

# Re-reading Plato's *Protagoras*

## On the Meaning of the Argument in 349e1sq.

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The purpose of this paper is to clarify the main subject of Plato's *Protagoras*.

The primary subject of this dialogue is already foreshadowed in the first half of the dialogue, in Socrates' conversation with Hippocrates and in the preliminary one with Protagoras: what is Protagoras the sophist or what is the learning received from Protagoras?

I argue that in the passages of 349e1 sq. Socrates examines Protagoras' convictions, but does not insist his own doctrines, and thereby try to reveal what Protagoras the Sophist is. Protagoras' convictions which are argued in this dialogue are following theses. [AD]: There are many men who are ignorant, but outstandingly courageous. [AD-1]: Courageous men are confident, and ready to go at that which many men (cowards) would be afraid. [AD-2]: Courage is *καλόν*. Hedonism that holds the identification of good and pleasure is Protagoras' concealed conviction.

I think that Socrates has made a device in order to reveal Protagoras' concealed convictions. On eliminating *καλόν* by which Protagoras (and the 'many') put restriction on pleasant life, he drives the 'many' (and Protagoras) to admit that in deciding whether an action is good or bad it is only the pleasant or unpleasant which need to be taken into account. As the result, 'being overcome by pleasure' that the 'many' experience proves to be ignorance, and the wisdom of Protagoras the sophist proves to be an art (or knowledge) of measurement of pleasure and pain.

After revealing that Protagoras and the 'many' have committed themselves to hedonism, Socrates asks Protagoras to defend his conviction [AD], in the light of their agreement (the pleasant is good/the painful bad, no one goes willingly toward the bad or what he believes to be bad, fear is expectation of evil, etc.). As far as he accepts their agreement, Protagoras couldn't assert his earlier conviction [AD-1]. Socrates revives *καλόν* which he has eliminated in order to show a way of resolving Protagoras' *aporia*.

Socrates' method of elimination and revival of *καλόν* suggests that Protagoras' [AD-2] has not function sufficiently in his convictions, though he admits in word that courage is *καλόν*.

Finally, as an inevitable conclusion of examinations of Protagoras' convictions, Socrates indicates that the wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is courage, which is inconsistent with his conviction [AD]. It put Protagoras to silence.