the original out from underneath.

IV. The Measure Thesis:

So let us now try, at long last, to do just that: to look at MT by itself. What did it have to say when Protagoras himself said it, as the opening of his *Truth*? Once its Platonic encrustations are

54 I here defer the question of why Plato chooses to supply Protagoras with a *relativistic* solution in particular; in Chapter VI I discuss the crucial evidence on this question, namely the 'olive oil speech' of Protagoras 334a-c. I take it that this has, like the rest of Plato's portrait there, a claim to represent the thought of the historical Protagoras in a roughly authentic way: and though the relational account of the good presented in it is a complex kind of realism rather than relativistic, it is highly suggestive. That is, anything said by the historical Protagoras along those lines might reasonably have been taken by Plato as suggesting an understanding of his *antilogiai* as revolving around *diaphôniai* which are merely apparent and due to subjective factors. This seems to me sufficient as both a source and a rationale for the relativistic *logos* Plato develops in the *Theaetetus*. 
sloughed off, MT is pretty self-evidently an aphorism or gnomic utterance, with a number of parallels in archaic Greek literature. Its most obvious analogue is Heraclitus B1, the famous logos fragment which likewise was the beginning of Heraclitus' book: "Although this logos holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard...". And Charles Kahn's landmark work on Heraclitus provides a starting point for the kind of reading of MT we need. Kahn notes the linguistic density of Heraclitus' work ("the phenomenon by which a multiplicity of ideas are expressed in a single word or phrase"), and its reliance on resonance: "a relationship between fragments by which a single verbal theme or image is echoed from one text to another in such a way that the meaning of each is enriched when they are understood together" (89). As Kahn notes, linguistic density amounts to fully intended ambiguity: an author uses it to generate indeterminacy, as a device for saying several things at once. So, as Kahn says, "we will be left with an irreducible residue of at least two partially significant interpretations, two distinct statements to be understood as 'intended' by the author" (92-3). The 'primary' reading -- the one likely to first be heard by the original audience -- will to some extent fall out of the antecedent usage of the words. Secondary readings (I see no reason there should only be one of them) arise in order to resolve problems, or in light of connections to other texts. Of course, in the case of Protagoras and MT, we are limited by not having further fragments of Protagoras' text (unless we count DKB4, as I will). Still, I think that we can see linguistic density, resonance, and a multiplicity of compatible readings at work even within MT itself.

55 Perhaps originally intended for oral delivery: cf. Bonazzi (2010), 26. I have nothing of interest to say about the once-exciting topic of orality and literacy in the fifth century, and the implications of the transition between the two for works like the Truth. In Chapters I-II I assumed that Protagoras and the other sophists were primarily oral performers; I also assume that their written works were both workshopped in performance and recited once written, and that this performance history might well help to explain their literary features. But in practice, we have too little of their texts for this observation to carry us very far. I would speculate only that the oral context might help to account for the multiple attributions of sophistic ideas, and textual overlaps such as *. Live performance can easily give rise to multiple redactions of the same ideas either by the same artist or several, and to a culture of informal influence in which 'borrowing' and recirculation is perhaps less stigmatized than in fully literary cultures. In other words, vaudeville artists steal.

56 Kahn's translation (1979), but with logos, a locus of polysemy here as metron is in MT, left untranslated: Kahn has 'account'. As with MT, the first three words set up expectations which are then baffled, calling for a succession of further interpretative sorties.

57 Kahn (1979), 87-95
So here it is -- in the context of no context, as *incipit* or exordium of Protagoras' famous book:

\[
\text{πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστίν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ ὄὐκ ὄντων ὡς ὄὐκ ἔστιν.}^{58}
\]

*Of all things the measure is man: of the things that are, that they are, of the things that are not, that they are not.*

The first thing we can see is that MT unfolds in two stages. Its first half proclaims; the second half explains, specifies, and complicates. The first half is a portentous crescendo leading up first to the focal term *metron* and secondly to the surprise (as I will argue) of *anthrôpos*. The former is a word of power, with a long and complex history already behind it; it is worth pausing to explore that history a bit.\(^{59}\)

The early uses of *metron* all circle around the basic scenario of taking a measurement (i.e., determining a quantity), as in the later-canonical trio of spatial measurement, weighing, and counting or calculation.\(^{60}\) From the start, confusingly, *metron* can play either of two roles in that scenario: that is, it is used both in an *active* sense, for the unit or instrument which measures, and in a *passive* one for the quantum which is measured -- be it of distance, length, weight, or anything else. So Homer speaks of men holding measures in their hands (probably rods or ropes) (*Il.* 12.422), but also of the Atreides being given a thousand measures of wine (*Il.* 7.471). But

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\(^{58}\) Diels-Kranz DK80B1 (= S.E. *M* 7.60: *Theaetetus* 152a has *mé* in place of *ouk*). Cf. Notomi 2013, 25 for a concise listing of further sources.

\(^{59}\) *Metron* has been extensively studied: see the landmark study of Untersteiner 1949, as well as Corradi 2007 and van Berkel 2013. Untersteiner's understanding of *metron* in MT in terms of 'mastery' leads him in some bizarre directions; but it is closer to the pre-Protagorean evidence than most recent readings, and the last part of my reading will echo it. Van Berkel presents very helpful reflections on pre-Protagorean uses of *metron*, and rightly concludes that MT is doing something new. However her positive reading is a bit unclear to me. The claim that MT "created the very concept of a standard" is false without many further specifications (59), and I do not understand why she thinks *metron* in MT is 'metaphorical'. In general, the startling quality of Protagoras' twin semantic innovations -- (1) using *metron* neither for the instrument nor for the object of knowledge, but for the knower; and (2) on that basis speaking of *human beings* as such as *metra* -- seems to me not to have been clearly seen.

\(^{60}\) See Heinimann 1975.
metron very early on comes to cover a range of related concepts which can be heard, I think, as either active or passive or as somehow a fusion of both, fluctuating in salience according to context: limitation, completion, and fulfilment, as in the haunting Homeric phrase, 'attain the measure of youth'. This fused sense of limit or completion quickly takes on a powerful normative dimension as right or due measure. Theognis is preoccupied with the idea of doing things in right measure as a mark of ethical distinction (614) -- above all, with measure as a norm of drinking (475, 479, 498, 501). Meanwhile Heraclitus says that the cosmos is an everliving fire, being lit and quenched in measures (DKB30); and that if the Sun oversteps his measures, the Furies will find him out (B94). Several of the Seven Sages are credited with the dictum that Measure is the best of all things, a doctrine revived in Plato's Philebus (66b). Such normative and cosmological Measures are vitally important for us to know, so measure becomes centrally an object of knowledge, associated with wisdom (Pindar, Ol. 13.48, Pyth. 2.34, Nem. 11.47, Is. 6.71, Solon). In On Ancient Medicine, the author uses metron twice in a single sentence, first to pick out the due measure instantiated in a healthy body, at which the doctor aims, and second to designate the bodily sensation by which he can decide on or evaluate his treatment. The first is a norm to be aimed at, the second a source of information to be observed. If the change in sense in such a short space were felt at all it would be jarring; so it must have passed unnoticed with the author. That tells us that what was salient for him was what these two ways of being a measure have in common: the more general idea of metron as a knowable and action-guiding standard or point of reference.

In sum, Protagoras might have expected his readers (or listeners) to hear in metron a unit of measure; an instrument of measure; a quantum; a completion or fulfilment; a bound or limitation; a right amount; or any kind of action-guiding point of reference. But this complex semantic story has something of a surprise ending. For if we now ask which of these options makes good sense

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61 Iliad 11.225, Odyssey 4.668, 11.317, 18.217, etc.  
62 Pythagoras, Carmen Aureum 38, Cleobulus fr. 1  
63 Cf. Theognis 694; and perhaps 876 (with the ambiguous phrase 'measure of wisdom' metron sophiês, which also appears in Solon (13.52)).  
64 "For one must aim at a measure [metron]; but you will find no measure [metron] -- nor number nor weight besides -- by referring to which you will know with precision [to akribès], except the feeling of the body. Hence it is difficult to acquire knowledge so precise [akribös] that one errs only slightly in one direction or the other." (VM 9.3, Schiefsky trans.)
of MT, the answer is that *none* of them does. In fact MT is an exercise in the (repeated) subversion of expectations. The opening phrase, *of all things <the> measure is...* places us in the cosmological-ethical register, summoning up the 'Heraclitean' measure which enforces cosmic norms (DKB3, 94). So we would expect the *estin* to be completed by some natural candidate for cosmic-Measure status, such as 'time', 'Nous', 'limit', 'the kairos', 'god'. Or, even better, rather than being identified with any other thing, Measure might have its normativity endorsed by some evaluative predicate: 'Of all things Measure is *best*. Instead we get *anthrôpos*, which in this context can only be startling and bathetic. Moreover, so far as I can tell from our surviving texts, *metron* is here being predicated of a human being for the very first time. Prior to MT, the human being is always at least implicitly the knower and *user* of measure -- not herself a measure in any sense, neither actively as an instrument nor passively as a quantum measured.

And who *is* this 'human being' anyway? Scholars have long debated whether the *anthrôpos* here (singular, no article) is to be understood as individual or collective. The former is required for Plato's use of MT in the *Theaetetus*, of course, and has tended to dominate ever since (despite the extension of measure-hood to cities in Protagoras' 'Defence'). But without a *hekastos* ('each') or *pas* or *pantes* ('all' or 'every'), that is unlikely to be what anyone would first hear. *Anthrôpos* standing alone, in this gnomic register, evokes not each and every one of us but *the human being*

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65 Scholars often pause over the term for 'things' here, *chrêmata*, but it does not have much to add. *Chrêma* is often a concrete physical stuff, and *chraomai* means to deal with; so many scholars have seen here an orientation to the objects we interact with in some concrete way (e.g. Bonazzi 2010, 29-30), and with it perhaps support for 'Protagoras the radical empiricist'. But this limitation could be at most a momentary suggestion, since in the second half of MT we find that our measure-hood extends to things which do not exist. So *chrêmata* is more likely chosen here as maximally neutral, weaker and thus broader even than *onta* (beings). It is also worth noting that humans are routinely said to *chraomai* objects which are not exactly concrete, directly accessible stuffs, notably the gods (e.g. Eur. *Herac.* 348, Hrdt 1.172, Xen. *Symp.* 8.3). Whether there is a particular connection to Anaxagoras' use of *panta chrêmata* (DK B1, 4, 12) is unclear.

66 The only candidate for a precedent would be a fascinating passage of the Certamen, or *Battle of Homer and Hesiod* (line 158): but the text and sense are unclear, and we have no reason to suppose that the material goes back any earlier than Alcidamas.

67 The absence of any such universalizing term also makes it very unlikely that any inerrancy claim is in view, or any other claim about every single human being. Aphorisms, like generics, are naturally blurry around the edges, and not to be taken as vehicles for exceptionless universal theoretical claims. If in *La Regle de Jeu* Jean Renoir says that *tout le monde a ses raisons*, he is not refuted by Velleman 1992 or Stocker 1979, or debarred, on pain of inconsistency, from ever depicting human agency as irrational.
as such: it is what we now call a generic. And two features of generics are significant here. First, they are not to be confused with exceptionless universal generalizations about individuals. (The mark of this is that exceptions to them are not counterexamples: 'a cat' has four legs, but not every cat does.) Second, they can be used not only to make claims which are typical of (or somehow salient for) individual members of the kind named, but for ones which make sense only when applied to the kind itself (tigers are rare, foxes are widely dispersed). The gnomic form and the suggestion of a normative standard in MT naturally evoke the latter. So this is a claim about the human race: us. But as we will see, it is the kind of claim about the kind which must rest on claims about its members.

So at the half-way mark we can tell that Protagoras is doing something new with the concept metron, and claiming something surprising about human beings. We cannot yet tell what. For that, we need to hear the second half:

... of the things that are, that they are; of the things that are, that they are not.

This brings a certain clarity to the startling claim that human beings are the measure of all things; for it resituates MT from the cosmological register to an epistemic one. We are the measure of all things not in the way that Time or Limit might be, but in the humbler, original active sense of metron as what epistemically determines a quantity, with the whole range of possible determinations here summoned up by the antithesis of are/are not. The second half of MT thus performs a kind of metonymy: the semantic innovation of MT as a whole is to transfer the familiar sense of metron as cognitive instrument to a different kind of measurer, namely the judging human subject. This in turn conjures up a conception of cognition quite generally as a kind of 'measuring': Aristotle's 'nothing extraordinary' reading of MT at Metaph. I.1 (1053a35-b3) confirms that on the most natural non-relativist reading, this is its principal point.69

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68 Cf. also the use of anthrōpos in scientific contexts, e.g. On Ancient Medicine 20.
69 At this point it is easy to see why later ancient authors such as Sextus take MT to be Protagoras' account of the kritērion. In Hellenistic epistemology, the 'criterion' is an infallible instrument of judgement -- conceived rather awkwardly as at once a yardstick of knowledge and the reliable source of it. So for the Stoics the kataleptic impression is the criterion; for the Epicureans, all perceptions are; for the Pyrrhonian sceptics, no such thing exists. And the term
But the second half of MT also poses its own puzzles. The antithetical *are/are not* clauses are ambiguous in at least two ways: the two instances of *hôs* might be equivalent either to 'that' or to 'how'; and the verb forms 'are' [*estin*] might be read as indicating either existence or the possession of a predicate. The decisions to be made here are related: 'that' goes naturally with existence claims, 'how' with predications. The question of how to evaluate these interpretive options is bound up with difficult questions about the early Greek usage of *einai*, which has been the subject of enormous scholarly discussion in recent decades. For present purposes, the important thing is that these two senses or uses of *einai* should not be assumed to be cleanly separated, and that it is natural to hear *einai*, even without an explicit completion, as embracing both. In fact, Protagoras' phrasing seems designed to evoke a progression from one possible understanding to the other. On first hearing, given that no predicate completions are supplied, it naturally evokes the distinction between things which exist and those which do not, just as DKB4 does with regard to the gods. And this gives MT a perfectly intelligible sense -- not least as a dig at Parmenides, who denied that we could intelligibly speak or think about what is not.

At the same time it sounds odd to speak of measuring what does not exist, and odder still to speak of plural non-existents. In any case to be is naturally conceived as involving being *in some way or other*; and what is in some way or other must also (in some sense) be. So the obvious solution is to hear the claim as also one about our capacity to measure *the ways in which* the things which exist both are and are not, i.e. what predicates are true and false of existing things. And so heard MT again gives a perfectly intelligible sense: humans are the measures of all things

and concept go back to the *Theaetetus* itself (178b6, c1); here in the context of a recap of the Protagorean view, Socrates says that we have a criterion (literally, 'place of judgement') within ourselves. At the same time, equating Protagoras' *metron* with the Hellenistic *kritêrion* obscures some important differences. Unlike, for instance, the Stoic claim that the kataleptic impression is the criterion, MT so read gives us no useful guidance: if the question is, 'By sticking to what as a cognitive guide may I attain secure knowledge?', it is hard to see how 'A human being' can be a helpful answer. Moreover, now that it is disencumbered it of the appears-is principle, nothing in MT itself suggests that individual human beings are inerrant, as any later *kritêrion* must be.

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71 Kahn, Brown
72 This has long been noted: cf. e.g. Farrar 1988 (47ff.) and Striker (15). I discuss Protagoras as an anti-Parmenidean thinker in Chapter VI.
73 Cf. Brown
in that, like measuring instruments, we register epistemically not only which ones exist and which do not, but also which properties the existent ones do and do not have.

At this point the reader or listener is in a position to assemble a Kahnian 'first reading' of MT -- one which second and third rethinkings may modulate or undermine, but not cancel out altogether. And that first reading looks very much like the 'radical' (in the 19th-century sense) reading proposed by Theodor Gomperz: a enlightened and humanistic credo, affirming our powers and achievements as collectively successful, all-conquering epistemic agents. 74 It is hard to doubt that Protagoras would have particularly in mind the apparently all-encompassing powers of the diverse crafts and sciences; and so heard, MT fits neatly into a corpus of famous fifth-century texts, including the famous chorus of the Antigonê, which celebrate the march of the technai. For the thinkers of this era, the canonical trio of spatial measurement, weighing, and counting offer an exciting, almost superhuman promise as a model for authoritative rational inquiry. Measurement reaches past deceptive appearances to realities; it resolves disputes, produces consensus, and ensures practical success. All told, measurement stands for an early form, I would suggest, of the ideal of rational objectivity, and with it the hope that the whole of the world is ours for the knowing. 75 For what is most fascinating about it is the tantalizing prospect represented in MT by the 'all': the hope that this model of authoritative rational inquiry could be reproduced in areas where disputes seem irresolvable. Thus in Aristophanes' Frogs, when Aeschylus and Euripides dispute for the Chair of Poetry in the underworld, the contest is to be decided scientifically -- by literally weighing selected lines against each other. (Contrast the more old-fashioned though later Certamen, in which the contest of Hesiod and Homer can only be decided by either popular acclaim or the verdict of a king.) Aristophanes is satirizing the sophistic hope (inherited by Plato, cf. Euthyphro 7b-c) that we can hope to reproduce the objective authority of counting or weighing in every sphere. 76

74 Cf. Gomperz (1901), 451-7, though I do not agree wholly with the empiricist direction in which his reading develops.
75 Cf. the critique of the 'clever' thinkers, the kompsoi, at Statesman 285, who think themselves wise for affirming that all things can be measured. It seems to me Protagoras must be at least part of the target here.
76 I discuss the importance of this vision to Plato in 'Statesman 283b-7b: Plato on Normative Measure' (ms).
But this first reading is only the beginning. Contained inside the credo is a sort of negative complement, implicit in the displacement of other candidates by *anthrôpos* and in the slapdown to Parmenides.\(^{77}\) As has often been noted, according to the dominant Greek epistemological tradition (to generalize sweepingly) knowledge belongs to the gods alone; they dispense it only sparingly to miserable, limited mortals. This tradition is enthusiastically appropriated by most of the early Greek philosophers even as they make bold claims for the special status of their own work. (Not itself a new or specifically philosophical strategy: Hesiod claims the authority of the Muses while warning that they speak falsely to others). Thus Parmenides claims to have got his Truth from a goddess; Empedocles, apparently, claims to *be* a god; and Heraclitus clearly thinks of his *logos* as having more than human origin and standing. Even Socrates in the *Apology* insists that only the god is wise (23a-b); and if he himself lays claim to wisdom, that wisdom is flagged as both merely human and due at least in part to privileged communications from the divine (20d-1a).\(^{78}\) If MT can proclaim that, on the contrary, *we* are the cognitive measure of all things, it can only be because the gods are unavailable for that role; and that can only be because we have no cognitive access to them (perhaps, though not necessarily, because they do not exist). If as I speculated earlier, Protagoras' suspension of judgement regarding the gods (B4) followed directly as the exordium of the theological part of the *Antilogiai*, it would serve to make this meaning powerfully explicit. Together, MT and B4 carry the powerful traditional norm of epistemic humility or pessimism to an extreme, then overturn it. We have *no* trustworthy access at all to divine wisdom: so we may as well forget about it, and turn to our own human capacities, which are fortunately sufficient.

So far, MT has two things to say, one positive and one negative. The two are complementary; but even taken together, they are not a stable resting point for interpretation. To see why not, think again about *anthrôpos* in the first half. I have so far been taking this as a generic understood collectively -- as 'humanity' or the 'human race', as we now say. It is this collectivity which has

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\(^{77}\) Not a new observation: Corradi 2007 speaks of "la substitution forte de thea par *anthropos*, de la déesse par l'homme", in relation to the Homeric tradition (and Parmenides) (201).

\(^{78}\) So it is a nice bit of table-turning snark in the *Apology* when Socrates describes the sophists who purport to teach virtue as claimants to a 'superhuman wisdom' (*Apology* 20d-e). That is precisely what Protagoras -- here as so often the unacknowledged precursor of Socrates himself -- meant to disavow.
acquired the arts and which can and must make do without divine wisdom. But nothing about Protagoras' phrasing *excludes* the application of MT to the individual human cognizing subject; and in fact its first 'radical credo' message prompts us to think about that as well. After all, if the human race can be said to know medicine or arithmetic it is because individual human beings instantiate that knowledge. So it is natural to hear, as well, a claim about individuals -- not the inerrancy one we get from Protagoras the relativist, but the more commonplace point implicit in the Aristotelian 'nothing extraordinary' reading: it is individual human beings who know and perceive things, and when they do so they can be thought of as measures of reality. So far so good. Unease sets in, though, when we rehear the *are/are not* antithesis in this light, as a report on individual cognition. For nothing is more striking than that individual human cognizers *disagree*: of any given predicate of any given object, one of us says that it is so, another that it is not. This is the whole basis of the *diaphônia* arguments which I suggested in section II were the substance of the book to follow. Even in the case of the *technai*, experts disagree. But if when we take the measure of reality individually we do not get the same results, how can we collectively be a measure at all? I would suggest, then, that the individual-level reading adopted by Plato in the *Theaetetus* is not totally alien to MT as Protagoras himself intended it. It is just not the first or even the second thing that it says, and when it arrives it is as a *problem* -- the problem of *diaphônia*, to which the relativist inerrancy of the *Theaetetus* offers Plato's ultimately unworkable solution. MT is thus self-problematizing: the third thing it says undermines the first. If Protagoras himself did not intend Plato's solution, where *does* MT go from here?

One natural direction for reflection to take at this point would be a *sceptical* one. Protagoras might intend to suggest, like the later Pyrrhonists, that when two judging subjects -- putative 'measures' -- conflict, we cannot rationally prefer one to the other, and so should suspend judgement. That is after all his own stance in B4, and the aporetic *antilogiai* to follow could only confirm its wisdom. It is also remarkable how many ideas prominent in later scepticism are unfolded in the *Theaetetus' discussion of MT-SD.*79 I suggest, then, that this is a fourth thing for

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79 Socrates' discussion anticipates several of the later sceptical modes of Aenesidemus (154a-160d), even in much the same order: he argues that different things appear differently to different animal species (the First Mode, 154a, cf. *PH* I.40-78) and to different individual humans (the Second Mode, 154a-b, cf. *PH* I.79-90), and that all perceptions are shaped by 'circumstances' such as waking or sleeping, being ill or healthy (the Fourth Mode, 157e-60b, though here the
us to hear in MT, one perhaps coming into focus only as Protagoras' *Truth* proceeds: as an invitation to ponder the implications of the pervasiveness of conflicting judgements, and with them the ineliminable subjective factor in our cognition. With it, MT ends by undoing the optimism of its own first reading.

Or does it end there? I would suggest that there is a fifth and final note to be heared as well -- one more, final stop on the MT streetcar. For this proto-sceptical note also suggests a certain way of thinking about *wisdom*. If human epistemic conflict is pervasive and irresolvable, it is because our thinking is necessarily contaminated by the subjective. And that means that there are some things human wisdom *cannot* be. It cannot be transcendent and perfect, of a kind we might attribute to a divine mind. If the idea of wisdom is to pick out anything genuinely worth aspiring to, it must build on what we can have. Now one thing wisdom *can* still be is an understanding of just these limitations. (A familiar enough idea, put to distinctive work by Socrates.) A bit more ambitiously, it can be a programme designed for managing just this ineliminable diversity of subjective perspectives. This makes room for us to see the force of a striking oddity of MT I noted but said little about: the way its use of *metron* for the human *knower* represents a kind of metonymy from the use of it for the *instrument* of knowledge. We might also speak of a regress or even a deliberate category mistake. Without canceling out the force of MT as optimistic credo, this must have imported a jarring note, with a startling, paradoxical instrumentalization of the judging subject. It is as if a creepy tech company today were to have the slogan, 'Because the most important cases are madness and disease'. The conclusion is that all being is really coming into being for, of, or relative to something [*tini, tinos, pros ti*] (160b-c); and that everything is relative is the sceptical Eighth Mode (PH I.135-40). (Admittedly, Plato does not quite attribute these arguments to Protagoras -- or to anybody else in particular.) Finally, the Tenth Mode involves conflicts between equally authoritative laws and customs, reminiscent of the Defense, in which each community is authoritative about what is just and pious for itself. What exactly we should make of this treasure-trove of proto-sceptical material is not obvious, and I cannot here enter into the huge question of the possible connections between Protagoras and later Greek scepticism (cf. Decleva Caizzi 1978, 27-8). But it seems to me likely at once (a) that these sceptical materials go back to Protagoras himself, at least in large part, as part of his armory in the *Antilogiai*; (b) that this part of the *Theaetetus* was a rich resource for later Greek scepticism; and (c) that later sceptics (Academics and Pyrrhonians alike), oblivious or indifferent to his sources, recognised this debt as one owed to Plato alone. Thus for later antiquity, Plato's construction of 'Protagoras the relativist' even erased the resources for 'Protagoras the sceptic' presented by him in the same text.
best software is the human mind' or 'Our app is you'. This conception of expertise is akin, for whatever it is worth, to the account of wisdom we find in the 'Defence' of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. The wise expert, says the revived Protagoras here, is *not* as we would naturally expect the one whose subjective 'appearances' are *themselves* in some way superior, but rather someone who can manipulate the appearances of others for the better. (Protagoras' model of expertise is, as always for Plato himself, medicine; the aspiration is to something like the doctor's ability to change the patient's own perceptions and experiences in a way that the patient himself will agree retroactively are an improvement.) Thus the fifth 'hearing' of MT suggests a more general stance or conception which we might see behind the Defence's account of wisdom or expertise: as a kind of *second-order mastery* in relation to the first-order thinking of other people. That idea loops back to provide a kind of synthesis of my earlier 'readings', the first of which also invoked the achievements of *technē*. We should be optimistic about the epistemic powers and potential of the human race, even in the absence of the divine, and even though human beings will always disagree, because it is possible for a wise few to come to *understand* their very different perspectives, and to manipulate them for the better. Moreover, this second-order stance of the assessor and manager looks like a charter for several of the Protagorean projects we have seen in earlier chapters. Protagoras is no poet; but he knows how to judge what is fine in their work, and how to extract wise principles from it. Protagoras is not a politician, but he can see what is best in various constitutions, and synthesize them for Thurii. He has no particular views himself about the gods (for instance), but his art of *anti-logikê* uses the views of others as raw material, and converts them into arguments. For better or for worse, by the time we reach the end of MT we can see Protagoras as something new, I believe, in the world of Greek thought, namely a conception of wisdom not as privileged access to reality but as a mastery over the thinking of others: the wisdom of the therapist, counsellor, social scientist, and political technocrat.  

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