

THE SOPHISTS

The individual Sophists included here are representatives of an important movement in fifth-century Greece. The Presocratic philosophers were mainly interested in natural philosophy, although many of them, notably Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Democritus, also explored issues in moral and social philosophy. The Sophists were fundamentally moral and social thinkers. The upheavals of the Peloponnesian War (431–404), a nearly thirty-year conflict, in which Athens was finally defeated by Sparta, had called many traditional values into question, and the growth of democracies (especially at Athens) called for a new civic virtue: the ability to speak well and persuasively in the assemblies and law courts. The Sophists explored all these issues. Most of them were itinerant teachers, taking on as pupils only those who could pay the fee (though this seems to have been the only requirement to be admitted as a pupil of a Sophist). They offered instruction in rhetorical skills (on almost any subject) and explored and exploited the new attitudes to traditional virtues. The Sophists examined the issue of whether morality was a matter of nature or convention; they gave rhetorical displays to large (and well-paying) crowds; and, according to Plato, many of them more than once crossed philosophical swords with Socrates, who was disdainful of their claims to many sorts of knowledge. They occupied an ambivalent position in Greek life, and on the evidence of Plato's dialogues, they were thought to be both fascinating and dangerous. Protagoras, the most famous of the early Sophists, was born in Abdera in Thrace, probably in 490 (about twenty years before Socrates), and he died about 420. He was often in Athens and became a part of the circle around Pericles; but he was also well known in the western Greek cities in Sicily and Southern Italy. His contemporary, Gorgias of Leontini (in Sicily), was almost as well known as Protagoras himself. Gorgias, too, was born around 490, and there are reports that he was well over one hundred when he died. There are also reports that he was a student of Empedocles, and he certainly shows an interest in metaphysical questions: One of his works is called *On Not-Being*. The Sophist we know as Antiphon is probably Antiphon of Rhamnous. As a native of Attica, he could put his own teachings into practice in the Assembly and in other gatherings that were limited to Athenian citizens. He was born about 480 and apparently had wide philosophical and scientific interests like others of the Presocratic philosophers. But it is as a Sophist that he is best known, having published a work called *Tetralogies*, which purport to teach how to make whichever side of a lawsuit one happens to be arguing for the strongest. Critias, too, was an Athenian, a cousin to Plato's mother, and an associ-

ate of Socrates. He was probably born around 453. Critias was one of the Thirty Tyrants, steadfast opponents of the democratic movement in Athens, and he died in 403 in the civil war in Athens between the democrats and the oligarchs. He was not technically a Sophist, for he was not a paid teacher but a politician. But to many Athenians, Critias seemed a perfect product of the Sophistic movement, representing both the glamour and the peril embodied in the teachings and activities of the Sophists.

Protagoras

1. A human being is the measure of all things—of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.
(Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.60 = 80B1)
2. Concerning the gods I am unable to know either that they are or that they are not, or what their appearance is like. For many are the things that hinder knowledge: the obscurity of the matter and the shortness of human life.
(Eusebius, *Preparation of the Gospel* 14.3.7 = 80B4)
3. There are two opposing arguments (logoi) concerning everything.
(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.51 = 80B6a; tr. Curd)
4. To make the weaker argument (logos) the stronger.
(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1402a23 = 80B6b; tr. Curd)
5. Education is not implanted in the soul unless one reaches a greater depth.
(Plutarch, *On Practice* 178.25 = 80B11)

Gorgias

6. He concludes as follows that nothing is: if (something) is, either what-is is or what-is-not (is), or both what-is and what-is-not are. But it is the case neither that what-is is, as he will show, nor that what-is-not is, as he will justify, nor that both what-is and what-is-not are, as he will teach this too. Therefore, it is not the case that anything is. And in fact, what-is-not is not. For if what-is-not is, it will be and not be at the same time. For in that it is considered as not being, it will not be, but in that it is not being, on the other hand, it will be. But it is completely absurd that something be and not be at the same time. Therefore, it is not the case that what-is-not is. And differently: if what-is-not is, what-is will not be, since they are opposites, and if being is an attribute of what-is-not, not-being will be an attribute of what-is. But it is certainly not the case that what-is is not, and so neither will what-is-

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68 not be. Further, neither is it the case that what-is is. For if what-is is, it is either eternal or generated or eternal and generated at the same time. But it is neither eternal nor generated nor both, as we will show. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is. For if what-is is eternal (we must begin at this point), it does not have any beginning. For everything that comes to be has some beginning, but what is eternal, being ungenerated, did not have a beginning. But if it does not have a beginning, it is unlimited, and if it is unlimited it is nowhere. For if it is anywhere, that in which it is is different from it, and so what-is will no longer be unlimited, since it is enclosed in something. For what encloses is larger than what is enclosed, but nothing is larger than what is unlimited, and so what is unlimited is not anywhere. Further, it is not enclosed in itself, either. For "that in which" and "that in it" will be the same, and what-is will become two, place and body (for "that in which" is place, and "that in it" is body). But this is absurd, so what-is is not in itself, either. And so, if what-is is eternal, it is unlimited, but if it is unlimited it is nowhere, and if it is nowhere it is not. So if what-is is eternal, it is not at all. Further, what-is cannot be generated either. For if it has come to be it did so either from a thing that is or from a thing that is not. But it has come to be neither from what-is (for if it is a thing that is, it has not come to be, but already is), nor from what-is-not (for what-is-not cannot generate anything, since what generates anything must of necessity share in existence). Therefore, it is not the case that what-is is generated either. In the same ways, it is not both eternal and generated at the same time. For these exclude one another, and if what-is is eternal it has not come to be, and if it has come to be it is not eternal. So if what-is is neither eternal nor generated nor both together, what-is would not be. And differently, if it is, it is either one or many. But it is neither one nor many, as will be shown. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is. For if it is one, it is either a quantity or continuous or a magnitude or a body. But whichever of these it is, it is not one, but being a quantity, it will be divided, and if it is continuous it will be cut. Similarly if conceived as a magnitude it will not be indivisible. And if it chances to be a body, it will be three-dimensional, for it will have length, width and depth. But it is absurd to say that what-is is none of these. Therefore, it is not the case that what-is is one. Further, it is not many. For if it is not one, it is not many either. For the many is a compound of individual ones, and so since (the thesis that what-is is) one is refuted, (the thesis that what-is is) many is refuted along with it. But it is altogether clear from this that neither what-is nor what-is-not is. It is easy to conclude that neither is it the case that both of them are, what-is and what-is-not. For if what-is-not is and what-is is, then what-is-not will be the same as what-is as regards being. And for this reason neither of them is. For it is agreed that what-is-not is

not, and what-is has been shown to be the same as this. So it too will not be. However, if what-is is the same as what-is-not, it is not possible for both to be. For if both (are), then they are not the same, and if (they are) the same, then (it is) not (the case that) both (are). It follows that nothing is. For if neither what-is is nor what-is-not nor both, and nothing aside from these is conceived of, nothing is.

Next in order is to teach that even if something is, it is unknowable and inconceivable by humans. For if things that are thought of, says Gorgias, are not things-that-are, what-is is not thought of. And reasonably so. For just as if things that are thought of have the attribute of being white, being thought of would be an attribute of white things, so if things that are thought of have the attribute of not being things-that-are, not to be thought of will necessarily be an attribute of things-that-are. This is why the claim that if things that are thought of are not things-that-are, what-is is not thought of is sound and preserves the sequence of argument. But things that are thought of (for we must assume this) are not things-that-are, as we will show. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is thought of. Further, it is completely clear that things that are thought of are not things-that-are. For if things that are thought of are things-that-are, all things that are thought of are—indeed, however anyone thinks of them. But this is apparently false. For if someone thinks of a person flying or chariots racing in the sea, it is not the case that forthwith a person is flying or chariots racing in the sea. And so, it is not the case that things that are thought of are things-that-are. In addition, if things that are thought of are things-that-are, things-that-are-not will not be thought of. For opposites have opposite attributes, and what-is-not is opposite to what-is. For this reason, if being thought of is an attribute of what-is, not being thought of will assuredly be an attribute of what-is-not. But this is absurd. For Scylla and Chimaera and many things-that-are-not are thought of. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is thought of. And just as things that are seen are called visible because they are seen and things that are heard are called audible because they are heard, and we do not reject visible things because they are not heard or dismiss audible things because they are not seen (for each ought to be judged by its own sense, not by another), so also things that are thought of will be, even if they may not be seen by vision or heard by hearing, because they are grasped by their own criterion. So if someone thinks that chariots race in the sea, even if he does not see them, he ought to believe that there are chariots racing in the sea. But this is absurd. Therefore it is not the case that what-is is thought of and comprehended. But even if it should be comprehended, it cannot be expressed to another. For if things-that-are are visible and audible and generally perceptible, and in fact are external objects, and of these the visible are

84 comprehended by vision and the audible by hearing, and not vice versa, how can these be communicated to another? For that by which we communicate is *Logos*, but *Logos* is not the objects, the things-that-are. Therefore it is not the case that we communicate things-that-are to our neighbors, but *Logos*, which is different from the objects. So just as the visible could not become audible and vice versa, thus, since what-is is an external object, it could not become our *Logos*. But if it were not *Logos*, it would not have been revealed to another. In fact, *Logos*, he says, is composed from external things, i.e., perceptible things, falling upon us. For from encountering flavor there arises in us the *Logos* which is expressed with reference to this quality, and from the incidence on the senses of color arises the *Logos* with reference to color. But if so, it is not the *Logos* that makes manifest the external (object), but the external (object) that comes to be communicative of the *Logos*. Further, it is not possible to say that *Logos* is an object in the way visible and audible things are, so that objects which are can be communicated by it, which is an object which is. For, he says, even if *Logos* is an object, it anyway differs from all other objects, and visible bodies differ most from *Logos*. For the visible is grasped by one organ, *Logos* by another. Therefore it is not the case that *Logos* makes manifest the great number of objects, just as they do not reveal the nature of one another. (Sexius Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.65–86 = 82B3)

5 7. I will set forth the reasons for which it was likely that Helen's voyage to
6 Troy took place. She did what she did through the will of Fate and the
designs of the gods and decrees of Necessity or because she was taken
8 by force, persuaded by words (*Logoi*), or conquered by Love. . . . Not
even if speech (*Logos*) persuaded and deceived her soul, is it hard to
make a defense against this charge and free her from blame, as follows.
Logos is a powerful master, which by means of the smallest and most
invisible body accomplishes most divine deeds. For it can put an end to
fear, remove grief, instill joy, and increase pity. I will prove how this is
9 so. But it is to the opinion of my audience that I must prove it. I both
consider and define all poetry to be speech (*Logos*) with meter. Those
who hear it are overcome with fearful shuddering, tearful pity, and
mournful yearning, and over the good fortunes and ill-farings of other
people and their affairs the soul experiences a feeling of its own,
10 through the words (*Logoi*). Come now, let me shift from one argument
(*Logos*) to another. Inspired incantations bring on pleasure and bring
away grief through words (*Logoi*). For conversing with the souls' opinion
the power of incantation charms, persuades, and changes it by
witchcraft. Two arts of witchcraft and magic have been discovered—
errors of the soul and deceptions of opinion. All who have persuaded
or who persuade anyone of anything do so by fashioning false *Logos*.
11 For if on all subjects everyone had memory of the past, (a conception)

of the present and foreknowledge of the future, *Logos* would not be similarly similar as it is for people who, as things are, cannot easily remember the past, consider the present or divine the future. Thus, on most matters, most people make opinion an adviser to their soul. But opinion is fallible and uncertain, and involves those who make use of it in fallible and uncertain successes. What, then, keeps us from supposing that Helen too, against her will, came under the influence of *Logoi* just as if she had been taken by the force of mighty men? For it was possible to see how persuasion prevails, which lacks the appearance of necessity but has the same power. For *Logos*, which persuaded, compelled the soul, which it persuaded, both to believe what was said and to approve what was done. Therefore, the one who persuaded, since he is compelled, is unjust, and the one who was persuaded, since she was compelled by *Logos*, is wrongly blamed. As to the fact that persuasion added to *Logos* makes whatever impression it likes on the soul, one should attend first to the accounts (*Logoi*) of the astronomers, who replace one opinion with another and so make things incredible and unclear seem apparent to the eyes of opinion; second, to compulsory competitions which use speeches (*Logoi*), in which a single *Logos* written with art but not spoken with truth delights and persuades a large crowd; and third, to contests of philosophers' accounts (*Logoi*), in which is revealed how easily the swiftness of thought makes our confidence in our opinion change. The power of *Logos* has the same relation (*Logos*) to the order of the soul as the order of drugs has to the nature of bodies. For as different drugs expel different humors from the body and some put an end to sickness and others to life, so some *Logoi* cause grief, others joy, some fear, others render their hearers bold, and still others drug and bewitch the soul through an evil persuasion. It has been stated that if she was persuaded by *Logos* she did not do wrong but was unfortunate. . . . By my account (*Logos*) I have removed ill fame from a woman. I have stayed faithful to the rule I stipulated at the beginning of my *Logos*. I have attempted to put an end to the injustice of blame and ignorance of opinion. I wanted to write the *Logos* as a praise of Helen and an entertainment for myself. (*Encomium of Helen* = 82B11)

8. Gorgias said that one should destroy the seriousness of one's opponent with laughter and his laughter with seriousness.

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1419b3 = 82B12; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

9. [Gorgias said that tragedy creates a deception in which] the deceiver is more just than the nondeceiver and the deceived is wiser than the undecieved.

(Plutarch, *On the Fame of the Athenians* 5.348c = 82B23; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

10. Those who do not care for philosophy, but engage in ordinary studies are like the suitors, who wanted Penelope but slept with her handmaids.

(*Gnomologium Vaticanum* 743 n.166 = 82B29;
tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

Antiphon

11. Understanding these things you will know that there is for [the mind] not one of the things the person seeing farthest sees with his vision, nor of the things the person knowing most profoundly knows.

(Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates' The Doctor's Workshop* 18B656 = 87B1; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

12. In all human beings the mind leads the body into health or disease or anything else.

(Galen, *Commentary on Hippocrates' The Doctor's Workshop* 18B656 = 87B2; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

13. Time is a thought or a measure, not a reality.

(Aetius, 1.22.6 = 87B9; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

14. Because of this, god does not need anything nor does he receive anything from anyone, but he is boundless and lacks nothing.

(Suda v. *adēētos* = 87B10; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

15. If someone were to bury a bed and the rotting wood came to life, it would become not a bed, but a tree.

(Harpocration, *Lexicon v. embios* = 87B15;
tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

16. . . . Justice is a matter of not transgressing what the laws prescribe in whatever city you are a citizen of. A person would make most advantage of justice for himself if he treated the laws as important in the presence of witnesses, and treated the decrees of nature as important when alone and with no witnesses present. For the decrees of laws are extra additions, those of nature are necessary; those of the laws are the products of agreement, not of natural growth, whereas those of nature are the products of natural growth, not of agreement. If those who made the agreement do not notice a person transgressing the prescriptions of laws, he is free from both disgrace and penalty, but not so if they do notice him. But if, contrary to possibility, anyone violates any of the things which are innate by nature, the evil is no less if no one notices him and no greater if all observe. For he does not suffer harm as a result of opinion, but as a result of truth.

This is the entire purpose of considering these matters—that most of the things that are just according to law are established in a way

which is hostile to nature. For laws have been established for the eyes, as to what they must see and what they must not, and for the ears, as to what they must hear and what they must not, and for the tongue, as to what it must say and what it must not, and for the hands, as to what they must do and what they must not, and for the feet, as to where they must go and where they must not, and for the mind, as to what it must desire and what it must not. Now the things from which the laws deter humans are no more in accord with or suited to nature than the things which they promote.

Living and dying are matters of nature, and living results for them from what is advantageous, dying from what is not advantageous. But the advantages which are established by the laws are bonds on nature, and those established by nature are free.

And so, things that cause distress, at least when thought of correctly, do not help nature more than things that give joy. Therefore, it will not be painful things rather than pleasant things which are advantageous. For things that are truly advantageous must not cause harm but benefit. Now the things that are advantageous by nature are among these. . . .

<But according to law, those are correct> who defend themselves after suffering and are not first to do wrong, and those who do good to parents who are bad to them, and who permit others to accuse them on oath but do not themselves accuse on oath. You will find most of these cases hostile to nature. They permit people to suffer more pain when less is possible and to have less pleasure when more is possible, and to receive injury when it is not necessary.

Now if some assistance came from the laws for those who submitted to these conditions and some damage to those who do not submit but resist, obedience to the laws would not be unhelpful. But as things are, it is obvious that the justice that stems from law is insufficient to rescue those who submit. In the first place, it permits the one who suffers to suffer and the wrongdoer to do wrong, and it was not at the time of the wrongdoing able to prevent either the sufferer from suffering or the wrongdoer from doing wrong. And when the case is brought to trial, there is no special advantage for the one who has suffered over the wrongdoer. For he must persuade the jury that he suffered and that he is able to exact the penalty. And it is open to the wrongdoer to deny it. . . . However convincing the accusation is on behalf of the accuser, the defense can be just as convincing. For victory comes through speech.

(Oxyrhynchus Papyrus XI no.1364, ed. Hunt, col. 1 line 6–col. 7 line 15 = 87B44)

17. One's own character inevitably comes to resemble the things one spends most of one's day with.

(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.31.41 = 87B62; tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

Critias

18. More [people] are good by practice than by nature.
(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.29.11 = 88B9, tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)
19. There was a time when human life was without order,
on the level of beasts, and subject to force;
when there was no reward for the good
or punishment for the bad.
And then, I think, humans established
Laws as punishers, so that justice would be the mighty ruler
of all equally and would have violence as its slave,
and anyone who did wrong would be punished.
(Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 9.54 = 88B25, lines 1–8)
20. Whoever does everything to please his friends, gives instant pleasure
that later becomes hostility.
(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.14.2 = 88B27, tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)
21. It is dreadful when one who is not wise believes himself to be so.
(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.14.23 = 88B28, tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)
22. Wise poverty or stupid wealth—which is the better household companion?
(Stobaeus, *Selections* 4.33.10 = 88B29,
tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)
23. Nothing is guaranteed, except that what is born will die, and that in
life ruin cannot be avoided.

(pseudo-Dionysius *Art of Rhetoric* 6.2.277.10 = 88B49,
tr. Curd, with Reeve and Cohen)

PLATO

Plato is traditionally thought to have been born in 428 B.C. and to have died in 347/8. His father, Ariston, was descended—or so legend has it—from Codrus, the last king of Athens; his mother, Perictione, was related to Solon, the first architect of the Athenian constitution. His family was aristocratic and well off. He had two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, both of whom appear in the *Republic*, and a sister, Potone. While Plato was still a boy, his father died and his mother married Pyrilampes, a friend of the great Athenian statesman, Pericles. Thus Plato was no stranger to Athenian political life even from childhood. Because he was eighteen in 409, when the Peloponnesian war with Sparta was still in progress, he almost certainly served in the military in that period. He may have served again around 395, when Athens was involved in the so-called Corinthian war.

Given his social class and family connections it would have been natural for Plato to take a prominent role in Athenian political life. He did not do so, however, and in his *Seventh Letter*, written when he was himself over seventy, he explains why:

As a young man I went through the same experiences as many others. I thought that as soon as I became my own master, I'd devote myself to public affairs. Now, it happened that the course of political events gave me the chance to do just that. The existing constitution came to be reviled by many people, so that a revolution occurred . . . and thirty rulers were set up with supreme powers. Some of these happened to be relatives and friends of mine, and they immediately called on me to join them, on the assumption that theirs was the sort of work appropriate for someone like me. It's no wonder, since I was a young man, that my feeling was that they would govern the city by leading it from an unjust way of life to a just one, and I was intensely interested to see what would happen. But after a short time, I saw that these men made the former constitution seem like a golden age by comparison. Among other things, they sent my aged friend, Socrates, whom I wouldn't hesitate to call the most just man of his time, along with some others to fetch one of their fellow citizens by force, so that he could be executed. Their purpose was to involve Socrates in their activities,

READINGS IN

ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

FROM THALES TO ARISTOTLE

Second Edition

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