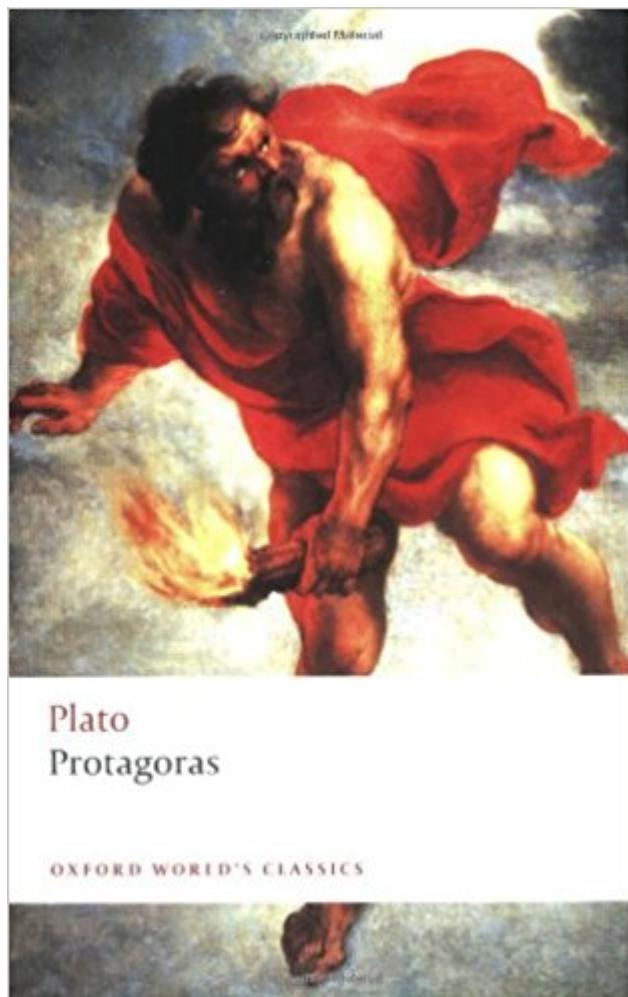


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Protagoras (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

In the fifth century BC professional educators, the sophists, travelled the Greek world claiming to teach success in public and private life. In this dialogue Plato shows the pretensions of the leading sophist, Protagoras, challenged by the critical arguments of Socrates. From criticism of the educational aims and methods of the sophists the dialogue broadens out to consider the nature of the good life, and the role of pleasure and intellect in the context of that life.

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Customer Reviews

C.C.W. Taylor is Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

Taylor's translation of the *Protagoras* is careful and refreshing. He avoids conventional misrenderings, and always explains problem words in the notes. For example, 'sophrosune' is soundness of mind (not temperance) and the concept (difficult and changing even in Plato's writing) is discussed thoroughly in Taylor's introductory essay, which is clear and illuminating. Besides entries on text and translation, the commentary provides some of the literary and historical

information necessary for Greekless readers. The bulk of the notes is philosophical interpretation and criticism. On some issues substantial entries are required, and Taylor furnishes them; they are particularly well organized and easy to read.

If you want to read Plato, the *Protagoras* is a good place to start. It will give you a correct impression of what Plato's dialogues are like (both content and style), but is short enough not to feel overwhelming, as the *Republic* might feel if you don't know what you are getting into. The most common things Socrates does is ask people to define things, and show them that their definitions are inadequate. If one studies with a sculptor to become a sculptor, then one studies with a sophist to become a sophist (this is already a typical line of reasoning), but, "I should be surprised if you even know what a sophist is." The only big Platonic doctrine that does not appear in the *Protagoras* is the immortality of the soul and the theory of recollection (which I think of as a single doctrine). We see the high quality of Plato's writing early in this dialogue. When Socrates is telling *Protagoras* how experts are followed in shipbuilding but not in state policy or teaching excellence, he says that the sons of excellent fathers are not taught excellence by their fathers, but rather "they wander about on their own like sacred cattle looking for pasture, hoping to pick up excellence by chance." *Protagoras* and Socrates quote and interpret a lyric poem of Simonides, and this takes up about a sixth of the dialogue. Adam Beresford has given a reconstruction of this poem: "Nobody's Perfect: A New Text and Interpretation of Simonides PMG 542", *Classical Philology*, vol. 103, no. 3, 2008, 237-256. (PMG = *Poetae Melici Graeci*. See also number 476 of the Loeb Classical Library.) Previously, Beresford translated the *Protagoras* and *Meno*, and the next time I read the *Protagoras* I plan to read his translation. I also recommend W. K. C. Guthrie's translation of the *Protagoras*; Guthrie had earlier written a monograph "Orpheus and Greek Religion" and later wrote his six volume "History of Greek Philosophy".

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