

references to the γνῶθι σαυτόν, apparently off-handed, signal something profound (*Chrm.* 164d4–165b4; *Phdr.* 229e6; *Alc.* 124a8, 129a2, 132d2; *Phlb.* 48c8; *RL* 138a7; *Hipparchus* 228e2);¹² and in the *Protagoras* Socrates suggests regularly the importance of self-investigation and self-testing. We find all the dialogue's references to philosophy, but for one, in this passage, and that outlier reference has programmatic relevance to the entire span of conversation—a conversation reflecting critically on itself, and at length—just before the passage (334c8–338e6). Further, calling philosophy “Spartan” is so arresting and so bizarre as to draw special attention to that phrase. Finally, this passage seems especially attuned to the image of Socrates, as someone who demands laconic speech of others (334d1–335c10), and who may have come to seem Spartan in other respects (e.g., Aristophanes, *Birds* 1281, Plato, *Crito* 52a).

The following paper aims to understand the way this passage contributes to the point of the dialogue, and even to Plato's Socratic project. I take a particular piece of information as crucial for doing this. Protagoras is presented as the preeminent pedagogue in mid fifth-century Greece (309d1).¹³ Others knew it, and he did too (318d8, 328b2). He draws the avid attention of the young men of Athens (310b7), has befriended the richest of literary patrons (311a2), places himself above all previous teachers in Greece, even Homer (316d4–317b5), and sees fit to judge Socrates, regarded as most promising in his own right, from a yet higher perch of authority (361d8–362a1). The *Protagoras* depicts Socrates as giving Protagoras his comeuppance. Socrates shows Protagoras that he has failed to defend his view that the virtues differ in kind and his picture of their various relationships with knowledge. This failure embarrasses Protagoras before a great crowd of colleagues, admirers, and potential students (cf. 362a3). Such conversational success seems destined to thrust Socrates into even greater public and intellectual esteem. The dialogue *Protagoras* thus depicts Socrates's ascendancy over against Protagoras. Unless Plato wants to instruct us only in Socrates's preeminently clever argumentation, however, or to make light of Protagoras's pitifully thin skin, or to illustrate the difficulty of thinking about the unity of the virtues, the dialogue must mean more. It is hard to see how Socrates's momentary success over Protagoras would otherwise advance our understanding of Socrates, or the nature of conversation, or the theory of ethics.

It does show us more, and in a way that Protagoras's fame as a great sophist is not merely incidental to the philosophical lesson. The dialogue contrasts two pedagogical modes, represented by two exemplary practitioners. On the one hand we have Protagoras. He aims to teach his students the skills appropriate for political success. He appears to think that such learning proceeds through emulation of ideals and criticism of poetry. He probably expects his notoriety for wisdom to entice students to study with him. On the other hand we have Socrates. He aims for his students to take responsibility for making themselves into good