

Plato’s Divine Comedy. The Comic, Epic and Historical Catabasis of the *Protagoras*

**1A Plato, *Protagoras* 314c-314e**

314c Δόξαν ἡμῖν ταῦτα ἐπορευόμεθα· ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐν τῷ  
προθύρῳ ἐγενόμεθα, ἐπιστάντες περὶ τινος λόγου  
διελεγόμεθα, ὃς ἡμῖν κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐνέπεσεν· ἴν’  
οὖν μὴ ἀτελής γένοιτο, ἀλλὰ διαπερανάμενοι  
οὕτως ἐσίοιμεν, στάντες ἐν τῷ προθύρῳ  
διελεγόμεθα ἕως συνωμολογήσαμεν ἀλλήλοις.  
δοκεῖ οὖν μοι, ὁ θυρωρός, εὐνοῦχός τις, κατήκουεν  
314d ἡμῶν, κινδυνεύει δὲ διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν σοφιστῶν  
ἄχθεσθαι τοῖς φοιτῶσιν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν· ἐπειδὴ  
γοῦν ἐκρούσαμεν τὴν θύραν, ἀνοίξας καὶ ἰδὼν  
ἡμᾶς, “Ἐα,” ἔφη, “σοφισταὶ τινες· οὐ σχολή  
αὐτῷ” καὶ ἄμα ἀμφοῖν τοῖν χεροῖν τὴν θύραν  
πάνυ προθύμως ὡς οἴός τ’ ἦν ἐπήραξεν. καὶ ἡμεῖς  
πάλιν ἐκρούομεν, καὶ ὃς ἐγκεκλημένης τῆς θύρας  
ἀποκρινόμενος εἶπεν, “ὦ ἄνθρωποι,” ἔφη, “οὐκ  
ἀκηκόατε ὅτι οὐ σχολή αὐτῷ;” “Ἄλλ’ ὠγαθέ,”  
ἔφην ἐγώ, “οὔτε παρὰ Καλλίαν ἤκομεν οὔτε  
314e σοφισταὶ ἐσμεν. ἀλλὰ θάρρει· Πρωταγόραν γάρ  
τοι δεόμενοι ἰδεῖν ἤλθομεν· εἰσάγγελον οὖν.”  
μόγις οὖν ποτε ἡμῖν ἄνθρωπος ἀνέφωξεν τὴν  
θύραν.

Having agreed on this, we set out. When we got to the doorway we stood there discussing some point which had come up along the road and which we didn’t want to leave unsettled before we went in. So we were standing there in the doorway discussing it until we reached an agreement, and I think the doorman, a eunuch, overheard us. He must have been annoyed with all the traffic of sophists in and out of the house, because when we knocked he opened the door, took one look at us and said, “Ha! More sophists! He’s busy.” Then he slammed the door in our faces with both hands as hard as he could. We knocked again, and he answered through the locked door, “Didn’t you hear me say he’s busy?” “My good man,” I said, “we haven’t come to see Callias, and we are not sophists. Calm down. We want to see Protagoras. That’s why we’ve come. So please announce us.” Eventually he opened the door for us.

**1B Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 393-409**

ΔΙΚΑΙΟΠΟΛΙΣ ὥρα ἴσθι ἀρμοῖ καρτεράν ψυχὴν  
λαβεῖν·  
καὶ μοι βαδιστέ’ ἐστὶν ὡς Εὐριπίδην.  
395 παῖ παῖ.  
ΘΕΡΑΠΩΝ τίς οὗτος;  
Δ. ἔνδον ἔστ’ Εὐριπίδης;  
Θ. οὐκ ἔνδον ἔνδον ἐστίν, εἰ γνῶμην ἔχεις.  
Δ. πῶς ἔνδον, εἴτ’ οὐκ ἔνδον;  
Θ. ὀρθῶς, ὦ γέρον.  
ὁ νοῦς μὲν ἔξω ξυλλέγων ἐπύλλια  
400 κοῦκ ἔνδον, αὐτὸς δ’ ἔνδον ἀναβάδην ποιεῖ  
τραγωδίαν.  
Δ. ὦ τρισμακάρι’ Εὐριπίδη,  
ὅθ’ ὁ δοῦλος οὕτως σοφῶς ὑποκρίνεται.  
ἐκκάλεσον αὐτόν.  
Θ. ἀλλ’ ἀδύνατον.  
Δ. ἀλλ’ ὅμως·  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἀπέλθοιμ’, ἀλλὰ κόψω τὴν θύραν.  
Εὐριπίδη, Εὐριπίδιον,

DICAEOPOLIS Now’s the time to gain a sturdy heart, and make a visit to Euripides. (*He knocks on Euripides’ door*) Boy! Boy!  
SLAVE (*opening the door a crack*) Who’s that?  
D. Is Euripides at home?  
S. He’s home and not at home, if you get my point.  
D. Home and not at home—how can that be?  
S. It’s straightforward, old sir. His mind, being outside collecting versicles, is not at home, while he himself is at home, with his feet up, composing tragedy.  
D. Thrice-blessed Euripides, that your slave renders you so convincingly! Ask him to come out.  
S. Quite impossible. (*He shuts the door*)  
D. Do it anyway. Well, I won’t leave; I’ll keep knocking on the door. Euripides! Dear Euripides, answer, if ever you answered any mortal. Dicaeopolis of Cholleidai calls you—’tis I.  
EURIPIDES (*from within*) I’m busy.  
D. Then have yourself wheeled out.  
E. Quite impossible.

- 405 ὑπάκουσον, εἶπερ πάποτ' ἀνθρώπων τινί.  
 Δικαίολις καλεῖ σε Χολλήδης, ἐγώ.  
 ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΗΣ ἄλλ' οὐ σχολή.  
 Δ. ἄλλ' ἐκκυκλήθητ'.  
 Ε. ἄλλ' ἀδύνατον.  
 Δ. ἄλλ' ὄμως.  
 Ε. ἄλλ' ἐκκυκλήσομαι· καταβαίνειν δ' οὐ σχολή.

- D. Do it anyway.  
 E. All right, I'll have myself wheeled out; I've no time to get up. (*Euripides is revealed reclining on a couch*).

## 2 Plato, *Protagoras* 314e-315b

- 315a Ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἰσήλθομεν, κατελάβομεν  
 Πρωταγόραν ἐν τῷ προστώῳ περιπατοῦντα, ἕξις  
 δ' αὐτῷ συμπεριεπάτουν ἐκ μὲν τοῦ ἐπὶ θάτερα  
 Καλλίας ὁ Ἴππονίκου καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ  
 315b ὁμομήτριος, Πάραλος ὁ Περικλέους, καὶ Χαρμίδης  
 ὁ Γλαύκωνος, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἐπὶ θάτερα ὁ ἕτερος τῶν  
 Περικλέους Ξάνθιππος, καὶ Φιλιππίδης ὁ  
 Φιλομήλου καὶ Ἀντίμοιρος ὁ Μενδαῖος, ὅσπερ  
 εὐδοκιμεῖ μάλιστα τῶν Πρωταγόρου μαθητῶν καὶ  
 ἐπὶ τέχνῃ μανθάνει, ὡς σοφιστῆς ἐσόμενος.  
 315b τούτων δὲ οἱ ὀπισθεν ἠκολούθουν ἐπακούοντες  
 τῶν λεγομένων τὸ μὲν πολὺ ξένοι ἐφαίνοντο—  
 οὐς ἄγει ἐξ ἐκάστων τῶν πόλεων ὁ Πρωταγόρας,  
 δι' ὧν διεξέρχεται, κηλῶν τῇ φωνῇ ὡσπερ  
 Ὀρφεύς, οἱ δὲ κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν ἔπονται  
 315b κεικλημένοι— ἦσαν δὲ τινες καὶ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων  
 ἐν τῷ χορῷ. τοῦτον τὸν χορὸν μάλιστα ἔγωγε ἰδὼν  
 ἦσθην, ὡς καλῶς ἠυλαβοῦντο μηδέποτε ἐμποδῶν  
 ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν εἶναι Πρωταγόρου, ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ  
 αὐτὸς ἀναστρέφοι καὶ οἱ μετ' ἐκείνου, εὖ πως καὶ  
 ἐν κόσμῳ περιεσχίζοντο οὗτοι οἱ ἐπήκοοι ἔνθεν  
 καὶ ἔνθεν, καὶ ἐν κύκλῳ περιόντες αἰεὶ εἰς τὸ  
 ὀπισθεν καθίσταντο κάλλιστα.

When we went in we found Protagoras walking in the portico flanked by two groups. On one side were Callias, son of Hipponicus, and his brother on his mother's side, Paralus, son of Pericles, and Charmides, son of Glaucon. On the other side were Pericles' other son, Xanthippus, Philippides, son of Philomelus, and Antimoerus of Mende, Protagoras' star pupil who is studying professionally to become a sophist. Following behind and trying to listen to what was being said were a group of what seemed to be mostly foreigners, men whom Protagoras collects from the various cities he travels through. He enchants them with his voice like Orpheus, and they follow the sound of his voice in a trance. There were some locals also in this chorus, whose dance simply delighted me when I saw how beautifully they took care never to get in Protagoras' way. When he turned around with his flanking groups, the audience to the rear would split into two in a very orderly way and then circle around to either side and form up again behind him. It was quite lovely.

## 3A Plato, *Protagoras* 315b-316a

- 315c Τὸν δὲ μετ' εἰσενόησα, ἔφη Ὅμηρος, Ἴππιαν τὸν  
 [Ἠλείων, καθήμενον ἐν τῷ κατ' ἀντικρὺ προστώῳ  
 315c ἐν θρόνῳ· περὶ αὐτὸν δ' ἐκάθηντο ἐπὶ βάθρων  
 Ἐρυξίμαχος τε ὁ Ἀκουμενοῦ καὶ Φαῖδρος ὁ  
 Μυρρινούσιος καὶ Ἄνδρων ὁ Ἄνδροτίωνος καὶ τῶν  
 ξένων πολῖταιί τε αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄλλοι τινές.  
 ἐφαίνοντο δὲ περὶ φύσεώς τε καὶ τῶν μετεώρων  
 ἀστρονομικὰ ἄττα διερωτᾶν τὸν Ἴππιαν, ὁ δ' ἐν  
 θρόνῳ καθήμενος ἐκάστοις αὐτῶν διεκρίενεν καὶ  
 διεξήκει τὰ ἐρωτώμενα.

And then I perceived (as Homer says) Hippias of Elis, on a high seat in the other side of the colonnade. Seated on benches around him were Eryximachus, son of Acumenus, Phaedrus of Myrrhinus, Andron, son of Androtion, a number of Elians and a few other foreigners. They seemed to be asking Hippias questions on astronomy and physics, and he, from his high seat, was answering each of their questions point by point.

Καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ Τάνταλόν γε εἰσείδον—ἐπεδήμει  
 315d γὰρ ἄρα καὶ Πρόδικος ὁ Κεῖος—ἦν δὲ ἐν οἰκῆματι  
 τινι, ᾧ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν ὡς ταμειῶν ἐχρητο Ἴππώνικος,  
 νῦν δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν καταλυόντων ὁ  
 Καλλίας καὶ τοῦτο ἐκκενώσας ξένοις κατάλυσιν  
 πεποιήκεν. ὁ μὲν οὖν Πρόδικος ἔτι κατέκειτο,  
 ἐγκεκαλυμμένος ἐν καρδίῳ τισὶν καὶ στρώμασιν  
 καὶ μάλα πολλοῖς, ὡς ἐφαίνετο· παρεκάθητο δὲ  
 αὐτῷ ἐπὶ ταῖς πλησίον κλίναις Πausανίας τε ὁ ἐκ  
 Κεραμέων καὶ μετὰ Πausανίου νέον τι ἔτι  
 315e μειράκιον, ὡς μὲν ἐγῶμαι καλόν τε κάγαθόν τὴν  
 φύσιν, τὴν δ’ οὖν ἰδέαν πάνυ καλός. ἔδοξα  
 ἀκοῦσαι ὄνομα αὐτῷ εἶναι Ἀγάθωνα, καὶ οὐκ ἂν  
 θαυμάζοιμι εἰ παιδικὰ Πausανίου τυγχάνει ὦν.  
 τοῦτό τ’ ἦν τὸ μειράκιον, καὶ τῶ Ἀδειμάντῳ  
 ἀμφοτέρῳ, ὃ τε Κήπιδος καὶ ὁ Λευκολοφίδου, καὶ  
 ἄλλοι τινὲς ἐφαίνοντο· περὶ δὲ ὧν διελέγοντο οὐκ  
 ἔδυναμην ἔγωγε μαθεῖν ἔξωθεν, καίπερ λιπαρῶς  
 ἔχων ἀκούειν τοῦ Προδίκου—πάσσοφος γὰρ μοι  
 316a δοκεῖ ἀνὴρ εἶναι καὶ θεῖος—ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν  
 βαρῦτητα τῆς φωνῆς βόμβος τις ἐν τῷ οἰκῆματι  
 γιγνώμενος ἀσαφῆ ἔποιεῖ τὰ λεγόμενα. Καὶ ἡμεῖς  
 μὲν ἄρτι εἰσεληλύθεμεν, κατόπιν δὲ ἡμῶν  
 ἐπισηλθὼν Ἀλκιβιάδης τε ὁ καλός, ὡς φῆς σὺ καὶ  
 ἐγὼ πείθομαι, καὶ Κριτίας ὁ Καλλαίσχρου.

And not only that, but I saw Tantalus too, for Prodicus of  
 Ceos was also in town. He was in a room which  
 Hipponicus had formerly used for storage, but because of  
 the number of visitors Callias had cleared it out and made  
 it into a guest room. Prodicus was still in bed and looked  
 to be bundled up in a pile of sheepskin fleeces and  
 blankets. Seated on couches next to him were Pausanias  
 from Cerames, and with Pausanias a fairly young boy,  
 well-bred I would say, and certainly good-looking. I think  
 I heard his name is Agathon, and I wouldn’t be surprised  
 if he were Pausanias’ young love. So this boy was there,  
 and the two Adeimantuses, sons of Cepis and  
 Leucolophides, and there seemed to be some others. What  
 they were talking about I couldn’t tell from outside, even  
 though I really wanted to hear Prodicus, a man who in my  
 opinion is godlike in his universal knowledge. But his  
 voice is so deep that it set up a reverberation in the room  
 that blurred what was being said. We had just arrived  
 when along came Alcibiades the Beautiful (as you call  
 him, and I’m not arguing) and Critias son of Callaeschrus.

### 3B Homer, *Odyssey* XI 572, 582-614

τὸν δὲ μέτ’ Ὠρίωνα πελώριον εἰσενόησα [...] καὶ μὴν Τάνταλον εἰσείδον χαλέπ’ ἄλγε’ ἔχοντα, ἔσταότ’ ἐν λίμνῃ· ἡ δὲ προσέπλαζε γενεῖω.  
 στεῦτο δὲ διψᾶων, πῖεῖν δ’ οὐκ εἶχεν ἐλέσθαι·  
 585 ὅσάκι γὰρ κύψει ὁ γέρον πῖεῖν μενεαίνων,  
 τοσσάχ’ ὕδωρ ἀπολέσκειτ’ ἀναβροχέν, ἀμφὶ δὲ  
 ποσσὶ  
 γαῖα μέλαινα φάνεσκε, καταζήνασκε δὲ δαίμων.  
 δένδρεα δ’ ὑψιπέτηλα κατὰ κρηθὲν χέε καρπόν,  
 ὄγχυαι καὶ ῥοιαὶ καὶ μηλέαι ἀγλαόκαρποι  
 590 συκέαι τε γλυκεραὶ καὶ ἐλαῖαι τηλεθώσαι·  
 τῶν ὀπότ’ ἰθύσει ὁ γέρον ἐπὶ χερσὶ μάσασθαι,  
 τὰς δ’ ἄνεμος ῥίπτασκε ποτὶ νέφεα σκιόεντα.  
 καὶ μὴν Σίσυφον εἰσείδον κρατέρ’ ἄλγε’ ἔχοντα,  
 λαῶν βαστάζοντα πελώριον ἀμφοτέρησιν.  
 595 ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν σκηριπτόμενος χερσὶν τε ποσὶν τε  
 λαῶν ἄνω ὤθεσκε ποτὶ λόφον· ἀλλ’ ὅτε μέλλοι  
 ἄκρον ὑπερβαλέειν, τότε ἀποστρέψασκε Κραταιῖς·  
 αὐτὶς ἔπειτα πέδονδε κυλίνδετο λαῶς ἀναιδῆς.  
 αὐτὰρ ὃ γ’ ἄψ ὠσασκε τιταινόμενος, κατὰ δ’ ἰδρώς  
 600 ἔρρεεν ἐκ μελέων, κονίη δ’ ἐκ κρατὸς ὀρώρει.  
 τὸν δὲ μέτ’ εἰσενόησα βίην Ἡρακλειήν,

“After him I became aware of gigantic Oriōn, [...] I also saw Tantalos suffering painful torment, as he stood in a pool, the water lapping his chin: he was maddened with thirst, yet couldn’t ever reach it, for whenever the old fellow bent down to drink the water was sucked down and vanished, and around his feet the black earth appeared, dried up by some god. Trees too, high and leafy, hung top-heavy with fruit— pears, pomegranates, boughs laden with shining apples, sweet figs, a profusion of olives. But every time the old man reached out to grasp them, a gust of wind would whirl them aloft toward the shadowy clouds. “I also saw Sisyphos suffering most painful torment, as he labored to raise a huge stone with his two bare hands: scrambling with hands and feet he’d try to push it up to the crest of the hill; but when he was on the point of getting it over the top, its weight would defeat him: bumpity back to the plain the shameless stone would clatter. Yet he kept straining and heaving, while the sweat streamed down from his limbs, and the dust rose swirling around his head. “After him I became aware of powerful Hēraklēs,

<p>εἶδωλον· αὐτὸς δὲ μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι τέρπεται ἐν θαλίῃς καὶ ἔχει καλλίσφυρον Ἥβην, παῖδα Διὸς μέγαλοιο καὶ Ἥρης χρυσοπεδίλου. 605 ἀμφὶ δέ μιν κλαγγὴ νεκύων ἦν οἰωνῶν ὥς, πάντοσ’ ἀτυζομένων· ὁ δ’ ἔρεμνῆ νυκτὶ ἔοικώς, γυμνὸν τόξον ἔχων καὶ ἐπὶ νευρῆφιν οἰστόν, δεινὸν παπταίνων, αἰεὶ βαλέοντι ἔοικώς. 610 σμερδαλέος δὲ οἱ ἀμφὶ περὶ στήθεσσι ἀορτῆρ χρῦσεος ἦν τελαμών, ἵνα θέσκελα ἔργα τέτυκτο, ἄρκτοι τ’ ἀγρότεροί τε σύες χαροποί τε λέοντες, ύσμῖναι τε μάχαι τε φόνοι τ’ ἀνδροκτασίαι τε. μὴ τεχνησάμενος μηδ’ ἄλλο τι τεχνήσαιτο, ὅς κείνον τελαμῶνα ἔῃ ἐγκάτθετο τέχνη.</p>	<p>his phantom, for he himself among the immortal gods takes joy in the feast, and has the elegant-ankled Hēbē, child of great Zeus and the golden-sandaled Hērē: around him arose a bird like clamor from the dead as they scattered in terror, while he, as dark as night, holding a bare bow with an arrow at the string, kept glancing sharply round him, as though about to shoot. A fearsome thing was the baldric girding his torso, a belt of gold on which wondrous objects had been fashioned— bears and wild boars, and lions with glinting eyes, and fights and battles and murder and the slayings of men. May he never have crafted, or again craft, another such, the man who stamped that belt with his special craftsmanship!</p>
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