

## The Major Fragments of Protagoras

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words and things in the fifth century initiated by sophistic theorizing about *logos* see Manfred Kraus, *Name und Sache, ein Problem im frühgriechischen Denken* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1987). See also G. B. Kerferd's review of Kraus (*CR* 40 [1990]: 59–60).

52. Kurt von Fritz makes an argument similar to mine (concerning the difference between things and qualities among pre- and post-Protagorean philosophers) when he discusses how those differences were reflected in Plato's treatment of Protagoras' human-measure fragment; see his article on Protagoras in *RE* 23 (1957): 914.

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### THE “STRONGER AND WEAKER” *LOGOI* FRAGMENT

The full Greek text of the stronger/weaker *logoi* fragment is found in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: καὶ τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν τοῦτ' ἔστιν (1402a23). Stripped of the introductory “And this is [an example] what one means by ...” the remaining text reads *ton hêttô de logon kreittô poiein*. Two categories of translation and interpretation are identifiable. The first interpretation can be labeled the Aristotelian-pejorative (hereafter “pejorative”) interpretation and the second the Heraclitean-positive (hereafter “positive”) interpretation.

The most perverse version of the fragment appears in Lane Cooper's translation: “making the worse appear the better cause.”<sup>1</sup> So interpreted, there are few better examples of what it means to be an unscrupulous rhetorician. In fact, the phrase has achieved that dubious status of a popular slogan allegedly representing the worst aspirations of the sophistic movement and perhaps of the art of rhetoric itself. Keith V. Erickson described the phrase as a “fundamental indictment of Sophistry” that represents “the most famous criticism of rhetoric”; Alexander Sesonske suggested that the phrase is an appropriate “summary of Plato's complaint against the Sophists”; and W. K. C. Guthrie suggested that Protagoras' promise was understood even in ancient time as “the very essence of sophistical teaching.”<sup>2</sup> If one grants such assessments even partial credibility, then the moral purpose and pedagogical orientation of

sophistic training was encapsulated in Protagoras' so-called "promise." Accordingly, a proper understanding of Protagoras' fragment is indispensable to a thorough understanding of sophistic theory.

### THE PEJORATIVE INTERPRETATION

The pejorative translation is inadequate on three counts. First, the choice of the word "cause" for *logon* falls short of suggesting the rich meaning of *logos*. Second, the insertion of the word "appear" is inappropriate. Cooper's translation requires the addition of a word that is not in the text (*phainetai* or *aisthanomai*), and it suggests a reality/appearance distinction that Protagoras would not have drawn.<sup>3</sup> Cooper, of course, is not the sole representative of the pejorative interpretation. J. H. Freese's "making the worse *appear* the better argument" and W. Rhys Robert's "making the worse argument *seem* the better" are improvements only in the substitution of "argument" for "cause."<sup>4</sup> Sesonke's essay on Protagoras' promise, "To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger," consistently inserted the word "defeat" when discussing the fragment.<sup>5</sup>

The third problem with the pejorative translation is the questionable translation of *kreittô* and *hêttô* as "better" and "worse." While later use in Plato and Aristotle of *kreittô* and *hêttô* implies the moralistic translation of better and worse, it is unlikely that in Protagoras' time such was the meaning. Lexicons document use of both terms back to Homer. *Kreittô* appears in Homer typically in reference to battle, and it meant "stronger," "mightier," or "more powerful." *Hêttô* also appears as early as Homer, with the apparent meaning of "weaker." Other usages of *hêttô* include "giving way," "yielding," "unable to resist or contend with," and "weaker" than another. In addition, from the time of Homer to that of Plato one finds passages which document the use of *kreittô* and *hêttô* as paired terms meaning "stronger" and "weaker." In the *Iliad* Apollo compared the strength of Hector to that of other mortals using *kreittô* and *hêttô* (16.722). In the fifth century book *On Fractures*, the author used the same words to describe "a weaker person grasping a stronger one" (3.15), and Plato's *Timaeus* described the battle of elements with *hêttô* and *kreittô*: "the weaker is fighting against the stronger" (57a). The terms also were used in the fifth-century Hippocratic treatises as quantifiers: *hêttô* as *less* and *kreittô* as *greater*. But the

quantitative sense is not evident when the terms were used together, and usage clearly did not suggest the ethical tone of better and worse.

It would not have been unusual to use terms implying physical strength to describe a *logos*. Terms denoting physical combat, particularly wrestling, were often used in describing an argumentative interaction. Protagoras was said by some to have written a book called "On Wrestling" (DK 80 A1, B8), and when one of the two battling *logoi* in the *Clouds* scored an early point "it" said, "I've got you held round the waist in a grip you can't escape."<sup>6</sup> Given the history of *hêttô* and *kreittô*, especially as they appeared together, the best translation of the terms in Protagoras' fragment is "weaker" and "stronger."

It is no accident that almost every word of Protagoras' brief "promise" has been translated pejoratively, given the fragment's context in Aristotle.<sup>7</sup> The reference to Protagoras followed a section describing the spurious use of argument from probability. Hence E. M. Cope's commentary translates the phrase as "making the worse appear the better argument" and interprets it in light of the context Aristotle created: "that is, giving the superior to the inferior, the less *probable* argument, making it prevail over that which is *really* superior, and more probable."<sup>8</sup> The quotation is followed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* with: "Hence people were right in objecting to the training Protagoras undertook to give them. It was a fraud; the probability it handled was not genuine but spurious, and has a place in no art except Rhetoric and Eristic" (1402a24–28). Aristotle's interpretation is the result of filtering Protagoras' doctrine through his own philosophical system. As I have said, Aristotle's descriptions always contrast the Sophists' doctrines with his own system, and they are made to appear inferior (in modern terms) epistemologically, ontologically, and ethically. The pejorative translation is consistent with how Aristotle himself may have understood the fragment, though there is no reason it must be assumed that his interpretation is either exhaustive or necessarily superior to alternative readings. Aristotle's interpretation is not irrelevant, since it provides valuable insight about how Protagoras' promise later came to be understood. Furthermore, since we have a fairly good understanding of Aristotle's attitude toward Protagoras and other fifth-century Sophists, it is possible to discriminate among Aristotle's understanding and earlier interpretations in order to trace the evolution of the fragment's meaning in the century between Protagoras and Aristotle.<sup>9</sup>

There are two pre-Aristotelian references to the stronger/weaker *logoi*

fragment, though neither reference directly identifies Protagoras as the phrase's originator. In Plato's *Apology* Socrates lists as one of the implicit charges against him that he "makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger" (19b5–6). The Greek is almost identical to that appearing in Aristotle: *ton hêttô logon kreittô poion*, which Benjamin Jowett translated as "makes the worse appear the better cause" and which H. N. Fowler in the Loeb edition translated as "making the weaker argument stronger."<sup>10</sup> The charge in Plato's *Apology* is not one specifically brought against Socrates by his accuser Meletus but a popular slander which Socrates suggests originated with Aristophanes (19c). Socrates does not directly address the charge, so Plato's *Apology* is of interest here only because it confirms the integrity of the fragment *ton hêttô logon kreittô poiein*.<sup>11</sup> The reference to Aristophanes, on the other hand, is both useful and important.

Aristophanes' *Clouds* portrayed Socrates as a leading Sophist whose school taught two "logics" (*logoi*): the "worse" (*hêttôn*) and the "better" (*kreittôn*).<sup>12</sup> Most commentators agree that Aristophanes used Socrates as his central character for primarily dramatic purposes, and that his portrayal was not necessarily historically accurate.<sup>13</sup> Having lived his whole life in Athens, Socrates was well known to Athenian audiences, and on stage presented an unmistakable figure "with his snub nose, bulging eyes, rolling gait and continuous, insatiable questioning."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Socrates was well known for his association with other Sophists and for sharing their interest in a variety of subjects. It should not be surprising that Socrates was presented as a representative Sophist, but it does not necessarily follow that Socrates held a doctrine identified with the phrase *ton hêttô logon kreittô poiein*. At least there is no evidence other than that in Aristophanes suggesting that he did.

Aristophanes' play is noteworthy because it appears to be an account (albeit perverse) of Protagoras' two-*logoi* doctrine and of the stronger/weaker *logoi* "promise."<sup>15</sup> The *Clouds* speaks initially of two *logoi* which are, in turn, described as *hêttôn* and *kreittôn* (line 112). Most commentators have agreed that the reference here is to Protagoras.<sup>16</sup> B. B. Rogers suggested that it might have been considered rude to have a distinguished foreign visiting Sophist portrayed as the butt of an entire comedy, and hence Socrates was made the target instead. It is at least as likely that Socrates was selected because he was well known and easily caricatured.<sup>17</sup>

Once a better understanding of Protagoras' fragment has been provided, I will return to Aristophanes' *Clouds* to try to identify its authenti-

cally Protagorean elements. For the moment it is sufficient to note that the sources traditionally relied upon for interpretations of Protagoras' stronger/weaker fragment were hostile to the Sophists' doctrines, and hence cannot be considered wholly reliable as historians of Protagoras' thinking. The conservative Aristophanes opposed the Sophists' challenge to tradition and was writing a bawdy farce. Hence both his agenda and his medium were possible sources of distortion and exaggeration. Both Plato and Aristotle were seeing Protagoras through their respective philosophical "terministic screens," again with agendas apparently at odds with that of Protagoras.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, it is understandable that the traditional interpretation of Protagoras' promise has been pejorative. However, armed with an awareness of Plato's and Aristotle's biases, and equipped with what appears to be the original Greek of Protagoras' promise, an alternative interpretation is possible.

#### THE POSITIVE INTERPRETATION

The category of translations I call positive renders the fragment "to make the weaker argument stronger."<sup>19</sup> Translating the fragment accordingly makes its interpretation far more comprehensible in terms of fifth-century thinking. Specifically, the stronger/weaker fragment is best understood as companion to the two-*logoi* fragment. Of the two *logoi* in opposition concerning any given experience, one is—at any given time—dominant or stronger, while the other is submissive or weaker. Protagoras claimed to teach the ability to make the weaker *logos* stronger; that is, to challenge the relationship of stronger and weaker between conflicting *logoi*.

A positive reading of the fragment is incompatible with the somewhat sinister reading found in Aristotle. The pejorative interpretation suggests a perverse motivation on Protagoras' part—to want purposely to select arguments he *knew* to be base in order to make them merely *appear* better. Giovanni Reale's translation of the fragment as "make the stronger argument weaker" reflects a belief in such motivation, but his (otherwise faithful) translation reverses the word order to fit his conception of Protagoras. Virtually everything known of Protagoras (including all of Aristotle's other references) suggests that ethically he was a conservative and a traditionalist. In both dialogues where he is a major figure Plato treats him with respect, despite Plato's general opposition to the Sophists.<sup>20</sup> Certainly if Protagoras had not been a person of high moral

character, or if his teachings had advocated an amoral relativism, his opponents would have seized the opportunity to rebuke him publicly.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, Plato has Socrates note that Protagoras enjoyed forty years of uninterrupted success and that his reputation was untarnished (*Meno* 91e). In short, Aristotle's portrayal of Protagoras' stronger/weaker *logoi* doctrine fails to square with Protagoras' known doctrines, the history of the words he used, and what is known of the historical Protagoras.

The most obvious influence on Protagoras' stronger/weaker fragment is Heraclitus. The connection between Protagoras' stronger/weaker fragment and Heraclitus' thinking is clearest when the former is juxtaposed with the Heraclitean notion of flux. According to Philip Wheelwright's reconstruction of Heraclitus' fragments, Heraclitus held that "everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed."<sup>22</sup> The most famous example of *panta rhei* in Heraclitus was his alleged claim that "one cannot step twice into the same river," for "as one steps into the same rivers, new waters are flowing on."<sup>23</sup> For Heraclitus the natural state of affairs was strife or conflict between opposites, which modern commentators have interpreted as an explanation of change: "To him every change is a knock-down battle between ontological opposites, and there is no referee—neither a Platonic higher Form nor an Aristotelian 'underlying substance'—that can be regarded as standing logically outside the process."<sup>24</sup> As Havelock has argued, interpreting Heraclitus' fragments as a doctrine concerning the process of change is somewhat anachronistic, since a term for "change" was not brought into currency until the time of Plato and Aristotle: "Elementary as the conception of change, or, for that matter, of process, in the abstract may seem, it would appear that its formulation presented some difficulty."<sup>25</sup> By Protagoras' time there was an embryonic conception of change as the shifting or swapping of opposites.<sup>26</sup> An exemplary Heraclitean passage indicating, *sans* verbs, his understanding of change is "cold warms up, warm cools off, moist parches, dry dampens."<sup>27</sup>

The idea that change (or interchange) was the result of a battle between opposites became a commonplace in Greek thought, including Plato and Aristotle. Influenced by Heraclitus, a variety of fifth-century medical writers believed that health was the maintenance of the proper balance of opposites. Illness was characterized as the dominance of the wrong opposite: "For example, hunger is a disease, as everything is called a disease which makes a man suffer. What then is the remedy for hunger? That which makes hunger to cease. This is eating; so that by

eating must hunger be cured. Again, drink stays thirst; and again repletion is cured by depletion, depletion by repletion, fatigue by rest. To sum up in a single sentence, *opposites are cures for opposites*."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, another Hippocratic author described the "new" theory in medicine as prescribing the healer to "counteract cold with hot, hot with cold, moist with dry and dry with moist"; since the illness "was caused by one of the opposites, the other opposite ought to be a specific [cure]."<sup>29</sup>

The parallel between the logic of these writers and Protagoras is striking. Though none of the medical writers used quite the same words as Protagoras did, there is an affinity between their theory for cures and the idea of making a weaker opposite stronger. It is true that the medical writers were far from unanimous regarding the theory of opposite cures, just as the Sophists were far from unanimous in their approaches to *logos*.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the texts of the fifth-century medical writers provide ample evidence that a Heraclitean interpretation of the stronger/weaker fragment is plausible.

The evidence adduced so far suggests that what Protagoras had in mind with the stronger/weaker fragment was the strengthening of a preferred (but weaker) *logos* for a less preferable (but temporarily dominant) *logos* of the same "experience." Protagoras' apology in the *Theaetetus* is strong evidence for such an interpretation, and it reinforces the connection between Protagoras and contemporary medical writers:

By a wise man I mean precisely a man who can change any one of us, when what is bad appears and is to him, and make what is good appear and be to him. . . . To a sick man his food appears sour and is so; to the healthy man it is and appears the opposite. . . . What is wanted is a change to the opposite condition, because the other state is better. . . . Whereas the physician produces a change by means of drugs, the Sophist does it by discourse [*logoi*] (*Theaetetus* 166d-167a).

The positive view of Protagoras' claim to make the weaker *logos* stronger has the support of several modern commentators. Kerferd has hypothesized that "it is possible that Protagoras associated with the two-*logoi* principle the prescription attributed to him by Aristotle 'to make the lesser (or "the weaker") argument the stronger.' This may have been what the Sophist was expected to do when altering a man's opinions for the better."<sup>31</sup> Untersteiner also interprets the fragment positively, as is reflected in his rendering of it as "to change the lesser possibility of knowledge into a greater possibility of knowledge."<sup>32</sup> Untersteiner's rendering is better characterized as a modern reformulation

than as a translation. However, noting what is wrong with his reformulation is a useful heuristic: by overstressing an epistemological reading of the fragment, Untersteiner indirectly provided a warning against an overly ontological reading. Both readings are misleading, since for the Greeks “knowing” and “being” were intertwined notions.<sup>33</sup> Modern thinking tends to separate cognition, perception, and experience into different categories and hence risks missing the point that the idea of substituting one *logos* for another was applicable to a broad array of “treatments”—from changing a city’s conception of what is just to a person’s experience of food.

A. T. Cole’s interpretation of Protagoras’ fragment is positive as well. In his view making a weak *logos* stronger meant making one argument prevail over another and hence improving the situation. The link between *logos* as discourse and as account of the world is well documented. Cole supports the applicability of the two senses of *logos* in his interpretation of Protagoras with Protagorean-sounding examples from fifth-century drama: “In Euripides *Suppliants* 486–93 the Theban messenger complains that mankind knows peace as a better *logos* but prefers war instead; in *Phoenissae* 559–60 Jocasta speaks of a patriotic and tyrannical course of action as the two *logoi* which confront Eteocles.”<sup>34</sup> Cole also cites the Sophist Prodicus’ famous speech “The Choice of Heracles” (as reported by Xenophon), which contrasted the two *logoi* of pleasure and virtue: “Heracles’ choice is between two arguments, but also between the two ways of life to which these arguments are linked.”<sup>35</sup> In each instance the two *logoi* in conflict represent arguments as well as external situations (peace vs. war, for example) between which a choice must be made.

The multivocal character of *logos* was diminished in the decades following Protagoras, especially as Plato and Aristotle dramatically increased the quantity and specificity of philosophical terminology. As *logos* in Plato and Aristotle became understood as primarily linguistic, Protagoras’ promise could be reduced from a theory closely linking speech, thought, and human condition to an apparently amoral argumentative boast.

#### THE EVIDENCE OF ARISTOPHANES’ *CLOUDS*

A reexamination of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* provides further evidence for a positive interpretation, and it suggests an explanation for how

Protagoras’ doctrine could be reinterpreted as perverse. The chief dramatic vehicle of *Clouds* is a clash between two personified *logoi*, one representing traditional education and pieties, and one representing the new sophistic teachings. Some versions of Aristophanes’ play have the two competing *logoi* named *Dikaios* and *Adikos*. W. J. M. Starkie translated these terms with their traditional Greek meanings of just and unjust, respectively, while Rogers translated them right and wrong, and Arrowsmith as philosophy and sophistry.<sup>36</sup> However, recent scholars have adopted the position that *Dikaios* and *Adikos* were later emendations of the text and were not the words used by Aristophanes.<sup>37</sup> The surviving scholia are in conflict, but at least three surviving manuscripts have the *logoi* named *kreittôn* and *hêtôn*, as found in Protagoras’ fragment.<sup>38</sup>

Evidence internal to the text of *Clouds* also suggests that the two *logoi* were named *kreittôn* and *hêtôn*. The expression *dikaios logos* never appears in the dialogue, and references to the unjust *logos* are usually preceded by a reference to the two *logoi* as the *kreittôn logos* and the *hêtôn logos* (112ff., 882ff.). The two *logoi* refer to themselves and each other at three different times as *kreittôn* and *hêtôn* (893ff., 990, 1038), and other characters refer to the two *logoi* with the same words (1338, 1444, 1451).

In addition to textual evidence favoring *kreittôn* and *hêtôn* as the names of the two *logoi*, there is also reason to doubt the choice of *dikaios* and *adikos*. The unjust *logos* in Aristophanes was not as abstract as the concept of *dikaiosunê* (justice-as-a-virtue) as used in the Platonic dialogues. Aristophanes used the term in the traditional Homeric sense of paying what is due. Indeed, the *logos* sometimes referred to in the *Clouds* as unjust is consulted on precisely the issue of how to avoid paying one’s debts. Aristophanes, though he was clearly attacking the Sophists, was not necessarily claiming that the Sophists represented a general abstract force of injustice, but rather that they were not really giving Athens what they advertised: knowledge and *aretê*.

Once it is accepted that the original names given by Aristophanes to the two *logoi* were *kreittôn* and *hêtôn*, two facts about Protagoras’ teaching become clear. First, his point of view was obviously important and sufficiently well known to enable Aristophanes to use it as a central dramatic vehicle. Second, the portrayal of the two *logoi* gives some indication of the content of the viewpoint, as long as Aristophanes’ dramatic intent is taken into consideration.

The famous contest between the two *logoi* is both a battle of words and a conflict between two ways of life. The dominant way of life (*kre-*

*ittôn logos*) is based on conservative pieties, the most relevant of which are respect for traditional music and poetry (964ff.), acceptance of mythology (902ff.), and respect for elders (963, 981ff., 993). The *hêttôn logos* seeks to defeat the *kreittôn logos* and thereby replace it. Innovation challenges musical tradition (969ff.), poetry is challenged by rational argumentation (passim, but especially 317ff., 942ff., 1003, 1058ff., 1109), mythology is challenged by agnosticism and cynicism (1048ff., 1080ff., 1470ff., 1506–9), and moral nihilism in general challenges traditional values (1020ff., 1039ff., 1061). If students follow the teaching of the *hêttôn logos*, they will become Sophists (1111, 1308–9), and the primary skill taught is that of persuasive speaking (239, 260ff., 1077). Through the power of persuasive speaking and correct analysis (*orthôs diairôn*, 742) the old way of life will be overthrown.

There are a number of textual clues indicating that Protagoras and his doctrines were targets of Aristophanes' bombast. Agnosticism is described in terms borrowed from Protagoras' famed "concerning the gods" aphorism (247, 367, 903). A number of phrases refer to two *logoi*, usually in opposition (112, 244, 882, 886, 938, 1336). There is a passage that makes fun of the ambiguity of *metron*—a key word in Protagoras' human-measure fragment (638ff.). Another passage pokes fun at Protagoras' apparently original analysis of gender-based word endings (659–93; cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1407b). There also are two passages that document the link between Heraclitus and Protagoras; one refers to presenting "whatever is foul to be fair, and whatever is fair foul,"<sup>39</sup> and another in which the discussion centers on whether the same person or day can be both new and old (1178–84). And, as was noted earlier, there are many references to Protagoras' *kreittôn logos* and *hêttôn logos*.

The method of the *kreittôn logos* and *hêttôn logos* represented by Aristophanes appears authentically Protagorean. Through persuasive speaking a dominant *logos* is supplanted by its opposing *logos*, which is the equivalent of swapping one way of life, experience, or state of being for another. The Protagorean promise to make *ton hêttô logon kreittô* is, however, dangerously vague. Although Plato's examples portray Protagoras as interested in making changes that were considered desirable by all, and despite the fact that in general the Greeks recognized one of each opposing pair as more desirable, Aristophanes' treatment links the weaker *logos* with unjust acts and hence gives a moral flavor to the terms *hêttô* and *kreittô*. The needs of most non-book-oriented audiences probably led Protagoras to craft his sayings using terms that were common and easily remembered, hence the homophonic *kreittôn* and *hêttôn*. But

the very richness of possible meanings (Kahn's "linguistic density") of such terms also makes them susceptible to perverse reinterpretation. Hence one *logos* could be rendered as morally inferior (worse) as well as in relative existential submission to a *kreittôn logos*, as in Aristophanes. Or, a *logos* could be represented as less true or probable as well as less persuasive compared to a *kreittôn logos*, as in Aristotle. Aristophanes was able to be true to Protagoras' method while standing Protagoras' moral content on its head.

To summarize, the Aristotelian pejorative interpretation and translation is flawed, making sense only in conceptual frameworks such as Aristophanes' and Aristotle's, which prejudged Protagoras' agenda as morally bankrupt. Read in light of the two-*logoi* fragment and with careful attention to mid-fifth-century usage of *kreittô* and *hêttô*, the stronger/weaker *logoi* fragment is better translated according to the Heraclitean positive interpretation. Such a rendering understands "making the weaker account [*logos*] stronger" as advocating the strengthening of a preferred (but weaker) *logos* to challenge a less preferable (but temporarily dominant) *logos* of the same experience.

#### PROTAGORAS' INFLUENCE ON PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

I want now to repeat and extend my earlier claim that Protagoras was a transitional figure between "compositional" and "attributional" patterns and logics of explanation. Plato's and Aristotle's explanation of objects' changing attributes was an obvious conceptual advance beyond Heraclitus' poetic descriptions of the shifting or swapping of opposites. In fact, the explanations found in Plato and Aristotle suggest a Protagorean influence.

During the fourth century *logos* took on a more exclusively linguistic connotation. Hence, Plato and Aristotle used different terms to describe an external situation or an object's attributes that, during the fifth century, might have been covered by the word *logos*. Their descriptions of how situations or objects change resonate with Protagoras' notion of stronger and weaker *logoi*. In the *Timaeus* (57a) Plato states that "in the transition" (alteration) of fire, water, and earth, "the weaker [*hêttôn*] is fighting against the stronger [*kreittôn*]." Aristotle describes the four basic qualities (hot/cold, dry/moist) as opposites in conflict. When fire becomes air and air becomes water, it is because the dry has been overcome by or prevailed over (*kratêthen*) the moist, and the hot by the

cold.<sup>40</sup> Aristotle describes that relative status of opposing qualities as prevailing (*kratein*) versus corrupted, destroyed, or ruined (*phthora*). Like Protagoras' *kreittôn* and *hêttôn*, *kratein* and *phthora* are metaphorical extensions of Homeric battle references, and the two sets of terms appear to function in parallel fashion to describe competing states of being.

A major part of Aristotle's solution to the problem of explaining change and "becoming" were his concepts of potential (*dynamis*) and actual (*energeia*).<sup>41</sup> Contrary qualities and attributes for both animate and inanimate objects were described as relating as potential versus actual. For example, both heavy and light are potentialities for an object, but only one is actual at any given moment (*On the Heavens* 307b31ff.), and knowing and not-knowing are described as actually knowing versus potentially knowing (*Physics* 255a35–b5). Aristotle used his actual/potential pair to describe a wide variety of different states of being (see *Metaphysics* 1071a), but when the pair was employed to explain the logical relationship between actual qualities and their potential opposites (called "privations"), there was clearly an indebtedness to Protagoras' notion of dominant and submissive *logoi*. The parallel is further bolstered by the fact that in Aristotle's view, as in Protagoras', there typically was little question about which of an opposing pair of qualities was to be preferred.<sup>42</sup>

It is not possible to prove that Protagoras was transitional in that his stronger/weaker *logoi* fragment directly contributed to the development of Plato's and Aristotle's thinking concerning contrary qualities and attributes. However, the evidence is adequate to establish that Protagoras' doctrine extended Heraclitean explanation in such a way that there remained only a small step between Protagoras' *logoi* and the Platonic/Aristotelian "qualities."

## NOTES

1. Lane Cooper, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1932), 177. On the quality of Cooper's translation see Thomas M. Conley, "The Greekless Reader and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *QJS* 65 (1979): 74–79.
2. Keith V. Erickson, *Plato: True and Sophistic Rhetoric* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), 10–11; Alexander Sesonske, "To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger," *JHP* 6 (1968): 218; Guthrie, *HGP III*, 377.
3. Gregory Vlastos, *Plato's "Protagoras"* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), xiii.
4. J. H. Freese, *Aristotle, "Art" of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1926), 335; Roberts' translation is in Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1984), 2:2235.

5. Sesonske, "To Make," passim. Dupréel's paraphrase is: "Protagoras recommandait son art comme le moyen de faire en sorte que 'le discours le plus faible devint le plus fort'" (*Sophistes*, 39).

6. Line 1047, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982), 111. On Protagoras' book "On Wrestling" see Ernst Heitsch, "Ein Buchtitel des Protagoras," *Hermes* 97 (1969): 292–96 (= Classen, *Sophistik*, 298–305).

7. Since the translator's goal is to reflect the context Aristotle provided for Protagoras' "promise," it is not surprising that the resulting translation is pejorative. Few translators add the sort of qualification found in Freese, *Aristotle*, 334n: "This utterance of Protagoras gave particular offence as apparently implying that the weaker cause was really identical with the worse, so that to support it was to support injustice. But, considering the high moral character ascribed to Protagoras, it seems more probable to take the formula as a statement of the aim of all ancient orators—how to overcome stronger arguments by arguments weaker in themselves."

8. E. M. Cope, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1877), 2:321. For Cope's view of the Sophists see his articles in *Journal of Classical and Sacred Philology* 1 (1854): 145–88; 2 (1855): 129–69; 3 (1856): 34–80, 252–88.

9. C. J. Classen, "Aristotle's Picture of the Sophists," in Kerferd, *Legacy*.

10. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato* (London: Macmillan 1892), 402; H. N. Fowler, *Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1914), 1:75.

11. Cf. Sesonske, "To Make."

12. B. B. Rogers, *Aristophanes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1924), 1:275.

13. *Ibid.*, 263–64; W. Arrowsmith, *Aristophanes: The Clouds* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1962), 3; K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), xxxii–lvii; Sommerstein, *Clouds*, 3. Cf. W. J. M. Starkie, *The Clouds of Aristophanes* (London: Macmillan, 1911), xlv–l.

14. Guthrie, *HGP III*, 371.

15. Dover, *Clouds*, lvii.

16. Guthrie, *HGP III*, 371; Sommerstein, *Clouds*, 165–66; Starkie, *Clouds*, 37.

17. For Rogers' suggestion and Guthrie's reply, see Guthrie, *HGP III*, 371 n3.

18. Kenneth Burke, "Terministic Screens," *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1966), 44–62.

19. A number of translations, including my own in the first edition of this book, supply what is believed to be an implicit second definite article: "to make the weaker argument the stronger." As Michael Gagarin argues, the weaker *logos* may overcome the stronger (is it does in Aristophanes' *Clouds*), but it is likely that Protagoras had a pedagogical interest in making the weaker *logos* stronger, regardless of whether it ultimately wins. See his *Antiphon the Athenian* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 2002), 24–26. Cf. Michael J. O'Brien's translation in *The Older Sophists*, ed. Rosamond Kent Sprague (Columbia: U. of South Carolina Press, 1972), 21; Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1978), 126. H. Gomperz translates the fragment as "die schwächere Rede zur stärkeren zu machen" (SR, 135).

20. Guthrie, *HGP III*, 37, 39n.

21. Theodor Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers* (London: John Murray, 1901), 1:473.

22. Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 29; see also Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 65.

23. Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1979), 166–69 (fr. 50).

24. Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, 34; see also Kahn, *Heraclitus*, 204–10.

25. Eric A. Havelock, "The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics," *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. Kevin Robb (LaSalle, IL: Hegeler Institute, 1983), 33.

## The Major Fragments of Protagoras

26. *Ibid.*, 33–37.
27. Kahn, *Heraclitus*, 165–66.
28. *Breaths* 1, trans. W. H. S. Jones, *Hippocrates* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1923), 2:229; emphasis added.
29. *Ancient Medicine* 13, *Ibid.*, 1:35.
30. Charles H. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1960), 130–33.
31. G. B. Kerferd, “Protagoras,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 6:506. Though not explicitly discussing the stronger/weaker fragment, Adolfo Levi suggests that Protagoras maintained that “the function of the rhetor is to replace the less perfect by better laws” (“The Ethical and Social Thought of Protagoras,” *Mind* 49 [1940]: 302).
32. Untersteiner, *Sophists*, 53. From the Italian: “ridurre la minore possibilità di conoscenza a una maggiore possibilità di conoscenza.”
33. Guthrie, *HGP III*, 187n.
34. A. T. Cole, “The Relativism of Protagoras,” *YCS* 22 (1972): 34.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Starkie, *Clouds*; Rogers, *Aristophanes*, vol. 1; Arrowsmith, *Clouds*.
37. Dover, *Clouds*, lvii–lviii; Sommerstein, *Clouds*, 95–117.
38. Dover, *Clouds*, lvii–lviii.
39. 1020–21, trans. Sommerstein, *Clouds*, 109.
40. Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption* 331a-b.
41. Guthrie, *HGP VI*, 119–29.
42. G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1966), 51–65; Guthrie, *HGP VI*, 121–22.

## THE “HUMAN-MEASURE” FRAGMENT

The Greek text of the human-measure fragment is: Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν (DK 80 B1). Given the fame of this doctrine and that widely quoted in virtually identical language, there is no reason to doubt that it represents Protagoras’ own words.<sup>1</sup> The world view implicit in the human-measure fragment is substantially the same as that posited by the two fragments already analyzed. In Kahn’s words, the human-measure fragment *resonates* with the ideas expressed in the two *logoi* stronger/weaker fragments, hence viewing the three fragments together amplifies an understanding of each.

Of extant fragments by Older Sophists, perhaps none is as important and as difficult to interpret and understand as Protagoras’ human-measure fragment. Modern commentators have described the statement as being the heart and soul of the sophistic movement, and one poet has gone so far as to say: “*Pantōn anthrōpos metron* ‘Man is the measure of all things.’ Twenty-five hundred years later we sometimes wonder why Protagoras didn’t after all summarize everything in just three words. The statement’s ambiguity has allowed it to be all things to all people and it has a legacy of multiple and contradictory interpretations. In the brevity of the fragment and the lack of corroborative elaboration, Protagoras have led to controversies over its meaning.<sup>3</sup>