

HOW NOT TO READ A POEM: UNMIXING SIMONIDES FROM *PROTAGORAS*

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When we for recompense have prais'd the vile,
It stains the glory in that happy verse
Which aptly sings the good.

—*Timon of Athens*

I. WHY SIMONIDES?

Listening to a philosopher analyze a poem is like watching a man attack a river with a sword, or so Socrates suggests in Plato's *Protagoras* (340A). He is making reference to a passage in Homer's *Iliad* where Achilles launches a personal assault on the river Skamander. The result is a cosmic impasse: Achilles, assisted by the element of fire, fights the element of water to an epic standstill, in a book that ends with the laughter of Zeus (*Il.* 21.389). It might be argued that no less laughable a result is achieved when poetry and philosophy confront one another in Plato's *Protagoras*; the confrontation includes a combined attack by Socrates and his interlocutor Protagoras on a poem of the fifth-century poet Simonides of Keos, which the two philosophers so thoroughly misquote, misconstrue, and misrepresent that most readers are left wondering why philosophers bother to read poetry at all.¹ By the end of the discussion Socrates seems to be wondering the same thing. He dismisses the whole activity of reading and analyzing poetry as the sort of foolishness "that amuses dull drunks at bad parties" (347C–E) and concludes this section of the argument with a stern warning to Protagoras: "This is not the kind of activity that enlightened gentlemen like you and I should imitate. Let's leave poets alone and go after the truth for ourselves" (348A).

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1. Commentators generally regard this exegetical exercise as deliberate pastiche of current sophistic literary-critical methods: see J. Adam and A. M. Adam, *Platonis Protagoras* (Cambridge, 1928), p. 194; P. Friedländer, *Plato: The Dialogues*, vol. 2 (New York, 1964), pp. 24–25; H. Gundert, "Die Simonides-Interpretation in Platons *Protagoras*," in *Hermeneia. Festschrift Otto Regenbogen* (Heidelberg, 1952), pp. 71–74; R. Harriott, *Poetry and Criticism Before Plato* (London, 1969), pp. 144–48; W. R. M. Lamb, *Plato: Protagoras* (New York, 1924), pp. 88–89; H. Parry, "Interpretation of Simonides 4 (Diehl)," *TAPA* 96 (1965): 299; H. D. Verdam, "De carmine Simonideo quod interpretatur Plato in *Protagoro* dialogo," *Mnemosyne* 56 (1928): 306; L. Woodbury, "Simonides on Arete," *TAPA* 84 (1953): 141–50.

But before they leave poets alone the two philosophers wreak considerable havoc on fragment 542 *PMG* of Simonides (see Appendix, below). It is a difficult poem, of uncertain genre and highly controverted text. It is a poem concerned with the will to praise and the will to blame, spoken by a poet who seems to be struggling to clear an original space for human virtue amid conventional definitions of words like “good,” “bad,” “blame-worthy,” “praiseworthy.” It is probably no accident that Socrates aligns the word “imitate” (μιμεῖσθαι 348A) with his attack on this poem. It is probably no accident that Plato has intruded this imitation into the middle of a dialogue between Socrates and a sophist about the teachability of virtue. Virtue is the subject of Simonides’ poem; imitation is what Simonides did for a living. Insofar as imitation can be imitated, virtue can be taught; and Protagoras did so on many streetcorners of Athens, making for himself a living as great as ten other people put together, Socrates tells us.²

But let us not be simple about Protagoras or his imitations. According to Diogenes Laertius,³ Protagoras was a complicated phenomenon. Among other things he invented the science of verbal quibbling that has come to be synonymous with sophistry and he was the first man in Athens to charge 100 minae to teach it. His teachings included the proposition that every question has two sides, which contradict one another, and the proposition that there is no such thing as contradiction. He composed a treatise entitled *Justice in the Matter of the Wage* which took the form, predictably, of two books of contradictory arguments. Timon, as quoted by Diogenes Laertius (9.52), sums up the popular view of Protagoras with the pungent Greek adjective ἐπίμεικτος, which would mean something like, “That Protagoras was really quite a mixture!”

Mixture is also a good description of what happens to Simonides fragment 542, on every level of its presentation and representation, in Plato’s *Protagoras*. Simonides has constructed his poem as a critique of the seventh-century Greek sage Pittacus, who evidently first formulated the wisdom “It is hard to be good.” In the hands of philosophers this simple critique complicates itself exponentially. As Simonides found fault with what Pittacus said, Protagoras finds fault with what Simonides said, Socrates finds fault with what Protagoras said, and Plato, we may presume, would have faulted them all, on grounds of a general mistrust of imitation, but that is an issue left obscure by the accidents of transmission.

For this poem of Simonides does not exist in manuscript or citation earlier than Plato’s; and Plato has chosen to so intermingle the words of the poetic text with philosophic commentary that to this day no one can agree on the most basic questions of its boundaries or restoration. We do not know where the poem begins, where it ends, how many verses are

2. Pl. *Meno* 91C. For a masterful survey of testimonia and arguments relating to the economics of sophistry, see D. Blank, “Socratics Versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching,” *ClAnt* 4 (1985): 1–49. On Protagoras’ finances in particular, see J. S. Morrison, “The Place of Protagoras in Athenian Public Life,” *CQ* 35 (1941): 1–16.

3. *Lives of Greek Philosophers*, 9.50–56.

missing, or what should be the order of the verses that are here. We cannot tell whether Socrates and Protagoras are quoting, paraphrasing, misremembering, or deliberately falsifying the original text. Within that text we cannot even disengage the words of Simonides from those of Pittacus precisely; some editors put the whole opening stanza in quotation marks, others regard verse 13 as the single citation of Pittacus' wisdom. The voices of Pittacus, Simonides, Protagoras, and Socrates grow louder or softer depending on how such choices are made. The limits of meaning shift or break off as authority moves in and out of focus. So Socrates says innocently somewhat later in the dialogue (356C):

φαίνεται ὑμῖν τῇ ὄψει τὰ αὐτὰ μεγέθη ἐγγύθεν μὲν μείζω, πόρρωθεν δὲ ἐλάττω· ἢ οὐ;
Φήσουσιν. Καὶ τὰ παχέα καὶ τὰ πολλὰ ὡσαύτως; καὶ αἱ φωναὶ αἱ ἴσαι ἐγγύθεν μὲν
μείζους, πόρρωθεν δὲ σμικρότεραι;

When we look at things with our eyes, the same objects seem bigger close at hand and smaller far away. . . . And when we listen to voices although they are equal the one that is close sounds louder and the one far away gets *very, very small*. . . .

And modern editions of Simonides' poem record this mixture of voices typographically: we see the words of the text shrink down to nervous whispering wherever Socrates is judged to be getting Simonides really wrong (e.g., vv. 19–20; 33–34). All in all “the Protagoras-poem” (as it has come to be called by philosophers) represents so thorough a contamination of one text by another, of poetry by philosophy, of fact by fiction, that no available method can filter Simonides' original meaning clear from its Platonic appropriation.

The mixed condition of the text is further confused by Socrates' hermeneutic method. His close reading of Simonides' poem relies heavily on violent transgressions of Greek syntax and idiom; he favors a technique of creative hyperbaton⁴ whereby words are trajected out of the boundaries of their natural phrasing into new and strange mixtures of sense. For example he treats in this way the adverb ἀλαθέως (“truly”) in the first verse (changing Simonides' meaning from “it is hard to become truly a good man” to “it is truly hard to become a good man”) and draws attention to his own impropriety with the bland statement ἀλλ' ὑπερβατὸν δεῖ θεῖναι ἐν τῷ ᾄσματι τὸ ἀλαθέως: “Well I think what we need at this point is a little hyperbaton of the truth” (343D).⁵ The entire dialogue in fact takes the form of such a hyperbaton, for Socrates and Protagoras both end up displaced (ἄτοποι 361A) from their original positions on the teachability of virtue and claiming the opposite of what each had set out to prove. Socrates calls the situation laughable (361A) and describes it as “this total terrible upsidedown mix-up,” ὃ Πρωταγόρα, πάντα ταῦτα καθορῶν ἄνω κάτω ταραττόμενα δεινῶς (361C).

4. Hyperbaton, from Greek ὑπερβαίνειν “to step across, go over,” is a mannerism that entails “transposition or change in the usual grammatical order of words or clauses” (*OED*). See Woodbury, “Simonides,” p. 145, on the audacity of Socratic hyperbaton.

5. A more vapid translation (“a little hyperbaton of ‘truly’”) is generally preferred, but I believe Socrates well knew how his audience would hear the words.

The *Protagoras* is a dialogue intent on mixing up certain of the distinctions that enlightened gentlemen like you and I value most highly. It asks us to consider and to confuse the difference between a philosopher and a sophist, the distinction between poetry and prose, the quality that separates real imitation from imitation, the definitions of words. It forces us to confront the dirt, impasse, and absurdity that result when boundaries are lost and categories mix and voices are misappropriated. It is a dialogue that ends by telling us that “the salvation of our life” (357A) depends on being able to unmix the categories of good and evil, for they exist in such confusion in the world and in our thinking that we mistake one for the other. It is a dialogue whose centerpiece is a poem devoted to this same unmixing of good from evil; moreover a poem whose author announces that he himself can perform the act of unmixing. In the final verse of his poem the whole category of things καλὰ (“the beautiful, the good, the honorable”) stands filtered clear of the contamination of τὰ αἰσχροῦ (“the ugly, the evil, the base”)—or so the poet claims. Socrates is profoundly distrustful of this claim. In order to understand why, we have to look very closely at what Simonides and his poem are doing in the middle of the *Protagoras*.

Simonides lived from 556 to 468 B.C. and was acknowledged by the Greeks as one of the most important intellectual and literary innovators of the early classical period. When we recall what were the two most notorious of his innovations, we begin to understand his relevance for the *Protagoras*.

The classical shape of Greek praise bore Simonides’ imprint from its first beginnings, for this poet was credited by antiquity with having pioneered that uniquely Greek genre of poetry the *epinikion* or epinician ode. The *epinikion* was a song of praise sung to honor a victor in the athletic games. Its brief brilliant history, culminating in the *oeuvre* of the incomparable Pindar, demonstrates a poetry of highly formalized intention and idiosyncratic procedure. Although only fragments of his epinician output remain, Simonides’ reputation and authority in the classical tradition seem to have derived importantly from his association with this genre. We know of Simonidean *epinikia* honoring winners in sprinting, wrestling, boxing, pentathlon, chariot racing, and mule racing; the poem discussed by Protagoras and Socrates may well be part of an *epinikion* commissioned by a certain Skopas of Thessaly.⁶

Moreover, the invention of *epinikion* was part of a larger event for which tradition also holds Simonides responsible: the professionalization of the art of poetry in Greece. Simonides was the first ancient poet to demand a fee for poetic composition and to make his living from these

6. H. Jurenka, “Des Simonides Siegeslied auf Skopas in Platons *Protagoras*,” *Z. für die öst. Gym.* 57 (1906): 867–75, took seriously the possibility that Simonides’ poem is an epinician ode for a particular victory of Skopas; a few subsequent commentators have examined the agonistic elements and encomiastic motifs of the poem in more general terms, e.g., K. Crotty, *Song and Action* (Baltimore, 1982), p. 39; M. Dickie, “The Argument and Form of Simonides fr. 542 PMG,” *HSPH* 82 (1978): 30–33; Parry, “Interpretation,” pp. 304–10.

transactions.⁷ As such he provides a worthy analogue to Protagoras the sophist, who supported himself by marketing traditional wisdom in prose and invented the trade of the professional educator. Both Protagoras and Simonides won for their pains a solid reputation of avarice, penury, and greed. Protagoras is reputed to have made more money than Pheidias, the most famous sculptor of his day, or ten other sculptors put together. Simonides has the nickname “skinflint” (κίμβιξ) in the later anecdotal tradition and is already notorious for pennypinching by the mid-fifth century. “That Simonides would put out to sea on a bathmat for profit!” says a character in Aristophanes:⁸

Ep. Σιμωνίδης; πῶς;
Tr. ὅτι γέρων ὦν καὶ σαπρὸς
κέρδους ἕκати κᾶν ἐπὶ ῥιπὸς πλέοι.

(Ar. *Pax* 697–99)

Now quite possibly Protagoras was a wealthy man and Simonides a curmudgeon. Yet perhaps more interesting than to take this ancient gossip literally is to understand avarice as a biographical trope for the fact of money itself, that is, for the cultural process that was reducing to commodity certain hitherto sacred activities like the transmission of wisdom within a deeply traditional society. Furthermore, counting out wisdom for coins was probably the least disturbing of the commodifications proposed by a Protagoras or a Simonides. πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν: “Man is the measure of all things, both of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not” said Protagoras famously (80B1 VS). Simonides also sought to take the measure of man and to mark out the limits of what a human being can know or do or hope or be worth. To measure the worth of a man and set it forth in words of praise was the function of the epinician poetry that he authorized. It is worth speculating that the Protagoras-poem quoted in Plato’s dialogue might be the very first example of an epinician ode; it reads like a programmatic statement of the genre. However that may be, current research in the sociology of praise poetry has made one factor unmistakably clear: what is crucial to its functioning is an ontology of measure.⁹ The commodity that Simonides put on

7. “Simonides was the first poet who introduced meticulous calculation into songmaking and wrote poems for a price” (schol. ad Ar. Av. 919).

8. *Pax* 697–99 and schol. The rumor that Simonides liked cash was known to Callimachus (frag. 222Pf) and to Plato (*Hipparch.* 228C); perpetuated in the Pindaric scholia (ad *Isthm.* 1.2); inflated by the biographical sources (e.g., Arist. *Rh.* 1391a8; Chamaeleon ap. Athenaeus 14.656D; *P.Hib.* 17; Plut. *Mor.* 786B; Stob. 10.62); lucidly situated within ancient anecdotal tradition by J. M. Bell, “*Kimbix kai sophos*: Simonides in the Anecdotal Tradition,” *QUCC* 28 (1978): 29–86. On Protagoras’ finances, see n. 3 above.

9. See recently, e.g., J. M. Bell, “God, Man, and Animal in Pindar’s *Second Pythian*,” in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, ed. D. Gerber (Chico, 1984), pp. 1–31 and further references p. 19, n. 54; G. W. Most, *The Measures of Praise: Structure and Function in Pindar’s Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean Odes* (Göttingen, 1985) and references p. 144, n. 39. Although my paper is more concerned with the metaphysics than with the socioeconomic facts of epinician measuring, I find myself increasingly persuaded by current studies, both anthropological and literary, that show these spheres to be closely and necessarily implicated. See especially R. Compagner, “Reciprocità economica

sale when he introduced the epinician form was his own unique ability to define the boundaries of human praiseworthiness. Simonides and his programmatic poem owe their place in Plato's *Protagoras* to the fact that the Platonic Socrates recognizes in the procedures of praise poetry an important (that is, importantly wrong) exemplar of what he calls "the art of measure that can save our life." If we construe the *Protagoras* as a dialogue whose structure, diction, and dramatization are mainly aimed at explaining this "art of measure," and if we accept that an art of measure is the essence of Simonides' portfolio as an epinician poet, it becomes worthwhile to ask how these two acts of measure imitate one another, and how they differ, and why Plato has placed Protagoras the sophist in the uneasy position of mediating between them.

II. HOW TO MEASURE PRAISE

Praise poetry owed its origin to a social and ethical order that preexisted Simonides' invention of the epinician by many centuries if not millennia. "Indo-European society in general operated on a principle of counterbalancing praise and blame primarily through the medium of poetry," as one historian has said.¹⁰ A great deal of interpretative work has been done recently, especially by Pindarists, to elucidate the rhetoric of praise and blame that informs epinician verse and to grasp its ideology.¹¹ Both ideology and rhetoric are strange to us—extravagant, elitist, and filled with talk about hatred. These features derive directly from its social function. Praise poetry addresses itself to a human individual who has chosen to test the limits of human capability and who has, for the moment, succeeded. For example Pindar addresses the victor of his fifth *Pythian Ode* (5–8):

ὃ θεόμορ' Ἀρχεσίλα.
σύ τοί νιν κλυτὰς
αἰῶνος ἀκρᾶν βαθμίδων ἄπο
σὺν εὐδοξίᾳ μετανίσεαι

O Arkesilas, in a space of life outlined by God,
you will reach out from the top stair of your life radiant
at this moment
with glory. . . .

in Pindaro," *QUCC* 29.2 (1988): 77–93; G. Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge, 1987); L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca, 1991).

10. G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, 1979), p. 222; see also E. L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica* (Berkeley, 1962), p. 35; G. Dumézil, *Servius et la fortune: Essai sur la fonction sociale de louange et de blâme et sur les éléments indo-européens du cens romain* (Paris, 1943); J. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, 1975).

11. E.g., Bell, *God, Man*; Bundy, *Studia*; Crotty, *Song*; S. Eitrem, "The Pindaric Phthonos," in *Studies Presented to D. M. Robinson* (St. Louis, 1953); W. Fitzgerald, *Agonistic Poetry* (Berkeley, 1987); H. Maehler, *Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum bis zur Zeit Pindars* (Göttingen, 1963); Most, *Measures*; F. Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Songs* (Baltimore, 1975); M. Simpson, "The Chariot and the Bow as Metaphors for Poetry in Pindar's Odes," *TAPA* 100 (1969): 437–74; P. Waring, "Smoke without Fire," *CQ* 32 (1982): 270–77.

Greek poetry is remarkably candid about what kind of response is called forth from other members of the community by such success—on the one hand we hate it for exceeding our own achievement; at the same time we love it for lighting up our possibilities.¹² This ambivalence is confronted directly by an epinician rhetoric that announces its own function of love and praise while denouncing the opposite, hatred and blame. For example, consider the following generic statements from Bacchylides and Pindar:

χρὴ] δ' ἀλαθείας χάριν
αἰνεῖν, φθόνον ἀμφοτέραισιν
χερσὶν ἀπωσάμενον,
εἴ τις εὖ πράσσοι βροτῶν.

It is necessary for the sake of truth
to praise
thrusting away envy with both hands
if ever some mortal has a win.

(Bacchyl. 5.187)

ἐγὼ δ' ἀστοῖς ἀδὼν καὶ χθονὶ γυῖα καλύψαι,
αἰνέων αἰνήτᾳ, μομφὰν δ' ἐπισπείρων ἀλιτροῖς.

I cheer my townspeople. . . .
because I praise what is praiseworthy
and scatter blame on the unrighteous. . . .

(Pind. *Nem.* 8.38–39)

. . . ὁ γὰρ ἐξ οἴκου ποτὶ μῶμον ἔπαινος κίρνεται

Yes, praise from the house
is concocted to counteract blame. . . .

(Pind. frag. 181 [S–M])¹³

It is important to emphasize that the poet's ability to comprehend both poles of response, both praise and blame, is a discriminatory skill and carries with it an active responsibility. The poet is one who knows how to draw a clear boundary between praiseworthy and blameworthy action and who is obligated to announce this difference in public poetry. The justice and health of his community depend on it.¹⁴ When clear lines are not

12. Cf. Hes. *Op.* 25–26; the complex emotions of φθόνος are discussed by many ancient authors, including Plato (*Phlb.* 47–50); Aristotle (*Rh.* 2 1378b–88a); Xenophon (*Mem.* 3.9.8); see also M. J. Mills, "Phthonos and its related *pathe* in Plato and Aristotle," *Phronesis* 32 (1985): 1–12; E. Raiga, *L'Envie* (Paris, 1932), p. 11; H. Schoeck, *Envy: Theory of Social Behaviour*, trans. M. Glenny and B. Ross (New York, 1969); F. G. Steiner, *Malice* (Oxford, 1952), p. 16; P. Walcot, *Envy and the Greeks: A Study of Human Behaviour* (Warminster, 1978).

13. My translation of this fragment differs from that of Nagy ("for praise is by nature mixed with blame," *The Best of the Achaeans* [Baltimore, 1979], p. 250) and that of G. M. Kirkwood, "Blame and Envy," in *Greek Poetry and Philosophy: Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, ed. D. Gerber (Chico, 1984), pp. 170–71 (who cites approvingly Puech's "l'éloge touche au blâme quand il vient de notre propre maison") in the interest (I believe) of closer attunement to its epinician intention.

14. "When a culture fails to maintain the differences between the praiseworthy and the blameworthy, it badly compromises itself," says Crotty, *Song*, p. 107, in a perceptive study of the socioethical functions of *epinikion*. He traces this ethic to Homer and sees the *Iliad* as an elaborate example of one such bad compromise. On the poetic obligation to praise see also Bell, "God, Man," pp. 14–28; Bundy, *Studia*, pp. 35–36; Most, *Measures*, pp. 126–29.

drawn between praise and blame the moral life of the community is confused and befouled; epinician diction typically uses images of darkness, shadow, and smoke to represent the condition of social defilement. There is an epinician fragment (sometimes attributed to Simonides) that says:

τό τ]ε καλὸν κρίνει τό τ' αἰσχρόν· εἰ δέ	
... (.)]. .αγορεῖ τις ἄθυρον [σ]τόμα	
...]φέρ[ω]ν, ὁ μὲν καπνὸς ἀτελής, ὁ δέ[
χρυ]σὸς οὐ μαιίνεται[α]	
..] ἀλλάθ[ε]ι[α παγκρατής	5
...] ὀλίγοις ἄρεταν ἔδωκενε[
...]ελος, οὐ γὰρ ἐλαφρὸν ἐσθλ[ὸν ἔμμεναι·	
ἦ γ]άρ ἀέκοντά νιν βιάται	
κέρ]δος ἀμάχητον ἦ δολοπλ[όκου	
με]γασθενῆς οἴστρος Ἀφροδίτ[ας	10
..](.)θαλοῖ τε φιλονικίαι.	
..δ]ὲ μὴ δι' αἰῶνος ὀσίαν	
]θεῖν κέλευθον,	
]ος ἐς τὸ δυνατόν.[
]αγκυλάν[15
]δίκαιος.[
ε]ὐθὺς ἀπο[
]θέοντι· τρ[
].ντρο[
]α.[20
].ο[

[the poet]
 differentiates beautiful from ugly: but . . . if
 someone speaks [evil]
 broadcasting from a mouth that has no door on it
 the smoke is a thing without edges or object.
 Yet gold does not become defiled.
 And truth is totally strong.

(Sim. frag. 541 *PMG* = *POxy.* 2432)¹⁵

I have translated the Greek adjective ἀτελής (v. 3) as “a thing without edges or object” to emphasize certain ideological assumptions embedded in the word and recurrent in the allusive language of praise poetry. Ἀτελής is a privative adjective from the noun τέλος (“end, goal”) that literally means “lacking completion.” It can be rendered “unfinished,” “aimless,” “imperfect,” “futile,” or “never-ending” and has connotations of infinitude or boundlessness that always signify pejoratively in ethical contexts. This is the adjective that Aristotle chooses, for example, to explain why the unbounded itself (τὸ ἄπειρον) is something naturally abhorrent

15. Its original editor ascribed this fragment to Simonides: E. Lobel and E. G. Turner, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Part XXV (London, 1959), pp. 91–94; but the matter remains controversial; see C. M. Bowra, “Simonides or Bacchylides?” *Hermes* 91 (1963): 257–67; W. Donlan, “Simonides fr. 4D and P.Oxy 2432,” *TAPA* 100 (1969): 90–95; D. E. Gerber, *Euterpe: A Selection of Greek Lyric and Iambic Poetry* (Amsterdam, 1970), p. 317; H. Lloyd-Jones, “The Oxyrhynchus Papyri,” *CR* 11 (1961): 19; M. Treu, “Neues zu Simonides (P.Ox. 2432),” *RhM* 103 (1960): 319–36.

(*Gen. An.* 1 715b15–16).¹⁶ And it is the adjective Pindar uses to describe the fantasy world of the stereotypical nonvictor (*Nem.* 3.41–42):

ὅς δὲ διδάκτ' ἔχει, ψεφεννὸς ἀνήρ
 ἄλλοτ' ἄλλα πνέων οὐ ποτ' ἀτρεκεῖ
 κατέβα ποδί, μυρίαν δ' ἀρετᾶν ἀτελεῖ νόφ γεύεται.

Full of instructions yet he goes in darkness,
 breathing now this way now that way,
 never placing his foot exactly
 he tastes ten thousand excellences
 in his own boundless imagining.

Clearly boundlessness of every variety is the natural enemy of the praise poet whose expertise is exactitude of measure. It is standard epinician procedure therefore to associate blame, blamers, and the blameworthy with messing up boundaries, as for example in Simonides' image (above) of the evil-speaker whose "mouth has no door on it," with which we might compare Pindar's characterization of unjust blamers as people who damage themselves with their own excess because they are so bad at measuring (*Pyth.* 2.89–91):¹⁷

ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ταῦτα νόον
 ἰαίνει φθονερῶν· στάθμας δέ τινος ἐλκόμενοι
 περισσᾶς ἐνέπαξαν ἔλ-
 κος ὀδυναρὸν ἔα πρόσθε καρδίᾳ

this does not gladden the mind
 of the envious: no, they drag down the measuring-line
 way past its limit
 and fix a painful wound into their own heart . . .

The damage of blame is indiscriminate. Greek tradition locates the type of the unjust blamer in Archilochus, a poet of iambic abuse who is said to "fatten himself on word-heavy hatreds" (Pind. *Pyth.* 2.55–56) while unrestrainedly "badmouthing his friends and his enemies equally" (Critias frag. 88 B44 VS). Archilochus represents for Pindar a failure of good measuring. The poet of blame is the antithesis of the poet of praise; he is a spokesman of excess and an obfuscator of boundaries: he mixes the categories of love and hate.

16. In light of the Pythagorean turn that Simonides gives to his description of the good man with the adjective τετράγωνος ("four-square") in frag. 542, we should note that boundlessness (τὸ ἀπειρον) heads the Pythagorean table of oppositions, set over against πέρας, which means "limit" or "boundary," and on the same side as κακόν, which means "evil." Aristotle comments, "As the Pythagoreans conjecture, evil belongs to the unlimited and good to the limited" (*Eth. Nic.* 2 1106b29). Moreover, τετράγωνος figures as the final item in the Pythagorean table (over against ἑτερομήκης, which means "having sides of unequal length") for the Pythagoreans regarded the square as the image of virtue and the symbol of justice. The man of perfect virtue is called four-square, Aristotle tells us, because like the square he is "complete" on all sides: τέλειος (*Rh.* 3 1411b26–27; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1 1100b20–22) i.e., perfectly bounded rather than ἀτελής.

17. For comprehensive bibliography on the extensive criticism of these verses, see G. W. Most, "Two Leaden Metaphors in Pindar P. 2," *AJP* 108 (1987): 571–84, with the addition of Kurke, *Traffic*, p. 220. Bell, "God, Man," offers an especially lucid analysis of this poem so intensely concerned—perhaps more intensely than any other extant epinician—with drawing those boundaries of praise and blame, friend and enemy, that ground social reality for Pindar's community.

III. HOW TO UNMIX LOVE FROM HATE

But here we touch the heart of epinician ethics, which is also the place where Socrates' interest in Simonides may have begun. Mixture is not incurable. A poet motivated by love instead of hate can undertake the epinician action that will wash these categories clear as water (or so he claims):

λέλογχε δὲ μεμ-
φομένοις ἐσλοῦς ὕδωρ καπνῷ φέρειν
ἀντίον.

When people are blaming good men
it is the dispensation [of the poet]
to bring water to fight off smoke.

(Pind. *Nem.* 1.24–25)

Fundamental to the ideology of praise is the belief that this clarificatory procedure is a willing act of love:

σκοτεινὸν ἀπέχων ψόγον.
ὕδατος ὅτε ροὰς φίλον ἐς ἄνδρ' ἄγων
κλέος ἐτήτυμον αἰνέσω
ποτίφορος δ' ἀγαθοῖσι μισθὸς οὗτος.

Holding shadowy blame off,
I will praise truly bringing glory like streams of water
to a man beloved.
This is the wage that good men get paid.

(Pind. *Nem.* 7.61–63)

This is the wage that the Protagoras-poem of Simonides is concerned to measure out, perhaps for the first time in Greek literature—the wage of song that will unmix praiseworthy action from unjust blame and clear away the shadow and smoke of hatred. As such the poem is a process of spatial definition. It marks out the area within which a man may prove himself good. Its language is that of boundaries and space and the purification of bounded spaces, moving from the four-square man of the first stanza to a declaration about mixture and unmixture in the last. Dirt, in its most fundamental definition, is matter out of place. The poached egg on your plate at breakfast is not dirt. The poached egg on the floor of the Reading Room of the British Museum *is* dirt: it has crossed a boundary it ought not to have crossed. Simonides devotes the main body of his poem to clearing away the dirt of blame and bad definition from the space where praise is to be sung. He clears away Pittacus, who failed to draw accurate boundaries (νέμεται 12) around his concept of the good man. He clears away the gods, who are simply incommensurable with human boundaries (14, 19–20). He clears away the race of fools who are coextensive with boundlessness (ἀπείρων 38). What remains is his own measured action of praise and love. “I praise and I love,” he says “whoever willingly does nothing ugly” (27–28).

Beginning with Protagoras, philosophers and literary critics have generated a good deal of smoke and shadow around the question what sort of

man it is that Simonides decides to praise and love. Complex debates continue about whether Simonides had it in mind to redefine the good, to distinguish being from becoming, to invent intentionality. Plato has seen to it, by the contaminated condition in which he transmits the poem to us, that these questions remain largely insoluble. But perhaps that is part of the point of the poem. That human life is an insolubly mixed condition is an idea as old as the two jars on the threshold of Zeus in *Iliad* 24 (529–33). From these jars, Pindar tells us, Zeus distributes to men two evils for every good (*Pyth.* 3.81–82). As Simonides emphasizes in verses 13–14 of the Protagoras-poem, perfection is the property of gods and should not concern us. “Do not try to become Zeus,” is the unambiguous advice Pindar gives us (*Isthm.* 5.14), and in another poem he explains, $\chi\rho\eta\ \delta\epsilon\ \kappa\alpha\tau'\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu\ \alpha\iota\epsilon\iota\ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\rho\alpha\nu\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\nu$: “It is necessary to look at the measure of everything in accordance with what you are” (*Pyth.* 2.34).¹⁸ What you are, as a human being, is a mixture of good and evil. You cannot control the fact or the proportions of the mixture. But you can control its representation—by means of an act of measure—or so the epinician poet claims. Moreover he claims to possess this art. And here is where epinician poets begin to make Socrates very, very nervous.

Simonides’ poem is not a poem about good, evil, gods, men, or Pittacus so much as it is a poem about praise. That is, a poem about Simonides himself in his role as epinician poet. In a way typical of epinician procedure but also emphatic enough to suggest he is inventing the procedure, Simonides’ poem would seem to propose that human goodness is ontologically *dependent* upon praise. The notion that unless it is celebrated in song a praiseworthy action does not exist became a working assumption of epinician poetry in the hands of Pindar and Bacchylides. As one critic puts it, “The poem is itself the recognition and acknowledgment that is vital to the completion of the victory.”¹⁹ So Pindar says (frag. 121):

... πρέπει δ' ἐσλοῖσιν ὑμνεῖσθαι . . .
 ... καλλίσταις αἰοδαῖς.
 τοῦτο γὰρ ἀθανάτοις τιμαῖς ποτιψαύει μόνον [ῥηθέν].
 θνάσκει δὲ σιγαθὲν καλὸν ἔργον

It is right to sing praise of good men. . . .
 a beautiful deed gone silent dies.

The epinician poet stands, therefore, side by side with the victor as *πρόφαντος* (“manifestor” Pind. *Ol.* 1.116) or *προφάτας* (“prophet” Pind. *Nem.* 9.50; Pa. 6.6; frag. 150) or *μάρτυς* (“witness” Pind. *Ol.* 4.5, 6.21; 6.21; *Nem.* 7.49) or *ἄγγελος* (“messenger” Pind. *Ol.* 6.90, 7.21; *Pyth.* 1.32, 9.1; *Nem.* 6.65; cf. Simon. frag. 542.26). According to Pindar, his poem is the means by which the victor becomes fully manifest as a victor (*Pyth.* 10.22–23):

18. The sentiment receives various formulations in Pindar (*Ol.* 3.44, 5.24, 13.48; *Pyth.* 8.78, 10.27; *Nem.* 11.47, *Isthm.* 6.71; Pa. 1.3) and can be traced to Pittacus himself, whose dictum “Keep to your own level” is quoted by Callimachus (*Epigr.* 1.12; cf. Heraclitus frag. B30 VS).

19. Crotty, *Song*, p. 81; see also R. Hamilton, *Epinikion* (The Hague, 1974), pp. 16–17, 81, 113–15; Most, *Measures*, p. 72; Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory*, p. 26.

εὐδαίμων δὲ καὶ ὕμνη-
 τὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ γίνεται σοφοῖς,
 ὃς ἂν χερσὶν ἢ ποδῶν ἀρετᾷ κρατήσῃς

This man becomes blessed and praised by poets
 whoever wins a victory by hands or excellence of feet.

This special epinician concept of becoming, expressed through a special epinician use of the verb γίγνομαι, is fundamental to our understanding of praise poetry. For the victor to become a victor depends in part upon the epinician poet, if becoming entails manifestation. Only the gods can hope to avoid blame simply by being what they are; a man must prove himself to be what he is by acting in such a way that a poet praises him. So Pindar says briskly to his patron Hieron of Syracuse in the second Pythian (72), γένοι', οἷος ἑσσι μαθών: "Find out what you are and get it made manifest! (become it!)" "Get it made manifest!" is a thick translation of the simple Greek imperative "Become!" (γένοιτο). Pindar is defining for his patron the metaphysics of their contract. Manifestation binds poet and victor together in a relationship as unquestionable as natural law; Pindar says (*Isthm.* 6.20–21):

τέθμιόν μοι φαμί σαφέστατον ἔμμεν
 τάνδ' ἐπιστείχοντα νᾶσον ῥαίνέμεν εὐλογίαις.

I say it is a necessary and absolutely lucid law
 that I come to this island and rain the water of praise on it.

The opening verse of Simonides' poem, then, can be read as a richly self-conscious assertion of the poetic function. Simonides begins by saying that "to become truly manifest as a good man is hard" in order to imply that the transaction between victory and manifestation, between praise-worthiness and praise, between being and becoming, is one that requires poetic mediation. Within this genre, no man is manifest as good unless a poet says so. After asserting that his task is hard, Simonides goes on to explain why: the rest of the poem defines the enemy of poetic manifestation, which is blame, and sets forth a strong poetic claim to be able to overcome this enemy by means of words. Simonides tells us in the clearest terms that his motive is love and his project is to unmix praise from blame. This is the claim that Socrates flatly and forcefully repudiates in the *Protagoras*.

Not praise but "blame" (ψέγω 347A) is the last word of Socrates' poetic exegesis. Not praise but blame, according to Socrates, is the whole message and motive of Simonides' poem from beginning to end. Socrates explains why (*Prt.* 343C):

ὁ οὖν Σιμωνίδης, ἅτε φιλότιμος ὢν ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ, ἔγνω ὅτι εἰ κατέλοι τοῦτο τὸ ῥῆμα, ὥσπερ εὐδοκιμοῦντα ἀθλητὴν, καὶ περιγένοιτο αὐτοῦ, αὐτὸς εὐδοκίμησεν ἐν τοῖς τότε ἀνθρώποις. εἰς τοῦτο οὖν τὸ ῥῆμα καὶ τούτου ἔνεκα, τοῦτ' ἐπιβουλεύων κολουῖσαι αὐτό, ἅπαν τὸ ἄσμα πεποίηκεν, ὥς μοι φαίνεται.

Simonides was ambitious to get a name for wisdom and knew that if he could overthrow [the saying of Pittacus] and beat him down like some famous athlete he would

win fame among his peers. So it was against this saying and with this purpose that Simonides composed the whole poem—in a covert attempt to cut it down to size.

Socrates proceeds to read every statement of the poem as a formal act of hatred, that is as blame, directed at Pittacus. When he comes to the part of the poem where Simonides explicitly declares that his motive is love not hate—"I praise and I love" he says at verse 27—Socrates coolly informs us that this is the kind of thing praise poets are always saying: after all, they make their living by lying to tyrants. "Simonides himself was no doubt aware," says Socrates, "that he had praised and celebrated this or that tyrant not willingly at all but under compulsion" (346B): πολλάκις δέ, οἶμαι, καὶ Σιμωνίδης ἡγήσατο καὶ αὐτὸς ἢ τύραννον ἢ ἄλλον τινὰ τῶν τοιούτων ἐπαινέσαι καὶ ἐγκωμιάσαι οὐχ ἐκὼν, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαζόμενος.

In other words, praise poets are people whose will is not entirely in their own control and whose motives for praise cannot be trusted. Socrates underscores this point with a deliberately wild hyperbaton practiced upon the Greek word that means "willingly" (ἐκὼν 28). "Willingly" properly modifies "whoever" (ὅστις 28) and belongs to the relative clause of verse 28: "whoever willingly does nothing ugly." Socrates transfers "willingly" to the previous verse so that it modifies the two main verbs and refers to Simonides himself: "I willingly praise and love. . . ." Socrates appropriates the poet's poem by stepping over the poet's will as if it did not exist. He goes on to dismiss Simonides as a salesman of praise and the slave of his own poetic function. It is interesting to note that Socrates has criticized sophistry in precisely analogous terms earlier in the dialogue. As he and his companion Hippocrates approached their interview with Protagoras, Socrates warned the younger man that sophists are salesmen of knowledge who have the same power to traduce their customer as do praise poets (Pl. *Prt.* 313C–D):

καὶ ὅπως γε μή, ὦ ἐταῖρε, ὁ σοφιστὴς ἐπαινῶν ἃ πωλεῖ ἐξαπατήσῃ ἡμᾶς, ὥσπερ οἱ περὶ τὴν τοῦ σώματος τροφήν, ὁ ἔμπορος τε καὶ κάπηλος. καὶ γὰρ οὗτοί που ὦν ἄγουσιν ἀγωγίμων οὔτε αὐτοὶ ἴσασιν ὅτι χρηστὸν ἢ πονηρὸν περὶ τὸ σῶμα, ἐπαινοῦσιν δὲ πάντα πωλοῦντες, οὔτε οἱ ὠνούμενοι παρ' αὐτῶν, ἐὰν μή τις τύχῃ γυμναστικός ἢ ἱατρός ὦν.

. . . We must take care, my friend, that the sophist does not deceive us when he praises what he sells. . . . for they praise indiscriminately all their merchandise without knowing what is really good or evil. . . .

The implications of Plato's analogy between Simonides and Protagoras are becoming ever more clear: both are mediators of becoming in a transaction that cannot be trusted. You can no more credit a sophist when he says "I know" than you can believe a praise poet when he says "I will."

IV. REPUNCTUATING THE WILL

Now it is well known that Socrates had some powerfully new and strange ideas about the human will. He devotes the latter half of the *Protagoras* to expounding some of them, in particular the notion that no human being

commits evil willingly. This Socratic doctrine of will, as he expounds it here, is directly dependent on what he calls “the art of measure that can save our life”—an art that promises to clarify the difference between good and evil once and for all. It is probably no accident that Socrates prefaces this discussion of the will with violent hyperbaton of Simonides’ word “willingly”—as if to imply that the art of measure practiced by a praise poet could not sustain a human will or clarify moral options or save our life. Praise is an extrapersonal judgment announced by the poet and validated by social convention. It moves from outside to inside, defining the boundaries of actions and people and concepts so as to locate value within those bounded spaces. When Pindar says μέτρῳ καταβαίνει: “Descend to measure!” (*Pyth.* 8.78)²⁰ he is inviting his victor into a spotlight defined by the poem itself. When Simonides says: “Those men are best whomsoever the gods love!” (542.19–20) he is clearing a space for the unspoken corollary: “Those men become good whomsoever a poet loves!” and he proceeds to fill that space with praise in the following stanza. Now if we read this stanza in the way Simonides wrote it and leave the word “willingly” in its place in verse 28, we see that there is a coordinate movement of individual will out from the center of the agent to meet external conditions. And it is clear from Pindar and Bacchylides that epinician ideology universally conceives of action in this way, as a collaboration of interior consciousness and exterior data.²¹ But Socrates blatantly removes the factor of interiority from Simonides’ definition and leaves his praiseworthy man defined by external actions alone: “whoever does nothing ugly.” This man has no moral center, no spiritual syntax. Insofar as he is good he is one unpunctuated exterior. Socrates knows this reading is syntactically outrageous, as he indicates in a wily parenthesis:

ὥς πρὸς Πιττακὸν λέγων τὸ πάντας δὲ ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω ἐκὼν (ἐνταῦθα δεῖ ἐν τῷ ἐκὼν διαλαβεῖν λέγοντα), ὅστις ἔρῃ μὴδὲν αἰσχρόν, ἄκων δ’ ἔστιν οὐς ἐγὼ ἐπαίνω καὶ φιλῶ.

Well it looks like we’ll have to repunctuate this and put a full stop after the “willing.”
(Pl. *Prt.* 346E)²²

To repunctuate the human soul and put a full stop after its willing sounds like a good description of what Socrates hopes to achieve with his “art of measure that can save our life.” This art of measure is a knowledge of good and evil centered in the soul and coextensive with the will. It gathers

20. Current scholarship on this admittedly difficult text affords three main lines of interpretation, well summarized by Kirkwood, *Selections From Pindar* (Chico, 1982), pp. 212–13. My reading follows that of U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Pindaros* (Berlin, 1920), p. 442; R. W. B. Burton, *Pindar’s Pythian Odes* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 187–88; Fitzgerald, *Agonistic Poetry*, p. 153.

21. See, e.g., Pindar *Ol.* 1.104–5, *Isthm.* 5.11, *Isthm.* 7.16–19; *Nem.* 6.13, 7.6–8; O. Becker, *Das Bild des Weges und verwandte Vorstellungen im frühgriechischen Denken*, Hermes Einzelschrift 4 (Berlin, 1937), pp. 65–68, treats the “road of φούα” that connects private ability and public accomplishment; Kurke, *Traffic*, pp. 15–53, discusses the reciprocity between inner man and outer world that informs Pindar’s epinician value system with an “ideology of the quest.”

22. I am overtranslating, for charismatic reasons not incongruent with what I take to be Plato’s purpose, the Greek verb διαλαμβάνω; cf. Plato *Phdr.* 81B.

the soul into itself as a coherent moral interval—impervious to mixture and indifferent to praise and blame because it carries its own boundaries with it.

V. WHY PROTAGORAS?

This is not the art that Protagoras teaches nor the art that Simonides uses. Both the poet and the sophist approach the human soul from the outside, through concepts that are notably spatial, external, and authoritarian. Protagoras' sophistic τέχνη is a practical skill for improving techniques of moral reasoning, conceived as a matter of boundaries defined and enforced from without. Protagoras describes it in three vivid analogies. First, he speaks of moral life as a "paradigm" (παράδειγμα 326D) into which we learn to fit ourselves just as children learn to write Greek by tracing the letter shapes over and over. Second, he tells us that children who do not learn have to be reshaped by their teachers or parents with the application of threats and blows, "like a bent and twisted piece of wood that needs straightening out" (325D). Third, he describes his own educational task as that of helping others "to get a little further along on the road to virtue" (328A). Protagoras' road metaphor recalls a fragment of Simonides (frag. 579 *PMG*):

ἔστί τις λόγος
τὰν Ἀρετὰν ναίειν δυσαμβάτοισ' ἐπὶ πέτραις,
†νῦν δέ μιν θοαν† χῶρον ἀγνὸν ἀμφέπειν·
οὐδὲ πάντων βλεφάροισι θνατῶν
ἔσοπτος, ᾧ μὴ δακέθυμος ἰδρῶς
ἔνδοθεν μόλη,
ἵκη τ' ἐς ἄκρον ἀνδρείας.

There is a story
that Virtue dwells on cliffs hard to climb
and she controls a holy space.
Nor is she looked on by the eyes of any mortal
into whom heartbiting sweat does not enter.
And he reaches the high edge of manliness.

Like Protagoras, Simonides conceives Virtue spatially, as an area to be covered on foot. Moreover, his climber is like a child tracing letter shapes as he attempts to fit the outline of his own manliness to the paradigm set by the cliffs of Virtue. We might say that paradigm-acquisition was the commodity Protagoras and Simonides put on sale, in different ways. And it is interesting to note that each of them uses the same verbal formula to describe his merchandise: ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι ("to become good") is what Protagoras promises to teach (328B) and what Simonides knows how to praise (542.1).

Protagoras, like Simonides, is a salesman of becoming, as Socrates has warned us early in the dialogue (313D). For Simonides, becoming is contingent upon manifestation and requires a poet to announce it. For Protagoras, becoming depends upon practical knowledge that a sophist can

teach. Socrates finds fault with this mode of teaching in many passages of the Platonic dialogues. You cannot, he says, add a knowledge of virtue into the soul from outside like someone sewing patches on old clothes (*Meno* 91D) or siphoning water from one jar to another (*Symp.* 175D) or putting sight into blind eyes (*Resp.* 518B). The eye of the soul is not blind, Socrates insists. But it does get darkened and defiled by bad living (*Resp.* 527–33D). Now “purification” of the soul was one of the descriptions under which sophists marketed their educational program; we find this sophistic project of καθαρός examined at length by Socrates in the *Sophist* and declared to be a “fantastic and unhealthy claim” (232A). It would seem that Socrates holds a very different conception of health²³ and of purification than Protagoras does or Simonides would understand. The difference is crucial to his art of measure.

Dirt, defined in ancient terms as matter out of place, is a kind of physical and moral hyperbaton. The “healthy man” (ὁ γυῖς ἀνὴρ 36) to whom Simonides refers in the final stanza of his poem is someone who abhors mixture of praise and blame and who entrusts moral clarification to a poet’s voice. Protagoras also professes to be able to purify human souls from the outside in, by positioning data. If you come to me for instruction, Protagoras in effect tells Hippocrates, you will “learn to put your goods in order” (318E). Socrates would no more trust a sophist to put his goods in order, or to cleanse the human soul, than he would rely on the public structures of praise poetry to define virtue. In the *Phaedo* he describes how truth itself, and nothing else, has the power to purify the soul of all the false coinages and painted imitations and unclean mixtures that constitute bad philosophy. Socrates does not seem to conceive purification as a matter of locating or relocating data in preexisting paradigms,

23. It is probably no accident that in the *Protagoras* Plato names Socrates’ interlocutor Hippocrates. Socrates draws attention to this naming early in the dialogue, notably in connection with some pointed questions about money (311B), and subsequently allows important branches of the conversation to develop around the metaphors of medicine, disease, and health. Hippocrates of Kos was a contemporary of Socrates and is believed by some to have inspired, or been inspired by, the Socratic method. Obvious parallels between the historical situations of doctors, sophists, and poets, just at this time when their respective expertises were first being put on sale in the Greek community, need not be rehearsed: the Hippocratic treatises are as gnarled with second thoughts about money as are the biographical traditions of Protagoras and Simonides. But it is interesting to see Hippocratic notions of polarity, spatial order, measure, and mixture glancing out from the central issue of “becoming good” that brings Simonides, Protagoras, and Socrates together in this dialogue. Certainly health is a standard epicurean trope for the context of excellences in which a victor flourishes (cf. Pind. *Ol.* 5.25–26; Bacchyl. 1.164–67); moreover Simonides’ professional concern for health is attested in two fragments. He tells us that health is the best thing in life (frag. 651 *PMG*) and a prerequisite to the grace of poetry (frag. 604 *PMG*). For the praise poet, health is a state of *being* good that prepares the moment of *becoming* good—i.e., manifest in action and song—in a homeostasis of complex interactions not unlike the *krasis* recommended by Hippocratic theories of bodily balance. There is a collaborative ideal inherent in the attitudes of poet and doctor which Platonic philosophy of soul is arguably at pains to privatize. On the possibilities of interface between Platonic and Hippocratic theories at this time, see H. Diller, “Hippokratische Medizin und attische Philosophie,” *Hermes* 80 (1952): 385–99; J. H. Kuhn, *System und Methodenprobleme im Corpus Hippocraticum*, Hermes Einzelschrift 11 (Berlin, 1956); P. Lain Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, trans. L. J. Rather and J. M. Sharp (New Haven and London, 1970); J. Longrigg, “Philosophy and Medicine: Some Early Interactions,” *HSPH* 67 (1963): 147–61; G. E. R. Lloyd, “Who Is Attacked in *On Ancient Medicine*?” *Phronesis* 8 (1963): 111–34. On the metaphor of health see C. M. Bowra, “Simonides and Scopas,” *CP* 29 (1934): 23–29; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin, 1913), p. 177, n. 1; Woodbury, “Simonides,” p. 162, n. 75.

but rather as an activity of the soul. The moral health he prescribes is one that each man achieves individually by searching through his beliefs in a process of dialectic (cf. *Soph.* 230B-D; *Chrm.* 157A; *Phdr.* 67B). Its objective is to learn, in practice, the art that will unmix evil from good in all the choices of human life. It is an art of measure that permanently changes the syntax of the soul.

VI. HYPERBATON

This Socratic syntax is a new and strange mixture. It inhabits the soul of the man who has truly *become good*, according to Socrates' way of thinking. Simonides would dismiss as idiotic such a claim to virtue not validated in public and communal praise. Protagoras, for his part, brings the dialogue to a close with a formal praise of Socrates framed in just the terms a praise poet would recommend (Pl. *Prt.* 361D-E):

Καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας, Ἐγὼ μὲν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐπαινῶ σου τὴν προθυμίαν καὶ τὴν διέξοδον τῶν λόγων. καὶ γὰρ οὔτε τὰλλα οἶμαι κακὸς εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, φθονερός τε ἥκιστ' ἀνθρώπων, ἐπεὶ καὶ περὶ σοῦ πρὸς πολλοὺς δὴ εἶρηκα, ὅτι ὦν ἐντυγχάνω πολὺ μάλιστα ἄγαμαι σέ, τῶν μὲν τηλικούτων καὶ πάνυ· καὶ λέγω γε ὅτι οὐκ ἂν θαυμάζοιμι, εἰ τῶν ἐλλογίμων γένοιτο ἀνδρῶν ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ.

I praise you Socrates for your zeal and expository power. I myself am not (I think) an evil man nor in any degree whatsoever a begrudging one—why I've spoken to numerous people about you, I've said I admire you more than anyone else I've met, among our present peers especially. And I tell you, I wouldn't be surprised if you were to become one of those held in high regard for wisdom!

Protagoras here strikes all the right epinician notes—avowal of praise and rejection of blame, the public eye and the poet's love, manifestation in becoming. Protagoras and Simonides would agree that “becoming good” depends on external evaluators and a fixed paradigm of value. But Socrates is congenitally impatient with paradigms. Blame and praise do not construct value for him.

Socrates prefers to believe that each human soul can become good by recognizing virtue to be a function of knowledge, for people do evil only through ignorance of what is good (he says) not willingly (357–58). I think I am not the only reader of Plato who finds this notion difficult.²⁴ Why does Socrates wish to put knowledge and virtue into direct relation with one another by a kind of conceptual hyperbaton that steps over the human will as if it did not exist? To mix knowledge directly with virtue in this way seems to make little more sense than saying praise and blame could reside in one and the same word. Every time I try to figure this out I feel like a man attacking a river with a sword. Perhaps it is the wrong

24. See, e.g., D. Gallop, “The Socratic Paradox in the *Protagoras*,” *Phronesis* 9 (1964): 117–29; G. M. A. Grube, “The Structure and Unity of the *Protagoras*,” *CQ* 27 (1933): 203–7; M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986); J. L. Stocks, “The Argument of Plato's *Protagoras* 351b–356c,” *CQ* 7 (1913): 100–104; J. P. Sullivan, “The Hedonism in Plato's *Protagoras*,” *Phronesis* 6 (1961): 10–28; G. Vlastos in B. Jowett, *Plato's Protagoras*, trans. rev. M. Ostwald (New York, 1956).

question to ask. Perhaps, as I heard one postmodern philosopher say to another last April in the elevator at the annual conference for the Society of Philosophy and Literature, "You know I think something is missed when one appropriates correctly."²⁵

Certainly something is missed when one appropriates a sophist like Protagoras correctly. For example, if we take his last words to Socrates at face value we miss the fact that the Greek verb he uses for "I admire you" may have exactly the opposite connotation. Ἀγαμῶν can mean equally "I am moved to wondering admiration, I praise you" or "I am moved to envy and begrudgment, I blame you" (LSJ). Now it is well known that Protagoras used to drill his students by setting them to plead for and against the same thesis in turn (Diog. Laert. 9.53). But perhaps Protagoras' rhetoric of praise and blame tells us less about Protagoras than it does about the appropriation and misappropriation of words. There is really no one except Protagoras who can know whether Protagoras is moved by a will to praise or a will to blame when he says, "I admire you, Socrates," just as there is no one but Simonides who can know exactly how "willingly" the poet says to his patron, "I love and praise you." Socrates tells us clearly and early in the *Protagoras* that we cannot rely on the voices of other people if we want to find the truth (347E). Other people mix things up.

But Socrates also mixes things up. In fact by the end of this dialogue we find ourselves listening to a Socrates who is so mixed up with Protagoras he is arguing the sophistic doctrine of the teachability of virtue (361A-C). Postmodern interpreters will congratulate Socrates at this point as a strong example of undecidability and pragmatic paradox. But enlightened gentlemen like you and I may be wondering uneasily whose side we are on. How should we in the end evaluate the three acts of measure that are put up for sale in this dialogue?

To dismiss the Simonidean art of measure as a luxury and an anachronism seems an obvious first step. Simonides speaks from an archaic poetic tradition that is able to construe the whole order of things, phenomenal, social, and spiritual, as one ecology of value and sense. Simonides is not naive about the pollutions that can be unleashed against this order by human folly or superhuman malevolence, but he maintains faith in the collaborative processes of purification still available within his society as well as in his own function as a poet to irrigate that faith. The educational strategy of a sophist like Protagoras seems little more than a high-priced fifth-century update of this old poetic program. But Socrates is offering something new and strange. The Socratic art of measure is a

25. Cf. P. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1984), p. 60: "the continuous differentiable function is losing its preeminence as a paradigm of knowledge and prediction. Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, *fracta*, catastrophes and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word knowledge while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known but the unknown."

postecological program for survival in a world where every human soul has to know how to take shelter within itself and how to purify the space of its own moral plan without dependence on mediators, technology, or the dangerous magic of misappropriation. Dialectic, as practiced by Socrates, is a kind of human experiment where the soul can play and train itself in its own purifications. The philosophical soul that is stabilized by a true art of measure can risk experimenting on itself in this way—can mix itself with what it is not, can entertain hypotheses contradictory to its belief—without fear of getting stranded in the experiment. So Socrates' favorite hermeneutic technique of hyperbaton is a profoundly experimental exercise in mixing and unmixing the possibilities of meaning available from words, syntax, and people. Its method is confusion but its result is to clarify the difference between sophistic and philosophic teaching: you can always tell the sophist from the philosopher in a Platonic dialogue. The sophist is the one who loses his sense of humor.

For example at that blank moment in the *Protagoras* when Protagoras and Socrates realize they have stranded themselves in dialectical deadend, Protagoras suddenly gets very depressed. "It's your dialogue, Socrates, you finish it!" he snaps (360D). Socrates' response is typically genial. He suggests they begin the conversation all over again. And at this point, reverting to a myth adduced earlier by Protagoras, he compares himself with the transcendent trickster Prometheus, ὃ χρώμενος ἐγὼ καὶ προμηθεύμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἑμαυτοῦ παντὸς πάντα ταῦτα πραγματεύομαι: "For I myself am constantly practicing to be a Prometheus in my own life as I keep working on all these questions" (361D).

This analogy with Prometheus offers us one final clue to how Socrates conceives and practices his philosophic art of measure. Prometheus figures in Greek myth as the god who saved the life of the human race by mixing up the dispensations of gods and men: his theft of fire from heaven is a kind of cosmic hyperbaton on which all our salvation depends. Neither teachable nor marketable, the fire of Prometheus surely has one important analogue in the cheerful chaos of Socrates' soul-experiments. But it also burns brightly within Plato's design. Plato's insistence on mixing a poem of Simonides into his philosophical discourse makes one thing very clear to readers of the *Protagoras*. Whatever it is that Simonides is trying to say in this poem is not what the philosophers get out of it. The poem escapes them—that is, it remains poetry: suspended, misappropriated, and unknown with the philosophical prose, like a seed of fire captured in a fennel stalk. You can always tell the poetry from the prose in a Platonic dialogue. The poetry is what keeps unmixing itself from everything else.

APPENDIX: SIMONIDES FRAG. 542 *PMG* (THE “PROTAGORAS-POEM”)

ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι χαλεπὸν χερσὶν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόφ τετράγωνον ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον·	
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οὐδέ μοι ἐμμελέως τὸ Πιττάκειον νέμεται, καίτοι σοφοῦ παρὰ φωτὸς εἰ- ρημένον· χαλεπὸν φάτ' ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι. θεὸς ἂν μόνος τοῦτ' ἔχοι γέρας, ἄνδρα δ' οὐκ ἔστι μὴ οὐ κακὸν ἔμμεναι,	15
ὃν ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ καθέλη· πράξας γὰρ εἴ πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, κακὸς δ' εἰ κακῶς[[ἐπὶ πλείστον δὲ καὶ ἄριστοί εἰσιν [οὓς ἂν οἱ θεοὶ φιλῶσιν.]	20
τοῦνεκεν οὐ ποτ' ἐγὼ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι δυνατὸν διζήμενος κενεᾶν ἐς ἄ- πρακτον ἐλπίδα μοῖραν αἰῶνος βαλέω, πανάμωμον ἀνθρώπων, εὐρυεδέος ὅσοι καρπὸν αἰνύμεθα χθονός·	25
ἐπὶ δ' ὑμῖν εὐρὼν ἀπαγγελέω. πάντας δ' ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω, ἐκὼν ὅστις ἔρῃ μηδὲν αἰσχρόν· ἀνάγκαι δ' οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται.	30
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[οὐκ εἰμὶ φιλόψογος, ἐπεὶ ἔμοιγε ἐξαρκεῖ ὅς ἂν μὴ κακὸς ᾦ] μηδ' ἄγαν ἀπάλαμνος εἰ- δώς γ' ὀνησίπολιν δίκαν,	35
ὕγις ἀνὴρ· οὐ †μὴν† ἐγὼ μωμήσομαι· τῶν γὰρ ἡλιθίων ἀπείρων γενέθλα. πάντα τοι καλὰ, τοῖσιν τ' αἰσχρὰ μὴ μέμεικται.	40
Hard to become truly a good man in hands and feet and mind built four-square without blame.	1
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Nor (if you ask me) does Pittacus' saying define its terms properly although said by a wise man: hard (he says) to be good.	13

God alone could have this privilege.
 Man cannot but be bad
 if the misfortune machine pulls him down.
 Yes sure, every man is good when things are good
 and bad when things are bad [
 [and in general the best are the ones
 whomsoever the gods love]. 19
 So never shall I go searching after what cannot come into being
 anyhow—throwing the space of my life down empty
 in actionless hope—
 An All Blameless Man.
 Among those of us who feed on the food of the earth
 (but if I find one I'll send you the news.)
 I praise and love anyone 27
 whoever willingly does
 nothing ugly. Necessity
 not even gods fight.
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 [
 [No I do not like blaming. Because for me it's enough
 if someone is other than bad] not too much out of hand, 33
 conscious at least of the justice that helps the city,
 a healthy man. No I shall not
 lay blame. Because fools
 are a species that never ends.
 All things, you know, are beautiful with which
 ugly things are not mixed.

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