

CIVIC AND ANTI-CIVIC ETHICS AMONG THE SOPHISTS

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THE PURSUIT OF *ARETĒ* AMONG THE SOPHISTS

A number of sophistic ethical works endorsed the pursuit of *aretē*.¹ The *Dissoi Logoi* provides the clearest evidence for this.² Section 6 of this text is devoted to the question whether *aretē* and wisdom (*sophia*) can be taught and learned. One reason they cannot be taught, the text notes, is that there are no demonstrated teachers of these things. The author then criticizes this position:

Against [this] proof, that there are not demonstrated teachers [of *aretē* and wisdom], what else do the sophists (*sophistai*) teach if not wisdom and *aretē*?³

One sophistic text that explicitly endorses the pursuit of *aretē* is Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*.⁴ The original does not survive; but on the basis of Xenophon's paraphrase of the work as well as testimonial evidence, we can infer that Prodicus represented the hero Heracles at a crossroads poised to choose between two courses of life. These two courses

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¹ "*aretē*" is typically translated as "virtue" or "excellence." But I presently leave the word untranslated and discuss its meaning below.

² This fragmentary text has been transmitted to us among the works of Sextus Empiricus (c. 150-220 CE). But it is widely believed to have been composed at the end of the fifth or early fourth century BCE. Authorship of the work is unclear. Based on its content, it is standardly included among sophistic works. However, the author's remark about the sophists at 6.7 – cited below – indicates that he does not identify himself as a sophist. I suggest that the *Dissoi Logoi* is simply a work of philosophy. For a recent discussion of the work, including the basis of its current division into nine sections, cp. Wolfsdorf 2020a.

³ *Dissoi Logoi* 6.7. In addition to providing evidence that a significant number of sophistic texts were concerned with the pursuit and teaching of *aretē*, section 6 of the *Dissoi Logoi* shows that the very question of the teachability of *aretē* was a topic of philosophical debate at the time. On my reading of the *Dissoi Logoi* as a whole, this very text is designed as a protreptic to the pursuit of *sophia*, and thereby – I would here add – to *aretē* of a kind. Cp. Wolfsdorf 2020a.

⁴ This work was also known as *Seasons (Hōrai)*, presumably referring to the stages of a man's life. Cp. the instance of "*hōras*" so used at DL 8.10.

were represented by two figures; in Xenophon, they are named "*Aretē*" and "*Kakia*."
Compare the following testimony from a scholiast to Aristophanes' *Clouds*:

There is a book by Prodicus entitled *Seasons*, in which he has Heracles encounter *Aretē* and *Kakia*, each calling him to her ways. And Heracles turns to *Aretē* and chooses her exertions (*hidrōtas*) over the transient pleasures of *Kakia*.⁵

The scholiast's reference to a book of Prodicus rather than to Xenophon's paraphrase of it encourages the view that the scholiast's description, which is in fact consistent with Xenophon's paraphrase, accurately describes general features of Prodicus' work.⁶

There is good reason to believe that in presenting a choice between the paths of life of *Aretē* and *Kakia*, Prodicus was adapting the theme of two paths of life in Hesiod's *Works and Days*:

Badness (*kakotēta*) can be attained easily and in abundance; the path to her is smooth, and she lives very near to us. But between us and *aretē*, the immortal gods have placed exertion (*hidrōta*).⁷ Long and steep is the path that leads to her; and it is rough at first(287–91)⁸

In fact, Xenophon cites these verses in the context of his paraphrase of Prodicus.⁹ Hesiod himself uses the term "*kakotēs*," a variant of "*kakia*," for "badness." Moreover, the contrast between "*aretē*" and "*kakia*" or "*kakotēs*" occurs in several other texts of the late fifth century; for example:

For honors come from *aretē*, not from *kakotēs*. (Gorg. Pal. 16)

I was motivated by concern for my relatives and friends, and by concern for the whole city, with *aretē* and not with *kakia*. (Andoc. 1.56)¹⁰

In sum, there is good reason to believe that in his original text, Prodicus championed *aretē*, using that term. So, we can conclude that Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* was an educational exhortation to *aretē*.¹¹

⁵ DK 84 B1.

⁶ The scholiast's statement that Heracles chooses the path of *Aretē* further supports this claim since Xenophon's paraphrase ends before Heracles makes a choice.

⁷ The literal meaning of the word "*hidrōs*" is "sweat." Observe its occurrence in the plural in the scholiast's testimony above.

⁸ Cp. West 1978: 229: "*kakotēs* and *aretē* are not 'vice' and 'virtue' but inferior and superior standing in society, determined principally by material prosperity ... The two roads in Hesiod represent alternative ways of life to choose between."

⁹ Mem. 2.1.20.

¹⁰ Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 56. Cp. also e.g. Antisthenes, fr. 86; [Lys.] *Funeral Oration* 2.9, 65.2.

¹¹ Therefore, Prodicus is also committed to the view that *aretē* is in some manner teachable.

Granted this, what exactly did it mean for the sophists to teach and pursue *aretē*?

THE MEANING OF "ARETĒ"

From the first half of the fourth century BCE through late antiquity, Greek ethical philosophy is prevailingly eudaimonistic in the following strict semantic sense: the majority of late classical philosophers and their successors maintain that what they call "*eudaimonia*" (personal wellbeing/flourishing/a person's life going well for them) is the goal of human life. Accordingly, their aims are to clarify what *eudaimonia* is and how to achieve it. Furthermore, the majority maintain that possession of what they call "*aretē*," which they use to refer to an excellent condition of the *psychē* (soul), is crucial for the achievement of *eudaimonia*. For example, salient constituents of *aretē*, so conceived, include psychological states such as justness and self-control. So, here again, the philosophers' aims are to clarify what *aretē* is and how possession of it contributes to the realization of *eudaimonia*.

With one possible exception, there is no evidence that the sophists conceived the goal of human life explicitly in terms of "*eudaimonia*".¹² Granted this, since they did endorse the pursuit of *aretē*, it may be questioned whether they employed the term "*aretē*" as Plato and his heirs did. I suggest that they did not.

In the late fifth century sophistic and, more generally, ethical philosophical contexts, the pursuit of *aretē* is not conceived as the pursuit of an excellent condition of the *psychē*. It is conceived as the pursuit of an excellent form of *life*. Consequently, in a number of sophistic ethical works, "*aretē*" plays a role akin to that of "*eudaimonia*" in philosophical ethics of the second half of the fourth century and thereafter.

To clarify and advance this thesis, it will be helpful to elaborate on the meaning of the term "*aretē*." "*Aretē*" is often translated as "excellence"; and this is the rendition that I will employ throughout this discussion.¹³ But two semantic properties of "excellence" and so of "*aretē*" should be recognized. One will be crucial to the ensuing discussion. The other, which I note in passing, has to do with the fact that terms such as "*aretē*," "excellence," and "goodness" are evaluative terms. That is, their meanings entail value in various ways. The various ways owe to the fact that value is a gradable property. That is, things that have value can in principle have more or less value. "Excellence" denotes a degree of value greater than that of "goodness" but lesser than that of "optimality" (what "best-ness" would mean if it existed). For example, compare the corresponding adjectives in the following sentences:

It's a good painting, but not an excellent one.

All of these paintings are excellent; but this one is best.

Consequently, in adhering to the common translation of "*aretē*" as "excellence," we also commit ourselves to the view that "*aretē*" denotes a very high, but not superlative

¹² Namely, Aristippus of Cyrene, as portrayed in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.1). Cp. n. 100.

¹³ In fact, I believe that, strictly, "goodness" is the correct rendition. But for convenience, I am simplifying here.

degree of value. In fact, this commitment and so the translation itself is questionable. At least, the Greeks sometimes appear to treat "*aretē*" as denoting a supreme degree of value. And if indeed "*aretē*" does denote a supreme degree of value, then "optimality" or the like is a more faithful translation. I note this point but will not dwell on it.

The second semantic property of "*aretē*," which, as I say, is crucial to the ensuing discussion is the following: "optimality," "excellence," "goodness," and likewise "*aretē*" may be attributed to most any kind of thing. This includes non-people as well as people. For example, the author of the Hippocratic *Regimen in Acute Diseases* says that one *aretē* of gruel is its lubricant nature and that boiled hydromel has the same *aretē* as unboiled hydromel.¹⁴ Herodotus speaks of the the *aretē* of Darius's horse; and Thucydides speaks of the *aretē* of land, referring to its fertility.¹⁵

In the case of people, "*aretē*" may be attributed to ethical psychological states; but it may also be attributed to non-ethical psychological states; and it may be attributed to actions, ethical and non-ethical, as well as to people in ways that are not wholly reducible to psychological attributes or actions. For example, in the following verses from the *Theognidea*, "*aretē*" is used to denote excellence of character:

It is hard even for a discerning (*sophos*) man, Timagoras, to know the temperament (*orgēn*) of many if he sees them from afar; for some keep badness (*kakotēta*) hidden by wealth, and others *aretē* hidden by baleful poverty.¹⁶

In contrast, in the following verses from Solon, "*aretē*" is used to denote a property of actions, speech making and the exercise of wisdom, presumably in contexts of political leadership:

In seven sevens [= at the age of 49], a man is best (*aristos*) in mind (*noun*) and tongue (*glōssan*) ... And in the ninth seven [= age 63], his tongue (*glōssa*) and wisdom (*sophiē*), albeit weaker, are both still capable (*dunatai*) of great *aretē*.¹⁷

Compare now the following verses from the *Theognidea*:

May I be favored by the gods (*eudaimōn*) and dear to the gods (*theophilēs*),
Cyrnus. That is the only *aretē* I desire.¹⁸

In this case, the bearer of the desired *aretē* is a person. Presumably, this *aretē* depends on the character and way of life of the person. But, strictly speaking, since the *aretē* is simply a condition of being favored by and dear to the divine, it is an extrinsic property of the person.

Two semantic features of evaluative terms such as "optimality," "excellence," "goodness," and "*aretē*" explain why these terms can be attributed to various kinds of

¹⁴ *Diet. in Morbis* 5.3 and 15.44 Littré.

¹⁵ Hdt. 3.88; Thuc. 1.2.4.

¹⁶ Theogn. 1059–62.

¹⁷ fr. 27.13–16.

¹⁸ Theogn. 653–54.

things. One is that an entity may bear value in various ways, for instance, instrumentally or non-instrumentally. Accordingly, one entity may have instrumental value, another non-instrumental value. Another is that value is specifiable by kind; for instance, there are ethical and non-ethical kinds of value. This latter feature will be central to the following account.

In felicitous instances of the evaluative term, context – be it linguistic or otherwise – typically clarifies the kind of value. (It may also clarify the way in which value is borne.) For example, on a battlefield, the claim that some soldier is *agathos* or *aristos* or exhibits *aretē* is naturally understood to mean that he is good or best or exhibits excellence in battle. But it is important here to appreciate that the meaning of the evaluative term, say, "excellence" or "*aretē*" does not thereby shift from context to context. Rather, supplementary content is implicitly or explicitly provided to specify the kind of value in question. "Excellence (in battle)," whether "in battle" is explicit or implicit, is a case in point.¹⁹

For example, Tyrtaeus begins an elegy in praise of martial *aretē* with these words:

I would neither call a man to mind nor put him in my speech for *aretē* of running or wrestling (*oute podōn ... oute palaimosunēs*), not even if he had the stature and strength of a Cyclops, nor if, in racing, he would win over the Thracian Northwind.²⁰

In this case, the accompanying genitives "*podōn*" and "*palaimosunēs*" specify the type of value. Compare Homer's description of the son of Eurystheus as:

better than his father in every sort of *aretē* (*pantoias aretas*), whether in running or in battle (*ēmen podas ēde machesthai*).²¹

Here, "every sort of *aretē*" ranges over the domain of highly valued activities performed by men.

Turning now to the sophists – the following text from Gorgias' *Olympic Oration* contains a clear example of "*aretē*," in this case in the plural, used to refer to psychological traits:

Our struggle requires two *aretaī*: boldness (*tolmēs*) and wisdom (*sophias*) – boldness to face the risk (*to kindunon hypomeinai*), wisdom to understand the riddle (*to ainigma gnōnai*). For reason (*logos*), like the Olympic summons, calls the willing, but it crowns only the able.²²

The infinitival phrases following "boldness" and "wisdom," namely "to face the risk" and "to understand the riddle," clearly indicate that boldness and wisdom are here conceived as psychological traits.

¹⁹ The same point holds for expressions such as "instrumentally good/excellent/best."

²⁰ fr. 12.1–4.

²¹ I. 15.641–42.

²² DK 82 B8.

Granted this example, it is in fact the only clear case of "*arete*" used to refer to a psychological condition among texts authored by philosophers and therefore sophists of the fifth century.

In Gorgias' *Helen*, "*arete*" is used to refer to the exemplary distinguishing attribute of action, and precisely not of the body or of the soul:

The adornment (*kosmos*) of a city is manly valor (*euandria*), of a body beauty, of a soul (*psyche*) wisdom (*sophia*), of an action (*pragma*) *arete*.²³

Compare the following fragment from Democritus, where again "*arete*" is used to refer a property of action:

It is necessary to strive for deeds (*erga*) and actions (*preksias*), not words, of *arete*.²⁴

In light of these linguistic remarks, recall now the path of *Aretē* to which Heracles is exhorted in Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*. Surely, Heracles' pursuit of *arete* is not to be understood as the pursuit of a certain psychological state or trait, even though the sort of excellent life that he is to pursue requires cultivation of excellent psychological capacities. Rather, the bearer of *arete* that Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* is concerned with is a human life and a person in virtue of the excellent condition of his life.

ARETĒ AND CIVIC EXCELLENCE

More precisely, the sort of excellent life endorsed in sophistic texts devoted to the pursuit of *arete* is a life of *civic excellence*. By "civic excellence" I mean success as a citizen. This saliently includes success in public affairs, but it may also include success in private affairs.²⁵ Moreover, such success is understood in commonly accepted terms. For instance, success in private affairs involves effective estate management and a flourishing family; success in public affairs saliently involves the agent's making significant positive contributions to his fellow citizens and polis.

In the following, my principal focus will be on success as a citizen in the public sphere. The exhortation of the figure of *Aretē* in Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* is a case in

²³ Gorgias, *Helen* 1.1 (= DK 82 B11).

²⁴ DK 68 B55. Cp. the following instance of "*arete*" from Alcidamas' *Odysseus*: "The *arete* of a man is to heed his commanders and do what is ordered and to be pleasing in all respects to the general public, and to see to it that he is in all respects a good man, doing good to his friends and harm to his enemies." (28)

²⁵ Consider Protagoras' description of his teaching of *arete* at *Plt. Prt.* 318e-319a. I suspect that this reflects the historical Protagoras' views. But clear evidence of the distinction of private and public spheres of action in a fifth-century ethical philosophical context comes from the opening line of Democritus' *On Happiness*: "He who who aims to be happy must not overextend himself, neither in private life (*idiēi*) nor in public (*xunēi*) life ..." (DK 68 B3, part) Consider also the value of *eunomia* for public (*pragmata*) and private (*erga*) activities, described in *Anon. Iambl.* 7.3-4, 8.

point. She says that that "no admirable action (*ergon kalon*)" can be performed without her, and that if Heracles follows her path, he will become good at performing "admirable and noble (*kalōn kai semnōn*) actions."²⁶ Heracles' *aretē* will then be constituted by the performance of admirable actions; and in her specification of these *Aretē* includes conferring benefits on one's friends, aiding the polis, and doing good to all of Greece.²⁷

Another sophistic text that concerns the pursuit of *aretē* and that conceives this pursuit as of civic *aretē* is the *Anonymus Iamblichi*. According to standard editions, seven sizeable fragments of the original work survive.²⁸ Seemingly of sequential and continuous argumentation, they derive from the twentieth chapter of Iamblichus' late third century CE *Exhortation to Philosophy (Protrepticus)*. Since Friederich Blass recognized them as fragments of a sophistic work of the late fifth century BCE, various attempts have been made to identify the author.²⁹ But as no consensus has been reached, the work is standardly referred to as the "Anonymous (Text) from Iamblichus."³⁰

The leading topic of the *Anonymus Iamblichi* is how a young man can bring *aretē* "to the best completion." Fragment 1 begins as follows:

Whatever one wants to bring to the best completion (*exergasasthai eis telos to beltiston*), whether [it be] wisdom, whether it be manliness (*andreia*),³¹ whether it be eloquence, whether it be *aretē*, either in its entirety or in some part (*ē tēn sumpasan ē meros ti autēs*), it is possible to work at (*katergasasthai*) this in the following way.³²

One question regarding the disjunction of wisdom, manliness, eloquence, and *aretē* here is whether the first three items are being conceived as parts of *aretē*. The paratactic syntactic ("whether ... whether ...") does not require this; and the secondary disjunction following *aretē* ("either in its entirety or in some part") also makes such a reading odd.³³

Assume that *aretē* is not in apposition to wisdom, courage, and eloquence. Still, if wisdom, manliness, and eloquence are conceived as psychological states or possessions, then *aretē* would also seem to be so. But there are strong reasons to resist the latter inference. In fragment 2 the author says:

²⁶ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.32, 27. (She also says that none of the actions of *Kakia* is *kalon*, 2.1.31)

²⁷ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.28. Here, I am highlighting actions in the public sphere. The list also includes actions in the private sphere such as the cultivation of one's farm.

²⁸ The number is debatable depending on one's views of Iamblichus' practices of excerpting and paraphrasing.

²⁹ Blass 1889.

³⁰ For a recent discussion of the text, cp. Horky 2020. Cp. also Musti 2003; Ciriaci 2011.

³¹ I prefer this rendition of *andreia* to "courage" here since in fragment 3 the author replaces this term with strength (*ischus*).

³² *Anon. Iambl.* 1.1.

³³ Cp. the peculiarity of the following: "If one wants to visit Norway or Sweden or Denmark or Scandinavia, either as a whole or in part."

If one starts late or [pursues it] for a short time, it is not possible to bring *aretē*, which is composed of many actions (*ex ergōn pollōn sunistatai*), to completion (*epi telos*).³⁴

So, the author appears to view *aretē* as composed of actions. Still, one might wonder whether the author's view here is actually proto-Aristotelian; that is, whether the author is suggesting that in order to acquire *aretē* qua excellent psychological trait one must repeatedly do the sort of things that those who have the trait do. But that this is not the author's point is corroborated in fragment 3. First, the author says:

We must consider on the basis of what speech (*logou*) or action (*ergou*) one who desires *aretē* in its entirety (*aretēs ... tēs sumpasēs*) would become best (*aristos*).³⁵

And the author responds here: by "being beneficial to the most people" (*pleistois ōphelimos ōn*).³⁶ The implication then is that achieving a part of *aretē* consists in benefiting a relatively small number of people. Accordingly, the distinction between achieving *aretē* in part versus achieving *aretē* in its entirety is not the distinction that occurs in *Protagoras* between acquiring one excellent psychological trait, say self-control, in contrast to all of them.

Also in fragment 3, the author speaks of *aretē* in terms of the use (*katachrēsthai*) of different types of possessions for good ends (*eis ta agatha*).³⁷ The possessions in question themselves correlate with the three others items enumerated in fragment 1: wisdom, strength (compare manliness), and eloquence. Conversely, the author says that if one uses these possessions for base ends (*eis ta ponēra*), the opposite of *aretē* will result and the agent will be an utterly bad (*pangakos*) person.³⁸ From this, it appears that in fact wisdom, manliness, and eloquence are conceived as belonging to the ontological category of possession and that *aretē* is conceived as belonging to the ontological category of exercise of possession, which is to say action. Further, given the stated requirement on its completion, complete *aretē* is not the mere exercise of a possession in a single instance, i.e. a single action, but rather a pattern of activity over a significant span of life.

The account of complete *aretē* as a pattern of activity in the *Anonymus Iamblichi* is additionally notable in that the excellence of such activity is taken to depend on public approbation of that activity. Given the importance of this point, it is worth elaborating in general terms. Broadly speaking, the *aretē* or excellence of a thing might be regarded as owing solely to intrinsic features of that thing; however, it need not. Certain actions and events are a case in point. Hippocleas of Thessaly may be an outstanding runner, and his excellence in running may then owe to his speed compared to that of his peers. But if Hippocleas wins the boys' double-stadium foot race, the value of his victory may owe,

³⁴ *Anon. Iambl.* 2.7.

³⁵ *Anon. Iambl.* 3.3.

³⁶ *Anon. Iambl.* 3.3.

³⁷ *Anon. Iambl.* 3.1-2.

³⁸ *Anon. Iambl.* 3.2.

among other things, to the prestige of the event.³⁹ Consequently, the value of the victory may, among other things, owe to the acclaim that the victor and his victory receives. Likewise, the value of a political career may owe to the civic benefits that the politician provides, but it may also owe to the appreciation that the politician receives from the citizens for those benefits. Note further that a politician's ability to remain in office and thereby continue his political career may depend precisely on the citizens' recognition of the civic benefits of his contribution.

The preceding considerations are important for understanding the use of "*aretē*" in various texts because often the Greeks, as we do, regard the value of achievements such as actions or patterns of activity as at least partly dependent on public esteem of those achievements. Accordingly, the relation between *aretē* and honor (*timeē*), glory (*kleos*), or renown (*doxa*) is in fact intimate in many contexts.⁴⁰ The account of *aretē* in the *Anonymus Iambichi* is a case in point.

Fragment 2 of the text begins with the following line:

From whatever source⁴¹ [e.g. wisdom or eloquence] one wishes to acquire renown (*doxa*) among men and to appear (in their eyes) such as one is,⁴² one must begin at once when one is young and apply oneself consistently and without wavering.⁴³

Here, the term "*doxa*" occupies the position that "*aretē*" does in the opening line of fragment 1, and the remainder of the fragment focuses on how best to achieve *doxa*. The conditions for the achievement of *doxa*, at least *doxa* of the kind the author advocates,⁴⁴ are precisely those required for the achievement of *aretē*.

As the author proceeds to explain, considerable care is required if one is to succeed in gaining public esteem for one's actions and contributions to society. Crucial to achieving this, one must gain the trust (*pistis*) of one's fellow citizens; and this is hard to do. The following passage encapsulates the problem and the author's response to it:

For it is not pleasant for people to honor another person, since they think that they are being deprived of something. But if they are won over by necessity itself [that is, by compelling evidence of the agent's civic benevolence and beneficence] and have been moved to it gradually over a long time, they come to praise [a man], albeit even then unwillingly. At the same time, they are not in doubt that the man is such as he appears [that is, that the man is genuinely motivated to benefit the

³⁹ This is the victory, of 498 BCE, praised in Pi. *P*. 10.

⁴⁰ Thuc. 6.11.7; Homer *I*. 9.498; Theogn. 1.30; Pi. *O*. 6.75; Hdt. 9.28.12; Theogn. 1.867; Homer *O*. 14.402.

⁴¹ For this reading of *ex hou an*, cp. Isoc. 5.53.

⁴² This peculiar phrase "appear such as one is (*toioutos phainesthai hoios an ēi*)" is explained by the occurrence of the same phrase at fr. 2.4 – cited below – as meaning that the agent wants others to recognize that his motives are decent, that he is not trying to deceive others for his own benefit.

⁴³ *Anon. Iamb.* 2.1.

⁴⁴ The author contrasts the pursuit of *doxa* by means of the pursuit of *aretē* with the pursuit of *doxa* by means of quickly and easily acquired *technai* at fr. 2.7.

community]; and [they are not suspicious] that he is setting a trap and hunting for reputation by means of deceit; or that what he does, he makes seem admirable (*kallōpizetai*), though he is actually misleading people. In this way, which I previously mentioned, *aretē*, being practiced, engenders trust (*pistis*) for itself and fair fame (*eukleia*).⁴⁵

In sum, in the *Anonymus Iamblichī* "*aretē*" is used to refer to a property of a pattern of action, in fact of a form of civic life. Moreover, the value of such a life is understood not merely in terms of properties intrinsic to the person whose life it is, nor even properties intrinsic to the actions constitutive of that life; it includes public esteem of that person and his actions.

Generalizing, I suggest that within the sophistic milieu the pursuit of *aretē* was not viewed, as it came to be in the course of fourth century ethical philosophy, as the pursuit of certain psychological traits, let alone as the pursuit of such traits as crucial for the achievement of eudaimonia. Rather, the pursuit of *aretē* was conceived as the pursuit of an excellent life. Moreover, the excellence of the life was viewed in terms of civic success, understood in commonly accepted terms. With respect to activity in the public sphere in particular, this saliently included beneficence to one's fellow citizens and polis as well as the esteem that the agent received therefrom.⁴⁶

In short, I am suggesting that a significant body of sophistic works was devoted to what I will call *civic ethics*. By "civic ethics" I mean ethics that advocates the agent's pursuit of his⁴⁷ success as a citizen saliently through making significant positive contributions to his fellow citizens and polis.

Following Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* and the *Anonymus Iamblichī*, a third example of civic ethics in a sophistic text is Hippias' *Trojan Dialogue*. Unfortunately, no fragments of this work survive. What remain are a few testimonies. One comes from Philostratus, who, in the life of Hippias in his third century CE *Lives of the Sophists*, explicitly refers the work as a "dialogue" (*dialogos*), "not an oration or monologue (*logos*)."⁴⁸ As such, Hippias' work is akin to Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*.⁴⁹ Also like Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*, the dramatic personae of Hippias' work are drawn from the Greek mythological tradition. In the following passage of Plato's *Hippias Major*, the character Hippias describes the content of the *Trojan Dialogue* as follows:

⁴⁵ *Anon. Iambl.* 2.3-4.

⁴⁶ On this aspect of Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*, cp. Wolfsdorf 2008: 6-8.

⁴⁷ "his" because all of the materials to be discussed were composed by and intended for males.

⁴⁸ *vit. soph.* 1.11 (= DK 86 A2). Incidentally, this fact indicates that the composition of ethical philosophical prose dialogues precedes Plato and in fact began outside of the Socratic circle. Cp. Charalabopoulos 2012: 40-41. What distinguishes Plato's and some of the Socratics' dialogues is their recent historical rather than mythological personae and settings.

⁴⁹ At least, Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* appears to have contained dialogue in addition to the competing speeches of *Aretē* and *Kakia*. Cp. Thesleff 1967: 56.

And by God, Socrates, just recently I've gained a good reputation [in Sparta] by giving an explanation of the admirable pursuits (*epitēdeumatōn kalōn*) that young men must undertake. I have a thoroughly admirable speech composed on these matters ... This is the layout and the beginning of the speech: I recount how, when Troy had been captured, Neoptolemus asked Nestor what type of admirable pursuits (*kala epitēdeumata*) could give the one who practices them the best reputation (*eudokimōtatos*), even if he is young. And, in response, Nestor laid out for him a whole collection of very admirable customs (*nomima pangkala*).⁵⁰

To be sure, the heavy emphasis on the admirable (*to kalon*) here is ridiculous and owes to the governing question of the dialogue: What is *to kalon*?⁵¹ Nonetheless, according to Hippias' description, Nestor attempted to educate Neoptolemus in how to achieve the best reputation by undertaking admirable pursuits. This appears to be equivalent to an education in the pursuit of *aretē*, understood as civic *aretē*, in Prodicus' *Choice* and the *Anonymous Iamblichī*.⁵²

So much for civic ethics among philosophical works of the sophists. I now want to briefly remark on sophistic texts in which civic *aretē* is praised or memorialized but which are not philosophical texts.⁵³ One example is Gorgias' *Funeral Oration*, from which the following passage derives:

Would that I could say what I wish, and would that I wish what I should,
avoiding divine displeasure, and escaping human envy, for these men
achieved an *aretē* that is divine and a mortality that is human ...⁵⁴

Evidently, the *aretē* here praised relates to the ultimate personal sacrifice that deceased soldiers made on behalf of their polis. By "divine" *aretē*, I take it Gorgias means a contribution of civic excellence whose significance perdures.⁵⁵

Note that Gorgias' *Funeral Oration* was a model speech, not actually performed on an occasion of burial, since Athenian practice required that a citizen deliver the eulogy. Granted this, there is evidence that some of the sophists delivered public orations, for example, at festivals;⁵⁶ and certainly some of these speeches praised civic *aretē*.

⁵⁰ Plt. *HMag.* 286a-b. On Hippias' work, cp. also Morgan 2000: 109-11.

⁵¹ A more common and better translation of "*kalon*" in this context is "fine"; but I am indicating the continuity between the language here and in Xenophon's paraphrase of Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*.

⁵² Plato's description of Hippias' work does not include the term "*aretē*," but that does not affect my main point.

⁵³ Not "philosophical" because arguments for principles do not predominate within them. Also, probably, instances of "*aretē*" in these contexts often refer to properties of individual actions or patterns of action rather than whole lives.

⁵⁴ DK 82 B6.11-15.

⁵⁵ For example, cp. Herodotus' distinction between divine and human eudaimonia (1.5), which I understand in these terms.

⁵⁶ For Hippias, cp. DK 86 A2. Hippias probably composed at least one Olympic oration himself, on which cp. Schüttrumpf 1972: 28. Note also that when at Olympia the

One other non-philosophical sophistic work that memorializes civic *aretē* belongs to a different genre entirely. Among his many and varied achievements, Hippias was the first to compile and publish an Olympic victor list (*Olympionikai*, also known as *Olympionikōn anagraphē*).⁵⁷ The context in which Hippias produced this work is relatively well understood. Elis, the polis of which Hippias was a citizen, had controlled Olympia and so administered the games from about 570 BCE.⁵⁸ Before that, games had been held at Olympia intermittently from as early as the tenth century BCE; but it was the Olympic truce, established between the Spartan king Lycurgus and the Elean king Iphitos in 776, that initiated an "unbroken series of Olympiads" down to Hippias' day.⁵⁹ Hippias produced his list at about 400.⁶⁰ At that time, Sparta and Elis were on the verge of or in fact at war. The Spartan-Elean conflict (400–398 BCE) and the Olympic truce provide the basic motivations for Hippias' enterprise, which Paul Christensen summarizes as follows:

Hippias produced the first Olympic victor list just at the time when Elean control of Olympia was potentially threatened by Sparta and, almost certainly, precisely because of this fact. He had every reason to be aware of Elis' problems with Sparta because he served with some regularity as an official envoy for Elis⁶¹ ... The loss of Olympia would have been a devastating blow to Elis' standing in the Greek world, and Hippias had every possible incentive to do what he could to prevent this from happening. It is quite likely that one of the steps he took was to produce his *Olympikōn anagraphē*.⁶²

Such contributions are illustrative of civic roles that a number of prominent sophists occupied. As leading *sophoi* and, in some cases, political or ambassadorial figures, these men were tasked with and often invited to make important contributions on behalf of their poleis. These achievements of course contributed to their authors' own civic *aretē*. But, as I have been emphasizing here, some of them lauded or memorialized the civic *aretē* of others.

Messenians erected statues of the members of a boys chorus that died at sea, Hippias wrote the elegiac verses that were inscribed on their bases (DK 86 B1). For Gorgias' *Olympic Oration*, DK 82 B7-B8a; *Pythian Oration*, B9; *Encomium of the Eleans*, B10.

⁵⁷ DK 86 B3. My discussion here is heavily indebted to Christensen 2007: 45-160.

⁵⁸ Christensen 2007: 53, nn.22-23.

⁵⁹ Christensen 2007: 57-73.

⁶⁰ Christensen 2007: 46-50.

⁶¹ On Hippias' role as Elean ambassador to Sparta, cp. Plt. *HMa* 281a-b. Note also that Hippias regularly made public appearances at the games; cp. Plt. *HMi* 363c-d; Plt. *HMa* 368c-d.

⁶² Christensen 2007: 57. For the term "*aretē*" in a fifth century athletic context, cp. Pi. *N* 7.89. Other examples of "*aretē*" in athletic contexts are cited in Miller 2004.

ANTI-CIVIC ETHICS AMONG THE SOPHISTS

That the sophists used "*areté*" as I have suggested should be news. But that they prominently contributed to civic ethics should not be. Consider John Dillon and Tanya Gergel's remark on the *Anonymus Iamblichii*:

The topic appears to be, broadly speaking, 'How to Succeed in Life' – a subject central to the projects of all of the figures (at least the *professional* ones) dealt with in this volume [*The Greek Sophists*].⁶³

What may be surprising is the relative dearth of sophistic contributions to what I will call *anti-civic* ethics. By this, I mean ethics that advocates the agent's pursuit of his self-interest disregarding and even at the expense of the wellbeing of his fellow citizens and polis.

Familiar treatments and criticisms of the sophists, especially by Plato, encourage some such idea of their ethical commitments and contributions. Plato suggests that the sophists were intellectual mercenaries, indiscriminate in disposing their intellectual wares, and primarily motivated to enrich themselves. The official Academic definition of the sophist is "a paid hunter of rich and distinguished young men" (*neōn plousiōn endoxōn emmīsthos thēreutēs*).⁶⁴ In one of Plato's most extreme treatments, Thrasymachus is likened to a selfish and violent animal.⁶⁵

Yet it is in fact difficult to find anti-civic ethical contributions among the sophists. For instance, the only fragment of Thrasymachus' that mentions justice describes it as "the greatest of goods (*to megiston tōn ... agathōn*) among human beings."⁶⁶ And it is noteworthy that Callicles – the other extreme representative of immorality among figures who appear in Platonic dialogues focused on sophists – is an Athenian citizen and not a sophist. Ironically, the most plausible cases of anti-civic sophistic ethics derive from the Socratic philosopher Aristippus of Cyrene and the Athenian Antiphon. I will discuss each of these in turn.

Today, Aristippus is primarily identified as a Socratic, not a sophist. He is certainly not standardly included within treatments of the sophists. However, among the Socratics, Aristippus was notorious for teaching for pay⁶⁷ – a principal, if not sufficient, condition for being a sophist – and he was explicitly described as a sophist by as early a

⁶³ Dillon and Gergel 2003: 310.

⁶⁴ [Plt.] *Def.* 415c9. Cp. *Plt. Ap.* 19e-20e, *Prt.* 311d-e, 313c-314a, *Soph.* 231d; *Xen. Mem.* 1.6.13, *Cyn.* 13.8-9.

⁶⁵ *Plt. Rep.* 1, 336b.

⁶⁶ DK 85 B8. As Dillon and Gergel (2003: 215) note, this fragment may derive from Thrasymachus' *Methods of Arousing Pity*, on which cp. DK 85 B5. Admittedly, it is open to doubt that it represents Thrasymachus' personal view. Still, there is no evidence for the sorts of views that Plato puts in the mouth of the character Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1.

⁶⁷ Cp. *SSR IV A* 1.

figure as Aristotle.⁶⁸ Granted then that Aristippus was a sophist, Xenophon attributes anti-civic views to him in the *Memorabilia*.

The relevant portion of Xenophon's work – book 2, section 1 – consists of a dialogue between Socrates and Aristippus.⁶⁹ Xenophon's expressed purpose in presenting the exchange is to show how "Socrates encouraged his companions to practice self-control (*enkratēia*)" specifically in various circumstances pertaining to their bodily needs and desires.⁷⁰ Note that Aristippus was a hedonist; and in antiquity he was widely criticized for his high evaluation of sensual or bodily pleasures.⁷¹

Socrates begins the dialogue by arguing that the capacity for self-control equips one to rule over others; and he concludes:

If then we classify those who control themselves in all these matters as "fit to rule," will we not classify those who cannot conduct themselves in this way as men with no claim to be rulers?⁷²

To this, Aristippus agrees. But while Socrates assumes that being a ruler is more desirable than being ruled, Aristippus states, contrary to common aristocratic values, that he has no desire to rule.⁷³ Rather, he maintains that rulers, insofar as they are responsible for providing for the wellbeing of their citizens, are effectively enslaved by their subjects and above all disabled from pursuing and satisfying their own desires. In contrast, as he says: "I classify myself with those who wish for a life of the greatest ease and pleasure (*rhasta te kai hēdistā bioteuein*)."⁷⁴

Given this commitment, Socrates now questions whether ruling communities or subject communities live more pleasant lives. It may appear that in posing this question, Socrates has illicitly shifted from the question whether a ruler or subject leads a more pleasant life. But, I take it, Socrates' aim here is to clarify the civic conditions conducive to a pleasant life.

Aristippus concedes that it is more pleasant to live in a ruling rather than a subject community. However, this concession is irrelevant, since he claims that there is an alternative to both:

I think that there is a middle path, which I try to walk, a path neither through ruling nor slavery, but through freedom (*eleutherias*), which most of all leads to personal wellbeing (*eudaimonia*).⁷⁵

⁶⁸ *Metaph.* 996a32-33. Aeschines of Sphettus may also have taught for pay. Lysias calls him a sophist (Athenaeus 612F). But he nowhere expresses anti-civic views.

⁶⁹ Cp. Bandini and Dorion 2011: 113-71.

⁷⁰ *Xen. Mem.* 2.1.1.

⁷¹ Arguably, Aristippus simply was a somatic or sensual hedonist. Cp. Cicero, *de fin.* 1.23, 2.18; DL 2.85. But there are reasons for caution here. Cp. Urstad 2008, 2018; Tsouna 2020.

⁷² *Xen. Mem.* 2.1.6-7.

⁷³ Aristippus clearly was a member of the wealthy class in his native Cyrene.

⁷⁴ *Xen. Mem.* 2.1.9.

⁷⁵ *Xen. Mem.* 2.1.11.

Still concerned with the civic conditions of life, Socrates objects that anyone in a society who does not achieve a position of rulership will ultimately be subject to the will of those in charge. But, as Aristippus explains, his pursuit of freedom entails that he does not "confine himself within a political constitution, but is a stranger everywhere (*oud' eis politeian emauton kataleiō, alla xenos pantaxou eimi*)."⁷⁶

In short, Aristippus expresses a commitment to the idea that by renouncing civic allegiance and responsibilities altogether, he can achieve the best life for himself. Here then is a curious case of anti-civic sophistic ethics. And the fact that we have good independent evidence for Aristippus' hedonism provides some support for the view that the anti-civic position Xenophon attributes to Aristippus is accurate.

A second plausible case of sophistic anti-civic ethics is found in Antiphon's *On Truth*.⁷⁷ This work originally consisted of two books, that is, two papyrus scrolls. Until recently, modern knowledge of the text was limited to a number of ancient testimonies and very brief fragments, often just single words, quoted by other authors of surviving, mainly grammatical and rhetorical, works. But in late nineteenth century or early twentieth century, British excavations at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt unearthed several papyrus fragments whose attribution to *On Truth* was supported by the identification of a line in one of the papyrus fragments with one of the already known non-papyrus fragments.⁷⁸

There are three principal papyrus fragments.⁷⁹ These are standardly referred to as F44(a), (b), and (c).⁸⁰ Their contents largely differ from the ancient testimonies and non-papyrus fragments. The ancient testimonies and non-papyrus fragments mainly address cosmological, physiological, and medical topics, whereas the papyrus fragments present criticisms of justice according to a definition of it in terms of convention (*nomos*).⁸¹

The definition of justice in conventional terms, which appears to be the critical target of the fragments, is introduced in the first legible line of F44(a):

⁷⁶ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.13.

⁷⁷ Cp. Pendrick 2002: 32-38, 103-191, 246-377; Decleva Caizzi and Bastianini 1989: 176-222.

⁷⁸ Harpocration s.v. ἄγοι, α 7. More precisely, the Harpocration fragment enables the attribution of F44(a) and (b) to Antiphon's *On Truth*. The attribution of F44(c) is then based on its kinship to F44(a) and (b). F44(a) and (b) = *P. Oxy.* 1364, Grenfell and Hunt 1915: 92-104; F44(c) = *P. Oxy.* 1797, Grenfell and Hunt 1922: 119-22.

⁷⁹ "principal" because they consist of sizeable legible passages.

⁸⁰ The alphabetization owes to Hermann Diels' interpretation of their relative order in the first (1903) edition of his *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. But it should be noted that while F44(c) is still widely regarded as last, some interpreters – for example, Decleva Caizzi and Bastianini 1989 – have maintained that F44(b) precedes F44(a) in Antiphon's text.

⁸¹ My translation of *nomos* as "convention" owes to Antiphon's understanding of this in terms of agreement (*homologia*); cp. F44(a), col. I, 27-col. II, 1.

But then (*d' oun*) justice is not transgressing the rules (*nomima*) of whatever polis one is a citizen.⁸²

Compare the following phrases that occur elsewhere among the papyrus fragments: "[such-and-such] is just according to/from convention(s) (*kata nomon/ek nomōn dikaiōn*)" and "[such-and-such] is conceived as being just (*dikaion nomizetai*)."⁸³ In view of this, we do not have warrant to claim that the papyrus fragments simply criticize justice.⁸⁴ For example, it would be compatible with the criticisms of conventional justice for Antiphon to endorse some modified conventional account of justice or some non-conventional account.

Granted this, one of the criticisms of conventional justice – which occupies most of F44(c) – is that some of its principles are contradictory.⁸⁵ Another criticism – which occurs in F44(a) and which seems to be Antiphon's principal concern – is that conventional justice is "hostile" to nature:

The examination (*skepsis*) is being conducted for the following reason: many of the things that are just according to convention (*tōn kata nomon dikaiōn*) are hostile (*polemiōs ... keitai*) to nature (*tēi physei*).⁸⁶

The way in which Antiphon views conventional justice as hostile to nature is made most explicit in the following passage, also from F44(a):⁸⁷

One would find that many of the things mentioned are hostile to nature, for there is present in them more pain (*algunesthai*), when less is possible; less pleasure

⁸² F44(a), col. I, 6-11. It is important to appreciate that we do not know how this line fit into its original context. In fact, we do not know that this line constitutes a whole sentence. For example, it may be an apodosis. The connecting particles (*d' oun*) that "introduce" the line are a hypothetical reconstruction by Decleva Caizzi and Bastianini 1989: 199. The cluster *d' oun* occurs only here in *On Truth*, and only once elsewhere in Antiphon, assuming he is identical to the author of the *Tetralogies*. My interpretation of *d' oun* as contrastive and inferential assumes a preceding *men*-clause and is speculative.

⁸³ F44(a) col. II, 27-28; col. VI, 6-7; F44(c) col. I, 5.

⁸⁴ Pace Furley 1981.

⁸⁵ Precisely, here it is argued that the legal requirement and therefore just action that a witness provide honest testimony on behalf of a plaintiff may contradict the principle that one should not harm another who has not harmed him.

⁸⁶ F44(a) col. II, 23-30. I note in passing that the contrast between convention (*nomos*) and nature (*physis*) that appears here and elsewhere in F44(a) constitutes our earliest sustained engagement with this "leitmotif" of late fifth-century thought.

⁸⁷ In the immediately following lines, Antiphon enumerates how laws and customs constrain one's experience, thought, and action, enjoining how we should and should not use our perceptual, cognitive, and motivational faculties. Still, it remains unclear why such conventions are hostile to nature.

(*hēdesthai*), when more is possible; and suffering (*kakōs paschein*) when it is possible not to suffer.⁸⁸

So, conventional justice is hostile to nature insofar as it enjoins conduct that is more harmful to the agent or at least less beneficial than what the agent, unconstrained by convention, could achieve.

Accordingly – in lines that immediately follow the definition of conventional justice at the beginning of F44(a) – Antiphon notoriously claims:

Therefore, a man would use justice (*chrōitai dikaiosynēi*) most advantageously (*xumpherontōs*) for himself, if in the presence of witnesses he regarded the laws (*nomous*) as great, but in the absence of witnesses nature (*ta tēs physeōs*).⁸⁹

In light of Antiphon's view of the hostility of conventional justice to nature, I take it that "use justice most advantageously for himself" entails selectively conforming to conventional justice insofar as this is less harmful or more beneficial to the agent. Note also that, although the following is not made explicit anywhere in the fragments, Antiphon appears to assume that one should always act to one's advantage and that human beings are naturally so motivated.

In short, the focus in the papyrus fragments is a criticism of certain conventions regulating interpersonal conduct in civic life. It is clearly not an account of how one may thrive by making significant positive contributions to one's fellow citizens and polis in accordance with these conventions. So, the ethical contents in the papyrus fragments of *On Truth* are anti-civic.

ETHICS AND SOPHISTIC ETHICS

How ought one to conduct one's life? This question, which is foundational to at least modern and contemporary ethics, asks one to consider a course of action, more broadly, a form of life that is within one's power to pursue. Since one ought not to do something if there is no reason to do it, and there is no reason to do something if it has no value, any rational answer to the question also entails a commitment to the value of the course of action or form of life.⁹⁰ Moreover, between two courses of action or forms of life that are in one's power to pursue and where the former has more value than the latter, there is more reason to pursue the former.

The sophistic texts, fragments, and testimonies considered in this chapter might be construed as responses to the foundational question of modern and contemporary ethics – some responses being civically-, others anti-civically-minded. But it is doubtful that the sophists' works do in fact constitute responses to precisely such a question. Consider the abstractness of the question, specifically its inclusion of the impersonal pronoun "one." The question is addressed to any person.⁹¹ Such universality is no part of

⁸⁸ F44(a) col. V, 13-24.

⁸⁹ F44(a), col. I, 12-23.

⁹⁰ I hereby reject the buck-passing account of value.

⁹¹ Cp. Williams 1985: 5.

the sophists' ethical agenda. The intended audiences for the sophists' works were more restricted – to males, as mentioned above, but more precisely to young male citizens of the particular Greek poleis in which the sophists were active. The civic ethical contributions should then be understood as responding to the question how a young Greek male citizen ought to conduct his life. These responses assume the supreme value of civic *aretē*.

Regarding Aristippus' and Antiphon's contributions, their purposes – I do not assume that they had a common purpose – are much more debatable. In Aristippus' case, it is unclear what the source of Xenophon's claims is. It could have been personal acquaintance or testimony as well as one or more of Aristippus' writings.⁹² In Antiphon's case, *On Truth* seems to belong to the Presocratic genre of the treatise *On Nature*. If so, then its intended audience would have been *philosophoi*, certainly not prospective clients.

In both cases, if we accept that the anti-civic commitments are genuine, then we face the following problem of normativity. Aristippus' endorsement of the anti-civic attitude that Xenophon attributes to him, even if only to the upper classes, would yield political chaos. So, perhaps Aristippus was not in fact committed to that attitude.⁹³ Or perhaps Aristippus' commitment did not consist of an endorsement for others.

Likewise, it seems dubious that Antiphon would have endorsed, if only to *philosophoi*, selective conformity to conventional justice. In this case, crucially, it is unclear whether Antiphon believes that the relevant conventions could be altered and improved to better accord with nature or whether he holds the – to my mind, absurd – view that any form of human society or sustained coexistence and collaboration is fundamentally and irredeemably at odds with nature. Regarding the former possibility, it is also unclear whether Antiphon is principally concerned with the local legal and social conditions of Athens.⁹⁴

Note that the extant fragments of *On Truth* – papyrus and non-papyrus collectively – constitute only about ten percent of Antiphon's original work. Consider also that a stichometrical sign in the margin of one of the columns of fragment F44(a) indicates that the criticism of conventional justice here occurs at about the middle of the original papyrus scroll.⁹⁵ Curiously, the scroll in question most likely belongs to Book One of *On Truth*,⁹⁶ while the cosmological, physiological, and medical contents derived from the non-papyri fragments and testimonies belong to Book Two. One might otherwise assume that a work devoted to cosmology, physiology, and medicine, as well

⁹² On Aristippus' writings, cp. *SSR* IV A 144-59, and Urstad 2018: 181-84.

⁹³ I wonder whether Aristippus' peregrinations were actually a function of hostility toward him by prominent political figures in Cyrene. On this, cp. Socratic epistle 27 (Malherbe 1977: 283-5), which is spurious, but possibly based on certain historical facts.

⁹⁴ Note that this suggestion is not contradicted by the content of F44(b), which suggests that, at least in certain respects, Greeks and barbarians do not differ by nature; for, possibly, social conventions among certain states or ethnic groups are more akin to nature than others. (I say "at least in certain respects," since it would also be compatible with Antiphon's claims in F44(b) for ecological conditions to variously influence human psychology, as the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* maintains.)

⁹⁵ The sign occurs in the margin at F44(a) col. VI, 24. Cp. Pendrick 2002: 316.

⁹⁶ For considerations in favor of this standard view, cp. Pendrick 2002: 316.

as to conventional justice, would begin with cosmology and physiology and then lead to anthropology and sociology.⁹⁷ Strangely, Antiphon's discussion appears to proceed in reverse order.

A few of the non-papyrus fragments have critical epistemological contents.⁹⁸ Moreover, these are attributed to Book One. Conceivably, *On Truth* began with some epistemological criticism, which was then applied to a conventional conception of justice, among other aspects of society; and these criticisms prepared the ground for some sort of return to nature, to which Book Two was devoted. Generally speaking, on this – admittedly highly speculative – way of interpreting the work as a whole, at least part of the ultimate aim of the work would then have been legal and political reform, again somehow better aligned with the nature of things and so truth (*alētheia*), correctly understood.⁹⁹

EUDAIMONISM AND SOPHISTIC ETHICS

Early in the chapter I suggested that in a significant body of sophistic ethics, "*aretē*" plays a role akin to that of "*eudaimonia*" in philosophical ethics of the second half of the fourth century and thereafter. "Akin to" but not "identical to." I have suggested that "*aretē*" was used to refer to civic *aretē*. But "*eudaimonia*" is a broader term, which I have translated as "personal wellbeing/flourishing" and which I understand as a life going well for the person leading it. The achievement of civic *aretē* may be a form of *eudaimonia*.

Granted this, "*aretē*" in the sophistic context and "*eudaimonia*" in later philosophical contexts were used to refer to the goal of human life. Why "*eudaimonia*" replaced "*aretē*" in this respect and why "*aretē*" came to be psychologized – in other words, used to refer to an excellent condition of the *psychē* – are subjects for another occasion.¹⁰⁰ Still, if we consider both the sophists' civic and anti-civic ethical contributions in eudaimonistic terms, then we can appreciate them as sharing a commitment to the primacy of the value of personal wellbeing.

Given this, the sophistic contributions differ in what they take personal wellbeing to consist in. The civically-minded ethicists hold that personal wellbeing consists in flourishing as a citizen and that this requires success in private and public affairs, saliently including significant political beneficence and public esteem for that. The anti-civic ethicists maintain a much narrower conception according to which the only thing good for a person is fulfillment of his selfish desires.

Note that both anti-civially-minded contributions appear to be committed to a hedonistic conception of personal wellbeing. Aristippus' hedonism was mentioned

⁹⁷ For example, this is how Archelaus of Athens' work seems to have been composed. Cp. Bétegh 2016.

⁹⁸ Cp. DK 87 B1-7.

⁹⁹ Such a reading is also supported by the fact that it would make *On Truth* more consistent with Antiphon's *On Concord*. On the latter text, cp. Pendrick 2002: 39-46, 191-211, 377-423.

¹⁰⁰ On the latter topic, cp. Wolfsdorf (in progress). On the former, cp. Wolfsdorf 2020b. The gist is that the Socratics were responsible. This accords with Aristippus' use of the term at Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.11.

above.¹⁰¹ For hedonism in the papyrus fragments of Antiphon's *On Truth*, recall the following passage from F44(a):

One would find that many of the things mentioned are hostile to nature, for there is present in them more pain, when less is possible; less pleasure, when more is possible; and suffering when it is possible not to suffer.¹⁰²

In view of this, it is interesting to observe that the civic ethical position of Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles* is also cast in hedonistic terms. Central to *Aretē*'s exhortation is a description of the pleasures that her path offers; for example:

The young enjoy the praises of their elders. The old are glad to be honored by the young. They recall their past deeds with pleasure, and they take pleasure in doing their present deeds.¹⁰³

Elsewhere, I have described these as "civic pleasures."¹⁰⁴ In fact, we have testimonies from both Plato and Aristotle that Prodicus distinguished different kinds of pleasure;¹⁰⁵ and it is highly likely that he did so precisely in the context of distinguishing the pleasures of *Aretē* from those of *Kakia*.¹⁰⁶

In contrast, the *Anonymus Iamblichī* seems committed to a more pluralistic view of personal wellbeing. The value of pleasure is clearly noted.¹⁰⁷ But the author recognizes other entities as valuable. And, crucially, the value of *aretē* does not seem reducible to any one of them.

In adjudicating between the sophistic contributions, what we and the disputants would need is a theory of value and of personal wellbeing. My hunch is that both civic and anti-civic ethicists are, at least implicitly, committed to a conception of value and so of personal wellbeing in terms of motivation, precisely desire. Accordingly, what ultimately distinguishes the two parties is their views of human motivation: one evidently prosocial, the other selfish.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ On the relation between episodes of pleasure and eudaimonia in Cyrenaic philosophy, cp. Tsouna 2002.

¹⁰² Consider also the positive view of pleasure in *On Concord*, especially in DK 87 B49. And contrast my hedonistic reading of *On Truth* with Riesbeck 2011, especially at 282, which seems to me to advance an anachronistic Aristotelian interpretation.

¹⁰³ Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.23.

¹⁰⁴ Wolfsdorf 2013: 11.

¹⁰⁵ Plt. *Prt.* 337c (cp. 358b); Aristot. *Top.* 112b; cp. Herm. *in Phdr.* 238.22-239.22.

¹⁰⁶ For a speculative attempt to explain Prodicus' pleasure terminology, cp. Wolfsdorf 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Cp. *Anon. Iamb.* 2.3, 7.3-5, 7.8-11.

¹⁰⁸ A major recent work of empirical psychology that endorses a pluralistic view of human motivation and resists its explanation in hedonistic and selfish terms is Higgins 2014.

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