

Socrates' Anti-Periclean History of Philosophy in Plato's *Protagoras*

In Plato's *Protagoras*, Socrates presents a "history of philosophy" (342a-343c) in response to Protagoras' earlier discussion of ancient sophistry (316b-317e; Coby 1987). In this paper, I suggest that Socrates' history redefines wisdom in contrast not only to Protagoras, but also to Thucydides' Pericles. In the Funeral Oration of Book II, Pericles gives an idealized vision of Athens. He describes Athens as an "education for Greece" (*τῆς Ἑλλάδος παιδευσιν*, 2.41), suggesting that all the other cities of Greece ought to look at Athens as a model. The sophist Hippias expresses a similar sentiment about Athens in the *Protagoras*, a dialogue set about two years before Pericles' famous speech. Hippias calls Athens "the wisdom-capital of Greece" (*τῆς τε Ἑλλάδος εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πρωτανεῖον τῆς σοφίας*, 337d). His primary aim is to win students from his audience of wealthy young Athenians, but his praise is flattering because it appeals to Athens' self-understanding as an intellectual capital.

Many scholars have discussed Pericles in relation to the *Protagoras'* primary question, the teachability of virtue (Coby 1987). Although Pericles is not present as a character in the dialogue, his influence is felt throughout the dialogue, from the dramatic setting during the height of his influence in Athens, to members of his household being present: his sons Xanthippus and Pericles, and his ward Alcibiades. In addition, much has been said about the way Socrates, by placing the roots of his philosophy in Crete and Sparta, tells a comic, even satiric, story that overturns two common Athenian opinions: (1) that Crete and Sparta are primarily warrior-like cultures; and (2) that their own culture is intellectually superior (e.g. Coby 1987; Lampert 2010; Cropsey 1995). But scholarship has not noticed Pericles' role within Socrates' history of philosophy: Socrates' description of philosophy's origins directly contrasts with Pericles' description of Athens in the Funeral Oration.

Pericles contrasts the Spartans, who make extreme physical training central to their way of life, with the Athenians, who, despite being more relaxed, show themselves to be just as courageous (2.38-39). Pericles later says the Athenians “philosophize without softness” (φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἄνευ μαλακίας, 2.40), suggesting that their culture trains the minds, as opposed to the Spartans, who emphasize training of the body. But he implies that the Athenians are not weak in body either. Socrates’ Crete and Sparta appear to be military cultures that have become powerful through “fighting and courage” ($\tauῷ$ μάχεσθαι καὶ ἀνδρείᾳ, 342b). In reality, Socrates suggests, they have become powerful through wisdom. Pericles’ Athens is open to the world, and it never holds “expulsions of foreigners” (ξ ενηλασίαις, 2.39) so that people may learn about its culture as much as they desire. The word ξ ενηλασία is used almost exclusively in relation to Sparta in extant Greek literature. Socrates’ Crete and Sparta do hold periodic ξ ενηλασίαι, in order to consult their sophists without any foreigners finding out their secret to obtaining power (342c). The most military of cultures, Socrates suggests, also take part in wisdom, but the secretive nature of their society prevents Pericles and other Athenians from recognizing this. Pericles characterizes Athens as an “education for Greece” ($\tauῆς$ Εὐλάδος παιδεύσιν). Socrates puts Crete and Sparta in this role. He describes the Seven Sages—the ancient lovers of wisdom—as “emulators” (ζ ηλωταὶ), “lovers” ($\grave{\epsilon}$ ρασταὶ), and “students” (μ αθηταὶ) of the “education of the Spartans” ($\tauῆς$ Λακεδαιμονίων παιδείας, 343a). By supplanting Athens as the center for wisdom, Socrates questions the status of Pericles’ idealized city. In the *Protagoras*, Plato, his most famous pupil, depicts an Athens filled with foreign sophists who are not the city’s students, but its teachers. While Pericles envisions foreigners studying and emulating the Athenians, Socrates lives in a world where sophists educate them.

Bibliography

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