

Mi-Kyoung Lee, *Epistemology After Protagoras:  
Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus*,  
Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005  
(x + 291 pp., ISBN 0-19-926222-5 [hb])

Lee says that the book was originally inspired by the following question: Did philosophical skepticism arise in the Hellenistic period, or is it possible to find elements of skepticism in the classical period? It seems that Protagoras' position anticipates some of the arguments used by Hellenistic skeptics. Moreover, since Plato's and Aristotle's attack on Protagoras could be seen as a powerful defense against the arguments which Hellenistic skeptics used, Lee wants to investigate the impact of Protagoras' relativism and Plato's, Aristotle's, and Democritus' responses to this relativism on the development of classical Greek epistemology. Focusing on Protagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus, the thesis defended is that 'scepticism was in the air' in the classical period, not in the developed form of a philosophical position, but in the form of loosely connected ideas and arguments.

Protagoras' book *Aletheia* (*Truth*), which began with the claim that 'Man is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, of what is not that it is not', undermines the concept of truth as deeper reality behind appearances and poses a challenge to the concept of expert knowledge. In Chapter Two, Lee discusses the ancient sources for determining the contents of Protagoras' lost work *Aletheia*. She thinks that the most important source for reconstructing *Aletheia* in antiquity is Plato's *Theaetetus*, but here we are confronted with 'The problem of Protagoras': Is it possible to separate the content of *Aletheia* from Plato's additions? Lee's answer is yes, because Plato is careful in indicating when he goes beyond what Protagoras actually said. Other sources – Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, and Diogenes Laertius – can be useful, but we cannot be certain that their testimonies are not based on the *Theaetetus* or on some doxographical work.

What was in *Aletheia*? *Aletheia* began with the man measure statement which was later restated that things are for each as they appear to each, and this was supported with examples of conflicting perceptual appearances and, perhaps, with examples of conflicting value judgements. Protagoras also used the undecidability argument, namely that it is not possible to decide between conflicting appearances. The epistemological and metaphysical implications

of Protagoras position were worked out by his opponents. Although Sextus ascribes to Protagoras a theory of metaphysical change as a support to measure doctrine, Lee maintains that it is not likely that this theory is Protagoras'. Sextus' account is similar to the flux theory from the Plato's *Theaetetus* and Plato clearly indicates that it is his invention because he calls it 'the Secret Doctrine'.

In Chapter Three, Lee argues that Plato attributes to Protagoras both relativism about truth and what she calls 'infallibilism' (following Gail Fine), the view that 'whatever is believed by anyone is true without qualification' (p. 31). Protagoras does not offer any definition of truth, despite the title of his book, but he offers a theory of what is to count as true. His position can be labeled as 'relativism of fact', a position which holds that every property or state of affairs is relative to some perceiver. Protagoras, though, is not committed to the relativization of truth itself.

In Chapter Four, Lee points out that the differences between infallibilism, relativism of fact, and relativism about truth emerge only if one raises 'the further question of whether truth should be relativized along with other properties. And this question is raised in cases of second-order disagreements such as in Socrates' belief that Theaetetus' belief is false' (p. 46-47). In the case of second-order disagreement, either Socrates' belief must be false or Theaetetus' belief must be false, and this poses no threat for the relativist position about truth but is a problem for infallibilism. If we describe Protagoras' position as relativism about truth, Plato's 'self-refutation' arguments do not work against it, but 'if Protagoras' claim is better described as infallibilism, then Plato's argument seems to work against it' (p. 57). Relativism of truth is distinct from infallibilism only in cases of second-order disagreement, and it is not likely that the historical Protagoras ever considered relativity of truth.

Chapter Five deals with 'the Secret Doctrine' in *Theaetetus*, in which Plato tries to make Protagoras' position as strong as possible with a collection of metaphysical theses which Protagoras himself did not hold. Lee argues against calling the Secret doctrine 'Heraclitean doctrine' and against identifying it with the thesis that everything is changing. There is no 'single, well-formulated statement of the doctrine to be found in the *Theaetetus*. What is introduced under the rubric of the Secret Doctrine is a bunch of slogans loosely strung together' (p. 86). The Secret doctrine is not the only way to defend Protagoras' relativism. For Plato it was a promising way in which the relativist can make his case stronger. Plato does not want to show that Protagoras was a secret Heraclitean, 'but that many philosophers, virtually everyone except Parmenides, think and talk in ways which appear to commit them to some version of Protagorean relativism, at least in the case of perception' (p. 117).

In Chapters Six and Seven Lee examines Aristotle's discussion of Protagoras' doctrine in *Metaphysics* Γ.5, showing that Aristotle follows closely the treatment of Protagoras in *Theaetetus*. Aristotle repeats the same metaphysical thesis and arguments in his discussion of the principle of non-contradiction by which Plato underpins Protagoras' measure doctrine. He identifies and tries to refute three assumptions that lead to the denial of the principle of non-contradiction: Protagoras' thesis that all appearances are true, the Heraclitean flux doctrine, and the doctrine that everything is the case and is not the case. The consequence of these three theses is that knowledge of truth is impossible. Aristotle thinks that it is unacceptable enough to persuade anyone to look for an alternative. In addition, he claims that virtually all of his predecessors shared with Protagoras the view that knowing and thinking are like perceiving in significant ways (p. 139). Thus thinking and other cognitive activities become passive processes, merely affections of the external objects. Those who support the like-by-like model must, at the same time, endorse that one can never be mistaken about anything.

The last two chapters focus on Democritus' epistemology. Democritus argued against Protagoras' *Aletheia*, but he also thought about the senses and sensible qualities in a Protagorean fashion, used argument from conflicting appearances, and argued that the senses are a *kanōn* necessary for knowledge. In *De anima* and *Metaphysics* Γ.5, Aristotle says that Democritus holds that all appearances are true. On the other hand, in *De generatione et corruptione* Aristotle does not imply that Democritus and Leucippus thought that all appearances and opinions are true when they thought that 'truth lies in appearing', or when they 'agreed with what seems to be the case'. All that he wants to say is that Democritus and Leucippus gave a central place to empirical observation and they intended to provide causal explanations for the characteristics of the world we observe (p. 193). Democritus was not a Protagorean subjectivist, but he had an empirical methodology in which the senses were the starting point in the search for truth. The later sources – Sextus Empiricus, Diogenes Laertius, Galen, and various Epicureans – explicitly deal with the question whether Democritus maintains that knowledge is impossible and whether he has a theory of 'criterion of truth', which, of course, was not Democritus' own preoccupation. Sextus, according to Lee, is our best source for Democritus' epistemology because of his careful and detailed discussion in *Against the Mathematicians*. In Fragment B11, Sextus says that Democritus was not sceptic about knowledge. Lee thinks that the most important Protagorean aspect of Democritus' epistemology is 'his argument that knowledge is impossible without the senses, and the conclusion that both senses and the

mind are *kanōnes* or “standards”, like Protagoras’ “measure of all things” (p. 250).

Lee has written a balanced book, well-argued, rich in references to the secondary literature, with fresh and challenging readings of important issues in Greek epistemology showing that there is a closer thematic connection between classical and Hellenistic philosophy.

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Diana Quarantotto,  
*Causa finale, sostanza, essenza in Aristotele. Saggio sulla  
struttura dei processi naturali e sulla funzione del telos.*  
Bibliopolis, Napoli, 2005  
(pp. 372, ISBN 88-7088-486-4).

Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*,  
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005  
(pp. xi + 339, ISBN 0-19-928530-6).

According to Aristotle, teleology is an indispensable tool for a successful investigation of the world around us. By ‘teleology’ I mean not just an account of the explanatory role that goals play in the study of this world but also a defense of the ontological claim that goals are part of reality. Teleology so understood involves a systematic understanding of goals as a specific type of cause: the final cause. But this in its turn involves a firm grasp of what a cause is, how many causes there are, and how they are related to one another. If this is right, it is not possible to answer certain questions about goals unless we agree on how to think about causes. Also, Aristotle develops his account of goals as a distinct mode of causality in the context of his natural philosophy. This of course does not mean that the relevance of teleology is confined to the study of nature. Quite the contrary: it is clear that the application of teleology goes beyond the boundaries of natural science. For example, teleology is an essential tool for the explanation of human action. It is significant, I think, that the examples that Aristotle chooses to illustrate the way in which goals are a distinctive type of cause often come from the sphere of purposive action. But it is also clear that Aristotle is trying to develop an account of goals as a distinct type of cause which extends beyond this relatively uncontroversial case. Does Aristotle succeed in this project? Is he able to develop an account of goals as final causes which can be usefully applied to the study of the natural world? Moreover, the causal investigation of animals that Aristotle offers in the biological works is commonly regarded as the best avenue to a study of Aristotle’s teleology. But does Aristotle confine the application of teleology to