

XXI

The Sophists

(a) *Anthropology*

Gorgias of Leontini has already made an appearance on the Presocratic stage. Gorgias was a Sophist; and his fellow Sophists will have a larger part to play in this and the following chapters. Who, then, were these Sophists? They do not constitute a school, like the Milesians and the Eleatics, bound together by a common philosophy; rather, they are a group of outstanding individuals—Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus, Antiphon, Thrasymachus—who are associated not by any common doctrines but by a common outlook on life and learning. The term ‘sophist (*sophistês*)’ was not originally a term of abuse: when Herodotus calls Solon and Pythagoras sophists (I.29; IV. 95) he is praising them as sages and men of wisdom (*sophia*) (cf. Aristides, **79 A 1**). But ‘*sophistês*’ became connected not with ‘*sophia*’ but with ‘*to sophon* (cleverness)’; and *to sophon ou sophia*. Thus Plato offers us six uncomplimentary ‘definitions’ of the sophist as a tradesman in cleverness (*Sophist* 231 D=**79 A 2**); and Aristotle defines the sophist as ‘a man who makes money from apparent but unreal wisdom’ (*Top* 165a 22=**79 A 3**). Xenophon, that stuffy old prig, put the classical view clearly:

The sophists speak to deceive and they write for their own gain, and they give no benefit to anyone; for not one of them became or is wise, but each is actually content to be called a sophist—which is a term of reproach in the eyes of those who think properly. So I urge you to guard against the professions of the sophists, but not to dishonour the thoughts of the philosophers (**370:79 A 2a**).¹

The sophist sells his cleverness: he is an intellectual harlot; and, not inappropriately, he adopts a meretricious intellectual pose (Xenophon, *Mem.* I.vi.13).

A Protagorean anecdote is apposite. Protagoras taught rhetoric for cash; and, confident of his tutorial abilities, he stipulated that his legal pupils need not pay him until they had won their first lawsuit. A pupil, Euathlus, had not paid his fees, and Protagoras took him to court. Euathlus argued that he had not yet won a case: Protagoras retorted that if he, Protagoras, won the present case, then clearly Euathlus must pay the tutorial fee; and if Euathlus won, then by the terms of the tutorial, he must equally pay the fee (Diogenes Laertius, IX.56=**80 A 1**).

A spurious cleverness, and a love of cash: those are the marks of the sophist in the unflattering portrait painted by Xenophon and Plato. I shall not trace out the somewhat tedious dispute among modern scholars over the reasons for Plato’s judgment and its fairness. Certainly, the Sophists taught for money; but no modern scholar will dare to hold that against them (cf. Philostratus, **80 A 2**). Certainly, they were clever; but

cleverness is not an intellectual vice. In some cases their seriousness is in doubt; but only the solemn will find fault with that. And it is an indisputable fact that many of the Sophists were men of wide interests and vast knowledge; the most cursory perusal of their remains will convince any reader of that.² I shall not attempt a rounded picture of the contribution to philosophy of the Sophists, nor even a portrayal of any individual Sophist: to do so would require a volume in itself. But in this and the following two chapters I shall discuss several of the larger and more interesting theses ascribed to one or another of those men; and some rough idea of the nature and value of the sophistic movement will, I hope, emerge.

About gods I cannot know either that they are or that they are not. For many things prevent one from knowing—the obscurity, and the life of man, which is short (**371:80 B 4**).

Later generations reported those resounding words with a frisson of pious horror, and alleged that they caused the Abderite Protagoras to be expelled from Athens, that bastion of liberty, and his books to be publicly burned (e.g., Diogenes Laertius, IX.52=A 1).³ Protagoras was listed among the ancient *atheoi* (e.g., Eusebius, *ad B 4*); but **371** is not atheistical: as Philostratus (**A 2**) correctly observes, it indicates *aporia* or agnosticism (cf. Cicero, *de natura deorum* I.42.117). Diogenes of Oenoanda, it is true, offers an atheistical interpretation:

He said he did not know if there are any gods, and that is the same as to say he knew that there are no gods (**372: fr. 11 Ch=A 23**).⁴

But Diogenes crassly conflates a profession of knowledge, ('I know that not-*P*') with a confession of ignorance ('I do not know that *P*'). To the believer, agnostics may be as bad as atheists; but to the atheist agnostics are not much better than believers.

Agnosticism is an interesting stance; but Protagoras' reasons for adopting it are disappointing. The term 'obscurity (*adêlotês*)' recalls Xenophanes; and we wonder if Protagoras developed arguments of the sort he found in Xenophanes' poem. But the second of the 'many things [that] prevent one from knowing' suggests that Protagoras offered no such support for his agnosticism: *vita brevis*—theology is dismissed with a shrug.

The significant part of **371** is the part we do not possess: the fragment begins '*peri men theôn*...(About gods on the one hand ...)'; the word *men*, we may guess, had its answering *de*: 'On the other hand'. A further guess has it that the *de* sentence asserted the possibility of knowledge about men: 'Of the gods I know nothing; about men I speak thus'.⁵ If we presume to scan god we shall observe nothing; theology is to be adjured, and replaced by anthropology.

And anthropology, in a broad sense of the term, was, as we know from Plato, an interest of Protagoras: the origins of man, and more particularly, the origins of human skills, of human customs, and of human social and moral conventions, were for him an object of speculative study. The long story put into his mouth in Plato's *Protagoras* (320C-322E=C 1) is doubtless Plato's own production; but it was produced on the basis

of a Protagorean original.⁶ The subject was popular in Abdera; for Democritus also offered an anthropology. A few fragments survive:

Democritus says that music is a younger art, and he gives the reason, asserting that necessity did not separate it off but it came about from superfluity (**373:68 B 144**),

and thus anticipating the familiar Aristotelian account of the origin of the arts and sciences (*Met* 981b13–25). Again:

In the most important things we became learners: of the spider in weaving and healing, of the swallow in building, of the songbirds—swan and nightingale—in imitative song (**374: B 154**; cf. Aelian, **A 151**).

These are pitiful remnants of a grand work. In a passage of Diodorus (**B 5**) many scholars see a comprehensive epitome of that original; but their view is on the whole unlikely to be true.

In scope and in emphasis Democritus' work and its Protagorean offspring represent a new departure; but behind them lies the old Ionian ideal: a complete and systematic account of the generation, growth and present state of the universe. Democritus' anthropology was probably set within a cosmogony (cf. Censorinus, etc. **A 139**): the universe began; life w[?]s formed; man, and human institutions, were founded. Anaximander or Xenophanes might have written the work; all that is new in Democritus is the anthropological slant: instead of the natural world it is the human world which absorbs his interest; instead of a history of the stars a history of human culture fires his intellectual imagination. (Or so at least it seems: we are dealing with fragmentary reports, and inference to the emphasis and focus of a work from a few fragments is a chancy thing.)

I shall not attempt to outline the speculations of Democritus or of Protagoras, nor yet to fit them into their historical contexts: both tasks are exceedingly intricate, and in any case I find anthropology—especially armchair anthropology—a fearful bore.⁷ Instead, I shall expand a little upon two topics included in the Democritean anthropology which do possess some philosophical interest. And the first of these, paradoxically, is theology.

(b) *The origins of atheism*

I begin, not with Democritus, but with Critias, a man of black fame: 'he seems to me the worst of all men who have a name for evil' (Philostratus, **88 A 1**). He was one of the Thirty who overthrew the Athenian democracy in the last desperate years of the Peloponnesian War, and who in turn received a swift and fatal overthrow. By all accounts he was an unlovely character, cruel, cynical, overbearing. He was also the scion of a noble house, and a literary dilettante: we possess fragments of occasional poems, of verse comedies, and of prose 'constitutions' full of recondite trifles. Critias was no philosopher; nor was he a sophist in the Protagorean or Gorgian mould; indeed,

his nearest connexion to philosophy was by blood, for Plato was his nephew. He might well be left for the historians and literary scholars to write upon; but one long fragment has won him, by accident, a place in the history of thought, and the fragment is amusing enough to bear transcription. It comes from a satyr play, *Sisyphus*:

There was a time when the life of men was unorganized,
 and brutish, and the servant offorce;
 when there was no reward for the good,
 nor again any punishment came to the bad.
 And then I think men set up laws 5
 as punishers, in order that justice might be ruler
 [of all alike], and hold violence a slave.
 And anyone who might transgress was penalized.
 Then, since the laws prevented them
 from performing overt acts by force, 10
 but they performed them secretly, then it seems to me
 [for the first time] some man, acute and wise in mind,
 invented the fear of the gods for mortals, so that
 there might be some terror for the bad even if in secret
 they do or say or think anything. 15
 Hence, then, he introduced divinity,
 saying that There is a spirit enjoying undying life,
 hearing and seeing by its mind, thinking and
 attending to everything, carrying a divine nature;
 and he will hear everything said among men 20
 and will be able to see everything done.
 And if in silence you plan some evil,
 that will not escape the gods; for thinking
 belongs to the gods.' Saying these words
 he introduced the pleasantest of teachings, 25
 hiding truth with a false account.
 And he said that the gods dwell there, where
 he might most confound men by naming,
 whence he knew fears came to men
 and toils in their wretched life 30
 —from the celestial orbit where he saw
 the lightnings were, and the terrible crashings
 of thunder, and the starry shape of heaven,
 fine embroiderv of the wise craftsman Time.

and whence the bright mass of the star steps
 and the damp rain travels to earth. 35
 Such fears he set about men,
 because of which in his account he fairly housed
 the spirit in a fitting place—
 and extinguished unlawfulness by fears.

Thus first I think someone persuaded mortals to believe that a tribe of spirits exists (**375: B 25**).

This is a speech from a play, and a semi-comedy at that: it is not a theological tract; nor need the view it expresses coincide with the sentiments of its author. For all that, its content is worth taking seriously, even if it was designed only to outrage or to entertain.

‘Some clever man, dismayed at the inability of human laws to curb human evil, invented the gods: by persuading them of the existence of a divine law and divine judges, he succeeded, to some extent, in making social life less nasty and less brutish.’ Such is the message of the *Sisyphus* speech. I shall use it, in this and the following section, to introduce two issues in philosophical theology. The first issue concerns divine justice.

In the *Sisyphus*, the *raison d’être* of the gods is a moral, or at least a social, matter: the gods are invented to supplement the laws; and by their invention the god-giver ‘extinguished unlawfulness by fears’. The notion that the gods punish malefactors is ancient and ubiquitous; in Greek literature its *locus classicus* is an elegy by the Athenian statesman Solon: Zeus, he proclaims, punishes all transgressors; and if justice sometimes proceeds at a limping pace, it is for all that unrelenting and inevitable (fr. 1. 25–32 D).⁸

Not all Greeks were equally convinced of the efficacy of divine justice. Against Solon’s solid affirmation we may set a poem in the collection ascribed to Theognis: the gods, he says, ought indeed to love the just and to hate and punish the unjust; but alas, they do not; for the unjust evidently prosper (Theognis, 731–52).⁹ Thrasymachus drew an unpalatable moral:

The gods do not observe human affairs; for they would not pass over the greatest of human goods, justice; for we see that men do not use justice (**376:85 B 8**).

‘O Zeus, what shall I say? That you do not observe mankind?’ (Euripides, *Hecuba* 488).¹⁰ The gods, lovers of justice, could not overlook the myriad unjust successes which Theognis laments; hence they cannot observe them—the gods are not omniscient.

Later, from a different perspective, Epicurus drew a different conclusion: ‘The statements of most men about the gods are not cognition but false suppositions, according to which the greatest harms befall the bad from the gods, and the greatest benefits the good’ (*ad Men* §124). Unlike the Thrasymachean divinities, Epicurus’ gods

do observe our miserable lives; but they do not care: omniscient, they are not practically benevolent.

The prevalence of successful malefaction provoked a third reaction. The ancient doxographers possessed a traditional catalogue *atheoi*, godless men or atheists.¹¹ The *atheos par excellence* was Diagoras of Melos who ‘made the downright assertion that god does not exist at all’ (Athenagoras, III, 9 J).¹² We know little about Diagoras, and that little is confused. He lived in the second half of the fifth century; ‘he committed verbal impieties about foreign rites and festivals [i.e. the Eleusinian mysteries]’ (pseudo-Lysias, VI. 17=I. 5J); and as a result he was prosecuted in Athens and forced to flee the country. Some scholars judge that the offending work—if indeed Diagoras really put his offensive thoughts to paper—was only ‘a sensational pamphlet published by an otherwise insignificant man’; and that ‘nowhere do we find evidence of an intellectual defence of atheism’. Perhaps, indeed, Diagoras was an *atheos* only in the old sense of an ‘ungodly’ man; he was not, properly speaking, an atheist. To other more generous scholars Diagoras appears as one of ‘the leaders of progressive thought’ in Athens.¹³

We lack the evidence to determine this dispute; but a few straws indicate a mildly philosophical breeze. If we find no ‘intellectual defence’ of atheism ascribed to Diagoras, we do find two or three rationalistic anecdotes. Cicero reports that Diagoras’ friends, attempting to convince him of the existence of the gods, pointed to the numerous votive tablets set up by mariners saved from the storms of the sea; Diagoras replied that there would be many more tablets had the drowned sailors survived to make their dedications (*de natura deorum* III. 89=III. 12 J). Sextus reports that Diagoras became an atheist when an opponent of his perjured himself and got away with his perjury (*adv Math* IX. 52=V. 5 J): the Suda makes the opponent a rival poet who had plagiarized Diagoras’ work (s.v. Diagoras=III. 3 J), and a scholiast on Aristophanes’ *Clouds* has the opponent refuse to return a deposit entrusted to him by Diagoras (III. 4 J). The anecdotes bring out, in a personal form, the same point which Theognis and Thrasymachus expressed more generally: injustice thrives. And it is suggested that Diagoras used that truism as a basis for atheism.¹⁴

That very inference was made in Euripides’ *Bellerophon*. One of the fragments of this lost drama reads thus:

Does someone then say that there are gods in heaven?
 There are not, there are not, if a man will
 not in folly rely on the old argument.
 Consider it yourselves; do not build your opinion
 on my words. I say that a tyranny
 kills many men and deprives them of their possessions,
 and breaking oaths destroys cities;
 and doing this they are more happy
 than those who live each day in pious peace.
 And I know of small cities that honour the gods
 which obey greater and more impious ones.

overcome by the greater number of spears. (377: fr. 286 N)

Euripides' fragment, the anecdotes of Diagoras' conversion to atheism, and the judgments of Thrasymachus and of Epicurus, all converge on an issue which Christian theology knows as the Problem of Evil.

The Problem concerns an apparent incompatibility between the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent god, and the prevalence of badness in the world. There is no unique statement of the Problem, and therefore no single answer to it. One version of it runs like this: Assume:

- (1) Unjust actions often go unpunished.
- (2) God loves justice.
- (3) God observes all human actions.
- (4) God can intervene in mortal affairs.

Here (2), (3) and (4) reflect the benevolence, the omniscience, and the omnipotence of God; and (1) is the mournful observation of Theognis. Now it is argued that (1)-(4) are mutually incompatible: suppose, by (1), that an unjust action *A* goes unpunished. Then, by (3), God observes *A*; by (2), he dislikes *A* and wishes it punished; and by (4) he has power to punish *A*. But if God—or anyone else—wants to ϕ and has the power to ϕ then he will ϕ . Hence God does punish the perpetrator of *A*. But, by hypothesis, *A* is unpunished. An almighty and omniscient god, who loves justice, cannot, logically, allow the unjust to thrive: if injustice is seen to thrive, that fact provides a conclusive disproof of the existence of any such god.

Different thinkers will react to that argument in different ways. Some, following in Solon's footsteps, will deny (1), and take the position pilloried in Voltaire's *Candide*. Heraclitus, in effect, adopts such a view (above, p. 131); and its most celebrated adherent is Leibniz. Modern philosophers have exercised their imaginations to provide reasons for rejecting (1): I assert, dogmatically, that (1) is a plain and patent truth.

Epicurus in effect denied proposition (2): his gods have no particular concern for justice. And the same denial is implicit in Theognis. Thrasymachus preferred to reject proposition (3). Both (2) and (3) may seem undeniable to those educated in a Christian tradition; and to many Greeks they will have carried the same air of self-evidence. But the Homeric gods were not remarkable for their love of justice, nor were they all omniscient; and a religion can, I suppose, survive the observation that its gods are neither all-knowing nor utterly devoted to the good of mankind.

Diagoras, and the speaker in the *Bellerophon*, take (1) for what it is: a platitude. And they implicitly accept (2)-(4): gods, they suppose, are by definition lovers of justice, possessors of knowledge, and repositories of power. Their conclusion is atheism: there are no gods.

I hold no brief for theism; but Diagoras has too easy a victory here. Doubtless there is a logical connexion between divinity and a love of justice; yet Diagoras requires a remarkably strong connexion: he must take it as a logical truth that gods wish for justice at any price. But a benevolent ruler, ardently desiring the prevalence of justice in his kingdom, may deliberately let some unjust acts go unpunished: the consequences of a constant intervention in the name of justice may be even less desirable than a state

wherein injustice occasionally triumphs. It is a platitude of political philosophy that justice and liberty frequently conflict. In theology the same conflict is found; and Christian apologists who explain the existence of ‘moral evil’ by reference to the free will of man are urging, in effect, that liberty is not always inferior to justice. Nor does that argument seem bad; proposition (2) is true, but in a sense too weak to yield any atheistical conclusion: God loves justice, but he also loves liberty.

I conclude that the Problem of Evil, in its original form, does not lead to atheism. It does not follow that the Problem holds no embarrassment for theists: first, the ascription of liberty to humans is itself hard to reconcile with many popular forms of theism; and second, other versions of the Problem, which refer to natural rather than to ‘moral’ evil, are not so easily evaded. If Diagoras failed to refute theism, he did at least invent an argument whose more sophisticated and subtle forms still cause the acutest difficulties for many types of contemporary theism.

(c) *The aetiology of religious beliefs*

I turn now to the second issue raised by the fragment of Critias’ *Sisyphus*. One of the *atheoi* in the ancient catalogue was Prodicus of Ceos, another sophisticated contemporary of Critias. Atheism was ascribed to him on the basis of a fairly innocent assertion:

The ancients thought that sun and moon and rivers and springs, and in general everything that benefits the life of men were gods, because of the benefit coming from them (**378:84 B 5**).

Something very similar was said by Democritus:

The ancients, seeing what happens in the sky—e.g., thunder and lightning and thunderbolts and conjunctions of stars and eclipses of sun and moon—were afraid, believing gods to be the cause of these (**379: Sextus, 68 A 75**).

According to Sextus, this passage offers an aetiology of religious belief: fear, inspired by a contemplation of celestial pyrotechnics, led men to postulate a divine pyrotechnician. The interpretation is plausible; and it receives some support from a fragment of Democritus’ treatise *On the Things in Hell* (cf. **B O c**):

Some men, ignorant of the dissolution of mortal nature, but conscious of the miseries of their life, crawl, during their lifetime, in troubles and fears, inventing falsehoods about the time after their death (**380:B 297**).

Men are mortal, but they will not acknowledge their mortality: doomed to a wretched life, they invent stories of *post mortem* bliss. There is an evident parallelism between this account of eschatological belief and the religious aetiology described by Sextus in **379**.¹⁵

We may possess an actual fragment of Democritus’ aetiology:

Of the sage men, a few raising their hands to what we Greeks now call air, said: 'Zeus is everything; and he knows everything, and gives, and takes away; and he is king of everything' (**381: B 30**).¹⁶

Some scholars compare these wise men to Critias' god-giver: cleverly and for political ends, they invent a ruler who knows everything and has supreme power of giving and taking. Others, more plausibly, take the reference to 'wise men' ironically, thus: 'some *soi-disant* sage, impressed by the weather, called the common air Zeus, and gave it divine powers'. Either interpretation will offer some sort of illustration of **379**; for each gives an aetiology of religious belief. But scholars dispute over **381**; and against those who find a cynical or contemptuous aetiology in the fragment there are others who find it a beautiful and touching assertion of faith: Those old, wise, men piously stretched out their hands; and rightly divinized the air'. In the absence of any context such a reading cannot be excluded: **381** must leave the arena; it cannot help us to understand Democritus' theology.

Critias, Prodicus and Democritus all offer anthropological aetiologies of religious beliefs: Critias and Prodicus are listed as *atheoi*, Democritus is not.¹⁷ Is that fair?

The *Sisyphus* speech implies that all present religious belief can be traced back to the pronouncement of the original god-giver. And that pronouncement was false (**375. 26**); the gods are an invention (**375. 13**).¹⁸ The speech is thus overtly atheistical, but its atheism is so far ungrounded. Xenophanes, I argued (above, p. 142), held that an inappropriate causal ancestry might deprive a belief of the title to knowledge; in particular, our beliefs about the gods, being causally explicable in terms of our local environment, fall short of knowledge. In effect, then, Xenophanes offered an anthropological aetiology of religious belief, and inferred that religious belief is unrational. Critias, I suggest, did just the same: all religious beliefs, he imagines, are explicable ultimately by reference to the god-giver's pious fraud; that fraud has a purely social explanation—hence the religious beliefs it grounds are unrational.

The same thought occurs more cleanly in Prodicus. In itself, **378** is innocent of sceptical implications;¹⁹ but Prodicus meant more than **378** says:

[He] attaches all human cults and mysteries and rites to the needs of farming, thinking that both the conception of gods and every sort of piety came to men from here (**382: Themistius, ad 84 B 5**).

All religious beliefs are explicable in terms of agricultural fears and hopes; those farming feelings are, plainly, irrelevant to the question of whether or not there are any gods: religious beliefs are therefore irrational.

What is irrationally believed is not thereby falsely believed. Why were Critias and Prodicus atheists? or were they called *atheoi* not for rejecting the gods outright but for a gentle Protagorean agnosticism? Suppose (truly) that very many very clever men have for many years searched for reasons for believing in the existence of gods; suppose (again, truly) that all their researches have failed to produce a single argument of any substance. Then, I suggest, we are entitled to lean towards atheism. The common inference from 'There is no reason to believe that *P*' to 'not-*P*' is puerile; the less common inference from 'Extensive inquiry has produced no reason to believe that *P*' to

‘Probably not-*P*’ is sound. Atheism is a negative position in two ways: first, it is essentially of the form not-*P*; and second, the strongest indication of its truth is the failure of all attempts to prove its contradictory. Did Critias or Prodicus glimpse something of that? Did they reflect that long generations of religious believers had produced no rational account of a position which remained causally tied to an old fraud or an ancient superstition? And did they infer that religion was not only groundless but also false? It would be beautiful to think so; but beauty, alas, is not truth.

Democritus remains, and his texts pose far greater problems. Comparison with Prodicus and Critias leads us to expect an atheistical or at least an agnostic stance; but certain fragments and reports appear to make Democritus a theist. First, in several of his ethical fragments Democritus refers, unapologetically, to gods and things divine:

He who chooses the goods of the soul chooses the more divine; he who chooses those of the body, the human (**383:68 B 37**).

It is best for a man to live his life with the most good cheer and the least grieving; and that will happen if he takes his pleasures not in mortal things (**384: B 189**).

They alone are dear to the gods, to whom injustice is hateful (**385: B217**).

But popular moralizing may appeal to the divine without committing itself seriously to theism; and we cannot ascribe theism to Democritus on the basis of a few disjointed platitudes.

Second, there is a confusing set of doxographical reports:

Democritus [says that] god is intelligence (*nous*) in spherical fire (**386: Aëtius, 68 A 74**).

Democritus imagines that the gods arose with the rest of the heavenly fire (**387: Tertullian, A 74**).

He thinks that ‘our knowledge (? *sententid*) and intelligence’, or ‘the principles of mind’ are divine (Cicero, **A 74**). The reports are uninspiring: Aëtius is corrupt, Cicero uses a hostile source, Tertullian is a Christian. Perhaps Democritus said that the fiery soul-atoms constitute the ‘divine spark’ in us; more probably, such a view was generously ascribed to him on the basis of his moral fragments. This second group of texts will not make Democritus a godly man.

The third and final set of evidences is of far greater importance.

Democritus says that certain *eidōla* approach men, and that of these some are beneficent, some maleficent—that is why he even prayed (*eucheto*)²⁰ to attain felicitous *eidōla*. These are great, indeed enormous, and hard to destroy though not indestructible; and they signify the future to men, being seen and uttering sounds. Hence the ancients, getting a presentation of these very things, supposed that there was a god, there being no other god apart from these having an indestructible nature (**388: Sextus, B166**).²¹

The passage has been interpreted in a variety of contradictory ways: does it offer an atomistic aetiology of religious notions? does it reduce gods to mere figments of the common fantasy? Or does it attempt to justify religious belief? and are its *eidôla* genuine divinities?

Cicero poses one of the problems: Democritus, he complains, ‘seems to nod over the nature of the gods’, treating the *eidôla* sometimes as being themselves divine, sometimes as images produced by the gods (A 74). The latter view is taken by Clement, who says that ‘*eidôla* fall on men and brute animals from the divine substance’ (A 79); it interprets the term ‘*eidôla* in the psychological sense of ‘*deikela*’ or ‘*aporrhoiai*’, ‘films’ or ‘effluences’ (see below, p. 477). The former view is taken by Hermippus, who says that Democritus ‘naming them [sc. daemons] *eidôla*, says that the air is full of these’ (A 78). Pliny, who asserts, in evident allusion to 388, that Democritus only admitted two gods, Penalty and Benefit, probably adhered to this interpretation (A 76); and Diogenes of Oenoanda may have accepted it.²²

Some scholars attempt to conjoin those reports into a unified theology; but I am inclined to think that they all spring from one source, the original of 388, and that that source has an atheistical tendency. 388 is talking about dreams: in praying for ‘felicitous *eidôla* Democritus was praying for happy dreams, in particular, I suppose, for dreams which ‘signify the future’. These *eidôla*, then, will be the dream images whose functioning is described by Plutarch in A 77; and ‘*eidôlon* has its psychological sense. (It will not do to object that images cannot utter sounds, or that they cannot be hard to destroy: to say that some dream images speak and are almost indestructible is simply to say that, in dreams, we imagine speaking and almost indestructible entities.)

Dreaming of huge and indestructible prophets, the ancients believed that they were perceiving gods: they looked behind their dream images for divine originals (cf. Lucretius, V. 1161–93). Democritus will, I suppose, have agreed that every *eidôlon* has an original; but he will not have allowed that divine-seeming *eidôla* require divine originals. Perhaps they are somehow ‘compounded’ or ‘enlarged’, by the process which gives us *eidôla* of chimaeras or giants; perhaps they are ordinary human *eidôla* which their observers fail to identify. (They are human in shape: Sextus, *adv Math* IX.42.) How can these *eidôla* ‘signify the future’? Plutarch ascribes a sort of telepathic theory to Democritus: human dream *eidôla* will include *eidôla* of the thoughts and plans of their originals; for those thoughts and plans, being physical structures, will emit effluences. Consequently, a dreamer, in grasping an *eidôlon*, may sometimes apprehend the thoughts and plans of its original (cf. A 77). It has been suggested that the ‘felicitous *eidôla* of 388 are just such images: the dreamer grasps the intentions of others, and hence gains a knowledge of the future entirely analogous to his knowledge of his own future actions.²³ The suggestion is ingenious, but strained: dream *eidôla* ‘speak’; sometimes it happens that what they ‘say’ is true—and in that way, unexcitingly, they ‘signify the future’. 388 does not imply that certain *eidôla* come overtly branded as truth-tellers, or that an attentive dreamer may distinguish good from bad dream utterances; it says only that some dream utterances will turn out true.

Thus, according to Democritus, religion arose first (as Prodicus suggested) from attention to natural phenomena (379), and second (his own contribution) from attention to the contents of the sleeping mind (388). 379 and 388 offer two complementary

aetiologies of religion; neither is inconsistent with the other, and neither implies any adherence to theism.

388, indeed, seems to commit Democritus to atheism: if ‘there is no other god apart from these’ dream *eidōla*, then there are no gods at all: evidently, the *eidōla* themselves are not gods; and, so Democritus says, there is in fact no divine source or origin behind or apart from the *eidōla*.

A final fragment stands strongly against that conclusion:

The gods grant men all good things, both in the past and now. But what is bad and harmful and useless, that neither in the past nor now do the gods donate to men; but they themselves strike against these things from blindness of mind and ignorance (**389: B 175**).

Does **389** make Democritus a theist? If so, we must credit him with an important distinction: **379** and **388** show that the *origins* of our religious beliefs are disreputable; but it does not follow that the beliefs themselves are irrational; a belief may overcome its low breeding. A full-blooded aetiologist will say that anthropology explains the origins of religious thought, and that all present beliefs are exclusively accountable for in terms of those origins; Democritus, we are now imagining, allows that anthropology explains the origination of religion but denies that all our present beliefs are explicable solely by reference to those origins. A rational theism may transcend its irrational childhood.

That is a consistent and an interesting view; and I hesitate to deny it to Democritus. Yet if it was his, it is strange that no explicit trace of it remains, and that no justification of religious belief is ascribed to its author. I incline still to an atheist Abderite. **389**, I guess, came from one of Democritus’ literary pieces: it is not a piece of philosophy but an exegesis of a passage in Homer’s *Odyssey* (I. 33). But the guess will not be found very appealing; and Democritus’ stand on religious belief will remain shrouded in the fogs of the past.²⁴

(d) *Poetics*

‘First, as Prodicus says, you must learn about the correctness of words’ (Plato *Euthydemus* 277E=**84 A 16**). Interest in language and the various disciplines associated with it was a feature of the Sophists. ‘I agree’, says Protagoras in Plato’s dialogue, ‘that I am a sophist, and that I educate men’ (317B=**80 A 5**). The primary art by which the Sophists sought to educate, and which they sought to instil in their pupils, was rhetoric, ‘the craftsman of persuasion’ (*Gorgias* 453A= **82 A 28**).²⁵ Gorgias, ‘the first to give the power and art of speaking to the rhetorical form of education’ (Suda, **82 A 2**), wrote a treatise on rhetoric (Diogenes Laertius, VIII.58=A **3**) of which we possess a scrap or two (**B 12–14**); and in *Helen* he dilates with evident satisfaction upon the persuasive powers of his art (**B 11**, §§8–14; see below, p. 529).

The matter as well as the mode of education led to language: study of language is a part of literary criticism, and literary criticism was a great part of education in a land where ‘from the beginning everyone learned from Homer’ (Xenophanes, **21 B 10**).

There is an example of the Sophist's literary art in the analysis and criticism of the verse of Simonides which Plato's Protagoras conducts (339A=80 A 25); and we know that Protagoras was famed for 'interpreting the poems of Simonides and others' (Themistius, *oratio* 23, 350. 20 D). Hippias (86 B 6) and Gorgias (82 B 24-5) engaged in literary studies; and the practice was no doubt widespread. The Sophists did not originate the studies of rhetoric and of literary criticism; but they were professed masters of those high arts.²⁶

One part of their studies dealt with strictly linguistic matters. Protagoras has some claim to be called the inventor of syntax;²⁷ and Prodicus dabbled in semantics. Prodicus is credited with a 'nicety (*akribologia*) about names' (Marcellinus, 84 A 9); and Plato's dialogues contain numerous examples of his subtle distinctions in sense: between 'strive' and 'vie' (*Protagoras* 337B=84 A 13), between 'enjoy' and 'take pleasure in' (*ibid.*), between 'wish' and 'desire' (*ibid.* 340A=84 A 14), between 'end' and 'limit' (*Meno* 75E=84 A 15). Some of Prodicus' distinctions are significant: Aristotle rightly availed himself of that between 'wish (*boulesthai*)' and 'desire (*epithumein*)', and he would have improved his account of pleasure had he attended to Prodicus' differentiation between 'enjoy (*euphrainesthai*)' and 'take pleasure in (*hêdesthai*)'. But there is no evidence that Prodicus himself saw any philosophical point in his linguistic diversions. If 'the Sophistic explanations of poetry foreshadow the growth of a special field of enquiry, the analysis of language', yet 'the final object is rhetorical or educational, not literary'—and still less philosophical.²⁸

In two ways, however, the literary interests of the late fifth century did make a direct contribution to philosophy: the period was exercised by a problem about the nature and origins of language; and it saw the birth of that Cinderella of modern philosophy, aesthetics.

Gorgias had an aesthetic theory:

Tragedy flourished and was famed, an admirable object for those men to hear and to see, and one which gave to stories and passions a deception (*apatê*), as Gorgias says, in which the deceiver is more just than he who does not deceive and the deceived wiser than he who is not deceived (390: Plutarch, 82 B 23).²⁹

In his *Helen* (82 B 11) Gorgias shows how speech, that 'great potentate', can 'persuade and deceive (*apatân*) the soul' (§8); and he illustrates his thesis from poetry:

All poetry, as I believe and assert, is measured speech; and upon those who hear it there comes a fearful shuddering (*phrikê periphobos*) and a tearful pity (*eleos poludakrus*) and a mournful yearning; and for the misfortunes and calamities of the affairs and the bodies of other men, the soul, through words, experiences an emotion of its own (391: §9).

(I refrain from commenting on the connexion between this passage and Aristotle's account of the effects of tragedy in *Poet* 1449b27.) The *Dissoi Logoi* offers the following consideration in support of the thesis that 'the just and unjust are the same':

In tragedy and in painting whoever deceives (*exapatai*) most by creating what is similar to the truth is best (392:90 A 3, § 10).

There is nothing original in the view that poets and artists are purveyors of falsehoods: *polla pseudontai aoidoi*. The Muses, according to Hesiod, ‘know how to say many false things similar to the true’ (*Theogony*, 27); and references to the deceptions of art are not infrequent in Greek literature.³⁰ Again, the gullibility of the vulgar, which leads them to believe in soap operas as well as soap advertisements, naturally breeds a puerile admiration for *trompe l’oeil* art and ‘realistic’ drama. Such phenomena were familiar enough in Greece: they are exhibited in the naive wonderment of the Chorus in Euripides’ *Ion* (184–219), and in the conversations of Herodas’ fourth *Mime*: ‘What lovely statues, Cynno dear.... Look, dear, at that girl up there, looking at the apple: you’d say she’d pass away if she didn’t get the apple’ (IV. 20–9).

Gorgias’ theory perhaps began from those commonplaces; but it goes far beyond them, and offers a genuine theory of art—or at least of literature and painting; for whether or not Gorgias intended the theory to extend to music and sculpture we do not know. Art essentially strives for illusion: the better the deception, the greater the art; and good artists will always try to deceive their public. As a dramatist, Sophocles is concerned to express, verbally and by action, a set of false propositions. As a good dramatist, Sophocles will regularly convince his audience that those falsehoods are true.

The theory had an enormous attraction; and it became a standard item of Philistine thought; for if Gorgias ironically asserted that a deceived audience would grow wiser by the deception, later men, condemning deceit, condemned art with it. Thus Macaulay: ‘Poetry produces an illusion on the eye of the mind, as a magic lantern produces an illusion on the eye of the body. And, as the magic lantern acts best in a dark room, poetry effects its purpose most completely in a dark age. As the light of knowledge breaks in upon its exhibitions, as the outlines of certainty become more and more definite and the shades of probability more and more distinct, the hues and lineaments of the phantoms which the poet calls up grow fainter and fainter. We cannot unite the incompatible advantages of reality and deception, the clear discernment of truth and the exquisite enjoyment of fiction’ (*Essays*, ‘Milton’). Art, like all fiction, will gradually lose its power and its attraction as knowledge of truth advances.

Some thinkers deny that art is a deceiver on the grounds that art has no connexion with truth or falsity at all. In the arts, according to the *Dissoi Logoi*:

Justice and injustice have no place; and the poets do not make their poems with a view to truth but with a view to giving men pleasure (393:91 A3 §17).

Coleridge echoes the point: a notion of Wordsworth’s, he maintains, ‘seems to destroy the main fundamental distinction, not only between a poem and prose, but even between philosophy and works of fiction, inasmuch as it proposes *truth* for its immediate object, instead of *pleasure*’ (*Biographia Literaria*, I. 104). Neither belief nor disbelief is an appropriate attitude to art; rather, we must experience ‘that *illusion*, contra-distinguished from *delusion*, that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real

existence by the judgment' (ibid., I. 107). Frege assents: 'In hearing an epic poem, for instance, apart from the euphony of the language we are interested only in the sense of the sentences and the images and feelings thereby aroused. The question of truth could cause us to abandon aesthetic delight for an attitude of scientific investigation' (*Philosophical Writings*, 'On Sense and Reference').

That answer to the Gorgian theory has something to be said for it: certainly, it is silly to wonder whether Achilles really dragged Hector's corpse around the walls of Troy, or to ask how the Ancient Mariner really managed to steer his ship with a dead albatross hanging about his neck. Such things are fictions, and they are presented as fictions; they do not deceive or delude us, and the poet does not fail if we remain unconvinced. But it will not do to answer Gorgias by saying, simply, that artists do not aim at truth: first, that answer will not appease the Philistines—if art is no longer a criminal falsehood, it is something just as bad: an empty fantasy; and second, it is simply untrue to say that contemplators of art must refrain from putting 'the question of truth'. Many artists regularly aim at a fairly mundane sort of truth: portraiture is a species of painting; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* is a work of literature. And many more artists aim, I guess, to convey a higher and less ordinary truth: the *Oedipus Rex* does not tell us a true history of a king of Thebes, but it does tell us some large truths about human destiny; *Pride and Prejudice* is not a journal or diary of events in an English country town, but it does make shrewd and true comments on human nature. Any reader will multiply those examples and give flesh to their skeletal frames: only the most insensitive philosopher will judge that there is no 'question of truth' in the *Iliad* on the grounds that Homer's account of the Trojan War is doubtful history.

Most generalizations about art are false. I do not suggest that all art purports to express truth (unaccompanied music cannot); I do not think that art can only be defended if it aims at truth; nor do I think that Macaulay's condemnation is just even in those few cases (mime, perhaps, is the best example) where deception and falsity are desired and attained. My aim in the last paragraph has merely been to recall the elementary truth that works of art very often do purvey truths, and the slightly less elementary truth that not all the sentences of a work of fiction are intended to be believed.

How, then, did Gorgias arrive at his false and influential theory? I suspect that he was led to it by puzzling over the emotive powers of art. **391** hints at an argument: when I attend to a work of art (Verdi's *Traviata*, say) I am affected by genuine emotions of a fairly strong variety; and my feelings are not capricious but seem an appropriate and rational response to the opera. Now if my feelings are rational, they must be backed by belief; hence if Verdi's aim is to arouse my passions, he must first instil some beliefs in me. And since his plot, like that of most dramatists, is a fiction, he must endeavour to instil false beliefs in me, or to deceive me. If a friend dies, you feel grief because you believe her to be dead; when Violetta dies you feel a grief of the same intensity and variety: that can only be because you believe, falsely, that Violetta is dead. Verdi is a great artist because he can move us; he can move us only if he can deceive us: art, therefore, is essentially deceptive.

I do not endorse that argument; but I do not think it despicable. And it does raise in a clear form the genuinely puzzling question of why Violetta's death infects us with grief:

is the grief (and hence the opera) an emotional sham? or does it give us something to weep for? Gorgias saw that there were questions here to be asked.

(e) *Language and nature*

The second contribution of fifth-century linguistic studies to philosophy is due not to sophists but to Democritus. Diogenes' catalogue of Democritus' writings lists eight titles under the heading *Mousika* ('Literary Studies'): 'On rhythm and harmony', 'On poetry', 'On beauty of words', 'On consonant and dissonant letters', etc. (IX.48=68 A 33). But the few fragments of these works that remain (B 15–26) are not of great interest. What is of interest, I think, is Democritus' contribution to the Greek debate on the status of human language: is language a natural or a social phenomenon? do words have their meaning by nature or by convention? is *phusis* the subtle *eminence grise* directing our speech, or are we rather governed by *nomos* or *thesis*? The classic text on the subject is Plato's *Cratylus*; and after Plato's time the debate rarely slackened. Aulus Gellius, writing in the second century AD, could say that 'it is ordinarily asked among philosophers whether names are by nature (*phusei*) or by legislation (*thesei*)' (X. iv. 2). The debate began in the fifth century BC.

There are two quite distinct questions involved: much of the literature confuses them. The first question concerns the *origins* of language, or of 'names': was language deliberately created and imposed by a 'name-giving' person of divine, heroic, or human status? or did language gradually evolve from brutish grunts and growls, without the intervention of any conscious agent? The former view is taken by the Book of *Genesis* and by the *Cratylus* (e.g. 388D). It posits a *thesis*, or laying down, of names; and since what is laid down is a *nomos*, the view may be stated by saying that words exist *nomôdi*. But that statement is misleading; for the *thesis* theory need not hold that the name-giver set up purely conventional or arbitrary connexions between words and objects. The *thesis* theory was vigorously expressed by saying that 'words are by convention'. The view was vigorously and mockingly attacked by the Epicureans, who advanced the alternative, 'natural', account (Epicurus, *ad Hdt* §§75–6; Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 10 Ch; Lucretius, V. 1041–90).

The second question concerns the relation between language and the world: does language fit the world naturally, like skin on an animal? or is it an artificial matching, like clothes on an Edwardian *belle*? Are names fixed to what they name by a natural adhesive? or is the glue man-made? Metaphorically stated, the questions are impressive and imprecise; a major part of the interpretation of the ancient answers consists in understanding the ancient questions.

Four texts bear on the two issues. Diodorus' anthropology contains the following passage:

Their sounds being without significance and confused, they gradually articulated their locutions; and by making signs for one another for each of the objects, they made their remarks about everything intelligible to one another. Such gatherings took place all over the inhabited world, and all did not have a similar-sounding language but each group ordered

their locutions as it chanced; that is why there are all types of languages (394: I.viii. 3=68 B 5).

Diodorus offers a ‘natural’ answer to my first question: language originated not with the fiat of a name-giver, but from the need, and the gradually increasing competence, of groups of men to communicate with one another.

Once a language has been rudely articulated within a group, some clever men may pose as a primitive *Académie Française*. But the Diodoran account of the first beginnings of language is surely true, and logically so: the existence of a name-giver presupposes the existence of a language; for he himself must have the names already articulated if he is to bestow them on his community. (Those philosophers who think that there can be no ‘private languages’—languages intelligible only to one person—will go further and say that a communal dialect, of the sort imagined by Diodorus’ source, must have preceded the activity of any name-giver.) Now if language is ‘natural’ in this way, then it is a product of specifically human nature; for the brutes do not in fact possess any articulated dialect. The mark of humanity is rationality; and rationality, if not thought itself, depends on language; for without language none but the simplest and crudest thoughts are possible. This amounts to a justification of the ancient and vain belief that humans are set apart from the other animals. Only a natural account of the origins of language will lead to that belief: on the *Cratylus* view, the divine name-giver might as well have bestowed his gift on apes or peacocks.

We cannot, however, rely on Diodorus, whose connexions with Democritus are unsure. My next two texts are genuine fragments of Democritus, but they are unreliable for different reasons. **B 145** reads simply:

The word is shadow of the deed (395).

Some have read this as implying that names are naturally attached to the world; for shadows are naturally attached to the objects that throw them. But the fragment is an apophthegm out of context; and a thousand interpretations can be found for it. In **B 142** Democritus says that the names of the gods are their ‘speaking images (*agalмата φωνήεντα*)’. Images are made by an image-maker, and they are usually tied to their originals by the natural relation of resemblance: the one word ‘*agalματα*’ thus suggests both that the origins of language were unnatural and that words are naturally attached to the world. But it is absurd to read so much theory into a single word. A simpler explanation of *agalματα* suggests itself: from Homer onwards the Greeks liked to see significance in the etymologies, or purported etymologies, of proper names. Aeschylus provides the best-known example when he describes Helen as ‘*helenaus, helandros, heleptolis* (destroyer of ships, destroyer of men, destroyer of cities’: *Agamemnon*, 689), and Democritus is known to have indulged in the sport: Tritogeneia is etymologized in **B 1** and ‘*gunê* (woman)’ is repellingly connected with ‘*gone* (semen)’ because a woman is ‘a receptacle for semen’ (**B 122a**). Some words are ‘speaking images’ by virtue of this etymological turn: a word may speak volumes.³¹

The fourth and last Democritean text comes from Proclus’ commentary on the *Cratylus*. It reads thus:

Democritus, saying that names are by legislation (*thesei*), established this by four arguments. From homonymy: different things are called by the same name; hence their name is not natural (*phusei*). From polyonymy: if different names will fit one and the same thing, [they will fit] one another too—which is impossible. From the changing of names: why did we change Aristocles' name to Plato, and Tyrtamus' to Theophrastus, if their names were natural? From the lack of similar names: why do we say 'think' from 'thought' but do not form a derivative (*paronomazomen*) from 'justice'? Hence names are by chance (*tuchêi*) and not natural. And he calls the first argument polysemy, the second equipollence, [the third metonymy], the fourth anonymy (**396: B26**).

Only the last sentence of this extract pretends to quote Democritus' own words: both form and content of the 'four arguments' are due to Proclus; and we do not know whether the form of the conclusion is Democritean or Proclan. What thesis can the arguments have been designed to establish?

Proclus believes (if I understand him aright) that Democritus is offering a *thesis* account of the origins of language: no *onomatopoeia* laid down language; names evolved by nature. But on that view the four arguments are very feeble. Other scholars associate **396** with **B 142**: some, but not all, names are *agalмата φησέντα*: the original names of Plato and Theophrastus did not reveal the nature of their bearers; that is why we changed them to the more descriptive terms Flatfoot and Godspeaker. (The examples are post-Democritean: I do not know what instances Democritus himself might have cited.) But neither the second nor the fourth argument of **395** has any tendency to support that thesis.

A third interpretation of **396** encourages us to attend to a less trivial aspect of the relation between language and the world. 'Mean' in English, like '*sêmeinein*' in Greek, can be used in at least two quite different contexts. On the one hand, spots mean measles; clouds mean rain; and a child's cry means hunger. Meaning, in such cases, is a matter of pointing to, indicating, being a sign of. On the other hand, 'measles' means measles; 'rain' means rain; and 'hunger' means hunger. In these cases meaning is the relation which links language to the world. The question: 'Are words by nature?' can be interpreted in terms of these two sorts of meaning; for it can be taken to ask whether or not the relation which links language to the world is the relation of pointing to, indicating, or being a sign of. To say that 'words are by nature' is thus to say that the word 'mean' in '“Measles” means measles' names the same, natural, relation as the word 'mean' in 'Spots mean measles'.

The first argument in **396**, from homonymy, now works well enough: if clouds mean rain, then if clouds appear rain will follow; natural signs are inevitably followed by what they signify. But though 'rain' means rain, not every utterance of 'rain' is followed by rain; and homonymy provides clear instances: not every utterance of 'mole' signifies the presence of a furry rodent (or of an idea or image or thought of such a rodent); for 'mole' may mean jetty. The third argument in **396** is even better: if a child's crying means hunger, no agreement or compact will make it mean anything else; if spots mean measles, we cannot, by *fiat* or convention, get them to mean intoxication.

But the meaning of ‘hunger’ or ‘measles’ could be altered by consent: vague words regularly replace standard English; and marriage usually changes a woman’s name as well as her nature.

The fourth argument is harder. I suspect that Proclus’ ‘paronyms’ are an anachronistic illustration of his own, and that by ‘anonymy’ Democritus meant nothing more impressive than the fact that language does not contain a term for every natural object: we may come across a new element, an unknown species of bird, a fresh frisson to titillate our jaded minds. If those new objects are to have signs, we must bestow them; and we can bestow any sign we care to. Natural signs do not work like that: we do not instruct a hungry child to cry, or fix clouds to the heavens as a sign of rain.

Finally, there is the argument from polyonymy or ‘equipollence (*isorrhopon*)’. Proclus’ remarks here are very obscure. ‘If different names will fit (*epharμοζειν*) one and the same thing, [they will fit] one another too’. Perhaps that means: ‘If *A* means *C* and *B* means *C*, then *A* means *B*.’ At least, that interpretation yields a truth; and I can find no other that does. For that ‘is impossible’; i.e., ‘that is impossible if words are natural’. Now if ‘mean’ is used in the ‘natural’ sense, then it is indeed false that if *A* means *C* and *B* means *C*, then *A* means *B*; for though a drought means poor crops, and a flood means poor crops, a drought does not mean a flood. If, on the other hand, ‘mean’ has its linguistic sense, then if *A* means *C* and *B* means *C*, then *A* does mean *B*.

The distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘non-natural’ meaning—between the way in which spots mean measles and the way in which ‘measles’ means measles—is not a trivial one: many classical theories of meaning founder on the failure to draw it, or on the assumption that the relation of a word to what it means is similar to that of a cloud to the rain it portends.³² 396 is not a simple fragment to interpret; and perhaps no simple thought lies behind it. But I incline to believe that one of the points that Democritus was attempting to make was the one I have briefly mentioned; and if that is so, then Democritus stands at the head of a long line of thinkers who have laboured to uncover the meaning of meaning.

(f) *Gorgias on communication*

The third part of Gorgias’ treatise on *What Is Not* (above, p. 173) attempts to show that even if what exists can be known, our knowledge cannot be communicated. The argument is a curiosity: I present it with no comment beyond the observation that it treats significance as a natural relation. Again, I follow Sextus’ text, though here the *MXG* differs from and expands upon Sextus to a considerable degree.

(83) And even if it were grasped, it is incommunicable to anyone else. For if what exists is visible and audible and, in general, perceptible (I mean, what lies outside us), and if what is visible is grasped by sight, and what is audible by hearing, and not vice versa, then how can these things be signified to anyone else? (84) For that by which we signify is a formula (*logos*), and what lies outside us and exists is not a formula; therefore we do not signify to our neighbours what exists but a formula which is different from what lies outside us. Thus just as what is visible

could not become audible, or the reverse, so, since what exists lies outside us, it cannot become our formula; (85) and if it is not a formula, it will not be signified to anyone else.

And a formula [, he says,] is constructed from the things which hit us from outside, i.e. from the objects of perception; for it is from meeting with a savour that the formula we utter about this quality is produced in us; and from the incidence of a colour comes the formula about a colour. And if this is so, it is not the formula which reveals the external object, but the external object which signifies the formula.

(86) And one cannot say that the formula lies outside us in the same way as the visible and the audible, so that, lying outside us and existing, it can signify what lies outside us and exists. For, [he says,] even if the formula lies outside us, yet it differs from the other things that lie outside us—and visible bodies differ very greatly from the formulae; for what is visible is grasped through one organ, the formula through another. Thus the formula does not reveal most of the external objects, just as they do not show the nature of each other (**397:82 B 3**).