

PROTAGORAS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIPPOCRATES IN PLATO'S DIALOGUE

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Abstract: In *Protagoras*, a dialogue by Plato, the role of a Hippocrates as a doctor is introduced abruptly to a gathering of sophists, where Protagoras, a renowned sophist teaches virtue to help people navigate legal troubles. However, the doctor's role is significantly overshadowed by the rhetoric of Socrates, his companion, who challenges Protagoras to instruct the doctor in the virtues of a better existence, thereby questioning Protagoras' authority. Socrates' search for flaws in sophistic arguments embodies a critique of sophistry and its understanding of virtue and wisdom. The satirical implications of Hippocrates reveal the ignorance inherent in relativism and the fallacious wisdom propagated by sophists, as well as a probable deeper perspective with regard to the Athenian education. This paper will analyze the significance of the doctor as a central figure in Plato's writing, concluding that the doctor serves as a means for Socrates to challenge Protagoras, but also embodies Plato's critique to sophistry and its role in Athenian education, enhancing the satirical depth of this written work.

Keywords: Sophistry; Epistemology; Virtue; Wisdom; Relativism; Education

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the *Protagoras*

Protagoras is a short philosophical dialogue. Its central around Socrates and Protagoras, who engage in exchanges on the nature of virtue and wisdom. Along the lines, *Protagoras* centers around Plato's criticism of sophistry, in the form of a featured debate between Socrates as a philosopher and Protagoras as a sophist, namely the best sophist in Athens who is often viewed upon as an itinerant professional teacher but rather does incompetent deeds such as teaching criminals and suspects rhetoric or tactic for them to escape trial in court, in exchange for cash [1].

The scene starts with Hippocrates rushing in, fiercely knocking on Socrates' door to wake him up in an urge to visit Protagoras, the famous sophist that he intends to be disciple of. However, Socrates questions Hippocrates how himself will benefit by learning from Protagoras, he could not answer. In light of this exposition, the two sets off to visit Protagoras, by then surrounded by students and many admirers in his mansion, where they initiate a fierce debate upon the teachability of virtue. In the process, Socrates continuously points out the longevity and obscurity of Protagoras' myth to support his claim, demands to leave unless Protagoras makes them clearer. The dialogue ends with Socrates and Protagoras having switched the positions they took at the beginning of the debate, in which Socrates makes fallacious and tactical rebuttals to prove his superiority in sophistry skills. In this way, Socrates shows that virtue can be taught, but not for the reasons Protagoras proposed, revealing a better critical mind as opposed to the vagueness of the respected sophist [2]. Socrates asks to continue the debate, but Protagoras declines, and they do not reach a clear outcome [3].

It is evident and claimed by present scholars that the short dialogue of *Protagoras* reveals Plato's devaluation of sophistry as a favor of rhetoric that hinders the exploration and love of beauty and truth. Though requiring some wisdom, Plato intentionally stresses the hollowness of Protagoras' speech, merely capturing tedious myths and dimming the concepts to avoid answer some questions. In proving Protagoras wrong and incapable of striving for truth, it is explicit that sophistry, rather than a pursuit of truth, stands in relativism and obscurity to justify ungrounded and sometimes unloyal statements, and the education of such a harmful practice will deter the collective, including Hippocrates, the young fellow doctor, as Plato embarrasses and mocks Protagoras amidst all his admirers and leaves the debate ground [4].

Ultimately, this essay will delve into the role of Hippocrates, analyzing him as both a crucial and enigmatic character in *Protagoras*. It will explore how Plato's intentional framing of Hippocrates serves as an ironic critique of sophistry, revealing deeper truths about knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom.'

2 HIPPOCRATES AS A CHARACTER

Most predominantly, Hippocrates is presented as the son of Apollodorus and the brother of Phanson, a countryman belonging to a properous family. As well, the most predominant trait of Hippocrates exposed is youngness and naiveness, as he claim part of the reason why he requires Socrates' accompany, and as both Socrates and Protagoras refer him as. Rather, according to the chronology that places the scene in 433 BC, dates Protagoras' previous visit to Athens between twelve and seventeen years earlier, historians estimate Hippocrates between sixteen and twenty years old, roughly the same as Alcibiades and Callias [5]. Moreover, though in intense seek of companion, it is seen that there

is a rather intimate and close relationship between Hippocrates and Socrates, though, Hippocrates have come not for the thought of seeking wisdom from Socrates but rather to convince him the visit, implies that the young man, though equipped with intellectual desires, does not properly represent the kind of follower accustomed to Socratic pursuits, but rather an ordinary young man who does not arouse any special interest.

In the later dialogues, Socrates then introduces Hippocrates as a celebrated Physician, as Polyclitus and Phidias were as sculptors, insinuating the scholarly character of this young man. Furthermore, he has some access, both in terms of interaction and information, with the city's elites and their affairs, as to be acquainted of Protagoras' visit and of his lodging at Callias' house. However, the opening scene also suggests that Hippocrates is neither an insider, but rather, as a third tier. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite being aware of Protagoras' arrival, he learns about it a day later and is unaware of the coincident presence of Hippias and Prodicus. But especially revealing is his insignificant role in the scene once he has been introduced to the sophist and the topic of the dialogue begins.

Furthermore, Hippocrates, as befits the family background with which he is introduced, shares some of the aspirations to common Athenian aristocratic youth. Specifically, he seeks from the sophist's education befitting free men rather than the expertise of a trade; Meanwhile, he hopes to become, with the help of this education, someone of renown in the city.

Afterall, it is probable to conclude that while Hippocrates is equipped with the quest and slight accomplishment of knowledge and truth, he pursues them in his admiration of Protagoras, where probable explanation could be drawn from his young and immaturity, as slightly differentiated with Socrates as they stand alongside each other. However, there is, apart from *Protagoras*, no additional evidence to prove his existence. Nor any evidence of Apollodorus, and minimally Phason, who are indicated as the father and brother of the Hippocrates, respectively. Alas, whether this young man is a historical figure, or a mere Platonic invention remains unknown.

Regardless of the teenager's existence, Plato deliberately portrays Hippocrates' blind admiration for Protagoras as a cautionary tale. In doing so, he raises concerns about the proliferation of misleading information, revealing easy fall of Athenian scholars to become prey of the deceptive allure of sophistry. The narrative leaves the fate of Hippocrates unresolved, creating an ambiguous space for interpretation and inviting future scholars to engage with the implications of this character's outcome.

3 LITERAL TOOL TO PROVE PROTAGORAS WRONG

In *Protagoras*, Hippocrates' presence is not randomly assigned but a literal tool that Plato employs to challenge Protagoras' assertions. His role, though secondary, could raise and be referenced by provocative questions about the nature of virtue and its educability. When Hippocrates queries Protagoras about the potential benefits of his teachings, he highlights a fundamental aspect of Socratic inquiry: the need for clarity and substance in philosophical discourse, as Hippocrates' occupation specializes.

Moreover, the character of Hippocrates serves as a typical representation of substance and groundedness, as a celebrated physician. His seek of knowledge typically acts in opposition of Protagoras' approach in mythology and fantastical playwright, setting the stage for a fierce debate between relativism in sophistry and the socratic pursuit of truth. The existence of Hippocrates, in simple words, necessitates the extension of the dialogue to the area of actuality and substance instead of relativism, and rationalizes Socrates' criticism of vagueness of Protagoras' argument, that could instead be accepted merrily as logistically valid.

Again, Socrates seizes this opportunity to expose weaknesses in Protagoras' claims about civic virtue. Through his engagement with Hippocrates, Socrates asks pointed questions that force Protagoras to confront the limitations of his arguments, using Hippocrates' need of substance and actuality as a tool. This emphasizes the need for genuine understanding rather than mere rhetorical flourish, as Hippocrates' earnest desire for knowledge contrasts sharply with Protagoras' sophistic strategies.

As Plato presents this exchange, he illustrates how Protagoras may obfuscate truth for the sake of persuasion [6]. Socrates' insistence on seeking substance contrasts and exposes the hollowness of sophistic teachings, situating Hippocrates as a focal point through which these philosophical dimensions are explored. In embodying the role of an inquirer, Hippocrates allows Plato to critique not only the particulars of Protagoras' philosophy but also the broader implications of a society that prioritizes eloquence over truth.

4 SATIRICAL EXISTENCES TO MOCK SOPHISTRY

Plato's use of satire in *Protagoras* is evident in the contrasts he draws between Hippocrates' genuine aspirations and the vacuous nature of sophistic rhetoric. The irony inherent in Hippocrates' admiration for Protagoras serves as a revelation of fallacy in sophistry. Through this juxtaposition, Plato powerfully critiques the educational practices that elevate rhetoric over substance, mocking the overall concept of sophistry as a much-admired occupation and skill of the era.

The very choice of Hippocrates, a figure associated with scientific knowledge, as a disciple of Protagoras emphasizes this irony. While Hippocrates embodies a quest for genuine medical expertise, Protagoras represents a form of education rooted in persuasion that lacks authentic substance [7]. This direct comparison and failure to address the scholar's need underscores Plato's core criticism of sophistry: whereas true expertise requires rigorous training and understanding, sophistic knowledge is often interchangeable with clever wordplay that fails to impart real wisdom.

Moreover, the character of Hippocrates highlights the perils of blind adherence to authority figures who may not genuinely possess the knowledge they claim. The satirical tonal selections in Plato's depiction of Hippocrates serves to showcase the consequences of such misplaced faith, revealing the risks associated with accepting sophistry as a legitimate source of understanding [8].

Together, Plato reveals his critique of a larger theme: What the scene of the *Protagoras* comes to show that, in the absence of their parents, this generation of youths suffer significant negligence regarding civic education. As it is hinted about Pericles, the illustrious parents of these men neglected their education. As Socrates puts it: while the general, concerning matters proper to the schoolteachers, educated Paralus and Xanthippus in the best way possible, in what he was wise, they have let them wander around like a herd, what Aristides and Thucydides, Lysimachus' and Melesias' fathers did, focused as they were on the affairs of the city. Upon all, Plato exposes the corruption of the neglected youth and the crisis of traditional morality that will drag the city into disaster lies on the negligence of the most representative generation of Athenian democracy [5].

5 SYMBOLIC MEANING AS RHETORIC

The symbolic meaning of Hippocrates in *Protagoras* has been the subject of considerable scholarly debate, with interpretations varying widely. At its core, Hippocrates represents the intersection of genuine inquiry and the potential dangers of intellectual complacency. His character symbolizes both the quest for knowledge and the pitfalls associated with uncritical acceptance of sophistic teachings.

In his blind trust of Protagoras, Hippocrates becomes a member of those who seek wisdom without the necessary critical scrutiny. This perspective of viewing the often-neglected character emphasizes the importance of philosophical skepticism, as Plato stresses. This symbolic contrast between Hippocrates and Protagoras created by Plato further enhances the dialogue by illustrating the stark divisions between authentic mastery of a subject and the deceptive nature of sophistic argumentation.

Additionally, the ambiguity surrounding Hippocrates' character invites deeper reflections on the nature of knowledge. While he embodies the pursuit of truth, his uncritical admiration for Protagoras raises questions about how easily individuals can be led astray. This complexity ultimately positions Hippocrates as more than just a character but a lens through which Plato critiques the prevailing attitudes towards knowledge and the sophistic tradition.

6 VIRTUE VERSUS RELATIVISM

The exchanges between Socrates and Protagoras results in an ironical inversion of roles, where Socrates finds himself articulating arguments that run counter to his initial position. This unexpected twist illuminates the controversial nature of relativism. In adopting Protagoras' perspective, Socrates demonstrates the limitations of relativism and emphasizes the importance of objective truths that transcend individual opinions. The irony lies in the fact that Socrates, while initially embracing the sophistic approach, effectively dismantles it from within, showcasing the inadequacies of Protagoras' claims regarding the teachability of virtue and wisdom. Though they do not arrive at an ultimate conclusion, Socrates' better grounded and fact driven rhetorical strategy suggests that true virtue cannot be reduced to mere rhetorical skill or subjective interpretation [9].

The tension between the three characters ultimately serves to reinforce the idea that wisdom requires more than eloquence; it necessitates a commitment to seeking truth. Socrates' victory in this debate emphasizes the philosophical distinction between genuine understanding and sophistic manipulation. In this way, the dialogue reveals not just a critique of Protagoras but also a broader commentary on the significance of virtue in philosophical inquiry.

7 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Hippocrates in *Protagoras* is of multiple significances, on the one hand, he could safely be considered the resemblance to common teenagers in seek for virtue in the Athenian society, which often suffer the negligence of their family and fall into sophistry. On the other hand, his nature as a physician contrast with Protagoras' as a sophist, ultimately presenting a medium for satire and conflict that supports Plato's critique of the relativism of sophistry as a disastrous factor of Athenian education [10].

However, there are limitations probable within this essay, at the core, by assuming Plato's intention of and the pretentiously set stage. Some may safely contend the possibility of *Protagoras* as a mere record of existed events rather than a molded playwright that introduces some means of personal embedment by Plato. On the contrary, others may argue, combining Aristotle's work on *Protagoras*, that Plato intentionally incorporated a misrepresentation of Protagoras [11]. In this way, inferences above are mere speculations that can be useful only in understanding Plato's philosophical thinking as well as ways in which Plato makes such thinking prominent in his works and dialogues. More historical investigations and evidence will have to be drawn to corroborate or prove false the inferences discussed above. Future scholarship may delve into the historical context and literary devices employed in *Protagoras*, examining the interactions between philosophy and rhetoric. This ongoing discourse will enhance our comprehension of Plato's critique of sophistry and its implications for the pursuit of truth and knowledge.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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