



## Studies

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### A Short History of Protagoras' Philosophy

#### **Abstract**

*It is a well-known fact that, with Nietzsche and Heidegger, a powerful re-evaluation of the history of philosophy took place, which brought about an inversion of the previously prevalent paradigm of progressive advancement. In Hegel and Husserl, to mention but two major figures of modern philosophy, the history of philosophy was conceived as the advancement from humble beginnings in ancient Greece, towards the ultimate culmination in absolute subjectivity in modern philosophy. Nietzsche and Heidegger, on the other hand, both in their way, more or less compellingly challenged this view by revealing the history of philosophy as regression and downfall rather than advancement. In their common view, the grand, yet undeveloped beginnings of philosophy, as recognised in the figures such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, were strictly understood as the first downfall from the truly grand beginnings to be found in Pre-Socratic thinkers such as Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaximander, and even the notorious sophist Protagoras. The paper attempts to shed light on this cataclysmic shift of the philosophical-historical paradigm by paying particular attention to the history of interpretation of Protagoras' philosophical impetus. The treatise ends with an open interpretative horizon, thereby emphasizing the importance of a re-consideration of the two opposing paradigms of the history of philosophy.*

#### **Key words**

Protagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, history of philosophy

Within the widely accepted historical context of philosophy, conceived of as a progressive going-on, the notoriety of Protagoras' relativistic threat to philosophical endeavour proves a negative cornerstone of any apologetic approach to philosophy, which wants to commence its (hi-)story from Platonic or Aristotelian positive foundations of Western philosophy. No doubt, the positivity of Plato and Aristotle as the grand originators of the subsequent history of philosophy are indeed extremely difficult to challenge. This *factum brutum* might, however, be avoided by paying attention to the troublesome enough negativity of Protagoras and may offer us fertile and dynamic ground for a serious undermining of the prevalent paradigm of the "traditionally proper" understanding of the history of philosophy.

The story of the history of philosophy to be uncovered here is that of Protagoras, the author of the famous *homo mensura* thought, which sees the history of philosophy bring about the widest possible array of interpretations, no doubt due to the scarcity of Protagoras' fragments preserved. In other words, the lack of a wider context and the loss of many a book written by this ancient author have triggered a long chain of interpretations which more often than not tell more of the interpreter and his own truth horizon than of the interpreted thoughts themselves, reminding us that every reading strategy is always a reading into.

Our story begins at the far end of the interpretation chain, with the modern, or better yet post-metaphysical, Heidegger. On no more than seven pages of his famous *European Nihilism*, Heidegger reveals the whole picture of (his own) Protagoras' *anthropos metron* or *homo mensura* statement. Of course, the "no more than seven" does not imply unimaginateness. Quite the contrary, this quantitative weakness betrays, again and again, a peculiar and astounding strength of Heidegger's thinking, capable of disturbing the balance of tradition, of the taken for granted, in as few words as possible; with Heidegger around, self-evident truths, no matter how metaphysical, historically sedimented or even cemented in the seemingly unshakeable eternity they may be, somehow drift into the open and begin to lose their habitual bearing.

Even the text as a whole, *European Nihilism* is a megalomaniacal project of its own. In this treatise, Heidegger succeeds in providing a sharp outline of his understanding of the history of European metaphysics from its early beginnings in ancient Greece to the ultramodern Nietzsche. The basic anchorage of the text is – and this goes for every one of us – a hardly digestible philosophical *factum brutum* that, since its grand beginnings, the essence of metaphysics is an essential history of growing nihilism; a monumental, yes, but retrogression from its pre-metaphysical, or pre-Platonic eminent origin.

For Heidegger, nihilism should be explained in relation to Friedrich Nietzsche, its first fully-fledged proponent and interpreter. Yet, as well befits Heidegger's loner genius, he instantly distances himself from Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism and unbendingly turns in his direction, submitting the problem of being, understood as a value, to highly intense scrutiny. Being as value, as yieldable to evaluation and thus also to devaluation, implying its fundamental disposability, immediately shifts attention to the crucial problem of modern metaphysics, that of the truth of subjectivity. After the critical examination of Nietzsche's unconditioned criterion of all beings (and being), Heidegger laconically embarks on a mission of threading this passionate thinker on the string of European metaphysical tradition, which Nietzsche was keen, even zealously so, to break away from, from Plato onwards (including Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer).

Contrary to Nietzsche's stance on ancient tradition, Heidegger thinks Nietzsche's *Will to Power* in its *necessary connection* with, and even dependence on, the Cartesian establishment of modern certainty. According to him, Nietzsche belongs intimately to the truth of subjectivity. Moreso, this methodically ensured self-*certainty* itself – again contrary to our fixed philosophical expectations – has purportedly evolved from the mediaeval yearning for the *certainty* of salvation. And, adding the last, but not in the least collateral token to this towering pile of extraordinary interpretative insights, Heidegger eventually connects Zarathustra's pupil with the thinker Nietzsche most fervently fought against.<sup>1</sup> That Nietzsche was able to think being as Will to Power, as the all-enabling and all-disabling highest criterion of being, striving for its self-over-

empowering, there had to be Plato at the beginning of European metaphysics; Plato with his idea of all ideas, the idea of the Good as the all-enabling enabler of beings in their entirety, and, let us not forget, the disabler of decrepit gods.

Talking of this strict interdependence of metaphysical epochs, here addressed only shortly and all too roughly, and for the sake of entering a more detailed and compelling philosophical polylogue with tradition, Heidegger offers three leading philosophical figures, covering the whole span of our philosophical heritage: Protagoras, Descartes and Nietzsche. As said before, Protagoras is addressed on but seven pages, after which Heidegger moves forward to Descartes and Nietzsche. Here, the “weakness” of the seven-page address of Protagoras acquires another quality: as strange and unconvincing as it may sound, Protagoras does not fit the context of metaphysics, serving rather as an enigmatic thinker, who enables Heidegger to recognize or recall a pre-metaphysical epoch as no less than a grand antecedent to metaphysics. The truth unravelled through Protagoras escapes the confines of entire metaphysics, and perseveres, despite its subsequent suppressions or distortions of its original import, as the reigning hidden essence of metaphysics, which calls for our renewed attention.

Does not the history of philosophy teach us that Protagoras, with his *homo mensura* as the first affirmation of the subjective criterion of truth, is the pioneer of the later full-fledged modern subjectivism? Indeed, what else can we come up with when presented with the following sequence: Protagoras → Descartes → Nietzsche? The measure of all things is the human being, strictly understood as the subjectivity of the subject. Might we not with every right attribute this to Descartes and his sovereign self-awareness of his *cogito*, who decides on the being or non-being of things according to the epistemic criterion of *clara et distincta perceptio*? And likewise to Nietzsche’s overman, who decides on the being or non-being of tradition, metaphysics and gods – all for the sake of the “over-manly” in man?

And yet, for Heidegger, Protagoras is to be thought on an entirely different basis. The unusualness of Heidegger’s choice shall reveal itself more clearly after we have addressed those thinkers from the history of philosophy, who have dealt compellingly with Protagoras.

### Plato and Aristotle against dire relativism

The first philosophical figure to bring into the discussion is Plato, who addresses the sophistry of Protagoras in the dialogues *Protagoras*, *Theaetetus* and elsewhere. Although the first dialogue seems more suitable for our context, bearing the name of the philosophical figure discussed here, if we want to find the sharpest criticism of Protagoras’ sophisms we have to turn to the latter. If *Protagoras* attempted to dismantle Protagoras as a teacher on a more superficial level (1997: 197, 751) – “sophist is a kind of merchant who ped-

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“Since Plato, philosophy has been dominated by morality.” And again: “The philosophers of Greece, e.g., Plato. He severed the instincts from the polis, from contest, from military efficiency, from art and beauty, from the mysteries, from belief in tradition and ancestors – He was the seducer of the nobility: he was himself seduced by the *roturier* Socrates – He

negated all the presuppositions of the ‘noble Greek’ of the old stamp, made dialectic an everyday practice, conspired with tyrants, pursued politics of the future and provided the example of the most complete severance of the instincts from the past. He is profound, passionate in everything anti-Hellenic (...).” (Nietzsche, 1968: 222)

dles provisions upon which the soul is nourished” – *Theaetetus* dives into the very core of the sophist’s teachings. To remain within the confines of this short treatise, we should direct our attention to the fact that what Socrates/Plato reads from the *anthropos metron* in Protagoras, is his grounding of knowledge on perception.

(Plato’s) Socrates summarised Theaetetus’ claims in the following manner (1997: 179, 160d):

“Then that was a grand idea of yours when you told us that knowledge is nothing more or less than perception.”

The second reading occurs a few sentences later when Plato claims that Protagoras’ perception-based knowledge is and remains in the clutches of *doxa* (ibid.: 161d):

“Well, I was delighted with his general statement of the theory that a thing is for any individual what it seems to him to be; but I was astonished at the way he began. I was astonished that he did not state at the beginning of the *Truth* that ‘Pig is the measure of all things’ or ‘Baboon’ or some yet more out-of-the-way creature with the power of perception.”

The rest of the dialogue sees the skilful mid-wife lure Theaetetus into a zealous advocate of Socrates’ readings, which can be summarized in the claim that building knowledge on relative perception and *doxa*, immersed in becoming, simply cannot hold water of a better, *i.e.* more proper philosophical reflection. Let us introduce an early-bird hunch here, which shall be further elaborated later on: no matter how compelling Plato’s arguments may seem here, one cannot but feel that what is at stake here on Plato’s part is the method of substruction; put in plain terms, a refutation of what’s been unjustifiably foisted upon Protagoras.<sup>2</sup>

Probably the most important aspect of Plato’s Protagoras interpretation, far more important than the grudge against perception and *doxa* as the building blocks of knowledge, is the ontological exposition of the core insight of Protagoras’ statement, namely the primacy of becoming (1997: 179):

“So we find the various theories have converged to the same thing: that of Homer and Heraclitus and all their tribe, that all things flow like streams; of Protagoras, wisest of men, that man is the measure of all things.”

With this said, we can move forward to Aristotle as the second important interpreter of Protagoras. He reproaches Protagoras with the very same things: knowledge as perception, *doxa*, and emphasis on the omnipresence of movement. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle directly addresses Protagoras in Book Gamma, Paragraph 5. Drawing on his famous principle of non-contradiction, he reproaches Protagoras with fundamental, and unconvincing, contradictoriness (1998: 98):

“The same opinion is the basis of the position of Protagoras. His position and that just examined must stand or fall together. For (1) if all opinions held and all appearances are true, then they must all be at the same time both true and false (it will often happen, after all, that two men hold opposite opinions, such that they think that those who do not believe as they do have lapsed into error, and this can only mean that the same thing is both true and not true). But also (2) on this assumption all opinions held must be true.”

The contradictoriness of simultaneous truth propositions is derived from Aristotle’s understanding of Protagoras’ *anthropos metron* sentence.<sup>3</sup> And for Aristotle, this kind of a quest for truth is (1998: 289) “nonsense on stilts”. His deadliest bullet hits in the following manner (1998: 84):

“If all contradictories are simultaneously true of the same thing, we can take it as settled that we get monism. A trireme, a wall and a man will be the same thing, if for anything at all it is possible both to assert and to deny any given claim. Anyone who signs up for Protagoreanism has to bite this bullet.”

What Aristotle proposes against (his own) Protagoras, is the self-evident existence of an unmoved Primary Mover, a claim which helps him escape the trap of contradiction; and the trap is a disastrous consequence of the acceptance of perception and appearance as the first building block of truth, and of things *qua* relational to opinion and sensation.

In a nutshell, in both Plato and Aristotle, besides sensuous and doxic relativity, which might very well be the consequence of substraction, the main grudge against Protagoras is their insistence on the inescapability of becoming (Plato) and movement (Aristotle). And both, in quite a similar vein, challenge these cosmic constant shifts and changes with their momentous endeavours in thinking towards (or from) the eternally self-same Idea of the Good, or the unmoved Prime Mover; fundamental (or better still, fathomless) changeability belongs to the dangerously relativistic Protagoras, who bets everything on the subjectivity of perception and opinion or doxa.

### Hegel’s jump and Nietzsche’s leap

Much later, at the peak of German Idealism, both thinkers, as well as their Protagoras, are re-appropriated, with the very same crucial aspects of perception, opinion and movement, by Hegel in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. And yet, for Hegel, Protagoras no longer represents an unnecessary dead meander or a false pregnancy of the soul. Quite the contrary, Protagoras now suddenly turns into something positive. More exactly, Protagoras is now seen as a promising precursor of great Socrates, who assumes the former’s negativist subjectivity,<sup>4</sup> upgrading it from particularistic changeability into a true universality of consciousness. For the first time in history, so Hegel, the restlessness of subjectivity, previously abolishing the objective, finds its rest in its universal self-sameness. In other words, it frees itself from having to rely on the existing objective reality negatively, and is thus freed from the restlessness of sensuous, merely opinionated consciousness.

What is crucial for our treatise is that, in Hegel, two new claims come surprisingly to the fore: Protagoras’ *anthropos metron* is subjectivity in its origination, in its initial negativistic stance towards objectivity. And the essential determination of his subjectivity is the restlessness of movement. Protagoras manages to come into possession of the self, the embryo of true subjectivity, which is still individual, simply because in assuming itself it is wholly dependent on the outer reality, which deserves but abolition. After him comes Socrates, whose self is no longer negativity of individual restlessness, but

<sup>2</sup> Regardless of our strong claim made here, a sound and compelling reminder of what is dangerously at stake with sophists can be found in Zore, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 289: “When Protagoras quipped that man is the measure of all things, he had in mind, of course, the knowing or perceiving man. The grounds are that they

have perception/knowledge and that these are said to be the measures of objects.”

<sup>4</sup> It is negativist because, with man being the measure of all things, subjectivity progresses and affirms itself through the negation of all that approaches it on the side of objectivity; and restless because, in doing so, it has to rely on objectivity if it wants to be what it is.

rather a universality; a consciousness which no longer relies on the outer objectivity, but rather on itself, thereby becoming a goal in itself and the ultimate source of truth and goodness (1892: 385):

“Protagoras finally expresses thought as real existence, but it is in this its movement, which is the all-resolving consciousness, the unrest of the Notion. This unrest is in itself at the same time something restful or secure. But the fixed point of motion as such, is the ‘I’, for it has the moments of movement outside of it; as the self-retaining, which only abrogates what is different, the ‘I’ is negative unity, but just in that very way individual, and not yet the universal reflected within itself. (...) Socrates expresses real existence as the universal ‘I’, as the consciousness, which rests in itself; but that is the good as such, which is free from existent reality.”

The turnabout we witness in Hegel, however, is humble in comparison with – whom else but – Nietzsche. Just a short stroll through a couple of manuscript paragraphs, posthumously published in *The Will to Power*, reveals an elixir of his radical alteration of the view on the sophists, and on Protagoras himself. What happens here is no less than a cataclysmic and unprecedented subversion of the history of philosophy, to be later on followed and perhaps surpassed only by Heidegger. Even the title, “Critique of Greek Philosophy”, and the first sentence of paragraph 427 from the second part, are telling enough (1968: 231): “The appearance of the Greek philosophers from Socrates onwards is a symptom of decadence; the anti-Hellenic instincts come to the top (...)”; and immediately in the next sentence, we witness an entirely newly conceived opposition (ibid.):

“The ‘Sophist’ is still completely Hellenic including Anaxagoras, Democritus, the great Ionians. (...) The ‘philosopher’, on the other hand, is the *reaction*: he desires the *old* virtue. (...) he desires the ideal *polis* after the concept ‘*polis*’ has had its day. (...) Gradually everything genuinely Hellenic is made responsible for the state of decay (and Plato is just as ungrateful to Pericles, Homer, tragedy, rhetoric, as the prophets were to David and Saul).”

It is indeed fairly easy to recognize the reasons for Nietzsche’s coarse sympathies for sophists and his even coarser antipathies for Socrates and Plato (1968: 233):

“The Sophists verge upon the first *critique of morality*, the first *insight* into morality: – they juxtapose the multiplicity (the geographical relativity) of the moral value judgments; – they let it be known that every morality can be dialectically justified; (...) they postulate the first truth that a ‘morality-in-itself’, a ‘good-in-itself’ does not exist, that it is a swindle to talk of ‘truth’ in this field. (...) The Greek culture of the Sophists had developed out of all the Greek instincts; it belongs to the culture of the Periclean age as necessarily as Plato does *not*: it has its predecessors in Heraclitus, in Democritus, in the scientific types of the old philosophy (...).”

And a page later (1968: 234):

“The Sophists were Greeks: when Socrates and Plato took up the cause of virtue and justice, they were *Jews* or I know not what.”

And finally, the passage where the coarseness of his criticism reaches its peak momentum, bluntly hinting at the decay and denaturalisation of instincts (1968: 235):

“In short, the consequence of the denaturalisation of moral values was the creation of a degenerate type of man – ‘the good man’, ‘the happy man’, ‘the wise man’, – Socrates represents a moment of the profoundest perversity in the history of values.”

### Heidegger’s novelty

After this short and sharp detour, we are now more than ready to come to grips with Heidegger’s Protagoras interpretation. In *European Nihilism*, in

the chapter “Metaphysics and Anthropomorphy”, the last concept hints at the direction in which Heidegger’s thinking is heading, specifically the role of the human being within metaphysics as the truth of beings in their entirety; not some specific role, but the decisive one. This is why he lists three thinkers in seemingly metaphysically necessary succession (1982: 86):

“The Greek thinker Protagoras concerning man as the measure of all things, Descartes’ doctrine of man as the ‘subject’ of all objectivity, and Nietzsche’s thought concerning man as the ‘producer and possessor’ of all beings.”

For Heidegger, the claim that these three thinkers, each in his particular way, demonstrate the primacy of the subject over and against reality is grossly misleading. To disprove this almost self-evident contention, Heidegger proposes a different reading of Protagoras’ metaphysical position. What follows is his famous interpretation of the *anthropos metron* sentence, which evinces a hugely different approach already on the linguistic surface, since his translation differs from traditional solutions. Of course, in this case, the surface is the depth itself because, for Heidegger, translation is always already an interpretation (1982: 91):

“Protagoras’ saying (according to its transmission by Sextus Empiricus) runs thus: *Panton chrematon metron estin anthropos, ton men onton hos esti, ton de me onton hos ouk estin*. An accepted translation reads, ‘Man is the measure of all things, of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not.’ One might suppose that it is Descartes speaking here. Indeed, the sentence quite clearly betrays the frequently stressed ‘subjectivism’ of Greek sophists. In order not to confuse matters by bringing modern thoughts into play when interpreting the saying, let us first of all attempt a translation that will be more in keeping with Greek thought.”

The ground is set for the challenging interpretation, seeking to unearth a pre-metaphysical element in Protagoras, which compellingly escapes the previously elucidated aspects of Protagoras’ perception- and opinion-based truth (ibid.):

“Of all ‘things’ [of those ‘things’, namely, which man has about him for use, customarily and even continually- *chremata, chresthai*], the [respective] man is the measure, of things that are present, that they are *thus* present as they come to presence, but of those things to which coming to presence is denied, that they do not come to presence.”

What is the peculiar novelty of Heidegger’s translation? One should of course not forget that Heidegger was an excellent connoisseur of the ancient Greek; and combined with his extraordinary skill of unearthing and elaborating on the etymological truth of particular words or concepts, the thing that first strikes our mind is the inverted commas used for ‘things’. Immediately after, the sentence inserted within brackets hints at how we are supposed to understand the nature of things more properly, shifting attention from the whatness, essence of things to their that-ness, to their existence, or even more accurately, to their mode or manner of being. Indeed, this is where Heidegger’s famous forgetfulness of being resolutely comes into play. And things “which man has about him for use, customarily and even continually”, are the things belonging to the practical life of Dasein’s circumspective concern or seeing, understanding the being of environmental things to be handled with as the readiness-to-hand. Indeed, *chrema*, thing, is derived from the verb *chraomai*, which means to use or make use of. Now the meaning of the second part of the saying becomes more transparent: [man is the measure] “of things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not” now points to (with the hermeneutical mindfulness of their being as readiness-to-hand) the getting in tune with the being of things in their readiness-to-hand and unready-

ness-to-hand. Getting in tune with the being of things: this we believe is what Heidegger wants to emphasise here, especially if we take into account his rendition of the polysemous Greek adverbial conjunction *hōs*. Heidegger opts for the adverb-of-manner meaning, from whence comes his change of translation by way of adding and even emphasising the word “thus”: if, traditionally, the subordinate clause following the main phrase “of things that are” reads “that they are”, expressing an oversimplified (oblivious in being oversimplifying!) modal that-ness of things, Heidegger opts for – better yet, hints at – a richer modality in “that they are *thus* present”.

The key element in Heidegger’s reading of Protagoras is to be recognized in his rewarding interpretation of Aristotle’s book five from *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he ingeniously explicates various modes (manners of being!) of dianoetic comportment (*arete* as *hexis*), as different “truthing” comportments,<sup>5</sup> and, correlatively, different manners of being (unconcealment) of things: what might come in handy for the purpose of our treatise, is his accent on the basic difference between the comportment of *theoria* and those of *phronesis* and *techne*. If *theoria* deals with things that are eternally self-same, the practical comportments of *phronesis* and *techne* deal with things which are potentially prone to be otherwise.

And this is where a criticism of Plato’s and Aristotle’s attack on Protagoras’ is most readily in place: what both ancient giants disprove of in Protagoras, namely his accent on becoming and movement, can be most readily justified if we presume – and the word *chrema* is actually grist to our mill of the argument – that Protagoras in his statement addresses the measure for the truth of things *within the practical rather than theoretical comportment*.

What we are witnessing here is the very core impetus of Heidegger’s thinking of being. The forgetfulness of being may be understood as the reduction of the meaning of being to a poor set of meanings: being understood as existence, non-existence, possibility, actuality, necessity and coincidence. Heidegger’s admonition against such a reduction – and forgetfulness of being actually points at this overly reductive approach – sees this thinker of being enrich the meaning of being throughout his philosophical career and in many an astounding philosophical text.

“That they are – that they are thus present” summarises his fundamental goal of doing philosophy. Things can be thus and thus, always in correlation with uncovering comportment, which can be thus and thus: and to get thoughtfully in tune with the thus and thus manner of being of things (or of human being) is what the Heidegger’s reading of Protagoras is actually all about.<sup>6</sup>

By stressing in Protagoras the primacy of the (manner of) being of entities, and thereby evading the misleading perception/opinion interpretation, Heidegger now makes a strong metaphysical move towards explicating basic guidelines of Protagoras’ fundamental metaphysical position, which (1982: 92)

“... ask[s] in a fundamental way the question about the relationship of man to the being as such and as a whole, and about the role of man in the relation.”

According to Heidegger, Protagoras’ metaphysical position compellingly emerges in the following guidelines (1982: 94):

“Experienced in a Greek way, the man of the basic relationship with beings is *metron*, ‘measure’, in that he lets his confinement to the restricted radius (restricted for each respective self) of the unconcealed become the basic trait of his essence.”

This sentence gives us the shortest possible articulation of not only the pre-Cartesian but also pre-Platonic fundamental position. Protagoras is seen as



the grand beginner of philosophy. Then and there, human being's relationship with truth as unconcealment is still compellingly alive; in stark contrast to Plato, where this relationship already becomes ambiguous, and where truth as correctness or adequacy, and the primacy of the gaze over the self-giving visiblens of things, already start to prevail, and later take full reign in the modern metaphysical position of the sovereign subject.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

Two years before *European Nihilism*, in *The Age of the World Picture*, Heidegger states vehemently (2002, 77–78):

“Does not this statement of Protagoras sound as though Descartes were speaking? Is it not through Plato that the being of beings is fully grasped as the visible, the *idea*? (...) And yet it is no more the case that Protagoras' sophistic statement is subjectivism than it is the case that Descartes had the capacity to bring the overturning of Greek thought. Through Plato's thinking and Aristotle's questioning there occurred, to be sure, a decisive transformation of the interpretation of being and of man (...). Precisely as a struggle against the Sophistic, and so dependent on it, this transformed interpretation proves so decisive as to become the ending of the Greek world, and ending which indirectly helps to prepare the possibility of the modern age.”

Exactly by emphasizing Protagoras' belonging to what presences, and by acknowledging the concealment of beings and (79) “that the presence or absence of things (...) lies beyond his power of decision”, Heidegger can, and this with a good conscience, quote another Protagoras' statement (1948: 126):

“About the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in form; for the factors preventing knowledge are many: the obscurity of the subject, and the shortness of human life.”

The yawning chasm between the pre-Platonic and modern position thus becomes all the more visible. For the chasm to gape as widely as widely can be, we only need to recall Descartes's *Meditations*, where Cartesius self-assuredly sets conditions to God himself, who is *allowed* to exist if and only if he is, or better still, remains truthful. In other words, the omnipotence of the Cartesian subject is clearly betrayed in his strongest possible claim that God *cannot be a deceiver*, that within the stronghold of *cogito*'s self-reflection, He is *not allowed to be otherwise than truthful* (2002, 21):

“And the whole strength of the argument which I have here made use of to prove the existence of God consists in this, that I recognise that it is not possible that my nature should be what it is, and indeed that should have in myself the idea of a God, if God did not veritably exist. I say, whose idea is in me, i.e. who possesses all those supreme perfections of which our mind may indeed have some idea but without understanding them all, who is liable to no errors or defect [and who has none of all those marks which denote imperfection]. From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect.”

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For the most compelling interpretation of Heidegger's relation to Aristotle, far more compelling than any subsequent attempts, see: Volpi, 2010.

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It is important to note how Heidegger uses a different verb for the Greek *einai*, for being.

Instead of the neutral verb *to be* he uses the verb *to be present*, which is a somewhat awkward English rendition of the German verb *anwesen*, perhaps to be more fittingly translated with the verb *to presence*.

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See: Heidegger, 1998: 155–182.

In view of Protagoras' more than humble philosophical legacy, Heidegger's Protagoras offers a lot, and perhaps even too much: he is not the one who relativizes the truth, but, rather, remains thoughtfully within the primordial sphere of unconcealment, mindfully attuning himself to the primordial measure of being. With his *anthropos metron*, he is not a precursor of modern subjectivism or anthropocentrism. He is not the one to experience the fateful downfall of the forgetfulness of being, and thus personifies the very promise of the greatest possible beginning of philosophy only to be rehabilitated by us post-moderns.

Regardless of how we relate to Heidegger's Protagoras, or to the scarce "remainders" of Protagoras himself, the task of finding the right measure still remains, daunting and challenging, in the open. And no doubt, we owe it at least to Protagoras to mindfully come up with a newly formulated solution, if we are to continue fulfilling the basic humanistic promise of, re-flection-wise, paying *ourselves* the most jovial visit possible: coming back to our senses joyfully.

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### **Kratka povijest Protagorine filozofije**

#### **Sažetak**

*Poznato je da je s Nietzscheom i Heideggerom došlo do snažne re-evaluacije povijesti filozofije koja je dovela do inverzije do tada prevladavajuće paradigme progresivnog napretka. U Hegela i Husserla, da navedem samo dvije velike figure moderne filozofije, povijest filozofije razumljena je kao napredak od skromnih početaka u drevnoj Grčkoj do kulminacije u apsolutnoj subjektivnosti moderne filozofije. Nietzsche i Heidegger, međutim, svaki na svoj način, više su ili manje uvjerljivo izazvali takav pogled, otkrivajući povijest filozofije kao regresiju i pad prije nego li napredak. U njihovu zajedničkom pogledu, veliki, ali slabo razvijen početak filozofije, kako se prepoznaje u Sokrata, Platona i Aristotela, striktno su razumijevani kao početak opadanja spram doista značajnog početka koji se mogao pronaći kod predsokratskih filozofa poput Heraklita, Parmenida i Anaksimandra, pa čak i notornog sofist Protagore. Ovaj rad želi osvijetliti to kataklizmičko pomicanje filozofsko-povijesne paradigme dajući posebnu pozornost povijesti interpretiranja Protagorina filozofskog impetusa. Rasprava završava kao otvoren interpretativni horizont, naglašavajući važnost ponovnog ispitivanja dviju suprotstavljenih paradigmi u povijesti filozofije.*

#### **Ključne riječi**

Protagora, Platon, Aristotel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, povijest filozofije

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### **Kurze Geschichte von Protagoras' Philosophie**

#### **Zusammenfassung**

*Es ist bekannt, dass es mit Nietzsche und Heidegger zu einer starken Neubewertung der Geschichte der Philosophie gekommen ist, die zu einer Inversion des bis dahin vorherrschenden Paradigmas des progressiven Fortschritts geführt hat. Bei Hegel und Husserl, um nur zwei große Figuren der modernen Philosophie zu nennen, wird die Geschichte der Philosophie als Fortschritt von den bescheidenen Anfängen im altentümlichen Griechenland bis zum Höhepunkt in der absoluten Subjektivität der modernen Philosophie erfasst. Indessen haben Nietzsche und Heidegger, jeder auf seine Art und Weise, mehr oder weniger überzeugend eine solche Sichtweise hervorgerufen und die Geschichte der Philosophie eher als Regression und Niedergang als Fortschritt offenbart. In ihrer gemeinsamen Betrachtungsweise wird der große, aber schwach entwickelte Anfang der Philosophie, wie er bei Sokrates, Platon und Aristoteles erkannt wird, strikt als Beginn des Herabsinkens im Vergleich zu einem wahrhaftig bedeutsamen Anfang angesehen, der sich bei vorsokratischen Philosophen wie Heraklit, Parmenides, Anaximander und sogar beim notorischen Sophisten Protagoras vorfinden lässt. Diese Arbeit setzt sich zum Ziel, diese kataklistische Verschiebung des philosophisch-geschichtlichen Paradigmas zu beleuchten, wobei der Geschichte der Interpretation von Protagoras' philosophischem Impetus besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet wird. Die Abhandlung endet als ein offener interpretativer Horizont und akzentuiert die Signifikanz einer erneuten Untersuchung zweier sich widerstrebender Paradigmen in der Geschichte der Philosophie.*

#### **Schlüsselwörter**

Protagoras, Platon, Aristoteles, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Geschichte der Philosophie

**Janko M. Lozar**

## **Brève histoire de la philosophie de Protagoras**

### **Résumé**

*Il est connu qu'avec Nietzsche et Heidegger la philosophie de l'histoire a subi une forte réévaluation qui a mené à une inversion des paradigmes, jusque-là dominants, de l'évolution progressive. Chez Hegel et Husserl, mentionnant seulement deux grandes figures de la philosophie moderne, l'histoire de la philosophie était comprise comme une évolution dont les débuts modestes ont émergé en Grèce Ancienne et ont trouvé leur point culminant dans la subjectivité absolue de la philosophie moderne. Nietzsche et Heidegger ont, pourtant, chacun à leur manière, plus ou moins encouragé un tel regard en révélant que l'histoire de la philosophie est davantage régression et chute avant d'être évolution. Dans leur pensée commune, le commencement considérable, mais peu développé, de la philosophie telle qu'on la connaît chez Socrate, Platon et Aristote, est perçu comme le commencement d'un déclin en comparaison au commencement majeur que l'on pouvait trouver chez les philosophes présocratiques tels que Héraclite, Parménide et Anaximandre, voire chez le fameux sophiste Protagoras. Ce travail souhaite mettre en lumière ce déplacement cataclysmique du paradigme philosophico-historique en attirant spécialement l'attention sur l'histoire de l'interprétation de l'impetus philosophique de Protagoras. La discussion se termine en proposant un horizon ouvert d'interprétation et en mettant l'accent sur l'importance d'une nouvelle recherche de deux paradigmes opposées dans l'histoire de la philosophie.*

### **Mots-clés**

Protagoras, Platon, Aristote, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, histoire de la philosophie