Introduction

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Published online: 29 December 2016
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The rise of the sophists marked a pivotal moment in the history of education. The sophists were intellectuals who self-identified as educators and grappled explicitly with questions about education. The sophists not only addressed the broad purposes of education, they were also innovators in both curriculum and pedagogy. Their intellectual and pedagogical agenda was so influential that one might argue we have not departed from it today. Despite their tremendous place in the history of philosophy and education, the sophists rarely receive the attention they deserve. Often they are (wrongly) dismissed as charlatans, “outsiders” who deceived Athenian citizens while pursuing profit and fame. This reputation of the sophists is due in part to some disparaging and dismissive comments about them in Plato’s dialogues. Yet recent interest in the sophists has led to a reevaluation of Plato’s treatment of them; scholars are beginning to question Plato’s supposed “hostility” to the sophists.

In *The Sophists in Plato’s Dialogues*, David Corey offers a study of Plato’s engagement with the sophists, examining the many ways in which Plato makes pedagogical and philosophical use of them. In doing so, Corey draws attention both to the nuances with which Plato treats particular sophists and to the general value of sophists and sophistry for philosophy. Plato’s sophists are teachers who are, like Plato and Plato’s Socrates, deeply concerned with the teaching of virtue. Plato uses the sophists for propaedeutic purposes—to prepare people for philosophy—and protreptic purposes—to lead people towards philosophy. The sophists’ insights and methods provide, Corey concludes, “the necessary precondition for philosophy in the Socratic manner” (p. 37).

But how might the sophists prepare people for philosophy or turn them towards it? Corey argues that this happens in different ways. Corey does not deny that the education offered by the sophists is inferior to Socratic philosophy. Yet the superiority of Socratic philosophy is not as straightforward as is typically assumed. Plato intentionally obscures the differences between the sophists and Socrates in order to draw readers into questioning

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what is distinctive about Socratic philosophy. Hence, for example, in Corey's analysis of Protagoras' "Great Speech," Corey concludes that Protagoras and Socrates are on the same side in the "ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy" in that both promote and appreciate the value of myth as something educative and, indeed, necessary for civic health (pp. 64–65).

For Plato, no sophist seems closer to Socrates than Prodicus, a man whom Socrates describes as his own teacher. Corey asks: if one does not dismiss Socrates' comment as ironic, what might Socrates have learned from Prodicus, or found valuable in his teachings? Part of Corey's answer is that Prodicus specialized in the art of distinction-making, which is of unquestionable value for Socratic philosophy. Plato's Socrates, according to Corey, would view the way Prodicus used the art as problematic. Corey argues that, for Prodicus, sufficiently precise language might capture the world's properties while Plato's Socrates believes that our use of language will fail to do so, and thus points to a stable reality beyond matter and physical perception (p. 92). Nevertheless, skill in distinction-making is critical for sound reasoning and philosophical conversation (p. 84).

Perhaps most importantly, the sophists challenged conventional beliefs. The sophists made the world seem less stable, less simple. They led people into a state of confusion and disorientation. Such an uncomfortable state, Corey points out, "is precisely what Socratic philosophy requires in order to get off the ground" (p. 37). If philosophy begins in wonder, as Socrates puts it in *Theaetetus* (155d), the sophists masterfully induce that state of wonder (pp. 5, 37, 119, 177, 231). For that reason, when no sophists are present, Plato often has Socrates play the part of a sophist.

Each of the contributors to this symposium addressed a particular part of Corey's argument. Anne-Marie Schultz challenges Corey's categorization of Platonic sophists by asking, among other things, whether Socrates himself might have been a sophist in Plato's eyes. Marina McCoy highlights some differences between Protagoras and Socrates in Protagoras' "Great Speech," such as their pedagogical aims and their contrasting uses of shame. I take up Corey's discussion of Prodicus, addressing a parallel between Prodicus and Damon and noting problematic aspects of Socrates' willingness to send students to Prodicus. Samantha Deane focuses on Corey's analysis of Crito in *Euthydemus*, and argues that Crito is grappling with the very question that Socrates' discusses in *Republic*: if education is of utmost importance, can it be trusted to individual parents? William Altman addresses the analysis of *The Sophist* in Corey's conclusion, resisting Corey's argument that that dialogue cannot stand as Plato's final condemnation of the sophists.

Overall, these contributors engage Corey's argument both in its general construction and in some of its particular features, but they support the main theses Corey develops about the propaedeutic and protreptic role of the sophists in Plato's dialogues. The responses are thus in the spirit of continuing a conversation about the complex role of the sophists in Plato's dialogues. All the reviews are animated by a deep appreciation for the insight and care with which Corey reads Plato in *The Sophists in Plato's Dialogues*.¹

¹ On a personal level, and in the spirit of full disclosure, I started reading Corey's work over a decade ago. I was routinely impressed by and excited about the innovative ways he explored the intersection of political and educational philosophy. I began corresponding with him a few years ago and was delighted to learn about, and to discuss, the book project that became *The Sophists in Plato's Dialogues*. It has been a great pleasure to organize this symposium, inviting others to weigh in on this critical topic in the history of educational philosophy and Corey's worthy book.