

Four Educators in Plato's *Theaetetus*

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ABSTRACT: *Scholars who have taken interest in Theaetetus' educational theme argue that Plato contrasts an inferior, even dangerous, sophistic education to a superior, philosophical, Socratic education. I explore the contrasting exhortations, methods, ideals, and epistemological foundations of Socratic and Protagorean education and suggest that Socrates' treatment of Protagoras as educator is far less dismissive than others claim. Indeed, Plato, in Theaetetus, offers a qualified defense of both Socrates and Protagoras. Socrates and Protagoras each dwell in the middle ground between the extremes presented in the dialogue's digression, which contrasts the life of the philosopher and the life of the courtroom orator. Both Socrates and Protagoras demonstrate a serious engagement with both politics and philosophy. Theodorus presents an educational option in which theory is divorced from politics while an ignoble sophistic education is presented as political but divorced from theory. Protagorean education, in Theaetetus, emerges as superior to a base sophistic education, though it remains inferior to Socratic education.*

Theaetetus is Plato's masterful dialogue on the question 'what is knowledge' and rightfully holds the preeminent place among classic discussions of epistemology. *Theaetetus* also contains several educational analogies: learning is compared to writing on a wax block (191c-196c) or the flocking of birds in an intellectual aviary (197b-200d). In addition, it offers arguably the greatest of Plato's many educational images, the educator as midwife. The midwife analogy vividly presents an educational insight that remains influential to this day—specifically that ideas may be drawn out of young minds by asking the right questions. Curiously, though the midwife metaphor is often cited in relation to the contemporary use of the 'Socratic method' in elementary, secondary, higher and, especially, legal education, educational philosophers have tended to neglect *Theaetetus* and the powerful educational analogy therein.ⁱ Indeed, to my knowledge, there are only three sustained treatments of *Theaetetus* in educational journals (Hansen, 1988; Kramer, 1976; Rozema, 1998).ⁱⁱ In this paper, I consider the rich discussion of education in *Theaetetus*, especially as it arises in the dialogue's digression. I argue that the two lives presented in the digression – a theoretical life divorced from politics and a practical life divorced from philosophy – each fail to capture the lives that would be a product of either Socratic or Protagorean education. I then argue that the dialogue contrasts exhortations, methods and epistemological foundations of Socratic and Protagorean education. Though Plato ultimately deems Protagorean education inferior to Socratic education, Plato presents both Protagoras and Socrates as dedicated educators and superb intellectuals. Plato therefore defines and, in a sense, defends each of their educational legacies.

Dramatic Frame and Overview

In order to explore Socratic and Protagorean education in *Theaetetus*, consideration of the dialogue's dramatic frame is valuable. The dialogue begins with a preliminary discussion between Euclides and Terpsion, associates of Socrates from Megara.ⁱⁱⁱ Euclides reports that he has just seen Theaetetus, who is near death, on his return to Athens after fighting valiantly in battle. At the dramatic date of the conversation between Terpsion and Euclides, Socrates is dead.^{iv} But Euclides says that Socrates had recounted to him a conversation Socrates had with Theaetetus that impressed him tremendously. Euclides had taken notes and transcribed it, even returning to Socrates to correct the account of the discussion. While Terpsion and Euclides rest, Euclides has his slave read the transcript, the main text of the dialogue *Theaetetus*.

This prelude announces the educational theme. Euclides recalls what a talented young man Theaetetus was, and recalls that Socrates had 'expressed great admiration for his nature' and that 'there was every necessity that he become renowned if he reached maturity' (142d).^v Socrates has clearly been up to his usual business of talking to young men and testing their intellectual mettle. Moreover, Socrates' educational authority is established from the outset. Not only does Socrates partake in these educational interactions with young men, he correctly surmises which of them will make their mark; Theaetetus ultimately does so both in mathematical studies and on the battlefield. But in addition to Socrates' impressive capacity for recognizing educational potential, Socrates' educational interactions are also cast in a darker light. The conversation between Euclides and Terpsion occurs years after an Athenian jury decided to have Socrates executed for corrupting the youth. Readers confront this fact by the implication of Socrates' death in the Prelude and also, more explicitly, in the close of the dialogue in which Socrates goes off to meet the indictment of Meletus (210d). *Theaetetus* thus invites readers to consider Socrates' interaction with a youth in light of the charge that cost Socrates' his life and Athens its gadfly.^{vi}

Following the prelude, the dialogue features a discussion among Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus, a young man whose intellect and character receive the highest praise from his teacher Theodorus (143e-144b and 145b). The beginning of the dialogue's transcript further emphasizes the importance of the educational theme. In Athens, Socrates meets Theodorus, who has a reputation as a geometer, as a teacher of geometry, astronomy, logistics, and music, and is skilled in 'everything connected with education (*paideia*)' (145a; cf. 143e, 145d). Socrates asks Theodorus, just as he asks 'everyone else with whom I see the young are willing to associate,' who Theodorus expects 'to turn out well' (143d-e).^{vii} Thus two educators, Theodorus and Socrates, are introduced as people who associate with young men and compare notes on their best and brightest.^{viii} The interaction between Theodorus and Socrates is also notable for the general goodwill between them. Education of the young is a serious business, and these two men seem to appreciate one another for giving it the attention it deserves.

As Theodorus and Socrates speak, Theaetetus and some of his friends approach. Thus, two teachers and several young men are present (144bc).^{ix} Socrates wants to test Theaetetus to see if he is able to live up to Theodorus' praise and quickly turns the discussion to the question, 'what is knowledge?' At a key moment in Theaetetus' attempt to answer this question, Theaetetus grows frustrated. At this point in the dialogue, the educational undercurrent becomes more pronounced as Socrates takes an apparent break from the discussion to tell Theaetetus that his frustration is an intellectual pain of labor, which he recognizes because he is a midwife of the soul. Socrates then describes in some detail (over three Stephanus pages) the sense in which he is a midwife: He identifies pregnant young men, helps deliver their brain-children, tests those

brain-children of their worthiness (abandoning many), and matches young men to suitable teachers. Encouraged by Socrates' tale of his educational expertise and the appropriateness of his own frustration as pains of labor, Theaetetus continues the conversation.^x

The educational theme arises strongly once again when Socrates claims that Theaetetus' next attempt to define knowledge as perception entails a Protagorean answer to the question. Protagoras is dead at the time of Socrates' conversation with Theaetetus. Yet Socrates constructs Protagoras' position on his behalf and thereby introduces him into the discussion as a quasi-independent character who prods and chides the interlocutors while defending his own view. Protagoras' presence in the dialogue presents a third teacher, and Protagoras' and Socrates' views of teaching and learning are contrasted. In the midst of the refutation of the idea that knowledge is perception, a digression occurs in which the life of the philosopher and the life of the courtroom orator are compared. After two more attempts to define knowledge prove to be unsatisfactory (that knowledge is true belief or true belief with an account, a *logos*), Socrates tells Theaetetus that he (Theaetetus) is better off for having undertaken this inquiry. Yet the dialogue ends *aporetically* and is unsuccessful, insofar as the interlocutors are unable to define knowledge.

Theodorus, Socrates, Protagoras and the Sophists

The definition of knowledge as perception, offered by Theaetetus and shown by Socrates to be based on the Protagorean position that man is the measure of all things, is ultimately refuted.^{xi} Based on the refutation of Protagoras, it is tempting to read *Theaetetus* as a Platonic statement about the unsoundness of Protagorean and, by extension, all sophistic education as opposed to the value of Socratic education. Indeed, this is the position that Scott Kramer (1976), drawing especially on the digression, takes, arguing that *Theaetetus* contrasts Socratic and sophistic education and that Protagoras is a stand-in for all sophists.

Kramer's view is not without reason. Throughout the Platonic corpus sophists are often ridiculed—e.g., for claiming to impart virtue when they do not fully understand it, for accepting fees, and for preferring victory in argument over the collaborative search for truth. Plato could be read as repeatedly defending Socrates from the charges of the Athenian court and the Athenian public by distinguishing him from the sophists. And one could reasonably contend that Plato agrees with Aristophanes' depiction in *Clouds* (1998) of a sophist as a dangerous, quasi-insane, crook, with the caveat that it is not Socrates but rather others who are justly called sophists and mocked. But before one decides whether Plato lumps Protagoras together with the other sophists, one must consider how Protagoras is actually depicted in *Theaetetus*. Further, one must determine whether there are only two educational options identified in the text or perhaps more. I shall ultimately argue that there are four. Let me begin by distinguishing the kind of education offered by Protagoras from that offered by Theodorus.^{xii} Protagoras is introduced as a friend of Theodorus at 161b and references to their friendship appear throughout the discussion of knowledge as perception (162a, 168c, 168e-169a, 170c, 171c, 183b). At 179a, Socrates calls Protagoras Theodorus' teacher (*didaskalon*). Though there is a relationship between Protagoras and Theodorus, there is no strong implication of a Theodorus-Protagoras educational continuum, at least no stronger than a Theodorus-Socrates continuum.

Further, Theodorus and Socrates have a relationship as well (143d ff.). Theodorus must be viewed as a gifted teacher of young men, the very young men who may soon be leaving Theodorus in favor of associating with other teachers. As presented in *Theaetetus*, Theodorus plays the role of matchmaker, a role so important that Socrates insists it is among the chief tasks

of the true midwife (149d-150a).^{xiii} As a matchmaker, Theodorus must come to appreciate that Socratic education will lead to one type of life, Protagorean to another, and sophistic to yet another. But Theodorean education is an educational option as well. Theaetetus and his friends could reasonably live a life centered on theoretical study by continuing to associate with Theodorus; and Theaetetus' demonstration of his mathematical prowess surely suggests that this might be a life well-suited for him. A Theodorean life would entail studying mathematics and other subjects and associating with others who have similar interests (not to mention welcoming young men into such a community and educating them).

The Theodorean educational option is already familiar to Theaetetus but he and his friends are intrigued by the other options as well. Indeed, Theaetetus is well aware of Socrates and his philosophical investigations prior to their initial conversation (148e). It is probably no coincidence that Theaetetus' education prior to meeting Socrates resembles the guardians' curriculum outlined in Book VII of the *Republic* that prepares them for dialectic.^{xiv} Notably, a line in *Protagoras* suggests students flee study of the subjects Theodorus teaches before studying with him.^{xv} Of the young men present, many must be exploring what kind of educational options are most appealing following their studies with Theodorus. If we learn anything of the interests of young Athenian citizens in Plato's dialogues, it is that in general they are emphatically concerned with their future place in the political life of the city, and Theodorus, whose lessons omit things relating to political affairs like rhetoric or discussions of governance (of one's home or city), is unlikely to support those interests. I suggest that Socrates is more concerned to educate Theodorus in his role as matchmaker than in his role as teacher. Since many young men are contemplating their educational options, Theodorus must come to understand the different options available to them and what is at stake.

Theodorus does seem to recognize, however, a difference between Protagoras and Socrates on the one hand, and sophists on the other. Theodorus tells Socrates that members of the Ephesian circle (who embrace the Heraclitean doctrine that everything is in flux) escape philosophical discussion by playing games with words: 'if you ask any of them anything, they send off shots as if they were drawing up enigmatic shaftlets from a quiver, and if you seek to get an account (*logos*) of this, as to what he has said, you'll be struck by another freshly altered name' (180a). Socrates then suggests to Theodorus that their contentious responses are probably only those presented to outsiders – surely among their students they discuss these matters calmly. Theodorus responds strongly, 'What do you mean, pupils? You extraordinary being! For this sort there's not another who becomes the pupil of an other' (180c). Theodorus' view that there are no teachers and pupils in the Ephesian circle is exaggerated, and is partly a joke based on the idea that if one believes that everything is in flux, one's identity as student or teacher is unstable. There are surely those who teach, those who learn and those who can speak reasonably about things in flux. His joke demonstrates that he understands the difference between an education that leads primarily to beguiling or contentiousness – an education that could be called eristic or sophistic – and the education offered by others such as Socrates and Protagoras who converse for nobler reasons (a point I return to below).^{xvi} But since Theodorus only distinguishes his friends Protagoras and Socrates from sophistic educators and not from each other, Theodorus reveals that he, as much as Theaetetus and his young friends, is in need of an education about their differences.

Theodorus cannot actually refer students to Protagoras since, at the time of the dialogue, Protagoras is dead (169a). But Plato's readers are also told that Socrates is dead in the Prelude (142c), the wider dramatic context of *Theaetetus*. Since readers must confront the death of each

in the dialogue, I suggest that Plato is seeking to define and, in some sense, acknowledge each of their legacies and their respective approaches to education.^{xvii} Before I proceed, an interpretive difficulty must be addressed. One may ask, to what extent is it valid to treat Protagoras as a character in this dialogue? After all, Plato does not present him as a living character here, as he does in *Protagoras*. Further, in Plato's dialogues Socrates often distorts the motives of historical or mythological figures in his recapitulations, presenting their cases as more noble or philosophical.^{xviii} For example, in *Apology*, Socrates says that Achilles sought to kill Hector to 'inflict a penalty on the doer of injustice' whereas in Homer's *Iliad*, the motive is not so much the pursuit of justice but rage felt at a time of grief (Plato, 1998; 28d, and see T. West, p. 79 n50). Further, the comments that Socrates attributes to Protagoras about conversing with the right intentions and celebrating philosophy (that I discuss further below) seem suspiciously close to what Socrates describes elsewhere as the key to productive philosophical discussion.^{xix}

One may consider the views attributed to Protagoras as Plato's attempt to pay tribute to him because, if Plato genuinely believed that Protagoras and Protagorean education were wholly without merit, it would be surprising to treat him so charitably.^{xx} While the positive characterization of Protagoras might primarily speak well above all of Socrates, the dramatic framework in which both Protagoras and Socrates are dead suggests that *Theaetetus* might be a sincere sendoff to both towering intellectuals of the fifth century. Further, Plato has creatively complicated the transmission of Socrates' legacy in *Theaetetus* as well. The dialogue, as readers are made aware from the outset, was based on Socrates' recollection of the events (already a degree removed from a dialogue purporting to be an account of a conversation). Plato may have wanted the recollection to appear genuine because Euclides' corrected his account in consultation with Socrates (143a). But the fact that the writing of the transcript continued over a great period of time, with corrections, may lend support either for readers to trust the account as more likely to reveal Plato's true Socrates (that is, the Socrates Plato wants his readers to recall) or for readers to wonder the extent to which Euclides' influence took root in the transcript. That Socrates corrected the account does not actually mean that the account is to be more trusted because, as Plato's readers see again and again, Socrates addresses particular individuals in particular ways – the conversation in *Theaetetus* may be crafted specifically for Euclides. Even if one wants to treat Protagoras in *Protagoras* as the 'real' Platonic Protagoras, one should note that that dialogue suffers from a similar interpretive obstacle; its outer frame shows Socrates recollecting the encounter to a *hetairos*, a comrade, companion or friend. (Readers might wonder, for example, why Plato forced readers to consider whether the filter of memory impacts the discussion in *Protagoras*. What might Socrates have hoped his friend would gain from hearing the encounter described in the way he describes it?) Ultimately, it is Plato who is behind the depictions of both Socrates and Socrates' Protagoras in *Theaetetus*, just as it is Plato who is behind the depictions of every individual who appears in his dialogues. Thus Plato chooses to have Socrates describe Protagoras' intentions and methods in a favorable light and it is Plato who shows both the conjured Protagoras and Socrates enmeshed in a philosophical discussion notable for its thoroughness and sustained engagement. This manner of presentation of Protagoras and Socrates allows readers to consider them both as superb intellects and compelling potential teachers. But my argument here depends on whether one can distinguish Protagoras from other sophists in *Theaetetus*, and I turn to that question next.

The Digression: Two Lives and Four Educational Options

In the digression, the lives of the philosopher and the courtroom-orator are contrasted. The philosopher is godlike, becoming 'just and holy with intelligence' (176b). The philosopher is interested in raising questions such as, what is a human being, while he is 'almost at the point of not knowing whether he is a human being or some different nursling' (174b). The philosopher of the digression is wholly ignorant of the ways of the city, 'in truth his body alone is situated in the city and resides there, but his thought, convinced that all these things are small and nothing, dishonors them in every way and flies, as Pindar puts it, 'deep down under the earth'' (173e) and he 'has been truly nurtured in freedom and leisure' (175d). In contrast, the courtroom-orators are slavish, always under the press of time, 'small and not upright in their souls' and 'with nothing healthy and sound in their thought' (173a-b). If the philosopher represents Socrates and the courtroom-orator represents Protagoras, then Kramer's reading (1976) is right and Socratic education leads to the good life of the philosopher while Protagorean education leads to the hurried, impoverished life of the courtroom.

Some aspects of the philosopher do bear great resemblance to Socrates. In addition to asking 'what is' questions, philosophers appear as 'laughable public speakers when they enter the courts' (172c) and 'whenever he's compelled in a court or anywhere else to converse about the things at his feet and things before his eyes... his lack of deportment is dreadful as he gives the impression of plain silliness' (174c). Of course, this is precisely how Socrates is portrayed in Plato's *Apology*. But other aspects of the philosopher do not resemble Socrates. Socrates says that philosophers 'since their youth, first of all, don't know the way to the marketplace [*agora*], or where's a court, councilhouse, or anything else that's a common assembly of the city' (173c-d). Socrates himself was always to be found in the *agora*, the marketplace, chief meeting place, and primary place of political life in the city (e.g. *Apology* 17c; Plato, 1998). Further, in the close of the dialogue, Socrates ominously tells Theaetetus, 'I have to go to the porch of the king and meet the indictment of Meletus which he's drawn up against me' (210d). Socrates clearly knows how to find his way to the 'court, councilhouse' and the other political institutions of the city. In addition, whereas the 'philosopher' is unaware of 'whether someone has been well-born or base-born' (173d), Socrates, shows impressive knowledge of fellow Athenians. As Theaetetus approached at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates says, 'I recognize him. He is the son of Euphronius from Sunium... [who is] well thought of and moreover who left, you know, a great deal of property' (144c). Evidently, Socrates recognizes individuals in the city and freely comments on a person's lineage and wealth. Like the philosopher, Socrates did not participate regularly in political affairs, but he did so when required (*Apology* 32a-c) and was greatly concerned with the political life of the city (serving as Athens' gadfly).

Because of the differences between Socrates and the 'philosopher,' some scholars have argued that the latter is a caricature.^{xxi} For the reasons I listed in the previous paragraph and others, Plato intends for his readers, and perhaps Socrates intended for those present or listening to Euclides' transcript, to see past Socrates' praise of the philosopher and recognize that Socratic philosophy must lie between the two extreme lives presented (Benitez & Guimaraes, 1993; Hemmenway, 1990; Howland, 1998, pp. 51, 56, 75; Rue, 1993; Stern, 2008, pp. 162-182; Waymack, 1985).^{xxii}

Yet Protagoras and Protagorean education are as problematically linked to the courtroom orator as is Socrates and Socratic education to the philosopher. It is true that Protagoras taught his students the art of persuasion, the chief concern of the courtroom orator. However, Socrates repeatedly mentions how the courtroom orator is slavishly concerned *only* with practical affairs;

the courtroom orators ‘are always speaking in the press of time... and there’s no room to have their talks about whatever they desire, but the plaintiff stands over them holding necessity and an outline that is read alongside as they speak and outside of which they must not speak’ (172e). Yet the entire discussion of ‘knowledge is perception’ attests to the fact that Protagoras was concerned with far more than the day-to-day legal and political affairs of the city. Protagoras, in *Theaetetus*, is beholden to no one, not to a ‘plaintiff,’ not to the clock, not to an ‘outline,’ nor to anything else. Protagoras articulates a sophisticated epistemological theory, and his elaborate discussion with Socrates in *Theaetetus*, I would argue, demonstrates for Theaetetus and his young friends that a Protagorean education entails such philosophical discussions in addition to the study of rhetoric. Further, as I already mentioned above, Protagoras was interested in improving individuals and the entire city, not merely in pandering to juries and the *demos*. Protagoras may even have been called upon because of his wisdom in devising sound and beneficial laws; if the account in Diogenes Laertius is to be trusted, Protagoras wrote the constitution of the panhellenic colony of Thurii (Diogenes Laertius, 1931, IX.50).

If leisure is supposed to distinguish the philosopher from the courtroom orator, it is notable that Theodorus and Protagoras are each freer than Socrates. Protagoras does not have to rush off, and even if he was a living character his time would be his own on account of his wealth. In *Theaetetus* he remains in the dialogue leisurely pressing his argument. Socrates takes his time with the argument as well, but he is actually far more responsive to pressures of the courtroom than is Protagoras, as he heads off to the king’s porch at the close of the dialogue.^{xxiii}

The courtroom orator of the digression would not necessarily be the product of Protagorean education – which, as presented in *Theaetetus*, must include serious philosophical discussion – but rather a generic sophistic or rhetorical education. The courtroom orators, with their narrow ambitions and disdain for the ‘impractical’ theoretical life that Theodorus, Protagoras and Socrates admire, have studied rhetoric and little beyond. In Plato’s dialogues, readers encounter the type of teachers who might provide such an education. Polus and Callicles in *Gorgias*, with their scorn for philosophy (and sophistry) are one example. These rhetoricians think that philosophy is best left for the young; making a name for oneself in the courts, assembly or other public gatherings of citizens is the most noble life of a citizen.

Educational Exhortations

Thus far I have attempted to distinguish four educational options present in *Theaetetus*, a Theodorean option dedicated to the life of the mind, a Socratic option that embraces philosophical inquiry but remains rooted in the life of the city, a Protagorean option that entails philosophical theorizing in addition to close engagement with the day-to-day political life of the city, and a sophistic/rhetorical option that focuses narrowly on winning arguments in courtrooms and elsewhere. In this section and the following two, I elaborate on the distinction of Socratic and Protagorean education.

Theodorus, Theaetetus and his young friends do not understand what is at stake in the vitally important decision about the next stage of their education. A sophistic/rhetorical education promises to enable them to succeed in the public life of the city, to be favored by juries, the *demos*, and to win fame and repute. Of course, Protagoras and other sophists would present themselves far more positively than does Socrates in the digression. Nevertheless, Protagoras, like other sophists and teachers of rhetoric, presents the educational ideal of the orator successful in public life to uninitiated students.^{xxiv} Yet Plato leaves little doubt in *Theaetetus* that Protagoras’ appeal to uninitiated students is only an enticement to Protagorean

education. Protagorean education clearly included preparing students to speak clearly and persuasively in the public sphere; but it also took students beyond these concerns to genuinely philosophical issues such as, what is the nature of truth? How can one improve oneself and one's city? What can one know about the existence of gods? The portrayal of Protagoras in *Theaetetus* indicates that Plato respectfully disagreed with Protagoras and Protagorean education but in so doing distinguished the Protagorean from a base rhetorical or sophistic education.^{xxv} The sophists and rhetoricians in general really did produce students like the courtroom orators of the digression, at least in Plato's eyes. They offered the ideal of the publicly successful man to prospective students and provided an education that led only to that. Protagoras offered the uninitiated the same ideal but then turned his students' souls part way towards philosophy.

Socrates presents prospective students with an opposite ideal of the educated person. Instead of describing those things which are likely to appeal to young men – fame, money, power – Socrates presents the uninitiated with a picture of a bumbling, inept philosopher. It is from Plato's digression that we get the story of Thales who, while philosophically gazing upwards at the stars, falls into a well and is laughed at by a Thracian servant girl (174a). It is the disparaging image of the philosopher as absent-minded Thales and as someone who does not know the way to the *agora* which has most troubled scholars. But these images are serving a pedagogical purpose. Socrates presents the life of the philosopher as wholly undesirable in terms of those things which most young men value. It is only if one wants to work incredibly hard, for no financial reward and no public adoration, that one should embark on an education in search of the fruits of philosophy. Unlike Protagoras, Socrates believed the uninitiated should come to him only if they are sufficiently intrigued by his startling, counterintuitive image of philosophical education. The uninitiated students must decide to embrace a life unappreciated by most. This educational ideal will discourage many students, but it will help identify the few who are worthy of a Socratic education.

Protagoras appeals to prospective students' baser desires to lead them, secondarily, towards a philosophical life, while Socrates appeals primarily to noble desires in order to trouble students and later turn them back towards public life.^{xxvi} The philosopher in the digression is not the product of Socratic education. Once initiated, the students of Socratic education will come to appreciate that Thales was no bumbling fool. Rather, it is the Thracian servant who is the fool^{xxvii} for failing to understand that the astronomer Thales intentionally climbed down into the well; its opening serves as a fixed observation point against which an astronomer could chart the movement of the stars.^{xxviii} And the clueless philosopher who cannot find his way to the *agora* will be understood to the initiated as someone who knows his way to the *agora* well, but elects not to partake in political showmanship once there. Possibly, as suggested in *Gorgias*, the Socratic philosopher knows how to practice the true political art (521d).

Educational Methods

Protagoras' educational methods may not be so different from Socrates', and Protagoras takes the matter of education quite seriously. He says, 'in education, one has to effect a change from another condition to the better. But the physician effects a change by drugs, the sophist by speeches [*logois*]' (167a).^{xxix} Plato, who demonstrates at every turn of his work the great importance of education, must have appreciated that Protagoras dedicated himself to its theory and practice. Though Protagoras acknowledges that he takes fees from his students (167d), he is not portrayed as duping his students or peddling false wares like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.^{xxx} Further, although he uses speeches, Protagoras says that he is comfortable with

the question and answer method as well. After reiterating a stronger defense of the ‘man is the measure’ doctrine, Protagoras respectfully asks of Socrates, ‘If you can dispute [my argument] from the beginning, then go ahead and range a counterspeech against it and dispute it; or if you want to do it through questions, do it through questions, for this in no case must be avoided, but anyone of sense must pursue it *most of all*’ (167d, my emphasis). This claim that Protagoras would prefer question and answer ‘most of all’ does not merely seem to be charitable to the conjured Protagoras, for he may have been the creator of the questioning method of investigation. Diogenes Laertius reports that Protagoras ‘first introduced the method of discussion which is called Socratic’ (1931, IX.53; cf. IX.51). Protagoras certainly enabled his students to ask and answer questions, as well as to argue both sides of a debate (*antilogic*), so it is clear that his students were not subjected to a strictly authoritarian education. Protagorean education would have cultivated genuinely inquisitive, if sometimes contentious, dispositions in his students. Socrates clearly preferred question and answer and in the Socratic dialogues he is most often seen using it or insisting on its use. However, Socrates too made longer speeches. Clitophon’s description of Socrates’ exhortations (*Clitophon* 407b-e; cf. 410b in Plato & Slings, 2006) is one example, as are the closing speeches in *Republic* and *Gorgias*. In *Theaetetus*, Socrates offers two longer speeches – the midwife analogy and the digression. Hence, readers are left to conclude that, in terms of pedagogical methods as presented in *Theaetetus*, Protagoras and Socrates may not be so different; pedagogically, they both prefer questioning students and they both make use of speeches as well.

Further, association was a key to both Socrates’ and Protagoras’ educational methods. The importance of prolonged association with Socrates is described at length in *Theaetetus* in the midwife passage (150d-151b).^{xxx} Substantial association must also have been essential in Protagorean pedagogy, though this aspect of Protagoras’ and other sophists’ education tends to get overlooked because of the formal nature – various lessons at set prices – of some of their instruction. In *Protagoras*, Socrates describes those surrounding Protagoras as a large group of people who ‘appeared to be foreigners’ and about whom Socrates comically explains that ‘these Protagoras brings from each of the cities he passes through, bewitching them with his voice like Orpheus, and they in their bewitched state follow his voice’ (Plato, 2004; 315a-b). These likely were paying students, but what is crucial to understand about the kind of association described in *Protagoras* is that it is not solely a quick lesson or a short series of meetings. While Protagoras likely gave short courses in rhetoric, antilogic and other subjects that characterize ‘sophistic’ teaching,^{xxxii} it is unreasonable to assume that all of his students merely aimed at becoming courtroom orators. Some students must have wanted to become statesmen, perhaps becoming a diplomat like Protagoras. Others clearly wanted to dedicate themselves to the life of learning and teaching as Protagoras did; in *Protagoras*, Socrates specifically notes the presence of one such man, Antimoerus the Mendaeian, ‘who is the most highly regarded of Protagoras’ students and who is learning the art in order to become a sophist himself’ (315a).

If Plato’s readers had not yet recognized that Socrates’ Protagoras is earnest, fair, and philosophical in his approach to the discussion, the conjured Protagoras articulates a detailed statement about how to pursue inquiries justly, as ‘conversation’ (*dialegomenos*) rather than ‘competition’ (*agōnizomai*):

to be unjust in a situation of this sort is to fail to separate, whenever one’s engagements are of this kind, competition and conversation, and in the former be playful and trip up one’s opponent to the extent that one is capable of it, but in conversation be in earnest put one’s interlocutor on his feet again, pointing out to him only the slip-ups in which he had

been led astray by himself and his former associations. For if you act in this way, those who spend their time with you will blame themselves for their own confusion and perplexity, and they won't blame you, and they'll pursue and love you; *they'll hate themselves and flee from themselves into philosophy* in order that, once they've become different, they may be rid of who they were before. But if, just as the many do, you do the contrary of this, the contrary will befall you and instead of as philosophers you'll reveal your associates as loathers of this business whenever they become older. If you obey me then—and this was stated even before—if not in a spirit of enmity or contention, but with gracious condescension in thought, you will truly examine what we're saying. (167e-168a, my emphasis)

I quoted this passage at length because it exemplifies the deference shown to Protagoras in *Theaetetus*. If Protagoras were merely a pandering, eristic sophist, one would expect the above passage to be part of Socrates' reprimand of him for aiming at reputation over truth and turning the young against philosophy. But that is not the case. Protagoras, with Socrates, comes to the defense of philosophy and serious investigation of philosophical matters. Protagoras is the one who exhorts those present to philosophy. Education, for Protagoras, is not a scheme, casually concocted to defraud gullible, ambitious young men. It is rather of utmost importance to the city (167c) and the individual. That Protagoras sought and accepted fees should not necessarily mar his educational work (see Corey, 2002). Protagoras is characterized as having estimable intentions that underpin his philosophical method. Throughout the dialogue, Protagoras rebukes Socrates, Theodorus and Theaetetus for failing to do the conversation justice by avoiding difficult matters (162de, 166a, 166c-d, 168b-c), just as Socrates rebukes himself and his interlocutors as well (e.g., 164d-165a).

Epistemology and Education

The point that separates Socratic and Protagorean education above all is epistemology. Socrates suggests that the young men present and Theodorus must come to understand that an epistemological theory provides the foundation for any enterprise of teaching and learning. Protagoras' relativistic position that man is the measure of all things cannot provide a sound foundation upon which he can articulate how he makes his students better. But Plato's respect for Protagoras' position becomes clearer to the reader throughout the dialogue. Though Socrates and Plato show that the Protagorean theory of knowledge is problematic, Socrates is unable to present any alternative. Socrates repeatedly insists that he is bereft of his ideas. Unlike a Protagorean education, a base sophistic/rhetorical education, in a concerted effort to take students' fees quickly and get them into the courts and assemblies persuading others, never even takes the time to ask the educationally fundamental question of epistemology. Like Socrates, Protagoras at least asks the right questions. Socrates' pedagogy is preferable because by testing the offspring of others he, at least, clears away non-viable theories (just as he raises serious objections to Protagoras' own doctrines). Protagoras is wrong but Socrates is not right; Socrates creates images, refutes, exhorts and even in other dialogues points towards robust positive doctrines, but nowhere does he provide these doctrines.

Conclusion

At stake in *Theaetetus* is one group of young men, among whom is one extraordinarily promising student, and perhaps more importantly their teacher, a gifted educator who also serves as matchmaker. Implicit in *Theaetetus* are four educational alternatives and a robust presentation

of three educators. The dialogue contains perhaps Plato's most compelling portrait of Socrates as a teacher. But the dialogue also demonstrates admiration for a great sophist and intellectual who is dedicated to learning and education like Socrates. Indeed, I have suggested that both Socrates and Protagoras occupy the middle ground between the two lives presented in the digression. Because of their proximity to one another in this middle ground, a question arises about how to separate Socrates the philosopher and Protagoras the sophist. Though I have speculated here about some of their differences in addition to their similarities, the fact that Theodorus, Socrates and the young men return the next day to consider the difference between philosophers and sophists suggests that the question remains open (*Sophist* 216c-217a).

As A. A. Long suggests, *Theaetetus* can be read as yet another apology of Socrates (1998). If my reading is right, Plato is also writing an apology of sorts for a great teacher and thinker with whom he disagrees. Protagoras in *Theaetetus* is a sincere and brilliant intellectual and most importantly is devoted to the task of benefitting the young. He is a sophist, but the sort of sophist worthy of a towering presence in a dialogue in which Plato presents a complex yet compelling portrait of his own teacher, Socrates.

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ⁱ Beck (1985) laments this neglect.

ⁱⁱ Outside of educational journals one finds varying treatments of education in *Theaetetus*. David Sedley (2004) integrates the midwife analogy into a fine reading of the dialogue, but he does so in a treatment, primarily, of the epistemological theme. Other prominent scholars such as McDowell (1973) and Burnyeat (1990) have failed to see much of a connection between the analogy and the remainder of the dialogue. Burnyeat's case is particularly revealing because he has not overlooked the analogy but offers an insightful study of it in an isolated paper (1977). Scholars who are interested in the drama of the dialogue have had much more to say about the role of education in it. See, for example, Hemmenway (1990), Polansky (1992), Benitez and Guimaraes (1993), Howland (1998, pp. 39-93), Blondell (2002, pp. 251-313, especially in light of her discussion of mimetic pedagogy, pp. 80-112) and Stern (2008).

ⁱⁱⁱ As is commonly noted, Euclides and Terpsion are noted as present at Socrates' death in Plato's *Phaedo* (59c).

^{iv} The dramatic date of the conversation is probably 391 and Theaetetus is returning from one of the battles of the Corinthian war (see Nails, 2002, pp. 320-321).

^v All translations from *Theaetetus* are those of Benardete (1984).

^{vi} On the corruption of youth charge as relevant to the dialogue, see Blondell (2002, pp. 252-253), Polansky (1992, p. 36) and Long (1998, p. 122).

^{vii} Following the translation suggested in *LSJ* (Liddell, Scott, Jones, & McKenzie, 1940, s.v. *epieikēs*) rather than Benerdete for *epidoxoi genesthai epieikeis*.

^{viii} The opening exchange between Socrates and Theodorus in which Socrates asks about the up-and-coming youth of Athens resembles the opening of Plato's *Charmides*, in which Socrates returns to Athens from battle at Potidaea and asks 'about the present state of philosophy and about the young men, whether there were any who had become distinguished for wisdom or beauty or both' (Plato, 1997, 153d).

^{ix} I call Socrates a teacher in this paper as he is clearly doing something educational. Hansen (1988) is surely right, however, that *Theaetetus* ought to be read as a meditation on what kind of teacher Socrates is. Theaetetus may be about 15 at the time of this conversation (Blondell, 2002, p. 256 n22).

^x See Hansen's perceptive discussion of Socrates' encouragement of Theaetetus (1988, pp. 215-217). Rozema presents a strong case for understanding *Theaetetus* as primarily an investigation of Theaetetus, rather than an investigation about Theaetetus' ability to answer the question about knowledge (1998, pp. 210-211, 219).

^{xi} At least, it is treated in the dialogue as though it is refuted. There is substantial scholarly discussion about what exactly gets refuted and whether the refutation is ultimately successful. For a recent contribution that attempts to show that Socrates does not fully engage Protagoras' position, but rather a version of it based solely on Theaetetus' character and beliefs, see McCoy (2005).

^{xii} Kramer claims that both Theodorean and Protagorean education employ sophistic methods and he therefore lumps them together (1976, p. 391). Blondell offers a more nuanced account of the shared pedagogical methods of Theodorus and Protagoras. Blondell identifies two lines of 'intellectual reproduction' in *Theaetetus*: one line is the Parmenides-Socrates-Theaetetus and the other is Protagoras-Theodorus-Theaetetus (2002, p. 283). Though I find the argument plausible, especially in its incorporation Socrates' remark about studying Parmenides at their leisure (183e-184a), I believe that Blondell overstates the similarities in Theodorus' and Protagoras' pedagogies. Blondell argues that they both prefer a student who accepts straightforward demonstration without questioning authority. This may be true of Theodorus, who repeatedly tells Socrates that he would rather listen than answer questions (165ab, 169ab, 177c), and indicates that questioning has no role in his pedagogy (146b), but as I show below, Protagoras' students must have been expected to be intellectually inquisitive and must have understood the value and importance of questioning authority, including that of Protagoras.

^{xiii} Blondell notices Theodorus' role as matchmaker and further notes that it is the role Theodorus plays in *Sophist* and *Statesman* as well (2002, p. 272 & 278). Socrates' matchmaking is richly dramatized in the Platonic corpus and is key to the dramatic theme of *Protagoras*, *Laches* and *Theages* (though many scholars doubt that Plato authored *Theages*).

^{xiv} As Rue (1993, p.95 with n33) points out, Theodorus' lessons include every subject that the guardians of *Republic* will be taught save bodily and mental gymnastics (and solid geometry).

^{xv} Protagoras says that other sophists lead students 'against their will and plunge them back into the arts, teaching them calculation and astronomy and geometry and music' (Plato, 2004, 318e). Protagoras aims his comment at Hippias who was known for offering his students such a diverse curriculum. But the similarity with Theodorus' curriculum listed in *Theaetetus* of calculation, astronomy, geometry and music (with harmony and logistics as well, 145a & c-d) is striking. Theodorus has provided his students with an excellent foundation for either Socratic or Protagorean education.

^{xvi} I follow Polansky (1992, p. 155) in drawing a line from the doctrine of flux to sophistic education, though I differ from Polansky in that he associates Protagoras straightforwardly with the sophistic education.

^{xvii} On the dialogue as another Platonic versions of an apology of Socrates, see Long (1998). Platonism might be argued to be the Socratic legacy, if one accepts a theory of Platonic developmentalism that differentiates the methods of the late dialogues from Plato's earlier Socratic dialogues (see Sedley, 2005). Regarding the Protagorean legacy, Isocrates, Plato's rival, may be a target and Beck has suggested that a challenge to Isocrates inheres in *Theaetetus* (1985, p. 120).

^{xviii} I thank David Corey for this observation.

^{xix} In *Gorgias* the contrast between disputing with a concern for victory (*philonikountas*) and discussing with care only for the truth (*dialegesthai*), comes up several times (e.g. 457c-458a; Plato 2007). In *Republic*, Socrates contrasts discussion (*dialektō*) with the art of *antilogic*, which, 'rather than 'drawing distinctions,' aims instead at

‘verbal contradictions of what has been said’ (454a). Also contrasted is ‘the fine free talk (*logōn*) which in its desire for knowledge looks determinedly for truth in every way’ and ‘the clever, combative arguments [*eristics*] whose sole aim is prestige and competition [*eris*], whether in the lawcourts or in private gatherings’ (499a; Plato 2000).

^{xx} I side with scholars who claim that Protagoras and his ‘man is the measure’ doctrine are treated with remarkable care here; e.g., ‘Plato has never been as careful as he is here in handling a thesis he intends to refute’ (Long, 1998, p. 127). I recognize, however, that one might counter that it requires the physical absence (or even death) of the sophistic Protagoras to deal with his ideas seriously. Lee (1973) has argued that the ironic elements of Socrates’ refutation actually reveal a harsh rebuke. I hope that my analysis of the digression below reveals that a plausible argument can be made here that Protagoras as educator is indeed treated well by Plato.

^{xxi} Several scholars, in addition, have argued that the ‘philosopher’ is designed to appeal to Theodorus. Indeed, Theodorus’ response to Socrates’ description of the philosopher is, ‘If you should persuade everyone, Socrates, of what you’re saying as you did me, peace would be more widespread and evils less among human beings’ (176a). Unlike the philosopher and Theodorus, Socrates needs the presence of wrestling partners (169a-c) and souls requiring midwives (see Hemmenway, 1990). Further, while Socrates recognized Theaetetus and was well aware of his father’s name and wealth, Theodorus could not recall the father’s name, thereby demonstrating little interest in Theaetetus’ background and the political implications of a boy’s lineage and wealth (144b). The philosopher therefore has much in common with a person who embraces a Theodorean education and way of life, a life dedicated to theoretical reflection and without concern for the political life of the city (Hemmenway, 1990, p. 344; Howland, 1998, pp. 35-36, 57; Waymack, 1985, p. 489 n425).

^{xxii} In addition to the interpretation of Socrates as between the philosopher and the orator, it seems to me that there are two other interpretations in the literature on the digression. First, on a developmentalist reading, Plato has Socrates describe a new, Platonic ideal of the philosopher, rather than the Socratic ideal that Plato is about to leave Socrates behind (Long, 1998). Second, some argue that Socrates is merely offering an idealized version of the philosopher that is, at its core, consistent with Socratic philosophy (e.g., Blondell, 2002, pp. 291-292; Polansky, 1992, p. 140; Sedley, 2004, p. 67).

^{xxiii} Though responsive to the city’s demands, Socrates took his time and even had another conversation with Euthyphro on the way, according to Plato’s dramatic sequence.

^{xxiv} Consider Protagoras’s presentation of his teaching to Hippocrates in *Protagoras* (318e-319a).

^{xxv} Plato provides an example in *Euthydemus* of the base sophistic education in the playful, vacuous quibblers who promise to teach virtue, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

^{xxvi} Socrates treatment of Alcibiades in *Alcibiades I* portrays such an approach.

^{xxvii} She is referred to as uneducated (*apaidētō*) at 175d.

^{xxviii} This insight into the Thales anecdote is made by Katja Vogt, who draws on what she points out are difficult to find German sources (2003, p. 123 and n2).

^{xxix} Consider also the careful thought he has put into education as evidenced in *Protagoras* and the fragment attributed to him: ‘Education does not sprout in the soul unless one goes to a great depth’ (Sprague, 1972/2001, DK 80 B11; cf. DK 80 B3 & B12).

^{xxx} In *Protagoras*, Socrates argues that sophists are potentially dangerous because they sell knowledge without understanding whether it nourishes the soul (313e-314a). Yet this claim comes early in *Protagoras* and should perhaps be read as the question that the conversation with Protagoras later in the dialogue addresses. (And the evidence of the dialogue does not weigh entirely against Protagoras on this question, though I lack the space to defend this claim here.) Further, for the reasons I outlined above, the treatment Protagoras in *Theaetetus* can more easily be understood to be Plato’s final assessment of Protagoras.

^{xxxi} Tarrant (2005) has argued, however, that the claims about association (*sunousia*) in the midwife passage may have been added to *Theaetetus* in the Academy of Polemo. Even if Tarrant is right and the evidence of *Theaetetus* should be doubted, one can argue that association of some sort must have been integral to Socratic pedagogy. Indeed, if Socrates did not ‘teach’ students, it was the benefit of association (in some sense) with Socrates that assisted his companions.

^{xxxii} Prodicus the sophist certainly offered short and long courses; Socrates jokes about only being able to afford the short course in *Cratylus* (384b-c).