(2) THE SOPHISTS

(*a*) *Professionalism*

In the lifetime of Socrates the word came to be used, though not solely, of a particular class, namely professional educators who gave instruction to young men, and public displays of eloquence, for fees. They recognized their descent from the earlier tradition of education by the poets; indeed Protagoras, in the somewhat self-satisfied speech which Plato puts into his mouth (*Prot.* 316d), accuses Orpheus and Musaeus, Homer, Hesiod and Simonides of using their poetry as a disguise, through fear of the odium attached to the name descriptive of their real character, which was that of Sophists like himself.[1] (The anachronistic confusion is in keeping with the light-hearted tone which Plato adopts in the dramatic parts of this dialogue, for needless to say no professional stigma attached to the name in earlier days, and in any case, as we have seen, it was in fact applied to the poets.) In the *Meno* (91e–92a) Plato speaks of 'many others' besides Protagoras who have practised the Sophists' profession, 'some before his time and others still alive'. Of professionals before Protagoras we have no record, and indeed Socrates in the *Protagoras* (349a) addresses him as the first to take payment for his teaching. Plato may have been thinking of a man like the Athenian Mnesiphilus, who is mentioned by Herodotus (8.57) as an adviser of Themistocles and of whom Plutarch writes in a passage of some interest for the development of the sophistic profession (*Them.* 2):

[1] The same was said by Plutarch (*Pericles* 4) of Damon, a Sophist who was a pupil of Prodicus and friend of Socrates (Plato, *Laches* 197d). He was chiefly known as an authority on music but, says Plutarch, though a leading Sophist and in fact the mentor of Pericles in politics, he used his musical reputation to hide his δεινότης. This however did not avail him and he was ostracized. His association with Pericles is confirmed by Plato (*Alc. I* 118c) and Isocrates (*Antid.* 235), and his ostracism (already in Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 27.4) by the discovery of an ostracon bearing his name (DK, 1, 382 n.). In the *Republic* (400b, 424c) Plato makes it clear that his interest in musical modes was bound up with wider questions of their moral and social effects. He goes so far as to say that in Damon's view 'the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling the most fundamental political and social conventions' (trans. Shorey). If more were known of him he might occupy an important place in the history of the sophistic movement, but in our comparative ignorance he can only appear as a footnote to it. Texts are in DK, 1, no. 37, and modern studies include W. D. Anderson, 'The Importance of the Damonian Theory in Plato's Thought' (*TAPA*, 1955; see also his book *Ethos and Education in Greek Music* and its review by Borthwick in *CR*, 1958); ch. 6 of F. Lasserre, *Plut. de la musique*; J. S. Morrison in *CQ*, 1958, 204–6; H. John, 'Das musikerziehende Wirken Pythagoras' und Damons' (*Das Altertum*, 1962).

He was neither an orator nor one of those called philosophers of nature. Rather he made a practice of what was called *sophia* but was in reality political shrewdness (*deinotes*) and practical sagacity, and so perpetuated what one might call a school which had come down in succession from Solon. His successors combined it with the art of forensic eloquence, and, transferring their training from action to speech, were called Sophists.[1]

References to the Sophists as paid for their work are frequent in Plato,[2] and occur also in Xenophon, Isocrates and Aristotle. The character of the Sophists may have changed, but they remained professionals from Protagoras to the time of Isocrates at least. 'Those who sell their wisdom for money to anyone who wants it are called Sophists', says Socrates in Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.6.13), and adds a comment more caustic than anything in Plato. In the *Meno* (91cff.) it is Anytus, a typical well-bred member of the governing class, who violently abuses them, and Socrates who is their somewhat ironic defender. Isocrates in his old age[3] defended the profession, which he equated with his own philosophical ideal, an ideal much closer to Protagoras than to Plato. The best and greatest reward of a Sophist, he says, is to see some of his pupils become wise and respected citizens. Admittedly there are some bad Sophists, but those who make a right use of philosophy ought not to be blamed for the few black sheep. In conformity with this he defends them from the charge of profiteering. None of them, he says, made a great fortune or lived other than modestly, not even Gorgias who earned more than any other and was a bachelor with no family ties.[4] Plato on the other hand emphasizes their wealth, saying for instance that Protagoras earned more from his *sophia* than Phidias and ten other sculptors put together (*Meno* 91d), and Gorgias and Prodicus more than the practitioners of any other art (*Hipp. Maj.* 282d). Aristotle describes a Sophist as one who makes money out of an apparent but unreal

[1] On Mnesiphilus see further Morrison, *Durham U.J.* 1949, 59, and Kerferd, *CR*, 1950, 9f.

[2] E. L. Harrison in *Phoenix*, 1964, 191, n. 44, has collected thirty-one Platonic references to the Sophists' earnings. What is known about the practice of individuals will be noted below in the sections devoted to them (pp. 262ff.).

[3] He was 82 when he wrote the *Antidosis*; see §9. For the Protagorean standpoint of Isocrates see Morrison's comparison of Platonic and Isocratean *philosophia* in *CQ*, 1958, 216–18.

[4] *Antid.* 155f. Dodds (*Gorg.* 7), in his argument that Gorgias was not a Sophist, tries to explain away this passage, as well as Plato, *Hipp. Maj.* 282b5 and Isocr. *Antid.* 268.

wisdom, and, setting aside the jibe, this and other passages are evidence that paid Sophists still existed in his time.[1]

The professionalism of the Sophists is emphasized by the fact that Protagoras had two classes of pupil: young men of good family who wished to enter politics, and those, like a certain Antimoerus of Mende (not, that is, an Athenian), who was studying 'for professional purposes (ἐπὶ τέχνῃ), to become a Sophist himself'.[2] In the *Protagoras* (313c) Socrates describes a Sophist as 'a seller of the goods by which a soul [or mind] is nourished', and suggests reasons why a young man should hesitate before entrusting himself to such a one: like retailers of bodily foods, they praise their wares indiscriminately without a dietitian's knowledge of their wholesomeness; unlike foods, their products enter the mind directly, and cannot be kept in jars until we find out which to consume and how and in what quantities. By the time Plato wrote the *Sophist* (where Socrates takes no part in the main argument) they had simply become (along with other undesirable characteristics) 'paid hunters of rich young men'. Mistrust of the Sophists was not confined to Plato. The outburst of Anytus must be true to life, as it is also when young Hippocrates, son of a 'great and prosperous house', blushes for shame at the thought of becoming one himself (*Prot.* 312a). In the *Gorgias* (520a) Socrates's most violent opponent, Callicles, dismisses them as 'worthless fellows', and in the *Phaedrus* (257d) Phaedrus asserts that the most powerful and respected politicians are afraid to write speeches and leave works of their own to posterity, for fear of being called Sophists. Plato himself, though he disagreed with the Sophists, was much gentler in his handling of the best of them like Protagoras, Gorgias and Prodicus. A disparaging remark about Sophists, in connexion with Prodicus, is put into the mouth of Laches, not Socrates (*Laches* 179d). Xenophon, in a moral epilogue to his treatise on hunting (ch. 13), castigates them as masters of fraud.[3]

[1] *Soph. El.* 165a21; cf. 183b36ff. (where μισθαρνούντων recalls the μισθαρνοῦντες ἰδιῶται of Plato, *Rep.* 493a) and *EN* 1164a30.

[2] *Prot.* 315a. For Sophistic as a τέχνη cf. e.g. τὴν σοφιστικὴν τέχνην 316d, and Protagoras 40 years ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ, *Meno* 91e.

[3] If the *Cynegetica* is by Xenophon, which some have doubted. See Lesky, *Hist. Gr. Lit.* 621f. Others have maintained that the passage is influenced by Plato's *Sophist* (Grant, *Ethics* I, 111) and have pointed out that both were written after the brilliant first generation of Sophists were dead. So, one may presume, were the *Protagoras* and *Meno*, yet it is Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias and Prodicus who are still for Plato the representative Sophists.

The attitude of the Athenian public was ambivalent, reflecting the transitional situation of Athenian social and intellectual life. The Sophists had no difficulty in finding pupils to pay their high fees, or audiences for their public lectures and displays. Yet some among the older and more conservative[1] strongly disapproved of them. This disapproval was linked, as Plato shows, to their professionalism. Why should this be? We are accustomed to thinking of teaching as a perfectly respectable way of earning a livelihood, and there was no prejudice in Greece against earning a living as such. Socrates was the son of a stonemason and probably followed the same trade, but (unpopular as he was in many quarters) this was never held against him. Poets had been paid for their work, artists and doctors were expected to charge fees both for the practice of their art and for teaching it to others.[2] The trouble seems to have lain first of all in the kind of subjects the Sophists professed to teach, especially *areté*. Protagoras, when asked what Hippocrates will learn from him, replies (*Prot.* 318e): 'The proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his own household, and also of the State's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city both as speaker and as man of action.' In short, says Socrates, the art of citizenship, and Protagoras emphatically agrees. Though some of them taught many other things as well, all included political advancement in their curriculum, and the key to this, in democratic Athens, was the power of persuasive speech.[3]

[1] This does not necessarily mean aristocratic or oligarchic as opposed to democratic. Anytus was a leading democrat. The division between democrat and anti-democrat cut across that between high-born and plebeian. Pericles, who completed the democratic revolution, was an Alcmaeonid like Cleisthenes who started it. Dr Ehrenberg has called him 'the aristocratic democrat'. Cf. his remarks on p. 65 of his *Soc. and Civ. in Gr. and Rome*: 'The old aristocratic education was out of touch with the realities of contemporary life, but it was largely the same leading class which governed the democratic state.' Cf. also M. A. Levi, *Pol. Power in the Anc. World*, 65, 90.

[2] See e.g. Isocr. *Antid.* 166; Ar. *Rhet.* 1405b24 (poets); Plato, *Prot.* 311c, *Meno* 91d (sculptors); *Prot.* 311b and Hdt. 3.131.2 (doctors). Further references are in Nestle, *VMzuL*, 259, n. 36. Zeno the philosopher is said by Plato to have exacted the impressive fee of 100 minas for a course (*Alc. I* 119a), though, when late authorities say the same of Protagoras (as indeed they do of Gorgias, Diod. 12.53.2), Zeller dismisses it as highly exaggerated (ZN, 1299, n. 2). Yet Zeno does not seem to have shared the name or the blame of the Sophists.

[3] Similarly in the *Clouds* (*v.* 432) Socrates, who is there caricatured as among other things a professional Sophist (cf. 98 ἀργύριον ἦν τις διδῷ), assures Strepsiades that through his instruction ἐν τῷ δήμῳ γνώμας οὐδεὶς νικήσει πλείονας ἢ σύ. At *Gorg.* 520e Socrates suggests a reason why teaching this kind of thing is generally frowned on.

Gorgias indeed concentrated solely on rhetoric and refused to be included among the teachers of *areté*, for he held that rhetoric was the master-art to which all others must defer.[1] Now 'to teach the art of politics and undertake to make men good citizens' (*Prot.* 319a) was just what at Athens was considered the especial province of the amateur and gentleman. Any upper-class Athenian should understand the proper conduct of affairs by a sort of instinct inherited from his ancestors, and be prepared to pass it on to his sons. Even Protagoras admitted this, while claiming that it still left room for his pedagogic art as a supplement.[2] In the *Meno* passage already referred to Socrates innocently suggests to Anytus, a prominent democratic leader who became his chief accuser, that the Sophists are the proper people to instil into a young man the *sophia* which will fit him to manage an estate, govern a city, and in general show the *savoir-faire* proper to a gentleman. When Anytus reviles them as a menace to society, and Socrates asks to whom then, in his opinion, a young man should turn for such training, he replies that there is no need to mention particular individuals, for 'any decent Athenian gentleman whom he happens to meet will make him a better man than the Sophists would'.

The grounds on which Socrates criticized their fee-taking were rather different, and typical of the man. He held (we have this not from Plato but Xenophon) that by accepting money they deprived themselves of their freedom: they were bound to converse with any who could pay their fees, whereas he was free to enjoy the society of anyone he chose (*Mem.* 1.2.6, 1.6.5). He went so far as to call it prostitution, selling one's mind being no better than selling one's body. Wisdom was something that should be freely shared between friends and

[1] Pp. 271ff. below. ἀρετῆς διδάσκαλοι was Plato's regular way of referring to the Sophists (Dodds, *Gorgias*, 366). For Gorgias see *Meno* 95c, *Gorg.* 456c–e, especially οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν περὶ ὅτου οὐκ ἂν πιθανώτερον εἴποι ὁ ῥητορικὸς ἢ ἄλλος ὁστισοῦν τῶν δημιουργῶν ἐν πλήθει. Gorgias even admits that his pupils will learn from him the principles of right and wrong 'if they don't happen to know them already' (460a), while at the same time maintaining that the teacher is not responsible for the use made of his teaching. For the correctness of including Gorgias among the Sophists see now E. L. Harrison in *Phoenix*, 1964 (against Raeder and Dodds).

[2] I do not understand how anyone can read the brilliant and sympathetic speech of Protagoras in the *Protagoras* from 323c to 328c and still hold that Plato in his representations of the best of the Sophists was setting out to blacken their memory.

loved ones (1.6.13). This was how philosophy had been regarded hitherto, especially in the Pythagorean school, of which Plato certainly, and Socrates probably, was an admirer. The complex Socratic–Platonic concept of *eros*, a sublimated homosexual love, will also have been at work.

(*b*) *Inter-city status*

The Sophists, then, were disliked for different reasons both by philosophers like Socrates and Plato and by leading citizens like Anytus. The odium which they incurred in the eyes of the establishment was not only due to the subjects they professed; their own status was against them. Not only did they claim to give instruction in what at Athens was thought to be for the right people a kind of second nature, but they themselves were not Athenian leaders or even citizens. They were foreigners, provincials whose genius had outgrown the confines of their own minor cities. Some of them first went abroad on official missions, as Gorgias to Athens to plead the cause of Leontini against Syracuse in 427.[1] Both he and Prodicus of Ceos took the opportunity, while presenting their cities' case before the Council, of advancing their own interests by giving classes and demonstrations which brought in considerable sums (*Hipp. Maj.* 282b–c). Hippias, too, boasted of the number of diplomatic missions on which his city employed him (*ibid.* 281a). Leontini, Ceos or Elis afforded inadequate outlet for their talents. At Athens, the centre of Hellenic culture at the height of its fame and power, 'the very headquarters of Greek wisdom' as Plato's Hippias calls it (*Prot.* 337d), they could flourish; but there they had no chance of becoming political figures themselves, so they used their talents to teach others. It was no wonder that, as Protagoras said, the position of such men could easily become precarious. Plato refers to it again more than once, in the *Apology* (19e) and in the *Timaeus* where Socrates says (19e) that the Sophists are very good speechmakers in general, but that 'their habit of wandering from city to city and having no settled home of their own' is a disadvantage when it comes to matters of active statesmanship in

[1] Plato, *Hipp. Maj.* 282b, Diod. 12.53.1–2. Thucydides also tells of the embassy from Leontini (3.86.3), but without mentioning Gorgias.

war or negotiation. This has been cited as an example of Plato's disparagement of the Sophists, but is only a statement of evident fact.[1]

(*c*) *Methods*

The Sophists gave their instruction either to small circles or seminars or in public lectures or 'displays' (*epideixeis*).[2] The former might be conducted in the house of a patron like Callias, the richest man in Athens, who was said to have spent more money on the Sophists than anyone else (Plato, *Apol.* 20a). His home is the scene of the gathering in Plato's *Protagoras*, and his hospitality to the Sophists and their admirers seems to have turned it into a rather unhomelike place. Protagoras paces the forecourt attended by a considerable crowd, including both Athenians and the foreigners whom he draws, like a Pied Piper, from every city that he passes through. In the opposite portico Hippias is holding forth to another circle, and Prodicus is occupying a former store-room which Callias has had to convert into a bedroom owing to the large number staying in the house. He too has his own circle of listeners round his bed. Callias's hall porter is understandably sick of the sight of Sophists. When hosts were so complaisant, even public displays could take place in private houses. We hear of Prodicus giving one at Callias's (*Axioch.* 366c),[3] and when Socrates and Chaerephon have missed a display by Gorgias, evidently in some public place, Callicles assures them that Gorgias is staying with him and will put on another performance at home for their benefit. Sometimes the displays would be in a gymnasium or other place of resort. Cleon accuses the Athenian assembly of behaving 'more like the audience at Sophists' displays than a serious deliberative body' (Thuc. 3.38.7). Hippias tells Socrates that in two days' time he will be giving a recital 'in the School of Pheidostratus', and Prodicus did the same in the Lyceum (*Hipp. Maj.* 286b, *Eryxias* 397c). Prices

[1] The point about the alien status of the Sophists is made by Joël, *Gesch.* 646f., who remarks, adapting a well-known story of Plato's, that if Themistocles had been a Seriphian he would have become a Sophist! At *Rep.* 493a the Sophists are μισθαρνοῦντες ἰδιῶται, which is also a fair description.

[2] The two methods are mentioned together in connexion with Prodicus at *Hipp. Maj.* 282c: πιδείξεις ποιούμενος καὶ τοῖς νέοις συνών.

[3] Even if our authority is of doubtful reliability for the actual fact, the author probably knew that such occurrences did take place.

of admission are mentioned more than once, as ½, 2 and 4 drachmas for a performance by Prodicus (*Axioch.* 366c). Socrates laments that his knowledge of correct diction is inadequate because he had only been able to afford the 1 dr. lecture of Prodicus and not the 50 dr. one.[1]

The display might take the form of inviting questions from the audience. This is mentioned as a practice of Gorgias (*Gorg.* 447c, *Meno* 70c), and Hippias was bold enough to do the same before the great pan-Hellenic concourse at Olympia (*Hipp. Min.* 363c–d). Alternatively the Sophist gave a display of continuous eloquence on a prepared theme and from a written text. Such were the Trojan dialogue of Hippias (*Hipp. Maj.* 286a, described by its author as 'splendidly composed'), and the speeches of Gorgias at Olympia, Delphi and Athens, the last a funeral oration for the dead in battle.[2] These declamations might be simply rhetorical exercises on mythical themes, designed to show how, with skill and effrontery, the most unpromising case could be defended. Of such we still possess two specimens in the *Helena* and *Palamedes* of Gorgias. Besides Gorgias and Hippias, Protagoras also claimed to excel in both genres, long and elaborate speeches and the technique of question and answer (*Prot.* 329b, 335a).

The appearance of the Sophists at the great festivals of Olympia and elsewhere had a threefold significance. First, it is further evidence that they considered themselves to be in the tradition of the poets and rhapsodes. Xenophanes and Empedocles had, like other poets, introduced their own work to the public by recitation either in person or through a rhapsode. Poets and rhapsodes wore special clothes, in particular a purple robe.[3] Hippias and Gorgias did the same (DK, 82 A 9), and Hippias made his own finery (*Hipp. Min.* 368c). It has to be remembered that we are still in an age when it was much more usual to hear a literary work read than to read it to oneself, and

[1] Many think that the 50 dr. must have been for a course, though the expression is πεντηκοντάδραχμος ἐπίδειξις (*Crat.* 384b). Cf. Ar. *Rhet.* 1415b15. Judging by what we know of the Sophists' standards, 50 dr. would have been rather little for a whole course. Euenus (p. 45 below) charged 5 minae, and Isocrates about the year 390 mentions 3–4 minae as the price for which Sophists are prepared to impart their secrets.

[2] See Philostr. *V.S.* 1.9.5 (DK, 82 A 1) and Gorgias frr. 5a–9.

[3] Empedocles at Olympia, D.L. 8.66; his poems recited there by a rhapsode, *ibid.* 63; Xenophanes αὐτὸς ἐρραψώδει τὰ ἑαυτοῦ, *idem* 9.18. For the poets' garb see Morrison, *Durham U.J.* 1949, 58, n. 21.

recitation at a pan-Hellenic festival, or in one of the cities,[1] was a way of making a new work known. Formerly the subjects had been poems, especially epic poems, and, although by the fifth century the public reading of prose authors was also common,[2] the elaborate epideictic rhetoric of the Sophists, when performed at the Olympian or Pythian games, aimed at something further. It was (and this is the second point) agonistic, competing for prizes in set contests as did the poets, musicians and athletes. Hippias speaks of 'entering the lists' (ἀγωνίζεσθαι) at Olympia and being unbeaten (*Hipp. Min.* 364a). This competitiveness came to be a general characteristic of the Sophists. For Protagoras any discussion is a 'verbal battle', in which one must be victor and the other vanquished (*Prot.* 335a), in contrast to Socrates's expressed ideal of the 'common search', one helping the other that both may come nearer the truth. The contest, said Gorgias, needs both boldness and wit, for the argument, like the herald at Olympia, summons whoever will come, but crowns only those who can succeed.[3] Thucydides is contrasting himself with the Sophists when he says that his own work is not intended as a 'competition-piece for a single occasion' but a possession for all time. As often, Euripides makes his characters speak in true contemporary sophistic style when Creon's herald sings the praises of monarchy as opposed to democracy and Theseus replies (*Suppl.* 427f.): 'Since you yourself have started this competition, listen to me; for it is you who have proposed a battle of words.'[4] Thirdly, the festivals were occasions for

[1] Isocrates comments on the fact that the first founders of the great festivals instituted athletic contests only, and praises Athens as a city where one can see 'contests not only of speed and strength but also of speech and wit and other accomplishments, for which prizes of great value are awarded' (*Paneg.* 1ff., 45). Isocrates made this speech at the age of 92, some half-dozen years after the death of Plato, but cf. Cleon's criticism of the Athenians in Thucydides (3.38.4, ἀγωνοθετοῦντες . . . θεαταὶ τῶν λόγων).

[2] Plutarch, *Mal. Hdt.* 862, speaks of Herodotus reading his work to the Athenians. Thuc. 1.21.1 and 22.4 compares the effect of *hearing* the work of logographers and hearing his own. (Nestle, *VMtuL*, 260 with n. 41.)

[3] Gorgias fr. 8 DK. DK translate as if ὁ γάρ τοι λόγος καθάπερ τὸ κήρυγμα were simply τὸ γὰρ κήρυγμα. Whether this is due to inadvertence, or they intended to impute the mention of the λόγος to Clement, I do not know (they give no note on the passage), but the elaborate balance of the clauses shows that Clement is giving a verbatim extract from the rhetorician, and I see no reason to suppose that the simile is an importation of his own.

[4] With ἀγώνισμα and ἁμίλλας in these lines cf. D.L. 9.52 of Protagoras καὶ πρῶτος . . . λόγων ἀγῶνας ἐποιήσατο, and Plato, *Prot.* 335a, where Protagoras says πολλοῖς ἤδη εἰς ἀγῶνα λόγων ἀφικόμην ἀνθρώποις.

members of all the Greek city-states to meet together and forget their differences, and the public appearance there of the Sophists was symbolic of a pan-Hellenic outlook that went naturally with their habit of staying in different cities in turn. Gorgias was as welcome in Larissa as in Athens, and Hippias (even more remarkably) in Athens as in Sparta. The subject of Gorgias's Olympic oration was *homonoia*, concord, and his advice, which he repeated in his Athenian funeral oration, was that Greek states should turn their arms against the barbarians, not against each other. We have already seen Hippias upholding the brotherhood of all Greeks.[1]

(*d*) *Interests and general outlook*

It is an exaggeration to say, as has often been said,[2] that the Sophists had nothing in common save the fact that they were professional teachers, no common ground in the subjects that they taught or the mentality which these produced. One subject at least they all practised and taught in common: rhetoric or the art of the *logos*.[3] In Athens in the mid fifth century to be an effective speaker was the key to power. 'The word is a mighty despot', as Gorgias said in one of his surviving declamations (*Hel.* 8, DK, II, 290); and with the art of *logos* would go all that was necessary for a successful political career. When young Hippocrates is asked what he thinks a Sophist is, he replies: 'A master of the art of making clever speakers' (*Prot.* 312d). The speaker's art they practised themselves, taught personally, and expounded in written handbooks (*technai*) covering both rhetorical argument and the correct use of language in general.[4] All save Gorgias would admit

[1] Gorgias A 1 (Philostr. 1.9.5), and fr. 5b. Plato, *Meno* 70b, *Hipp. Maj.* 283b.

[2] E.g. T. Gomperz, *Gr. Th.* 1, 415: 'It is illegitimate, if not absurd, to speak of a sophistic mind, sophistic morality, sophistic scepticism and so forth.' (Even the bare fact of being professional teachers can have an effect: some at least would be prepared to maintain that there is such a thing as a schoolmasterly or donnish mind.) For a similar point of view see H. Gomperz, *Soph. u. Rh.* 39.

[3] See the evidence collected by E. L. Harrison, *Phoenix*, 1964, 190ff., nn. 41 and 42. Schmid's contention (*Gesch. gr. Lit.* 1.3.1, 56f.) that rhetoric was unknown among the early Sophists and introduced by Gorgias in the last third of the century is not borne out by the evidence.

[4] For the written *technai* see Plato, *Phaedr.* 271c οἱ νῦν γράφοντες... τέχνας λόγων and cf. 266d. Isocrates, *In Soph.* 19, speaks of 'those of an earlier generation' who wrote τὰς καλουμένας τέχνας. Protagoras's ὀρθοέπεια is mentioned in the same context by Plato (267c; see p. 205, n. 2, below), and the list of his works in D.L. includes τέχνη ἐριστικῶν. According to Plato (*Soph.* 232d) he published sets of arguments to enable a man to hold his own against

to being teachers of *areté* (of which, as understood by them, the art of persuasive speech was a prerequisite), and one may suspect that Gorgias's disclaimer was a little disingenuous (pp. 271f. below): his teaching of rhetoric was aimed at securing for his pupils the same kind of success in life that Protagoras promised as a teacher of *politiké areté*.[1] In accordance with their claim to be the educational successors of the poets, the Sophists included in their art of *logoi* the exposition and criticism of poetry. This is well attested for Protagoras (pp. 205, 269, below), and another Sophist, Euenus of Paros ('fee 5 minae', Pl. *Apol.* 20b), who was especially interested in knowing why Socrates should have taken to writing poetry in prison (*Phaedo* 60d), also lectured on poetry, as well as writing it himself.[2] It is also recorded of Hippias and Antisthenes (pp. 282, 309 below).

Apart from this one overriding interest, many of them had their own specialities. Hippias prided himself on his polymathy and versatility. He not only taught mathematics, music and astronomy (which Protagoras derided as useless for practical life)[3] and had perfected his own system of memory-training, but claimed mastery over many handicrafts as well.[4] It has been said of the Sophists that they were as much the heirs of the Presocratic philosophers as of the poets. W. Schmid has claimed for Protagoras a debt to Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, the Milesian physicists and Xenophanes, and gives him the credit for making the paradoxical conclusions of Heraclitus and

experts in divers arts and crafts. He also wrote on grammar. For Gorgias see Plato, *Phaedr.* 261b–c. He τέχνας ῥητορικὰς πρῶτος ἐξεῦρε, Diod. 12.53.2 (DK, A 4). D.L. 8.59 speaks of him as ὑπερέχοντα ἐν ῥητορικῇ καὶ τέχνην ἀπολελοιπότα, and Quintil. 3.1.8 (A 14) puts him among the *artium scriptores*. Thrasymachus wrote a rhetorical τέχνη (Suda, A 1) which seems to have been known as the Μεγάλη Τέχνη (B 3). For something of its content see *Phaedr.* 267c with DK, B 6. Prodicus and Hippias are also mentioned in Plato's review of the βιβλία τὰ περὶ λόγων τέχνης γεγραμμένα (*Phaedr.* 266dff.), and Hippias's expertise in the minutiae of speech at *Hipp. Min.* 368d. Prodicus's passion for distinguishing between apparent synonyms is often referred to by Plato, e.g. *Prot.* 337c, *Euthyd.* 277e (περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος), *Laches* 197d (ὀνόματα διαιρεῖν). More on this below, pp. 222f.

[1] Cf. E. L. Harrison in *Phoenix*, 1964, 188f. Bluck has pointed out (on *Meno* 73d) that *areté* according to Gorgias is there said to be 'the capacity to govern men', which is precisely what Gorgias himself, in the *Gorgias* (452d), claims to impart through the art of persuasion. See also p. 181, n. 2, below.

[2] See *Phaedr.* 267a. Some fragments of his elegiacs have survived, and will be found in Diehl, *Anth. Lyr.* 1.78ff. Aristotle quotes him a number of times.

[3] For a more definite reason for Protagoras's quarrel with mathematics, based on his general theories of knowledge and reality, see vol. II, 485f.

[4] Plato, *Prot.* 318d–e, *Hipp. Min.* 368b–d; Philostr. *V.S.* 1.11.1 (DK, 86 A 2).

Parmenides generally current in educated circles. (See *Gesch. gr. Lit.* 1.3.1,16 and 38.) On the other hand it has been said that they had no interest in natural philosophy at all. There can be no doubt that they were familiar with the writings of the philosophers and that their general outlook, with its rationalism, rejection of divine causation, and tendency to scepticism, owed much to them. This is not inconsistent with a fundamental difference of aim, and, making allowance for this, there was also a meeting ground in their common interest in anthropology, the evolution of man as a product of nature and the development of human society and civilization. But there is little positive evidence of a serious interest in cosmology or physical questions generally, though this has sometimes been claimed for Protagoras on the basis of a quotation in Eustathius from the comic poet Eupolis (DK A 11), who ridiculed him for 'pretending an interest in the heavens but eating what came out of the ground'. This is slender, and probably comic slander like Aristophanes's jibe against Socrates and Prodicus together as 'meteorosophists'.[1] In Plato's *Protagoras* (318e, a better source), Protagoras disclaims an interest in all such unpractical studies. At the gathering in the house of Callias (*ibid.* 315c), Hippias is shown answering questions about 'natural science and astronomy', and in the *Hippias Major* (285b) Socrates speaks to him of 'the stars and other celestial phenomena, in which you are such an expert'; but his pride was in the astonishing breadth and variety of the topics on which he could discourse. His acquaintance with each must have been extremely superficial, and there is no suggestion that, except possibly in mathematics, he had any original contribution to offer. Galen reports a work of Prodicus (fr. 4) *On the Nature of Man* which repeats the title of a Hippocratic work and shows an interest in physiology. Some fragments of Antiphon (between 22 and 43 in DK) seem to reveal an interest of Presocratic type in questions of cosmology, astronomy, earth and sea. Cicero speaks (*De or.* 3.32.126–8) of Prodicus, Thrasymachus and Protagoras as having spoken and written *etiam de natura rerum*; but he

[1] As Schmid notes (*Gesch.* 1.3.1,36, n. 3), after the trial of Anaxagoras μετεωρολόγος became a general term of abuse. One may compare also Plato, *Apol.* 26d, and, for Anaxagoras as the high priest of μετεωρολογία, *Phaedr.* 270a.

puts this in the right perspective when he connects it with the Sophists' claim to hold forth on any subject whatsoever and answer any question that can be put to them. Among the 'practitioners of every art', with whom Protagoras undertook to enable a pupil to argue on their own ground, would no doubt be the cosmologists and astronomers. The aim was to be a good talker and to make debating points, not to acquire a scientific interest in a subject for its own sake.

One branch of Presocratic philosophy had a profound influence on sophistic as on all other Greek thought: the extreme monism of Parmenides and his followers. Its challenge to the evidence of the senses, and rejection of the whole sensible world as unreal, inspired a violent reaction in the empirical and practical minds of the Sophists, who opposed it in the name of common sense. Protagoras, we are told, took time off from teaching political *areté* to write a work on Being which was directed against 'those who uphold the unity of Being',[1] and Gorgias in his *On Non-Being* showed his mastery of Eleatic argument by turning it against its inventors. Yet the Sophists could not, any more than other pretenders to serious thought, brush aside the Eleatic dilemma, which forced a choice between being and becoming, stability and flux, reality and appearance. Since it was no longer possible to have both, the Sophists abandoned the idea of a permanent reality behind appearances, in favour of an extreme phenomenalism, relativism and subjectivism.

The Sophists were certainly individualists, indeed rivals, competing with each other for public favour. One cannot therefore speak of them as a school. On the other hand to claim that philosophically they had nothing in common is to go too far. They shared the general philosophical outlook described in the introduction under the name of empiricism, and with this went a common scepticism about the possibility of certain knowledge, on the grounds both of the inadequacy and fallibility of our faculties and of the absence of a stable

[1] Protag. fr. 2. The informant is Porphyry, who mentions that 'by accident' he has come across this book himself. Some have tried to identify it with other known works of Protagoras. Bernays (*Ges. Abh.* 1, 121), followed by T. Gomperz, Nestle and others, said it was only another name for the Καταβάλλοντες or Ἀλήθεια. For Untersteiner, on the other hand (*Sophs.* 11), this is incorrect, and it belongs to the second part of the Ἀντιλογίαι, while von Fritz (*RE*, XL. Halbb. 919f.) thought it might be an independent work. The title does not occur in D.L.'s list of Protagoras's works, which is however defective.

reality to be known. All alike[1] believed in the antithesis between nature and convention. They might differ in their estimate of the relative value of each, but none of them would hold that human laws, customs and religious beliefs were unshakeable because rooted in an unchanging natural order. These beliefs—or lack of beliefs—were shared by others who were not professional Sophists but came under their influence: Thucydides the historian, Euripides the tragic poet, Critias the aristocrat who also wrote dramas but was one of the most violent of the Thirty Tyrants of 404 B.C. In this wider application it is perfectly justifiable to speak of a sophistic mentality or a sophistic movement in thought. The Sophists, with their formal instruction backed by writing and public speaking, were prime movers in what has come to be known as the Age of Enlightenment in Greece. This term, borrowed from the German, may be used without too much misgiving to stand for a necessary transitional stage in the thought of any nation that produces philosophers and philosophies of its own. Thus Zeller wrote (ZN, 1432): 'Just as we Germans could hardly have had a Kant without the Age of Enlightenment, so the Greeks would hardly have had a Socrates and a Socratic philosophy without Sophistic.'[2] That Socrates and Plato could never have existed without the Sophists is repeated by Jaeger (*Paid.* 1, 288), and this in itself would make them repay study even if they were not (as some of them are) important figures in their own right.

[1] This is expressly attested for Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias and Antiphon, and can be confidently asserted of Prodicus, who shared Protagoras's view of the practical aims of his instruction (Plato, *Rep.* 600 c–d). It is traceable in later Sophists like Alcidamas and Lycophron, and it would be difficult to produce a clear counter-instance.

[2] Burnet (*Th. to P.* 109) complains of the influence which this 'superficial analogy' has had over German writers, and claims that if there is any parallel it occurs much earlier, and Xenophanes not Protagoras is its apostle. But Xenophanes was rather the first swallow that does not make a summer; the sophistic Age of Enlightenment means not only Protagoras but Prodicus, Gorgias, Hippias, Antiphon, Critias, Euripides and many others. Burnet's next remark, that 'it is not to religion but to science that Protagoras and Gorgias take up a negative attitude', is a strange one to make of the man who declared that he did not know whether there were gods or not. As a general rule such warnings against facile analogies are salutary, but the resemblances between the Enlightenment and the age of the Sophists are certainly many and striking. The relationship of the *philosophes* and their contemporaries to their predecessors in the ancient world, both Greek and Roman, is discussed by Peter Gay in *The Enlightenment* (1967), 72–126 (chapter entitled 'The First Enlightenment').

(e) *Decline or adolescence?*

To a hostile contemporary like Aristophanes, sophistic ideas were a symptom of decline. The great days of Greece were those of the Persian Wars, when men were men. Courage and hardiness, simplicity of life, high moral standards were all attributed to this immediately preceding generation. Now, he lamented, all standards are being abandoned and no one can distinguish right from wrong, or, if they do, they blatantly uphold the wrong and despise the right. The young generation are luxury-loving, effeminate, immoral and cowardly. Look at the drama: no longer do playwrights choose high and noble themes as Aeschylus did. Instead we have Euripides with his plays of adultery, incest and deceit, his flaunting of the mean and sordid, his endless quibbling talk. All this, thought Aristophanes, came of following the new atheistical science and the new morality of the Sophists.

This view—that Greece had already passed the peak of her greatness and that the Sophists were a sign of the times and by their own teaching hastened her decline—has tended to reappear in modern histories. On the other hand Karl Joël in the 1920s (*Gesch.* 674f.) was already seeing, in the intellectual ferment of which they were the leaders, not decline but the 'Rausch der Jugend'. Like the young they were ambitious, contentious, breaking out in all directions. In the same strain T. Gomperz (*Gr. Th.* 1.480) perceived in the rhetoric of Gorgias 'the streaming and unbridled vitality of an age in which the young blood leaps with a wayward pulse, and the mind's activity is in excess of the matter at its disposal'. Grant (*Ethics* 1, 76f.) worked out a division of morality into three eras: 'first, the era of popular or unconscious morals; second, the transitional, sceptical or sophistic era; third, the conscious or philosophic era'. (In the third era, of course, the three stages will exist contemporaneously among people of different education and intellectual powers.) He noted a parallel development in the individual:

> The simplicity and trust of childhood is succeeded by the unsettled and undirected force of youth, and the wisdom of matured life. First, we believe because others do so; then, in order to obtain personal convictions, we pass through a stage of doubt; then we believe the more deeply but in a somewhat different way from what we did at the outset.

Now if one thinks of the great things that lay ahead—the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, to be followed by the Stoics, Epicureans and other philosophers of the Hellenistic age—there can be no doubt that, however it may be with Greek history in general, with the Sophists Greek thought entered not on its decline but on its early manhood.[1]

(*f*) *Rhetoric and scepticism*

There was, we have seen, one art which all the Sophists taught, namely rhetoric, and one epistemological standpoint which all shared, namely a scepticism according to which knowledge could only be relative to the perceiving subject. The two were more directly connected than one might think. Rhetoric does not play the part in our lives that it did in ancient Greece. Nowadays the words 'success' or 'a successful man' suggest most immediately the world of business, and only secondarily that of politics. In Greece the success that counted was first political and secondly forensic, and its weapon was rhetoric, the art of persuasion. Following the analogy, one might assign to rhetoric the place now occupied by advertising. Certainly the art of persuasion, often by dubious means, was no less powerful then, and, as we have our business schools and schools of advertising, so the Greeks had their teachers of politics and rhetoric: the Sophists. *Peitho*, Persuasion, was for them a powerful goddess; 'the charmer to whom nothing is denied', Aeschylus called her (*Suppl.* 1039f.), and Isocrates a century later reminded his Athenian audience that it was their custom to offer her an annual sacrifice (*Antid.* 249). Gorgias in his *Encomium of Helen*—a school exercise in rhetoric, sophistic in every sense—names speech and persuasion as the two irresistible forces. 'He who persuaded did wrong by compelling, but she who was persuaded acted under the compulsion of the word and it is vain to upbraid her.' Thus Helen is absolved from blame and depicted as a helpless victim, deserving pity, not hatred or condemnation.[2]

It was part of rhetorical instruction to teach the pupil to argue with

[1] The comparison of the stages of Greek thought to the stages of an individual life is also made by Cornford in *Before and after Socrates*, 38ff. For further comment on Grant's division see p. 164 below.

[2] In Aeschylus on the other hand it is Paris whose hand is forced by Persuasion, 'the insufferable child of Doom (*Ag.* 385f.). Pindar speaks of the 'lash of Persuasion' (*Pyth.* 4.219).

equal success on both sides of a question. As Protagoras said, 'On every topic there are two arguments contrary to each other'. He aimed at training his pupils to praise and blame the same things, and in particular to bolster up the weaker argument so that it appeared the stronger.[1] Rhetorical teaching was not confined to form and style, but dealt also with the substance of what was said. How could it fail to inculcate the belief that all truth was relative and no one knew anything for certain? Truth was individual and temporary, not universal and lasting, for the truth for any man was simply what he could be persuaded of, and it was possible to persuade anyone that black was white. There can be belief, but never knowledge.

To prove his point that 'persuasion allied to words can mould men's minds as it wishes', Gorgias adduced three considerations, which illustrate the way in which the Sophists' teaching grew out of the life and philosophy of their times (*Hel.* 13):

1. The theories of the natural scientists, each one thinking that he has the secret of the universe, but in fact only pitting one opinion against another and setting up the incredible and the invisible in the eye of the imagination.

2. The inevitable contests and debates of practical life [as in the law courts or the Assembly], where a single speech can delight and convince the crowd just because it is artistically and cleverly contrived, not because it contains the truth.

3. The disputes of philosophers, which only go to show the rapidity with which thought can demonstrate the mutability of opinions and beliefs.

In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that an epistemology should gain favour according to which 'what appears to me *is* for me, and what appears to you *is* for you', and that no man can be in a position to contradict another.[2]

(*g*) *Fate of sophistic literature: Plato and Aristotle*

Finally, a word about the loss of the Sophists' writings. Havelock has written of Greek liberalism, which roughly corresponds to what

[1] See D.L. 9.51 and Protagoras A21 and C2 in DK.

[2] For such opinions in Protagoras see Plato, *Theaet.* 152a, *Euthyd.* 286c. The subject is resumed in ch. VIII below.

is here called the sophistic outlook, that 'to chart its course with precision is a difficult task, impossible but for the twin guide-posts supplied by the *ipsissima verba* of these two men' (*L.T.* 255). The two in question are Democritus and Antiphon, and since on the same page he has to warn us that 'the chronology of Antiphon's life, nay his very identity, is in doubt'; since moreover the liberal temper is represented for him not only by these two but by Archelaus, Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias, Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Lycophron and others, this is a somewhat pessimistic view. His suggestion that these are the only two contributors to the school of thought in the classical age who are documented by their own utterances is happily belied by what he says elsewhere.[1] Nevertheless it is true that the fifth-century empiricists are represented for us in the main by meagre fragments, or more or less hostile paraphrases, of the extensive writings which they produced. Hitherto historians had assumed that this, though unfortunate, was accidental: many other works of classical Greece have perished, not surprisingly, in the passage of upwards of 2,400 years. But their modern champions see a more specific reason determining the fate of the Sophists, namely the authority of Plato and Aristotle. Plato's idealism carried the day, and, since he himself would have liked to suppress the teaching of his opponents, his followers duly suppressed it; or at least, as contrary philosophies became entrenched, nobody saw reason to preserve what were generally considered unorthodox and objectionable views. So it has come about, to quote Havelock (*L.T.* 18), that 'the history of Greek political theory, as also of Greek politics, has been written in modern times exactly as Plato and Aristotle would have wished it to be written'.

Here again, like Sidgwick with Grote, one may say that these critics have a real point which others have neglected, but that they probably overstate their case. What they allege may have been part-cause, but other reasons, no less plausible, suggest themselves for the loss. It has been pointed out that in general the Sophists were not scholars writing philosophical and scientific treatises for the future.

[1] On p. 157 he speaks in the same terms of *ipsissima verba* of Thrasymachus, Gorgias and Protagoras. (For T. Gomperz, *Gr. Th.* 1, 490, 'the sole surviving literary monument of the movement known as sophistry' was the Hippocratic treatise *On the Art* [of medicine]!)

They were rather teachers, lecturers and public speakers, whose aim was to influence their own age rather than to be read by posterity. Moreover, since much of their work was educational, of the handbook type, it would naturally get incorporated in the handbooks of later teachers, including Aristotle, which would be regarded as superseding it. Aristotle, besides writing his own *Art of Rhetoric*, compiled a summary of the earlier 'Arts', from their originator Tisias onwards, of which Cicero wrote that he not only lucidly explained the precepts of each teacher but so exceeded the originals in brevity and attractiveness of style that no one any longer consulted them, preferring to read Aristotle as a much more convenient exponent of their teaching.[1]

While on the subject of Aristotle it may be as well to issue a caveat against speaking of 'Plato and Aristotle' in one breath,[2] as if their opposition to sophistic empiricism were equal and identical. On the subjects in which the Sophists were primarily interested, Aristotle's standpoint was in many ways closer to theirs than to Plato's. True, he shared Plato's teleological view of the world, and on the question of realism *versus* nominalism he is usually supposed to have been a Platonist. That is to say, though he gave up the transcendence of the Platonic Forms, he continued to believe in the existence of permanent substances or essences corresponding to universal terms—*universalia in rebus* if not *ante res*. In general this may be true,[3] but his position is complex, and it cannot be asserted without qualification when we turn from his metaphysics to his treatment of human action both individual and collective, that is, his ethical, social and political theory. For one thing, he drew an explicit distinction between the aims, and in consequence the methods, of scientific investigation on the one hand and inquiry into the problems of human behaviour and character on the other. In the former, the most exacting standards of accuracy must be demanded, but these would be inappropriate to the study of

[1] Cic. *De inv.* 2.2.6. See Jaeger, *Paideia* 1, 302 and Untersteiner, *Sophists*, 9. Untersteiner does recognize, as an additional reason for the loss, the different turn taken by the prevailing philosophies in succeeding generations.

[2] As Havelock regularly does, e.g. on pp. 12, 17, 18, 19, 32, 34 (five times) in his *Liberal Temper*.

[3] See however Miss Anscombe in Anscombe and Geach, *Three Philosophers*, 31 f.

human material, which is undertaken not for theoretical but for practical ends. In the *Ethics* he puts the point many times, perhaps most forcibly in the statement that to demand strict logical proof from an orator is no more sensible than allowing a mathematician to use the arts of persuasion.[1] In the ethical field the abandonment of Plato's absolute, self-existent moral norms or patterns had far-reaching effects, for it made possible a divorce of theory from practice, of knowledge from action, which for Plato had been unthinkable. Aristotle can write (1103b27): 'The object of our inquiry is not to know what virtue is, but to become good men', whereas on the Socratic–Platonic view 'to know what virtue is' was an essential prerequisite of becoming good. He openly prefers Gorgias's method of enumerating separate virtues to the Socratic demand for a general definition of virtue, which he calls self-deception (*Pol.* 1260a25), and in the first book of the *Ethics*, which contains one of his most sustained and effective attacks on the Platonic theory of Forms, we find a defence of the relativity and multiplicity of goods which might almost have been written by Protagoras.[2]

[1] 1094b25. See also 1098a26ff. (the carpenter is not looking for the same straightness as the geometer), 1104a3, 1102a23.

[2] The brevity of the above remarks may lay them open to a charge of over-simplification. In so far as Aristotle believed in the relativity of goodness, it was only in the first of the two senses enumerated on p. 166 below, and he was Socratic enough to combine it with a belief in a single function of man as such, resulting from our common human nature and overriding the different subordinate functions of individuals or classes. This and related points are well brought out in Lloyd's article on Aristotle's biological analogies in *Phronesis*, 1968, in which however one is conscious all the time of an influential figure standing in the background though never mentioned: Protagoras.