

## Prodicus

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Prodicus is probably the best known, after Protagoras and Gorgias, of those conventionally labeled Sophists.<sup>1</sup> That is not saying much, since these figures continue to be understudied and under-appreciated for their intellectual significance. But three things about Prodicus are generally recognized among specialists in ancient Greek thought: 1) he told a story about Heracles' choice between Virtue and Vice; 2) he paid a lot of attention to fine distinctions among terms that most people would regard as synonymous; and 3) he offered explanations of the origins of religious belief that resulted in his being labeled an atheist. Of these, the first clearly has ethical import; the second might seem irrelevant to ethics, but is in fact importantly implicated in Prodicus' ethical thinking, though the details are likely to remain elusive; and the third, which one might expect to be of ethical significance, shows no sign of having been viewed in this light by Prodicus himself, even if others may have done so. In what follows, I shall address each of these topics in this order. But first, it is worth saying a little about how Prodicus was portrayed in antiquity, and especially in his own time. Besides establishing or suggesting a few biographical markers, the picture we are given often seems to be connected in interesting ways with the views I have just mentioned.<sup>2</sup>

### I

The most widely read text dealing with Prodicus is undoubtedly Plato's *Protagoras*, which features him as a character, and he is introduced in a striking vignette: Prodicus is in bed, lecturing to a group of people (315d-16a). Socrates, the narrator, does not enter

the room, but can apparently see inside and can make out some, but not all, of those seated there. This is part of a longer description of all the people and activities in the courtyard of Callias, the well-known patron of Sophists; Socrates has already introduced a mock-Homeric tone to his account, and this is continued when he begins his sketch of Prodicus with “and then I spied Tantalus”, a near-quotation from the *Odyssey*’s Underworld book (*Od.* 11.582). Scholars have naturally thought of the punishment of Tantalus that immediately follows in Homer; when this is combined with the picture of Prodicus as lying in bed, it is tempting to think that he is ill, or even that he is generally a sickly specimen.<sup>3</sup> But the passage says nothing about any suffering – it just says that he is in bed; he is apparently performing with his usual vigor, and just afterwards, when it is proposed that everyone join in a common discussion, he has no trouble getting up and joining the group, in which he participates throughout the rest of the dialogue. The relevance of Tantalus, then, may be not so much the fact of his punishment, but the life that preceded it.<sup>4</sup> Tantalus was proverbial for wealth and luxury, including the kinds of luxurious fruits that are forever dangled out of his reach in Hades. But his offence was outrageous hubris against the gods; there are various versions of the story, the most graphic being that he cooked his son Pelops and served him to the gods to see if they could tell what the meal was.

What does all this have to do with Prodicus? The hubris can be connected easily enough with Prodicus’ deflationary views about the gods. But the wealth and luxury seem to have a connection with Prodicus as well. First, Plato himself elsewhere has Socrates mention that Prodicus made an astounding amount of money (*chrêmata ... thaumasta hosa*, *Hipp. Ma.* 282c5-6)<sup>5</sup> from speaking and teaching; and there are numerous reports of

his delivering a speech that cost fifty drachmas to hear – which, however precisely one assesses its value in modern terms, is clearly represented as an extraordinary amount of money.<sup>6</sup> Now, the room in which Prodicus is lying is said to have been a *tamieion* (315d1), a word often translated “store-room”, but whose primary meaning is a room for storing money; the room belongs to Callias, widely known for spending money on Sophists, but it is especially appropriate that it should be occupied by Prodicus, renowned as a Sophist who *took* a great deal of money. Moreover, he is not merely lying in bed when everyone else is up and about, but the bed has a great many sheepskins and blankets; he is conspicuously living the life of luxury – indeed the latter-day Tantalus. And the bedding also recalls a detail that takes us away from the purely biographical. In Xenophon’s report of Prodicus’ story of Heracles’ choice, to which we shall return, Vice promises Heracles that he will not just sleep, but sleep “most softly” (*malakôtata*, *Mem.* 2.1.24), and Virtue later criticizes her for sleeping on soft blankets (2.1.30);<sup>7</sup> the reclining Prodicus, then, seems to be living up to his own image of Vice. We need not take this an indication that Prodicus advocated vice over virtue, and we shall see later that the opposite is true; but Plato may be suggesting that his lifestyle did not exactly chime with his ethical prescriptions.

We have thus seen implied references to two of the three Prodician themes I mentioned at the outset.<sup>8</sup> And there is good reason to think that the third, his interest in precise distinctions, is also alluded to. Socrates says that Prodicus’ voice was so deep that he made the room vibrate, which meant that from outside it was not possible to hear what was being said. For an expert in linguistic precision, also renowned as a public speaker, to be indistinct because of the sound of his own voice is a supremely mischievous touch.<sup>9</sup>

Plato has given us an unforgettable image of the man, which sums up several features of his life and activities, but also manages to capture something about all three of his main philosophical contributions – all in a manner that makes him look suspect or ridiculous or both. With an opponent capable of such a subtle but devastating portrait, it is no wonder the Sophists have had a hard time being taken seriously as philosophers. Yet, as we shall see, Plato's attitude towards Prodicus is by no means wholly hostile, and this too is understandable.

Before we get to the central topics, just a few more biographical details. In the same passage where he alludes to Prodicus' great wealth, Socrates mentions that Prodicus was from the island of Ceos, and that he frequently traveled to Athens in a public capacity (*dêmosiai*, 282c2-3), speaking at least once to the Athenian Council and making a very good impression. Ceos was a tribute-paying part of the Athenian empire, and relations between it and Athens are likely to have been uneasy, particularly during the Peloponnesian War, when this speech may well have taken place.<sup>10</sup> As Socrates makes clear, Prodicus was not the only Sophist to come to Athens on both public and private business; but the fact that he had the public role over some length of time, and his apparent success on the specific occasion Socrates refers to, suggests at least some diplomatic, and not just oratorical, skill. Plato also gives us indications that seem to place Prodicus as a rough contemporary of Socrates. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras says that he is old enough to be the father of anyone else present (317c3). Protagoras is generally thought to have been born about 490 BCE; if so, Prodicus could not have been more than a few years older than Socrates (born 469). But he is clearly an established figure in the circle cultivated by Callias – as opposed to mere youths such as Alcibiades – and so is

also unlikely to be much younger.<sup>11</sup> We also learn from Plato's *Apology* (19e) that he is still alive at the time of Socrates' trial in 399. A pair of late sources claim that Prodicus suffered the same fate as Socrates: execution by hemlock at the hands of the Athenians for corrupting the youth.<sup>12</sup> Like most scholars, I consider this a fanciful extrapolation from his known teaching of rhetoric and his widely reported atheism. But the implied assimilation of Prodicus and Socrates may nonetheless reflect what seem to be genuine expressions of affinity for Prodicus' ideas that Plato puts in Socrates' mouth in several places. We shall return to this point.

## II

The story of Heracles' choice is reported to us by Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* (2.1.21-33). Other, shorter references to it exist; but most of these could just as well be dependent on Xenophon's version as drawing on Prodicus' original.<sup>13</sup> It is Xenophon, then, on whom we shall concentrate. Socrates is urging Aristippus (later known as the originator of the Cyrenaic school) to reconsider the irresponsible life, centered around the avoidance of toil and suffering, to which he seems to be tending. And the climax of his case is a story, attributed to Prodicus, in which the personified Virtue and Vice address Heracles – and to some extent each other – advertising their own advantages and the shortcomings of the other. Vice emphasizes the ease and pleasure of following her route, and says that she provides a trouble-free road to happiness (*eudaimonia*, 2.1.29, cf. 26); Virtue does not deny that her path involves hard work, but insists that, properly understood, this is the one that offers the truest happiness (2.1.33). The story clearly has a significant rhetorical dimension to it, and Socrates says that Prodicus presented the story as a display speech (*epideixis*) to a great many people (2.1.21);<sup>14</sup> it may very well have been useful in

attracting wealthy young men to study with him,<sup>15</sup> and it may also have played a role in his actual teaching of rhetoric. But Socrates also calls it a “written composition” (*suggramma*, 2.1.21), and we learn from a scholium on Aristophanes *Clouds* that it appeared in a book of Prodicus’ called *Horai – Hours or Seasons*.<sup>16</sup>

We know nothing else directly about this work.<sup>17</sup> But a passage of another Aristophanes play, *Birds*, sheds some light on it (685-722). Here the Birds, as the chorus, tell a spoof theogony in which the birds are older than the gods. The word *hōra*, in the sense “season”, appears no less than five times, and the account is supposed to make “Prodicus weep from now on” (692). It sounds, then, as if this is a parody of something Prodicus offered in his work *Horai* (which gives us, incidentally, a *terminus ante quem* for the work of 414 BCE, when the *Birds* was produced). If we combine all this information, it is a plausible inference that the work included something about the origins of the gods – or, in Prodicus’ understanding, the origins of our belief in gods – and something about an appropriate choice of human life. Speculating somewhat further, one could combine these items under the title *Horai* by supposing that it had two parts: one about the early “season” of the human species, somewhat as Protagoras’ speech in Plato’s *Protagoras* surveys the growth of human civilization (320d-323c), and including reference to how we came to believe in gods, and one about the various stages or “seasons” of a human life;<sup>18</sup> Xenophon explicitly includes a mention of Heracles being on the cusp of manhood and hence at a time of important choice concerning his way of life (2.1.21). In any case, it seems clear from Aristophanes’ parody that *Horai* was not a rhetorical training book, but a work containing Prodicus’ own reflections on a variety of topics; hence we can assume that the Heracles story was not only a rhetorical exercise or

piece of advertising, but was also intended to promote a point of view.<sup>19</sup> The next question is what this may have been.

Two things are clear about Xenophon's presentation: first, that he is not giving Prodicus' exact words, but second, that his version is a fair approximation to the original.<sup>20</sup> Socrates says that Prodicus' story was "something like this, as much as I can remember" (2.1.21); it does not purport, then, to be an exact reproduction. But at the end, repeating this point, he says that Prodicus used "even more high-flown language" than he has used in his recounting (2.1.34). This implies at least some attempt to capture the "high-flown" language of Prodicus' original – on Socrates' part as character and on Xenophon's part as author. There is room for debate about the extent to which the vocabulary of this passage departs from the norm for Xenophon.<sup>21</sup> But the impassioned confrontation between Virtue and Vice does stand out, in terms of its emotional register, within the *Memorabilia* itself, and marks a clear shift, within this particular chapter, compared with Socrates' previous conversation with Aristippus. We shall also see in the next section that Xenophon's version uses a cluster of terms to which there is strong evidence for thinking Prodicus devoted his attention. Thus we have good reason to suppose that Xenophon consulted Prodicus' own text<sup>22</sup> and, while not making a simple transcription, made a genuine effort to approximate the tone of the original.

And if he is trying to reproduce the tone, he is presumably trying to reproduce the content as well. Although Socrates does not say explicitly that Virtue was presented by Prodicus as the winner, it is very obvious that Xenophon takes the story to be a recommendation of virtue over vice. In closing, Socrates refers to it as Prodicus' presentation of "the education of Heracles by Virtue" (2.1.34); and the whole point of

introducing it is to reinforce the message in favor of virtue that he has already been serving Aristippus. The other reports on the speech, to the extent that they comment on this, uniformly agree with Xenophon on this point. The earliest model for such a sentiment is a section of Hesiod's *Works and Days* where the poet is exhorting his brother Perses to cultivate virtue and avoid the easy path of vice (286-319), and especially a passage where, in contrast to that of vice, the path of virtue is said to be long, hard work – but easy once you have climbed to the top (287-92). The language of the path (*hodos*) is explicit in both Hesiod and Xenophon. There is some difference in what Hesiod and Prodicus consider virtue and vice to consist in;<sup>23</sup> for Hesiod, the contrast is between working hard on the land, with thoughtful planning, so as to make money, and idle lounging and sponging off others, whereas for Prodicus it is mainly between exercising one's abilities to the full and acting for the benefit of one's community, so as to achieve lasting honor and satisfaction in one's accomplishments, and indulging in an unrestrained hedonism. But the parallel is nonetheless strong, and there is circumstantial evidence that Prodicus made deliberate use of the Hesiodic precedent. In Xenophon, Socrates quotes the central lines of the *Works and Days* immediately before introducing Prodicus' story (2.1.20), and introduces it by saying that Prodicus expressed the same opinion. And in Plato's *Protagoras*, when the discussion has turned to the analysis of a poem of Simonides, Socrates quotes in passing some of the same lines, prefacing them with the words "And perhaps Prodicus here and many others would say, in line with Hesiod, that it is hard to become good" (340c8-d2), and receiving Prodicus' praise for doing so.



It looks, then, as if Prodicus' story was an exhortation to virtue, following an ancient precedent but recasting the nature of virtue and vice themselves to suit a fifth-century context. Now, it has recently been suggested that, while the story is indeed intended to show that virtue is the best choice for a character like Heracles, it does not follow that everyone would do better to follow virtue. Rather, on this interpretation, Prodicus laid out the two options, and left each person to find which of the two, virtue or vice, was most suitable to their own temperament. This is said to comport with a general sophistic outlook according to which "there are no objective moral truths and/or moral absolutes, by reference to which everyone ought to pursue a life of virtue"; whether or not one should pursue virtue depends on what kind of person one is.<sup>24</sup>

This is a substantial and intriguing new reading of what Prodicus is up to, but I think there are several reasons to resist it. First, if this interpretation is correct, then of course Xenophon, and all those who follow him, are completely wrong about Prodicus' intentions. Rather than making a powerful case for virtue, as Hesiod did and as Xenophon's Socrates takes Prodicus to have done (and is himself trying to do, with Prodicus' help, for Aristippus), Prodicus is offering a picture of the virtuous life as optional; it may be that virtue will suit some people, but if it does not suit you, there is no reason for you to pursue it. And it is not just that Xenophon has fundamentally misunderstood what Prodicus was suggesting. The nature of his misunderstanding is such that, had he been apprised of Prodicus' real message, he would have been horrified. Now, Xenophon may not be as philosophically sophisticated as Plato, but he is not a fool; he is also not isolated from the intellectual currents of his day. For him to have been so drastically mistaken about the tenor of Prodicus' thinking seems to me very unlikely.

Another reason why I find this reconstruction unlikely has to do with the attitude of Plato, and of Socrates as depicted by Plato, towards Prodicus. As we have already seen, Plato is certainly capable of making fun of Prodicus. But there is no suggestion, either in the *Protagoras* or anywhere else in Plato where Prodicus is mentioned, that he is a dangerous figure undermining basic commitments about how life should be lived. We do, of course, meet such characters in Plato. There is Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, who maintains that justice is the interest of the stronger and that any sensible person will look out for their own interests, at the expense of others if needed; and there is Callicles in the *Gorgias*, who holds that the unrestrained pursuit of one's own interests is the naturally right course of action. If Prodicus had held that virtue is not incumbent on all of us, and that for some, vice – understood as the pursuit of sensual pleasure in the absence of any responsibilities – may be the better course, he would have been scarcely less anathema to Plato's Socrates than these two. Yet in the *Protagoras* and elsewhere, Prodicus consistently comes across as one of the “good” Sophists like Protagoras himself: that is, as someone whose ideas may be suspect in various ways, but who shows no sign of wanting either to overthrow conventional conceptions of virtue and its importance, or to undermine or dismiss Socrates' own quest to understand and exemplify the virtues. In the *Protagoras* Socrates even describes himself as a student of Prodicus, and his wisdom as divine and ancient (341a1-4) – remarks that, to be sure, are partly in jest, but that imply at least some intellectual affinity.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to imagine that Plato would have depicted Socrates' attitude in this way if Prodicus had been such a stark opponent of his self-appointed mission in the *Apology*: to get *everyone* to care about virtue (30a7-b4). It is

also hard to imagine that Prodicus, in Plato's depiction of him, would have been as consistently benign and harmless as he in fact is.

A final reason why I am suspicious of this interpretation of Prodicus' intentions in the Heracles story has to do with the general picture of sophistic thought that it is said to exemplify. The claim quoted above, that there are "no moral absolutes", can be understood in various different ways. If one takes it to mean that what actions or objects qualify as good varies with the circumstances, we can agree that several Sophists took that idea very seriously. But many other Greek thinkers adhered to it too, and it has no tendency to show that virtue is optional; all it shows is that what virtue demands will vary from case to case – which both Aristotle and the Platonic Socrates would be happy to endorse. If, on the other hand, the idea is that virtue, understood in a conventional way, is good for some people – given their particular dispositions, strengths and weaknesses – and vice for others, it might perhaps be seen as a special case of the "good varies with circumstances" view, but it seems to me unparalleled in the evidence on this period. As noted just above, that virtue is optional is a radical view, and this would be as true on the present reading as on any other. Yet, so understood, it has very little in common with the recommendations of those familiar radicals Thrasymachus and Callicles. Even if there is a hedonistic element in Callicles' view, both counsel the pursuit of political power, for those capable of it – not a life of sensual ease – and neither counsels conventional virtue for any group, whether rulers or ruled. One could also take an example not mentioned by Plato, namely Antiphon, who tells us how to use justice to our own advantage by obeying the law only selectively<sup>26</sup>. Antiphon too speaks of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. But he too seems to be speaking at least in part about public contexts – in this case,

mainly judicial rather than political – and he too gives no hint that some people would do better to pursue a quite different goal, devoting themselves to virtue.

Let us try one more possible reading of “there are no moral absolutes”. If the idea is that what counts as good depends on one’s outlook or perspective, and that there is no objective way to judge among these perspectives, the response is that we are talking about Prodicus, not Protagoras. This point deserves a little expansion. Protagoras is famous for saying “A human being is measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not”. This is quoted and discussed in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (152a), and in other authors who largely seem to be dependent on the *Theaetetus*. This statement is often taken as a kind of emblem for the Sophistic movement as a whole.<sup>27</sup> If the point is to emphasize that the Sophists’ primary concern was with human beings and how they see the world – rather than with the nature of the physical universe, the primary focus of the thinkers that preceded them – then this has some merit. But if the point is that the Sophists as a group subscribed to the particular view that the *Theaetetus* takes Protagoras to express by these words – a view according to which whatever a person perceives or believes is “true for” that person – then there is no reason to accept it.<sup>28</sup> Not a shred of evidence connects this view with any other Sophist besides Protagoras. A couple of late sources call Prodicus a student of Protagoras.<sup>29</sup> But it is not clear how seriously to take this; no doubt Prodicus heard Protagoras, was acquainted with him, and learned something from him, but we have no detail that would confirm a formal teacher-pupil relationship between the two. And even if Prodicus did really study with Protagoras, it does not follow that he accepted everything Protagoras

believed, including that “a human being is the measure” as the *Theaetetus* interprets that. To repeat, there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that he did.

Thus I do not find the proposed interpretation persuasive. It is not supported by fitting neatly into a generally shared Sophistic mindset, and the attitudes of both Plato and Xenophon seem to tell against it.<sup>30</sup> We are back, then, with the more straightforward reading in which Prodicus is making the case quite generally for virtue against vice.<sup>31</sup> Can we say any more about the character of the view? One thing in Xenophon’s presentation that may strike us as very conventional, and is indeed a commonplace of Greek philosophy, but that – if it does in fact go back to Prodicus himself – may have been somewhat original for its time, is the argument in favor of virtue on the basis that it leads to happiness, properly understood; and, in the service of that argument, the contrast between superficial, short-term sensual pleasures and the much more substantial happiness that comes from having developed one’s talents, acted well and earned the respect of one’s community. Similar kinds of argument – developed, of course, in much more detail – are central to both Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s ethical work. One might even see Virtue’s argument as a prototype of the thinking that, in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* book 1, yields the identification of the highest good – previously identified verbally as “happiness”, but in need of further specification – as “activity of soul in keeping with virtue” (1098a16-17).

Of course, we may wish we knew in more detail what Prodicus said. And we may speculate that what he said in his spoken renderings of the story varied depending on his audience.<sup>32</sup> When using it to attract students, and with a view to keeping the parents happy, he probably kept it simple and conventional. When speaking in more private and

erudite settings, he may have elaborated more on how and why virtuous activity was productive of happiness, and he may deviated to some degree from purely conventional conceptions of what virtuous activity is: I mean, in the sort of way that Plato's Socrates does, when he argues that it worse to do wrong than to suffer it, or Aristotle does, when he elevates theoretical contemplation above the political life. It is possible that the conventional-minded Xenophon, without reneging on Socrates' pledge that he is conveying roughly what Prodicus said, has ironed out some such innovative features in his version – features that were perhaps present in the written text. In the present state of evidence, all of this is bound to remain guesswork. What we can say is that the story of Heracles' choice, understood at face value as an argument in favor of virtue, is easily intelligible as an early contribution to a line of thought squarely in the mainstream of ancient Greek ethics as we see it develop in the fourth century BCE and beyond. In what follows, I consider the relation of this side of his activity to the other two that we noted at the outset.

### III

What does any of this have to do with Prodicus' reflections on language? We have ample evidence, beginning with Plato but also from numerous later authors, that Prodicus was interested in precise attention to the meanings of terms, which included distinguishing the meanings of terms that would generally be considered equivalent; this was one of several overlapping projects concerning language, pursued by various thinkers in the period and known under the heading "correctness of names" (*orthotês onomatôn*). It has been well established in recent scholarship that Prodicus' distinctions were not based on special sensitivity to common usage; in at least one case he actively goes against common usage,

while in others he seems unconcerned with it. It has also been established that his choices of usage are sometimes, although by no means always, based on etymology.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the best starting-point in trying to understand what Prodicus hoped to achieve with this attention to language is a text exemplifying both these points. Galen tells us that Prodicus was not willing to use the term *phlegma*, “phlegm”, like everyone else, to refer to the cold and moist humor; instead, that should be called *blenna*, “mucus”, and *phlegma* should instead be used to refer to the hot and dry humor. This is because *phlegma* is related to *pephlechthai*, “having been burnt”.<sup>34</sup> Unlike many ancient etymologies, this one is actually correct, and in Homer *phlegma* is used to refer to burning (*Il.* 21.337); but it later became the name of one of the four humors, the one that was regarded as the coldest (e.g., Hippocrates, *Nat. Hom.* 7). Now, Galen also tells us that this piece of linguistic reform occurred in a book of Prodicus called *On Human Nature (Peri phuseôs anthrôpou)* – that is, in a work we may guess to have belonged, broadly speaking, to natural philosophy (applied to ourselves), but in any case not to have been primarily about language. And if we ask why Prodicus would consider it important, in such a context, to use *phlegma* in this unusual way, an obvious answer suggests itself: to make the words line up properly with the things.<sup>35</sup> That, of course, leaves a great many matters vague. In this period language was often thought to have originated from ancient linguistic “lawgivers” (*nomothetai*) who laid down what was to be called what.<sup>36</sup> One might also combine this (though one would not have to) with the idea that there was some sort of *natural* correctness to names, which might itself be based on etymologies or on other principles; Plato’s *Cratylus* explores this possibility at some length. Is Prodicus attempting to get back to the original correct – perhaps naturally correct – names, which

he considers usage over centuries to have distorted? We have no way of knowing. But the case reported by Galen does suggest that he is operating with some version of the idea that if one gets the names straight, that will be a considerable help in getting the facts straight.

If so, the same kind of motivation may be behind his distinctions in other contexts, including ethical ones. Now, among the numerous reported instances of Prodicus' focus on "correctness of names", the most frequent in the sources has to do with a group of terms signifying pleasure. In the various snippets of evidence on Prodicus' treatment of this topic, we encounter four different terms in this general range: *hêdonê*, *chara*, *terpsis* and *euphrosunê*,<sup>37</sup> which might be translated "pleasure", "joy", "delight" and "good cheer" respectively. And it is striking that all four of these terms appear in Xenophon's version of Heracles' choice; indeed, Vice uses all four in the same sentence early in her first speech (2.1.24). Although none of these words is particularly rare, in Xenophon or elsewhere, the close juxtaposition of precisely these four, the ones to which we know Prodicus paid explicit attention, is strong reason to think that some of the time, at least, Xenophon is drawing on Prodicus' own language,<sup>38</sup> and that careful distinctions among these terms played some role in Prodicus' case for virtue.<sup>39</sup> What may have been the thinking behind this?

If he is engaged in the same kind of enterprise as in the case reported by Galen, an answer springs to mind relatively easily: if one has the correct names for the various phenomena loosely categorized as pleasures, one will be better able to grasp the facts – that is, the facts about the superiority and preferability of virtue over vice. Recall that Vice offers a life of sensual pleasure unaccompanied by effort, whereas Virtue offers toil



followed by a more genuine happiness; and Virtue does not hesitate to characterize this genuine happiness as prominently including certain kinds of pleasures. They are very deliberately contrasted with the pleasures peddled by Vice; but Virtue is quite prepared to cast the debate as, at least in large part, one about which forms of pleasure are most lasting or worthwhile. It does not seem overbold to suggest that Prodicus may have seen an application of the maxim “getting the names straight will help to get the facts straight” to the case of pleasure-terms as an important tool in presenting his case.

Beyond this, I think it is difficult to go. The evidence on precisely *how* Prodicus distinguished these four terms is not consistent; and we again have to reckon with the fact that Xenophon does not pretend to be giving an exact reproduction of Prodicus’ words, and with the likelihood that the speech existed in different versions, of differing levels of subtlety, complexity and closeness to the written version in *Horai*. Aristotle says that Prodicus “divided the pleasures [*hêdonas*] into *chara* and *terpsis* and *euphrosunê*” (*Topics* 2.6, 112b21-6) – a mistake, in Aristotle’s view.<sup>40</sup> The late Platonic commentator Hermias follows Aristotle’s classification and gives details, saying that *terpsis* is the pleasure (*hêdonê*) from hearing,<sup>41</sup> *chara* the pleasure of the soul, and *euphrosunê* visual pleasure (*Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 267b). Here, then, *hêdonê* is apparently a superordinate category, with several sub-varieties. But Plato puts in Prodicus’ mouth a speech in which *euphrosunê* and *hêdonê* are distinguished alongside one another, as referring to mental and physical pleasure respectively (*Protagoras* 337c1-4), while Socrates later implies (without giving any details) that Prodicus had something to say about the distinctions among *hêdonê*, *terpsis* and *chara* (358a6-8).

One might be inclined to trust Hermias, who is in line with the classification Aristotle attributes to Prodicus and gives us specific information about what Prodicus said. But the fact that this information contradicts Plato's portrait might give us pause. Admittedly Plato is not *telling* us what Prodicus said, but depicting Prodicus in a parody. However, Plato was active in and shortly after Prodicus' lifetime, as opposed to almost a thousand years later, and his writing exhibits an exquisite attention to nuance and detail; to say, on the authority of Hermias, that he is misrepresenting Prodicus<sup>42</sup> might be thought to be arguing in the wrong direction. I see no way to decide between these possibilities. And in any case, neither Hermias' nor Plato's classification seems to line up with Xenophon's version of the speech. The Platonic distinction between bodily and mental pleasures might seem a promising fit with the Heracles story, seeing that Vice emphasizes the sensual pleasures. But the pleasures emphasized by Virtue are by no means all non-physical; they include the pleasures of praise from others and of recollecting one's achievements, but they also include the pleasures of food and drink when hungry and thirsty, and the pleasure of sleep after honest exertion (2.1.33). These bodily pleasures do indeed come under the heading of *hêdonê*, but so does pleasure in remembering past good deeds and in doing present ones. As for pleasure in praise, that comes under *chara*, which might lead us back to Hermias' distinctions;<sup>43</sup> *chara* was said to apply to pleasure of the soul. But Hermias also distinguished *terpsis* as applying to the pleasures of hearing, which might seem equally suitable; to make a clear choice, one would need to know much more about the details of the classification.<sup>44</sup>

As for Vice, as I said, she uses all four terms in one sentence, applying them all, apparently, to some form or forms of sensory pleasures; this does not seem to fit either

Hermias' or Plato's classification. It has been suggested that this was meant to show Vice's lack of understanding of these matters, which Virtue subsequently corrected.<sup>45</sup> But if so, Xenophon gives us little or nothing of what this would have looked like. For with the exception of the one use of *chara*,<sup>46</sup> only one of the four terms is used by Virtue throughout her long final speech: *hêdonê*.<sup>47</sup> But for Hermias *hêdonê* is apparently the general term, which therefore gives us nothing of the finer taxonomy; while for Plato, as we saw, it refers to bodily pleasure, but Xenophon's usage conforms to this only some of the time.

This much is likely: Prodicus made use of fine distinctions among pleasure-terms in at least some versions of his speech on Heracles' choice, and these distinctions were in aid of achieving a clearer understanding of how various kinds of pleasures differed from one another and which were the most worth having. Xenophon is either not sensitive to this dimension of Prodicus' work or not interested in accurately reproducing it; and we have nowhere near enough consistency or enough detail to be able to reconstruct his thinking from other sources. Still, that this was not the only case where Prodicus found "correctness of names" helpful for improving ethical insight is suggested by the fact that a number of the other fine distinctions Plato puts in his mouth in the *Protagoras* (or in Socrates' mouth, attributing them to Prodicus) have to do in some way with ethical or evaluative questions. There is "equal" (*isos*) and "common" (*koinos*) in the context of our attitude towards, and treatment of, others (337a3-6); "disagreeing" (*amphistbêtein*) and "quarelling" (*erizein*) in the context of debate (337a8-b3); "getting a good reputation" (*eudokimein*) and "being praised" (*epainesthai*, 337b4-7); and "wishing" (*boulesthai*) and "desiring" (*epithumein*, 340a8-b1). There is also a suggestion in Plato's *Laches* that

Prodicus applied this expertise to different terms in the area of courage (197d1-5). I do not mean to suggest that his interest in “correctness of names” was confined to ethical topics; the Galen passage with which we began this section suggests otherwise, and the preponderance of ethical examples could easily be an artifact of Plato’s own concentration on ethical topics in these dialogues. But there is no reason to doubt that ethics was among the areas in which he concerned himself with precise definitions. And if so, finally, we can see why Socrates (in Plato’s depiction of him) and Plato himself would have found Prodicus’ work of some interest, as they certainly seem to do. For despite all the fun at his expense, Socrates and Plato too saw clarity about what one means as crucial in the search for ethical understanding; they may not have shared his methods, but if my general conclusions in this section have been on target, they will at least broadly have shared his goal. And of course, they leave a legacy in Greek philosophy – which makes it no surprise that several of the distinctions mentioned above again have echoes, to varying degrees, in Aristotle.<sup>48</sup>

#### IV

The third well-known fact about Prodicus is that he discussed the origins of religious belief. A number of texts tell us that, according to him, aspects of the natural world that benefited human life – crops, rivers, the sun and so on – came to be revered as gods; others tell us that he thought this happened to exceptional human beings who made discoveries of great benefit.<sup>49</sup> Philodemus, claiming as his source the early Stoic Persaeus, combines the two and reports a two-stage process: Prodicus took early humans to have deified aspects of the natural world first, and then those humans who exploited them especially effectively (*On Piety* 2, *PHerc* 1428, col.s ii 28-iii 13).<sup>50</sup> This is plausible

enough; however, the distinction between these two types of source for religious belief, and their temporal relations, are not crucial.<sup>51</sup> The important thing is that religious belief is given an explanation in the psychology and experience of humans at the dawn of civilization.

Now, is this atheism? Most of the authors who supply the information about Prodicus' view clearly think so, adding explicit statements to the effect that Prodicus denied the existence of gods.<sup>52</sup> However, it is worth noting that explaining how people came to believe in gods is not necessarily tantamount to saying there are no gods.<sup>53</sup> Even if, as in this case, the belief is to some extent a product of confusion – “beneficial” somehow gets magnified into “divine” – it does not follow that there are no gods, though it may be that the true nature of the divine is somewhat different from what is ordinarily supposed. In this connection, it is striking that (if the reconstruction of the text is correct)<sup>54</sup> Philodemus claims that Persaeus *approves* of Prodicus' doing away with the divine. But this must be a mistake, since the divine is absolutely central to Stoic thought; elsewhere we hear of Persaeus as someone who did indeed explain the origin of religious belief in the same way as Prodicus, but by no means abolished divinity (Cicero, *Nat D.* 1.38). On the other hand, we know a great deal about the Stoics' positive conception of the divine, which allows us to see how these things are compatible – basically, because the divine is embedded in the natural world and in the human soul. By contrast, we hear nothing whatever about any positive conception of the divine in Prodicus. And in the absence of any such positive conception, it is hard not to read Prodicus' explanations of how people came to believe in gods in the way that these ancient authors read them: that

is, as explanations of how, *even though there are in fact no gods*, people came to think that there were.

Assuming, then, that the ancient accusation of atheism is correct,<sup>55</sup> we face two questions concerning Prodicus' ethical thought. First, how is this compatible with the depiction of Virtue and Vice as goddesses, and with Virtue's repeated references to the gods (2.1.27-8, 31-3), in the choice of Heracles?<sup>56</sup> And second, how is it compatible with a robust advocacy of virtue, however expressed?

The first of these questions seems to me not hard to answer. As we have already noted more than once, the Heracles story was no doubt told by Prodicus in a number of different versions, both written and oral, and some of these would surely have been tailored to a public who took the gods for granted. Nor need this have been simply a matter of pandering to his audience. For it is quite possible to hold that while in reality there are no gods, *belief* in gods has a valuable social function and should be encouraged in the general public. The fragment of a satyr-play quoted, and ascribed to Critias, by Sextus Empiricus, and usually known as the *Sisyphus* fragment, clearly expresses this point of view: the gods are a clever invention designed to keep people from breaking the law when no one is watching (*M* 9.54). Without it, the protections provided by society are crucially incomplete; hence, even though there are no gods, belief in gods is a very good idea.<sup>57</sup> Protagoras, too, wrote a book *On the Gods*. We are told that this began with a declaration of agnosticism (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 14.3.7, DL 9.51), which might seem an unpromising start for a work with this title. But if the work continued with a treatment of the ways in which religion benefits society, whether or not there really are gods, the beginning could have made very good sense. The long speech that Plato gives him in the

*Protagoras* (320d-328d) shows a keen interest in the development of society (expressed, incidentally, in mythical terms that are explicitly presented as an optional extra for entertainment, 320c); and one could very well imagine religion being added to the list of valuable inventions that make our lives together more secure or more enjoyable. And finally, of course, there is Aristotle, who is no atheist or agnostic, but whose god is highly remote from human existence. Having explained why there must be such a god, Aristotle adds that ordinary religion is something quite different; it is a mythical addition, devised with the purpose of ensuring that “the many” behave as they are supposed to (*Met.* 1074b3-5). Aristotle, of course, is not writing for “the many”, and so he has no qualms about saying such things. Prodicus’ story of Heracles’ choice is a very different literary product with a very different audience; but it is entirely consistent to suppose that, in a small company of like-minded intellectuals, he could have described ordinary religion very much as Aristotle does (but without the grain of truth that Aristotle, who did believe in a divinity, accords it), and approved of it for its role in society.

Thus I see no difficulty in reconciling the religious elements in the speech, as Xenophon conveys it, with Prodicus’ atheism. What of the other issue – that atheism and a sincere desire to promote virtue do not mix? We have no evidence concerning Prodicus’ own attitude on this issue; but no doubt there were people in his time who thought so. The accusers of Socrates surely thought of the two parts of their charge – corrupting the youth and believing in gods other than those recognized by the city – as not unconnected. And the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, which Socrates in Plato’s *Apology* blames for much of the misconception of him that led to the trial, shows an unscrupulous “Socrates” who derisively rejects the usual gods and teaches people how to flout society’s rules; again,

these two elements are clearly meant to be seen as a related pair. To those who shared such an attitude, someone who did not believe in *any* gods would hardly have seemed any less suspect, and the stories we saw earlier, of Prodicus himself being put on trial for corrupting the youth, may reflect this. However, we do not need to follow these people's lead, any more than in today's world we need follow the lead of preachers or politicians who claim that those who do not believe in god "don't believe in anything". The case for virtue, as Xenophon presents it, is clearly based in enlightened self-interest; if one sees what things are truly valuable or beneficial in human life, one will prefer virtue to vice. Although relations between humans and gods are mentioned in Virtue's speeches, for reasons just discussed, an appeal to enlightened self-interest does not need to appeal to divine rewards or sanctions, and most of the benefits catalogued by Virtue do not include any reference to them.

Here again, as in several instances noted earlier, Prodicus is actually in the mainstream – which makes this a fitting theme on which to conclude. The recommendation of virtue on grounds of enlightened self-interest is a central thread of ancient Greek ethics. Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's ethical works, and the teachings of the Stoics and Epicureans all fit this pattern in one way or another. Admittedly, all of these philosophers appeal at some point to divine models, inspirations or overseers; and indeed, the notion of "assimilation to the divine" is another powerful strand in Greek practical philosophy – one that could hardly have resonated with Prodicus. But the central books of the *Republic* (2-9), where the key idea of justice as a harmonious state of the soul is developed, explicitly disavow any appeal to divine rewards or punishments; in Aristotle's ethics, the idea of becoming as close to god as possible plays only a late, brief and



somewhat unexpected role; and in Epicureanism, the gods that serve as ideals for human life are absolutely disconnected from human affairs<sup>58</sup>. In explaining away the gods altogether, Prodicus may have been an outlier. But there is no inconsistency between atheism and the view that people are better off being virtuous than being vicious. And in maintaining the latter, he was certainly in good company.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I see no harm in the use of this word as a convenient label for a group that clearly includes Prodicus. But it is worth noting, first, that we should be wary of treating the Sophists as a monolithic group, or as clearly distinct in their ideas and methods from other currents of thought; and second, that the term “sophist” was for some time contested territory – it was not always used to refer to these people in particular. On the first point see R.W. Wallace, “The Sophists in Athens”, in D. Boedeker and K. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 203-22; on the second see H. Tell, *Plato’s Counterfeit Sophists* (Washington, 2011), ch.2.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper I am greatly indebted to a valuable new volume collecting the testimonia on Prodicus, with translations and commentary, which has made it much easier to study him seriously: R. Mayhew, *Prodicus the Sophist: Texts, Translations, and Commentary [Prodicus]* (Oxford, 2011). I have discussed this volume in R. Bett, “Language, Gods, and Virtue: A Discussion of Robert Mayhew, *Prodicus the Sophist*” [“Mayhew”], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XLIV (Summer 2013), 279-311. In this paper I sometimes use Mayhew’s text numbers, in addition to or instead of standard citations, to refer to passages from the more obscure authors.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch supposes so (*Whether Old Men Should Engage in Politics* 791E), but there is no reason to think he had any evidence beyond this passage of Plato (or other now lost texts that depended on it.)

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<sup>4</sup> Here I follow the interpretation of C.W. Willink, “Prodikos, ‘Meteorosophists’ and the ‘Tantalos’ Paradigm”, *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983), 25-33, supported by Mayhew, *Prodicus*, 90-3, although some of the details are my own.

<sup>5</sup> I assume that the *Hippias Major* is by Plato, but this is not essential to my point.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* 384b, Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1415b12-17, plus commentaries on each (Proclus on Plato, anonymous on Aristotle – see Mayhew, *Prodicus*, texts 42, 44). On the purchasing power of fifty drachmas, see Mayhew, *Prodicus*, 74. Note also Timon of Phlius’ epithet for Prodicus: “money-grabbing” (*labarguros*, Athenaeus 406d-e).

<sup>7</sup> Also for being in bed during the daytime - although sleeping, not talking as Prodicus is.

<sup>8</sup> The reference to Prodicus as “all-wise and divine” (315e7-316a1) – or at least the “divine” part – is surely also an ironic reference to his views about the gods.

<sup>9</sup> Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 1.12.496 (Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 10), makes the general statement that Prodicus was hard to hear and spoke in a deep voice. The second point we have no reason to doubt, although no one else mentions it besides Plato; the first is a transparent misreading of the significance of the *Protagoras* passage.

<sup>10</sup> See Mayhew, *Prodicus*, 78-80.

<sup>11</sup> The dramatic date of the *Protagoras* is a matter of some controversy. Some place it confidently just before the start of the Peloponnesian War, while acknowledging a few anachronisms (e.g., D. Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2002), 309-10). For others, these anomalies are more serious, e.g. D. Wolfsdorf, “The Dramatic Date of Plato’s *Protagoras*”, *Rheinisches Museum* 140 (1997), 223-30, who concludes that there is no consistent dramatic date. For present purposes I make no assumptions about the dialogue’s dramatic date. However, I

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do assume that, even if there is no clear dramatic date, Plato would not have misrepresented the relative ages of the many well-known historical figures he features in this work.

<sup>12</sup> *Suda* II 2365; Scholium on Plato's *Republic* 600c (texts 1 and 2 in Mayhew, *Prodicus*).

<sup>13</sup> The only exception is the passing mention in Plato, *Symposium* 177b. For the rest, see Mayhew, *Prodicus*, texts 80-3, 85 with commentary.

<sup>14</sup> This is elaborated on by Philostratus (*Lives of the Sophists* 1.482-3, Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 81), who says that he gave it in many cities to great acclaim; but it is not clear whether this is drawing on independent evidence or is simply development of a hint already present in Xenophon.

<sup>15</sup> So D. Sansone, "Heracles at the Y" ["Heracles"], *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124 (2004), 125-42, also D. Wolfsdorf, "Hesiod, Prodicus, and the Socratics on Work and Pleasure" ["Hesiod"], *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXXV (Winter 2008), 7; however, if I understand them correctly, neither author means to restrict the goal of the speech to the purely rhetorical or epideictic, as has one strand of scholarship on the subject.

<sup>16</sup> Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 80.

<sup>17</sup> Although *hōrologētês*, "discourser on hours", in the fragment of Timon mentioned in n.6, is surely a reference to it.

<sup>18</sup> This is the speculation of Mayhew, *Prodicus*, xxi-xxiii, which I find attractive but unprovable. One possible difficulty is that it is hard to find a parallel use of the word *hōra* to refer to a period in the development of a species. On the other hand, the very idea of the human species as undergoing a development over time, from a primitive state in the

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distant past to its sophisticated state in the present, is itself a novelty in this period; if Prodicus was casting around for terminology, it might have seemed natural to extend the word *hōra*, which can certainly be used of the springtime of an individual human life, to refer to the springtime of the life of the species.

<sup>19</sup> This formulation may drive classicists and other humanists crazy; I am essentially saying that Prodicus' story belongs in the arena of philosophy, and is hence worth serious consideration – as it would not be if it were just a rhetorical exercise. However, unless it qualifies as philosophy, Prodicus has no business (at least on this score) in a volume such as this.

<sup>20</sup> Mayhew, *Prodicus*, 203-4 gives a useful survey of recent (and not-so-recent) debate on the subject. He is, I think, more optimistic than I am on the question of linguistic closeness. All I mean to encompass in the phrase “fair approximation” is that Xenophon knows the Prodican original, uses it in composing his own version (which results in some use of Prodicus' own language), and draws from the story the same moral that Prodicus himself does. Ironically, Mayhew disagrees with me on the last point; see below.

<sup>21</sup> For opposing positions on this issue, see Sansone, “Heracles”, and V. Gray, “The Linguistic Philosophies of Prodicus in Xenophon's ‘Choice of Heracles’?” [“Linguistic”], *Classical Quarterly* 56 (2006), 426-35.

<sup>22</sup> Sansone, “Heracles” 140, says that Socrates heard Prodicus give it as a speech “and was much taken with it, repeating it for the benefit of Aristippus, as recorded in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*”. While I do not doubt that Socrates heard the speech, we cannot assume that the episodes in the *Memorabilia* actually occurred, as this seems to suggest. In any case I assume that Xenophon is relying on the written version, not (just)

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on Socrates' recollection of the speech. Sansone's article is, however, valuable in drawing attention to the fact that numerous different oral versions of the speech must have occurred in different times and places, and that, almost certainly, none of these would be identical to the written version.

<sup>23</sup> The differences are well discussed in Wolfsdorf, "Hesiod".

<sup>24</sup> See Mayhew, *Prodicus*, xviii-xxi, 205-6, 214-15; the quoted words are on p.205.

<sup>25</sup> Note also Socrates' description of Prodicus as "all-wise and divine" (cf. n.8); no doubt this too is in fun, but the admiration does not seem wholly feigned.

<sup>26</sup> The relevant text exists in the form of papyrus fragments, which are from Antiphon's work *On Truth*; the various portions were edited at different times, not all of them taken into account in Diels-Kranz. The most convenient place to find the full Greek text as we have it, along with a translation, is D. Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics* (Cambridge, 2010), 812-17 (section 17, text 62).

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., W.K.C Guthrie, *The Sophists* (Cambridge, 1971), 4; R. McKirahan, *Philosophy before Socrates* (Indianapolis, 1994), 364; Mayhew, *Prodicus*, xxiv, n.10.

<sup>28</sup> I discussed this in R. Bett, "The Sophists and Relativism", *Phronesis* 34 (1989), 139-69. The nature of Protagoras' view has received considerable further attention since that article was published; see especially M. Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus* (New York, 2005). But the fact remains that there is nothing to connect this view with any Sophist besides Protagoras.

<sup>29</sup> The *Suda* and a scholium on Plato's *Republic* 600c (Mayhew, *Prodicus*, texts 1-4).

<sup>30</sup> On the considerations Mayhew takes to support it, see Bett, "Mayhew", 304-7.



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<sup>31</sup> There remains the question of the relation between the story of Heracles' choice and Prodicus' views on religion. I address this in section IV.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. n.22.

<sup>33</sup> Both points are argued in D. Wolfsdorf, "Prodicus on the Correctness of Names: The Case of *τέρψις*, *χαρά* and *εὐφροσύνη* ["Correctness"], *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 131 (2011), 131-45; for the second, see also Mayhew, *Prodicus*, xxiv-xxvii.

<sup>34</sup> *On the natural faculties* 2.9. Galen also comments on this non-standard choice of usage at *PHP* 8.6.46-50 and *On the differences among fevers* 2; in all three places he is equally scathing. (See Mayhew, *Prodicus*, texts 63-5.)

<sup>35</sup> Note, however, that the choice of *blenna* for the cold and moist humor has no clear etymological basis; we have no means of knowing whether there may have been some other rationale.

<sup>36</sup> This is illuminatingly discussed in D.N. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge, 2003), especially ch.s 2 and 3.7. Note also that the focus on naming and names is pervasive; naming things is assumed to be the one and only function of language. It is not until Plato's late dialogue *Sophist* that we get a really clear recognition that it does other things as well.

<sup>37</sup> Or the cognate verbs or adjectives.

<sup>38</sup> Pace Gray, "Linguistic", who seems to me not to take the non-Xenophontic evidence on Prodicus' linguistic activities sufficiently seriously. Her article is nonetheless a strong caution against assuming that we can reconstruct Prodicus' usage of these terms in any detail.

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<sup>39</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Xenophon himself is carefully distinguishing them; as we shall see, this does not appear to be the case. My point is that we know from elsewhere that Prodicus did carefully distinguish them, and that Xenophon provides good evidence that they *appeared* in the speech; that careful distinctions among them played a role in the speech is an inference, but not, I think a particularly adventurous one.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, commenting on this passage (*Commentary on Aristotle's Topics* 181: Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 48) is unhelpful; he says that Prodicus resembles the Stoics in distinguishing the meanings of these terms, but then discusses the Stoics without indicating whether Prodicus agreed with them in detail.

<sup>41</sup> Not pleasure “from hearing what is beautiful”, as Mayhew, text 46 has it (cf. Wolfsdorf, “Correctness”, 133), and as I had originally rendered it; *kalôn* is not from the adjective *kalos*, but is the nominative masculine singular participle of the verb *kalô* (“calling *terpsis* the pleasure through the ears, etc.”). Thanks to David Wolfsdorf for correcting this error.

<sup>42</sup> As does Wolfsdorf, “Correctness”, 140. Wolfsdorf gives arguments for accepting Hermias’ testimony (133-6), but acknowledges their inconclusiveness.

<sup>43</sup> But earlier, pleasure in hearing praise comes under *hêdonê* (2.1.31).

<sup>44</sup> As Wolfsdorf, “Correctness”, 143, rightly points out, the nature of the distinction here “depends upon some substantive psychological views”, about which we know nothing.

<sup>45</sup> Sansone, “Heracles”, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Or rather, the verb corresponding to *chara*; cf. n.37.

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<sup>47</sup> Further confusing the issue is that Xenophon uses other terms, beyond these four, that belong in the same general semantic region: *apolausis*, “enjoyment”, *agallontai*, “rejoice” (2.1.33).

<sup>48</sup> Wishing versus desiring is the most obvious case. But *NE* 1.12 is about the difference between praise and something else (in this case *timê*, honor). And *NE* 5.3 is interested in clarifying the equal (*isos*), and shares with Prodicus the idea that not everyone should receive equal amounts of some commodity – distribution should instead be proportional to merit.

<sup>49</sup> For the first, see Cicero, *Nat. D.* 1.118; Philodemus, *On Piety* 2 (*PHerc* 1428, fr.19); Sextus Empiricus, *M* 9.18, 51-2. For the second, see Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 21.

Themistius, *Oration* 30.349a-b is ambiguous between the two. These texts are collected in Mayhew, *Prodicus*, texts 72-7.

<sup>50</sup> This is Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 71.

<sup>51</sup> Here I am in agreement with Mayhew, *Prodicus*, 180-3.

<sup>52</sup> This is true of Cicero, Philodemus and Sextus (cf. n.49). Philodemus also makes the same point in another context: *On Piety* 1 (*PHerc* 1077, fr. 19.519-41; Mayhew, *Prodicus*, text 70). Philodemus is reporting what Epicurus said; hence the accusation of atheism can be traced back to perhaps only a century after Prodicus’ death.

<sup>53</sup> I have discussed this in more detail in Bett, “Mayhew”, 300-3.

<sup>54</sup> Philodemus’ writings survive as charred papyri; often letters or whole words have to be supplied in the missing spaces to complete the sense, and this is bound to be to varying degrees conjectural.

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<sup>55</sup> This seems to be broadly accepted among scholars today. An important voice in the discussion was Albert Henrichs; see A. Henrichs, “Two Doxographical Notes: Democritus and Prodicus on Religion”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975), 93-123, and “The Atheism of Prodicus”, *Cronache ercolanesi* 6 (1976), 15-21.

<sup>56</sup> This seems to be a concern for Gray, “Linguistic”, 435, and a further reason for doubting that Xenophon’s version of the speech preserves much of the Prodican original.

<sup>57</sup> Of course, this device only works if people do not realize the belief is false – which makes the attitudes of both the speaker (perhaps Sisyphus), who exposes its falsehood, and the author (Critias or, according to Aetius, Euripides) somewhat hard to fathom. I have discussed this in R. Bett, “Is there a Sophistic Ethics?”, *Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002), 235-62, at 251-4.

<sup>58</sup> Some scholars understand Epicurus to have regarded the gods as products of our own thought-processes rather than as objectively existing beings. A. Long and D. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1987), vol. 1, section 23, was a major impetus to this interpretation in recent scholarship; see also, more recently, D. Sedley, “Epicurus’ Theological Innatism” in J. Fish and K. Saunders, *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge, 2011), 29-52, and in opposition, D. Konstan, “Epicurus on the Gods”, 53-71 in the same volume. If this is correct, Epicurus is of course even closer to Prodicus than I suggest in the main text. However, in the later Epicurean tradition (from at least Lucretius’ time) the gods are clearly envisaged as existing in the spaces between worlds – in which case they are objective beings, but have no interest in us.