

## XXIII

# Conduct Unbecoming

### (a) *Antiphon and moral anarchy*

According to Aristotle, Socrates invented moral philosophy. Aristotle is hardly fair; for if the moral views associated with the earlier Presocratics are scanty and somewhat unstimulating, the men of the fifth century were much given to ethical speculations. The fragments of the Sophists and of Democritus, and the plays of Euripides, testify to a widespread and excited interest in moral matters; and that interest extended beyond the desire to preach or to enrage, and exhibited an admirable tendency to tunnel and to probe. The testimony is rich and my treatment in this chapter will be partial and selective. I choose two main topics, moral nihilism and systematic ethics—the former associated with the Sophists, the latter with Democritus. And I divide my first topic into three parts: moral anarchism; moral relativism; and moral irresponsibility.

In the nineteenth century the Sophists were generally denounced as immoral charlatans, teaching vice for cash, corrupting the minds and bodies of the young, and leading Athens (or Greece as a whole) into a dank cesspool of iniquity. Against that charge George Grote protested, in a celebrated chapter of his *History of Greece*: ‘I know,’ he wrote, ‘few characters in history who have been so hardly dealt with as these so-called Sophists’; and in twenty brilliant pages he portrayed Protagoras and his crew in the implausible disguise of Victorian moralists, stern and upright men, educators, the ethical leaders of the Greek enlightenment. Grote had some right on his side: the pious homily of Prodicus’ *Choice of Heracles* (84 B 2) can now be matched by the banalities of the ‘Anonymus Iamblichii’ (89 A 1), of which Grote knew nothing. But Grote overstated his case: the performances of Thrasymachus in the *Republic* and of Callicles in the *Gorgias*; the speeches in Thucydides’ Mytilenean debate and in his Melian dialogue (III. 37–48; V. 84–111); and the *agôn* between Just and Unjust *Logos* in the *Clouds*, are evidence enough of that.

Yet all that is philosophically uninteresting: the Sophists may have been demon kings or Prince Charmings, they may have preached sobriety or sin; I do not greatly care. This chapter is concerned with questions of a more theoretical nature: did the Sophists propound any general accounts of ethics? and if so, to what extent and in what direction might those accounts have influenced their substantive ethical judgments? If we have no complete theory of ethics from a Sophist’s hand, we do possess three substantial pieces, each of which has been supposed to offer some general reflexions on ethics, and each of which has been suspected of immoral tendencies.

The first passage belongs to Antiphon. Of Antiphon’s life nothing is known. Indeed, there is a standing dispute, of antique origin (Hermogenes, 87 A 2), over precisely how many men Antiphon was. We hear of Antiphon the Sophist, who wrote *On Truth*; we possess speeches by the orator, Antiphon of Rhamnous; there is Antiphon the tragedian; and Antiphon the interpreter of dreams. There is no decisive evidence telling for or

against the identification of any two, of any three, or of all four of these men; nor is the question of great moment.

The passage in question comes from Antiphon's *On Truth*. Its three parts, preserved on papyrus, were discovered at Oxyrhynchus and published in 1915 and 1922; I translate them in the order in which they are printed in Diels-Kranz, where they figure as **88 B 44**; for convenience I number them separately.<sup>1</sup>

...justice...consists in not I  
 transgressing the regulations (*nomima*) of  
 the state in which you are a citizen. 10  
 Hence a man will deal with justice in the way most  
 advantageous to himself if in the  
 presence of witnesses he holds the laws 20  
 high, and when isolated from witnesses the  
 dictates of nature (*ta tês phuseôs*). For the dictates of  
 the laws are imposed (*epitheta*), those  
 of nature necessary; and those of the  
 laws are agreed and not grown (*phunta*), 30  
 those of nature grown not agreed. Hence II  
 if in transgressing the regulations you escape  
 the notice of those who have made the agreement, you are  
 free of shame and of penalty; but  
 not if you do not escape notice. But if 10  
*para to dunaton* you violate any  
 of the things which are connate with nature,  
 then if you escape the notice of all men,  
 the ill is no less; and if everyone sees, it  
 is no greater; for you are harmed not 20  
 in opinion but in truth. The  
 inquiry is for the sake of all these things,  
 because most of what is legally just  
 is inimical to nature: laws 30  
 have been made for the eyes, telling them  
 what they must see and what they must not; and III  
 for the ears, what they must hear and what they  
 must not; and for the tongue, what it must  
 say and what it must not; and for the hands,  
 what they must do and what they must not; and for 10  
 the feet. where they must go and where they must

not; and for the mind, what it must  
 desire and what not. 'On the contrary, by nature the things  
 these laws turn us from are no dearer or more 20  
 appropriate than the things they turn  
 us towards. For living and dying  
 belong to nature; and living is among  
 what is advantageous, dying among what 30  
 is not advantageous. 'But of things advantageous IV  
 those laid down by the laws are chains,  
 those laid down by nature are free. Well, it is not true,  
 by a right account, that what pains 10  
 benefits nature more than what delights;  
 nor would what grieves be more  
 advantageous than what gives pleasure; for  
 what is truly advantageous cannot 20  
 harm but must benefit. Thus what is by  
 nature advantageous..... and those V  
 who having suffered defend themselves and do not  
 themselves initiate action; and those who behave  
 well to their parents even if they are bad  
 to them; and those who allow others to tender an 10  
 oath but do not tender an oath themselves. And of the  
 things I have recounted you will find many  
 inimical to nature; and in them there  
 is the suffering of more pain when it is possible  
 to suffer less, and the getting of less pleasure when 20  
 it is possible to get more, and being treated  
 badly when it is possible not to be treated so.  
 Now if for those who submit to such things there  
 came any help from the laws, and 30  
 for those who do not submit but oppose them, some  
 penalty, then obedience to the laws would not be VI  
 unbeneficial; but in fact it seems that  
 the justice that derives from law is not  
 adequate to help those who submit to such  
 things; for, first, it allows the sufferer 10  
 to suffer and the agent to act, and it does  
 not there and then prevent the sufferer from

suffering or the agent from acting. (?) And when it is referred to punishment, it 20 is no more partial to the sufferer than to the agent (?); (?) for he must persuade those who will administer punishment that he suffered, and requires the power to win the case (?). And 30 these same things are left for the agent, to deny...(448).

...we praise and honour; but those from II a family that is not noble we neither praise nor honour. And in this we have become barbarians towards one another, since by nature we are all in all respects similarly 10 adapted to be either barbarians or Greeks. (?) We may consider this in the case of natural things, which are necessary to all men (?)...20 ...and in all these things none of us is marked off, neither barbarian nor Greek. For we all breathe into the air by our mouths and noses...(449).

...since what is just seems to be good, I testifying truly concerning one another is deemed (*nomizetai*) to be just and no less useful for the practices of men. Now he who does this is not just, if 10 not wronging anyone unless you have been wronged yourself is just; for it is necessary for him who testifies, even if he testifies truly, nevertheless in a way to wrong another. And it is probable that he himself will be wronged later on. For 20 this is possible, in so far as the man he testified against is condemned because of the things he testified to, and loses either his money or his life because of someone he in no

way wronged. In this way, then, he 30  
 wrongs the man he testifies  
 against, because he wrongs someone  
 who has not wronged him; and he himself  
 is wronged by the man he testified  
 against because he is hated by him for  
 testifying truly—and not only II  
 by hatred, but also because for all his  
 life he must guard against the man he  
 testified against; for he stands as  
 an enemy to him, ready to say and do 10  
 whatever ill he can to him. Now  
 these wrongs are evidently not inconsiderable,  
 neither those which he himself suffers nor  
 those which he commits. For it is not  
 possible both for these things to be just and for neither  
 wronging at all nor being wronged oneself to be just. 20  
 But it is necessary that either  
 the one set of things is just or both  
 are unjust. And it seems that to condemn  
 and to judge and to arbitrate,  
 however things are settled, are not just; 30  
 for benefiting some harms others.  
 And in this those who are benefited are not  
 wronged, but those who are harmed are  
 wronged...(450).<sup>2</sup>

Modern commentators are distressed by these fragmentary opinions: on the one hand, they applaud the 'cosmopolitanism' of 449; on the other hand, they are appalled at the 'moral anarchism' in 448 and 450. The two opinions, nice and nasty, are united by a common prescription: Follow nature, *phusis*; do not follow law or convention, *nomos*. Social and racial discord is based on conventional artifice: abandon convention and you enjoy the cosmopolitan harmony of nature. Ordinary morality is based on law and etiquette: abandon convention and you may luxuriate in an advantageous immorality.

I have nothing to say about 449: I suppose that it represents Antiphon's own views; and I suppose that Antiphon means to urge the claims of *phusis* above those of *nomos*. In that case, Antiphon becomes the father of what is surely the silliest of all arguments in political philosophy (a subject where folly spreads like bindweed, choking the few weak shoots of truth): 'By nature all men are equal; hence all men deserve equal treatment.' The evidently false premiss of natural egalitarianism yields, by an evidently

invalid inference, the absurdity of moral egalitarianism. But more than one interpretation of 449 is possible; and we are not obliged to file a paternity suit for that argument against Antiphon.

The connexion between 448 and 450—and between them and 449—is quite uncertain: the papyrus gives no technical answer; and the content of the fragments does not help.<sup>3</sup> I shall therefore treat 448 and 450 in relative isolation, beginning with 448.

448 divides into three main sections: first, I.6–II.23 argues that it is in a man's interest to obey the regulations in public and to follow nature when he can do so unobserved; then II.23–V.24 urges that the regulations normally show themselves inimical to nature; and finally V.25–VI.33 remarks that the regulations do not offer the advantages they pretend to. Antiphon uses '*nomima* (regulations)' and '*nomoi* (laws)' interchangeably: both terms, I take it, refer not just to the enactments of the legislature, but generally to the rules and customs, whether legally or socially sanctioned, by which any communal life is ordered. To follow the *nomima* is to conform, to do the done thing. By '*phusis*' Antiphon intends, primarily at least, human nature (cf. II.11). Among the constituents of human nature are certain desires, wants, longings and yearnings: to follow 'nature', or to obey 'the dictates of nature (*ta tês phuseôs*)' is to act on those natural inclinations: crudely, it is to do what you want to do.

Many scholars find in 448 an injunction or recommendation to 'follow nature' and to disregard the regulations, so long as you can do so with impunity: 'Join me, and do what's natural: play, and laugh, and think nothing is wrong' (Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1078). Other scholars, eager to clear Antiphon of so foul a crime, say that the thesis advanced in I.6–II.23 is not advanced *in propria persona*; rather, it represents a view which Antiphon is concerned to refute. That has no foundation in Antiphon's text; and in any case the suggestion that Antiphon is offering an immoral injunction is groundless: there is no word of injunction or recommendation in 448; Antiphon does not say 'Follow nature when you can get away with it'; he asserts, as a statement of fact and not as a suggestion for action, that if you do follow nature and get away with it you will act in your own interest.<sup>4</sup>

Antiphon offers an argument for his statement: it is advantageous to follow your natural inclinations, because if you ignore them 'you are harmed not in opinion (*diadoxan*) but in truth' (II.21; i.e., 'you will surely be harmed, for the harm does not depend simply upon the beliefs which other men have about your action'). Thus the whole argument of I.23–II.26 runs as follows: 'Suppose  $\phi$ ing is against the customs or laws; suppose that you want to  $\phi$ ; and suppose that you can  $\phi$  unobserved. If you do not  $\phi$ , you violate the dictates of your nature. But those dictates are "necessary (*anankaia*)" (I.26; i.e., it is not up to men to decide what they shall want and when) and they are inborn (*phunta*: I.32); consequently, the penalties attached to their violation are necessary and inborn, and "you are harmed...in truth" whether your law-abiding course is overt or covert. If, on the other hand, you do  $\phi$ , you will violate a dictate of custom. Now such dictates are "imposed" and "agreed" (i.e., it is up to men to decide what acts shall be allowed by *nomos* and what forbidden). Hence the penalties they threaten depend on detection; and an undetected piece of  $\phi$ ing is harmless.' The argument is clear and correct: if I can get away without paying my income tax, it is to my advantage to do so. If I do not pay, I suffer no harm, and gain the advantage of extra cash; if I do pay, I am harmed in truth, for my natural desire not to waste my substance is frustrated.

The second part of **448** runs from II.23 to V.24. Suppose that all *nomima* are in fact in line with nature: then, though it is still in my interest to follow nature when I can, the fact has no bite; for following nature and following *nomima* lead to the same actions. Antiphon shows that the supposition is false by arguing that ‘most of what is legally just is inimical to nature’ (II.26). ‘Law,’ as Hippias says in the *Protagoras*, ‘is a tyrant of men and violates nature in many ways’ (337D=86 C 1). Again, Antiphon has hold of a sober truth; he is not counselling anarchy but reporting a fact about the relation between law and nature: the purpose of a large part of the law and of many social customs is to curtail the exercise of natural desire; *nomima* would lose their point if they never clashed with *phusis*.

That truth is stated, in roundly rhetorical terms, at II.23–III.17, and repeated, with a different type of example, at IV.30–V.24. The intervening passage, III.17–IV.30, is obscure; I tentatively suggest that it first states and then answers an objection to Antiphon’s truth: *mejn oun* at III. 17 introduces the objection, and *de* at IV.2 the reply. Objection: ‘*Nomima* not only discourage, they also promote; and what they promote is just as advantageous to us as what they discourage; e.g., by discouraging murder they promote life.’ Reply: ‘*Nomima*, even where they seem advantageous, are chains on our nature; they therefore involve pain, and things that pain us are not more advantageous than things that give us pleasure.’ The reply is feeble; for surely the pain or frustration we suffer by having our liberty chained is outweighed by the advantage we gain from chaining the liberty of other human tigers?

The third part of **448** answers just that point. The tigers pounce with impunity: the law cannot prevent their pouncing; at best it will punish them after they have pounced; and punishment is far from certain if the tigers have honeyed tongues. Is that true? Or rather, was it true in Athens in the last quarter of the fifth century? I do not know; but Antiphon was in a better position to tell than we are.

**448** thus argues that *nomima* are not advantageous to those who obey them: almost always, obedience will involve a frustration of natural inclinations; and the bonds of the social contract are not tight enough to constrain the determined criminal. What is the moral? We cannot tell: perhaps, as some believe, Antiphon was out to urge ‘natural’ behaviour; perhaps, as others assert, he wanted a reform of the laws in order to bring the balance of advantage down on the side of the just.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps he offered his observations with no practical recommendation in mind: his book, after all, is *On Truth*; it was not primarily a practical tract.

**450** contains a clear and self-contained argument: men generally think *both* that it is unjust to wrong someone who has not wronged you, *and* that it is just to tell the truth in the witness box. Antiphon correctly points out that those two views will lead to conflict when, as often happens, truthful witnesses who have been unharmed send crooks to jail. And he correctly adds that in such circumstances the just witness may put himself in danger.

The verb ‘wrong’ translates ‘*adikein*’, which literally means ‘treat unjustly’. A defender of the general opinion might say that bearing true witness against a man cannot be a case of *adikein*: a witness may ‘wrong’ someone in the sense of harming him; but he cannot ‘wrong’ him in the sense of treating him unjustly. But that defence will not do; for if ‘wrong’ is construed as ‘treat unjustly’, then the first of the two general opinions is reduced to a tautology: ‘It is unjust to treat a man unjustly unless he

has treated you unjustly'. The opinion was plainly meant in a non-tautological sense: 'You should not act against a man's interests unless he has acted against yours'. That, I suppose, sounds like a decent moral principle. And Antiphon proves it untenable.

**450** talks a lot about justice; and justice is mentioned in **448**. Many scholars feel that justice is the central concern of the fragments, thus: 'At I.6, **448** defines justice as obedience to the rules of society; at II.20, **450** defines justice as not wronging those who have not wronged you. The function of **448** is to reduce the legalistic account of justice to absurdity; the function of **450** is to substitute a moral account; and the overall aim of the two passages is the establishment of a sound theory of justice.'

I fear that will not wash. There is no definition of justice in **450**: II.20 merely offers the thesis that it is unjust to harm those who have not harmed you; and (if I am right) it implies that we should reject the thesis. There is no suggestion that **450** replaces views dismantled in **448**, and there is no suggestion in **448** that the definition of justice given at I.6 is absurd. **448** does offer a definition of justice; but the definition was a commonplace. It is reflected in Euripides and in Lysias; it was advanced approvingly by Xenophon's Socrates, and Aristotle recognizes it as giving one of the senses of 'just'.<sup>6</sup> In Antiphon's fragment it is neither new nor shocking; and it plays no role in the development of his argument: **448** argues that illegal and irregular conduct may be advantageous, and we may infer that unjust conduct may be advantageous; but Antiphon does not make the inference for us, and he cannot have felt it of great importance.

Fragments **448–50** of Antiphon contain the earliest essay written in the light of the distinction between *nomos* or convention and *phusis* or nature. To accept that distinction does not imply a preference for *phusis* and a leaning to anarchism: Antiphon's *Truth*, so far as I can see, contains no moral or political recommendations at all. It is, in part, a sociological work; but not even a sociologist need preach distasteful doctrines—for he need not preach at all.

#### (b) *The Dissoi Logoi and moral relativism*

The definition of justice, which Antiphon treats so lightly, can be used to promote a view more vigorous than anything he professed. Swiftly and fatally, the argument runs thus: 'What is just is what is *nomimon*; *nomima* are human creations, and vary from one culture and country to another: hence justice—and, in general, morality—is a relative thing. 'The first premiss of the argument was a fifth-century commonplace; the second premiss was a familiar truth, classically illustrated by the experiment of Darius (Herodotus, III.38); and the conclusion seems to give the deathblow to morality.

[Archelaus, Anaxagoras' pupil] composed a *Physiology* and believed that the just and ugly are so not by nature (*phusei*) but by custom (*nomôi*) (**451**: Suda, **60 A 2**).

Here we have the first appearance of the fatal argument. Aristophanes makes comic use of its elements: Pheidippides is proposing to beat his father, Strepsiades:

STR: But it's nowhere the custom (*nomizetai*) for a father to suffer this.

PH: Wasn't the person who first laid down this custom (*nomos*) a man, like you and me? And didn't he persuade the men of old by making a speech? Then is it any less possible for *me* now to lay down a new custom for sons—to beat their fathers back? (*Clouds* 1420–4).

And Plato spells the argument out: 'And about political things too—things fine and ugly, just and unjust, holy and the reverse—whatever any city thinks to be and lays down as lawful (*nomima*) for itself actually is so in truth for it; and in these matters no individual is any wiser than any other, and no city than any other. But on the question of laying down what is advantageous or not advantageous to it, here if anywhere it will agree that one counsellor is better than another and that the judgment of one city is better with regard to truth than that of another. And it would not dare to say that whatever a city thinks to be and lays down as advantageous to itself will actually be advantageous to it come what may. But in the case I am talking about—the case of the just and unjust, the holy and unholy—they want to insist that none of them has by nature any substance of its own, but that what is communally judged to be the case actually comes to be the case at the time when it is so judged and for as long as it is so judged' (*Theaetetus*, 172AB; cf. *Laws* 889E).

Plato ascribes the argument to Protagoras, and the *Theaetetus* here is sometimes taken to provide genuine Protagorean doctrine.<sup>7</sup> But it occurs at the end of Socrates' long and plainly unhistorical 'defence' of Protagoras; and the doctrine it expounds is not, in fact, very closely connected with Protagoras' epistemological relativism (see below, pp. 545–53). To discover a Sophistic expression of moral relativism we must turn to the *Dissoi Logoi*.

The *Dissoi Logoi* or *Double Accounts* is a strange document. An anonymous piece of some dozen pages, written in an odd dialect by a talentless author, it somehow became attached to the text of Sextus, and so survived along with his works. It is generally dated to about 400 BC;<sup>8</sup> and it is therefore supposed to breathe, in a puerile way, the air of Sophistic Athens. It is a contemporary document on the workings of the Sophistic movement, the more interesting in that it reflects a feeble layman's apprehension of things.

The work is divided into nine sections: 'On Good and Bad'; 'On Fine and Foul'; 'On Just and Unjust'; 'On True and False'; on the thesis that 'things are and are not'; 'On Wisdom and Virtue—whether they can be taught'; on the proper way of choosing state officials; on the relation between speech, knowledge and action; on memory. Some scholars think that the *Dissoi Logoi* is a compilation of two or more originally separate essays, and much effort has been expended in finding traces of the great Sophists in the work. The discussion is sadly inconclusive.<sup>9</sup> No less fruitless are the attempts to categorize the tract: is it a schoolboy's exercise? the notes of a pupil on his master's lectures? the lecture notes, or half-finished lecture, of the master himself? We cannot tell.

Section 1, on Good and Bad, opens thus:

Double accounts are offered in Greece by those who philosophize about the good and the bad. For some say that the good is one thing, the bad

another; others that they are the same—good for some, bad for others; and for the same man now good, now bad (452:90 A 1 §1).

First, the relativistic argument, that bad and good are the same, is offered (§§2–10); then the counter-argument, that good and bad are different, is produced (§§11–17). The author concludes:

I do not say what the good is; but I attempt to teach this: that the bad and the good are not the same, but each is different<sup>10</sup> (453: §17).

The pattern of argument in sections 2, 3, and 4 is precisely analogous.

Here are samples of the relativistic arguments:

Incontinence is bad for the incontinent, good for the sellers and hirers. Illness is bad for the sick, good for the doctors. Death is bad for the dead, good for the undertakers and funeral masons (454: A 1 §3).

For the Lacedaemonians it is fine for girls to exercise(?) without sleeves(?) and to walk about without tunics; for the Ionians it is foul. For the former it is fine for children not to learn music and letters; for the Ionians it is foul not to know all these things (455: A 2 §§9–10).

First I shall say that it is just to lie and to deceive. People would say that to do this to one's enemies [is fine and just], to do it [to one's friends] foul and wrong: [but how to one's enemies] but not to one's friends? Take your parents: if your father or your mother has to eat or swallow a medicine and doesn't want to, isn't it just to give it to them in their food or drink and to say that it is not there? Then it is [just] to lie to and deceive one's parents (456: A 3 §§2–3).

All three ethical sections of the *Dissoi Logoi* begin by advancing a relativism; yet neither the author nor his modern commentators realize that three different relativisms are advanced. The relativist of section 1 in effect argues that '... is good' is an incomplete predicate, elliptical for the overtly relational predicate '...is good for—'. Goodness is understood as advantage: 'a is good' means 'a is advantageous'; and if we sometimes omit the *relatum* and say, simply, 'a is advantageous', our saying always carries a tacit rider of the form 'for b'. Goodness is advantage; and advantage is relative in an obvious enough fashion. It follows that items and events cannot be divided up into the advantageous and the disadvantageous, the good and the bad: what is good for me is very likely bad for you, and vice versa. Everything advantageous is also disadvantageous; everything disadvantageous is also advantageous: in a word, 'the good and the bad are the same'.

The relativism of section 2 is less clear; but it probably intimates the thesis that '...is fine' is elliptical for '...is fine in culture—'. Sometimes, it is true, the relativist says that things seem (*dokei*) or are deemed (*nomizonti*) fine in certain cultures; but he does not distinguish between 'a seems fine in K' and 'a is fine in K'.

Section 3 does not imply that '...is just' is elliptical; rather, its message is that  $\phi$ ing is always (un)just' is always false. Lying may be usually unjust, but it is sometimes just;

returning a loan may be usually just, but it is sometimes unjust. ‘The just and the unjust are the same’ in a weaker sense: ‘For any  $\phi$ , some cases of  $\phi$ ing are just if and only if some cases of  $\phi$ ing are unjust.’ Nothing is *both* just *and* unjust in the way in which some things, according to section 1, are *both* good *and* bad.

The author of the *Dissoi Logoi* produces a single line of argument against all his relativists. In the case of ‘good’ he gets nowhere:

Tell me, have your parents ever done you any good?—Yes, many great goods.—Then you owe them many great evils, if the good is the same as the bad (457: A 1 §12).

‘*a* does *b* good; good and bad are the same: hence *a* does *b* evil.’ The inference sounds right, but it ignores the proper meaning of ‘good and bad are the same’; and it ignores the central fact that the relativist makes ‘good’ *relative*. The answer is a silly *ignoratio elenchi*.

That ‘advantageous’ is a relative term is plain; that ‘good’ means ‘advantageous’ is less clear. Yet I am inclined to let the relativist win on ‘good’: sometimes, at least, ‘good’ does seem to mean ‘advantageous’ or ‘profitable’; when it has a different meaning it is likely to prove a synonym of ‘fine (*kalon*)’ or ‘just (*dikaion*)’; so that the relativist of section 1 wins no significant victory unless he carries the day in sections 2 and 3 as well.

The author of the *Dissoi Logoi* fares no better in section 2: if fine and foul are the same, then

In Lacedaemon it is fine for the girls to exercise, and in Lacedaemon it is foul for the girls to exercise (458: A 2 §25).

That, again, is a mere *ignoratio elenchi*. But he almost grasps a better retort: answering the relativist claim that ‘to wear ornaments and make-up and gold bangles is foul for a man, fine for a woman’ (§6), he says that ‘if it is fine for a woman to wear ornaments, then it is foul for a woman to wear ornaments, if foul and fine are the same’ (§24). A neat point can be extracted from that clumsy remark: the relativist claims that ‘ $\phi$ ing is fine’ is elliptical for ‘ $\phi$ ing is fine in *K*’; his opponent asserts that ‘ $\phi$ ing is fine in *K*’ if and only if ‘ $\phi$ ing-in-*K* is fine’; and this latter use of ‘is fine’ is not elliptical. For women to parade naked is fine—‘in Lacedaemon’. Then for women in Lacedaemon to parade naked is fine *tout court*. Culture may determine what is fine and what is foul; but the concepts of fineness and foulness are not culture-relative. The difference sounds small but is considerable: it is one thing to say that the *contents* of our value judgments must always refer to some culture, so that ‘When in Rome do as the Romans do’ becomes the supreme recommendation; it is quite another to claim that our judgments *themselves* are logically culture-bound, that we can no more talk of ‘fine *simpliciter*’ than we can of ‘advantageous *simpliciter*’.

The relativist may fight the equation of ‘ $\phi$ ing is fine in *K*’ with ‘ $\phi$ ing-in-*K* is fine’. An educated but prudish Athenian will know that naked female sport is fine in Sparta but will deny that naked female sport in Sparta is fine; and the same Athenian may hold

that slave revolts in Sparta are fine without holding that such things are fine in Sparta. But in making this case, the relativist destroys himself; for he allows a non-elliptical use of ‘...is fine’. The Athenian does not deny that naked female sport in Sparta is fine *in Sparta*—he knows that to be true; nor does he deny that naked female sport in Sparta is fine *in some other culture*—for no other culture lays down canons for *Spartan* behaviour. What the Athenian denies is that naked female sport is fine, *simpliciter*. And that, I think, crumples the culture relativist: it is simply an error to maintain that ‘fine’ is an elliptical term, expandable to ‘fine in culture *K*’.

The relativist of section 3 is an Aristotelian: ‘We shall speak adequately if we are as clear as the subject matter allows; for rigour (*to akribes*) is not to be sought in all accounts alike any more than in all products of craft. And the fine and the just, about which political science inquires, contain great differences and divergences, so that they seem to exist by custom alone and not by nature. And good things too contain such a divergence because harm comes to many people from them (for men have died before now on account of riches, and others on account of bravery). Thus we must be content in arguing about such matters and from such principles to show the truth roughly and in outline—in arguing about what is for the most part and from such principles, to conclude in such a way too’ (*EN* 1094b11–22). The details of that celebrated passage remain unclear; but its sophistic background is immediately discernible.

Aristotle seems to mean at least this: every sentence of the form ‘ $\phi$ ing is always wrong (right, just, unjust, fine, foul, good, bad, etc.)’ is false. We can sometimes say, truly, ‘For the most part,  $\phi$ ing is wrong’; we can never say truly ‘In all cases,  $\phi$ ing is wrong’. And that is precisely the message of the relativist of the *Dissoi Logoi*: lying is not *always* wrong—it is all right to lie to your enemies; lying to your friends is not *always* wrong—it is all right to lie to your parents in order to get them to drink their medicine. No doubt lying is normally wrong; but it is not *always* so. And neither is anything else.

The view can be given a weak or a strong construction. Weakly, it points out that all the customary moral injunctions we daily parrot (Tell the truth, Be kind to your mother, and Brush your teeth after meals) allow exceptions. They are at best rules of thumb, not universally binding laws. That is, I take it, indubitably true; and since people, even philosophers, are sometimes extraordinarily rule-bound, there is something to be said for proclaiming the truth from time to time. From a pedagogic point of view, moral injunctions need to be neat and snappy; and if we issue and accept them with a pinch of salt or a *hōs epi to polu* we shall not do or suffer much harm. But only wretchedness or hypocrisy can result from taking universally and defending rigorously those nursery-room saws which constitute the rough bedrock of our moral beliefs. A stronger interpretation, however, is surely intended both by Aristotle and by the *Dissoi Logoi* relativist: *every* universal moral judgment—not merely every simple moral saw—is, strictly speaking, false; for *all*  $\phi$ , it is not the case that  $\phi$ ing is always *M* (where *M* is any moral predicate). Moral education, according to some modern philosophers, consists in a progressive refinement and sophistication of our first crude and general moral principles: I reject ‘Do not kill’ in favour of ‘Do not kill except in time of war’; that yields to ‘Do not kill except in time of war, and then only kill combatants’; and so on. According to the Aristotelian doctrine, that process of education is incomplete: however complex and refined your moral principles may be, they are (strictly speaking)

false; they may be replaced by other principles yet more complex and yet more refined, but the replacements will still be false.

The *Dissoi Logoi* rejects the view:

That stealing your enemies' goods is just proves that that very thing is unjust too, if their account is true (459: A 3 §16).

That again is an *ignoratio elenchi*; but it hides a clever point: the relativist, attacking the naive thesis that stealing is always wrong, must specify his exceptions to the rule; he must produce a thesis of the form 'Stealing in circumstances *C* is right'. But such a thesis is, according to the very view he is trying to advance, inevitably false: in arguing for his case, the relativist disproves it. The argument is clever but unsatisfactory: the relativist need only emend his exception clause to read 'Stealing in circumstances *C* is, at least sometimes, right'. However that may be, the Aristotelian relativist has, so far as I can see, no good argument for his position: in the *Dissoi Logoi* he simply claims to be able to find an exception to any moral generalization; the claim is illustrated by simple cases, and there is no reason at all to believe that every generalization can be so punctured. Aristotelians customarily talk of the 'infinite variety' of human circumstances: circumstances alter cases; and so many and so varied are the circumstances that no universal rule can govern them all. But circumstances, if varied, are not infinitely varied; nor is it clear that all their variations are of moral import. Rules must certainly be complicated; but nothing has yet shown that they are impossible.

These programmatic remarks do not exhaust the question: no doubt more can be said in favour of Aristotelianism. And more should be said; for if the theory is correct, its implications for morals, and for moral reasoning, are serious. The 'relativism' of section 3 of the *Dissoi Logoi* is the most interesting and the most dangerous of the Sophistic relativisms.

### (c) *Gorgias and moral irresponsibility*

A certain athlete accidentally struck Epitimos the Pharsalian with a javelin and killed him; and he [sc. Pericles] spent the whole day with Protagoras puzzling over whether, in the strictest account, one should hold responsible (*aitios*) for the accident the javelin or the thrower rather than the organizers of the games (460: Plutarch, 80 A 10).

The story may be apocryphal; but issues of responsibility were certainly discussed and debated in Athens, a city where litigation was a popular hobby. Indeed, the second *Tetralogy* of Antiphon contains four speeches, two prosecuting, two defending, devoted to the very case that Protagoras allegedly debated with Pericles. A boy was practising the javelin; as he hurled it, another youth ran across the stadium, and was transfixed and killed. Who, Antiphon's speeches ask, was responsible (*aitios*) for the youth's death?

The English word 'responsible' is slippery: '*aitios*' in Greek is anointed with the same oil. Sometimes in saying of someone that he is responsible for a certain state of affairs, we mean to hand out blame: calling someone responsible is calling him guilty. '*Aitia*', according to Liddell and Scott, means '*responsibility*', mostly in the bad sense, guilt, blame, or the imputation thereof, i.e. *accusation*'. ('Haig was responsible for the slaughter at Paaschendaele'; The conductor is responsible for the ragged violin entries'.) Sometimes we use 'responsible' more generously, to saddle someone not with blame, but with a liability to be blamed: by saying 'he is responsible for so and so', we mean that any moral, political, aesthetic or other evaluation of so and so should be laid at his door, whether for good or for ill. ('Haig was responsible for the strategy on the Western Front'; 'The conductor is responsible for the ensemble playing'.)

Again 'responsible' may impute agency: if *a* brought it about that *P*, then *a* is responsible for the fact that *P*. ('My cat is responsible for the holes in the lawn'; 'I am responsible for the broken plate'.) Or 'responsible' may indicate causation: inanimate objects, and events, may be responsible without being agents; and animate creatures can sometimes be causally responsible at one or more removes from agency. ('Bad weather is responsible for the poor batting averages this season'; 'His great-grandfather is responsible for his Habsburg profile'.) Thus '*a* is responsible for *X*' may be used to pick out *a* as an agent or cause, and it may be used to blame *a* or to mark *a* as an appropriate object of appraisal: the phrase has a causal and an evaluative use.

It is easy to think that the evaluative and the causal uses are co-extensive, that I am causally responsible if and only if I am evaluatively responsible; and there is, of course, a close connexion between causal and evaluative responsibility: standardly, 'he is responsible' holds evaluatively only if it holds causally, and vice versa. But that is not always so: vicarious and collective responsibility yield cases in which the evaluatively responsible are not causally responsible (parents must pay their children's debts; the orchestra fails if the horns alone are out of tune); accidents and flukes yield cases in which the causally responsible are not evaluatively responsible (I knocked the jug off the window-sill, but liability for blame attaches to the fool who put it there; I won the rubber by making three no trumps, but the contract was made by way of an inadvertent squeeze).

It is easy to confuse the two uses of 'responsible'. Antiphon's defence counsel does so: he wishes to show that his unfortunate client is guiltless and not a suitable subject for blame and punishment, that he is not morally *aitios*. But he argues, bizarrely, that his client did not kill the youth at all (III. 10; IV.4; cf. *Tetralogy* 3, II.6), that he is not causally *aitios*. The correct defence, that the boy is causally but not morally *aitios*, was apparently too subtle for Antiphon.

One sophistic document appears to deal *ex professa* and in philosophical depth with the issue of responsibility: Helen left her husband Menelaus and sailed to Troy with Paris, thereby launching a thousand ships and the Trojan War. The Greek poets liked to berate her for her indiscretions. Gorgias in his *Helen* sets out to defend her:

I wish to give a certain reasoning (*logismos*) in my argument and so to remove responsibility (*aitia*) from her who has a bad repute and to remove stupidity from those who blame her by showing them up as liars and by proving the truth (461:82 B 11 §2).

Gorgias' defence has a lucid structure:

She did what she did either by the wishes of Luck and the decision of the gods and the decrees of Necessity; or seized by force; or persuaded by arguments; or captured by love (**462**: §6).

Successive paragraphs argue that Helen bears no responsibility if her rape was due to the gods (§6), or to force (§7), or to persuasion (§§8–14), or to love (§§15–19):

Then how can one think the blame of Helen just, who, if she did what she did either loved or persuaded by argument or seized by force or compelled by divine necessity, in any case escapes responsibility? (**463**: §20).

Gorgias ends his oration on a note of self-deprecation:

I wished to write a speech that would be praise for Helen and a plaything (*paignion*) for myself (**464**: §21).

Scholars have disputed the seriousness of Gorgias' purpose: is his *paignion* a contribution to moral philosophy, or a rhetorical exercise? the expression of an intellectual position, or a clever speaker's exhibition piece?<sup>11</sup> We can hardly hope to answer the question: Gorgias' psychology is unknown to us, and his use of the term '*paignion*' signifies nothing. In any case, whatever Gorgias may have felt or intended, the *Helen* is the first detailed and challenging contribution to the vexed question of human responsibility; we may take Gorgias seriously whether or not he did so himself.

Nothing ties the argument of the *Helen* to its eponym: if the argument works at all, it lets every adulteress off the moral hook. Indeed, nothing really ties the argument to any particular type of action: if the argument works, it works for all agents and all actions, and no one is ever responsible for anything. I assume that Gorgias was himself aware, and intended his audience to be aware, of the general application of his argument. The speech, after all, is surely meant to shock; and no one is going to be shocked by an argument that applies only to an ancient and fictional delinquency.

Gorgias' argument relies on his fourfold classification of the springs of actions, and it cannot succeed unless that classification is exhaustive. I think that it is: if I  $\phi$ , then either my  $\phi$ ing was accidental (a fluke or quirk or freak occurrence) in which case it falls under 'divine necessity'; or my  $\phi$ ing was forced upon me; or my  $\phi$ ing was the result of thought, in which case I was 'persuaded by argument', my own or someone else's; or, finally, I  $\phi$ ed impetuously, driven on by my feelings. No doubt many  $\phi$ ings are complex in their causes, and will fall into more than one of these four categories; but no  $\phi$ ing, I think, can miss all four pigeon-holes.

First, 'divine necessity': in this case, 'the responsibility must be assigned to Chance and God' (§6). Gorgias is confused: god and divine necessity are irrelevant (their place is in §7 under the heading of Force); and Chance cannot be ascribed responsibility at all. Yet many philosophers will find a serious truth behind Gorgias' confused façade: '...if

it is a matter of pure chance that a man should act in one way rather than another, he may be free but he can hardly be responsible. And indeed, when a man's actions seem to us quite unpredictable, when, as we say, there is no knowing what he will do, we do not look upon him as a moral agent. We look upon him rather as a lunatic.<sup>12</sup> Chance, as Gorgias says, removes responsibility.

Now if chance events are simply unintended events, then I may surely be both causally and morally responsible for what happens by chance. If I draw a bow at a venture and the arrow lands in your eye, you will plausibly hold me responsible for the event which I never intended; and if I affix a randomizing device to my bow, so that your transfixion is the immediate result of an uncaused event, you will again take me to task. Chance, *pace* Gorgias, does not in general exonerate. Yet clearly chance does somehow fight against responsibility. I suggest that the connexion is this: if I  $\phi$  by chance, then I am responsible for  $\phi$ ing only if I am responsible for bringing it about that I  $\phi$  by chance. If I put myself, knowingly, in a position where chance will play a part, I bear responsibility for the effects of chance. Gorgias must, I think, allow that to be true; but he can immunize his position. Let him hold that if chance and chance alone plays a part in my  $\phi$ ing, then I am in no sense responsible for  $\phi$ ing.

That force (*bia*) excludes responsibility is a corner-stone of Aristotle's theory of responsibility (*EN* 1109b35–1110b17); and it is taken as axiomatic by modern moralists: what I am forced to do, I cannot help doing; what I cannot help doing, I am not responsible for doing. The argument seems impregnable; but it is ambiguous. One philosopher has argued thus: '...if the man points a pistol at my head, I may still choose to disobey him; but this does not prevent its being true that if I do fall in with his wishes he can legitimately be said to have compelled me. And if the circumstances are such that no reasonable person would be expected to choose the other alternative, then the action that I am made to do is not one for which I am held to be morally responsible.'<sup>13</sup> Force or compulsion, on this view, is consistent with choice; so that if I am forced to  $\phi$ , I may still be causally responsible for  $\phi$ ing. But I am not morally responsible. That seems wrong to me: the bank-clerk who opens the safe at pistol-point acts, I judge, with wisdom and prudence; in ascribing such virtues to him I am praising him (in a fairly mild way); and if I praise him, I deem him liable to praise and hence I deem him morally responsible. Had he refused to give in to the gunman I should have judged him foolhardy; and that judgment again presupposes responsibility. *Bia*, then, does not remove responsibility: it will, no doubt, affect our assessment of the agent, and it may cause us to think pity a more appropriate attitude than disapprobation; but to say that is to say nothing about responsibility.

Aristotle has a different view: 'A forced act (*biaion*) is one of which the principle is external [to the subject], being such that the agent or patient contributes nothing' (*EN* 1110a1–3). That is a contrived reading of '*bia*' or 'force': we *do* say that the bank-clerk was forced to open the safe, even though he did not 'contribute nothing' to the action; and so did the Greeks (e.g. *Odyssey* XXII.351). But the contrivance is intelligible and perhaps intelligent; and we may imagine that Gorgias adopted it. Given the contrivance, *bia* certainly removes causal responsibility. But even so, it does not remove moral responsibility; for the agent may be responsible for putting himself into the situation in which he is forced. (If a captain sails in spite of gale warnings and his ship founders,

then he is responsible for the wreck even though it was brought about by *force majeure*) We can, however, come to Gorgias' aid here in the same way as before: if *bia* and *bia* alone accounts for my  $\phi$ ing, I am not responsible in either way for what I do.

I turn next to the fourth of Gorgias' arguments, leaving the third and most interesting to last. Gorgias claims that love is either 'a god, having the divine power of gods', or 'a human disease and an ignorance of the soul' (§19): in neither case is the victim of love to blame. He compares the action of love with that of fear:

Some men on seeing fearful things have actually lost their present mind at the present time: thus fear extinguishes and expels thought (465: §17).

And he offers a psychological explanation of the effects of fear:

We see, having the sight not that we wish but whatever chances; and through the sight the soul is actually moulded in its ways (466: §15).<sup>14</sup>

An easy generalization suggests itself: whenever we act from passion, we ourselves are not responsible; the object of passion strikes our senses; our senses directly move the soul; and the soul moves us. Thought (*to noêma*) is by-passed, and we are not involved essentially in the action. Gorgias does not say that the emotions always have this effect: 'many' and 'often', not 'all' and 'always', qualify his remarks in §§15–19; but where love and fear do not have these effects, thought has a place; and thought-induced acts fall to Gorgias' third argument.

Aristotle refers to the view that 'things pleasant and fine are compulsive (for they necessitate, being external)' (*EN* 1110b9–10). The view is found in Euripides: according to Jason 'Eros necessitated you [i.e. Medea] to save my body' (*Medea* 530–1); other tragic figures are 'conquered' against their will (fr. 220), for 'Aphrodite cannot be borne if she comes in force' (*Hippolytus* 443) and sometimes 'anger is stronger than my plans' (*Medea* 1079)—Aristotle will have none of that. His arguments are on the whole pretty feeble (1110b9–15, 1111a24–b3), but his final comment deserves quotation: 'Irrational passions seem nonetheless to belong to the man, so that the actions done from anger and desire are the man's; hence it is absurd to make them involuntary' (1111b1–3). Euripides, in one passage, concurs:

We know and recognize the good but do not do it—some through indolence, some preferring some other pleasure to the fine (*Hippolytus* 380–3).

What the *Medea* rhetorically ascribes to anger, the *Hippolytus* honestly attributes to the angry man: the passions through which we act 'belong to the man', they are *our* passions; and if they are ours, it is we who are responsible for actions done through them. Gorgias says that 'it was love which did all these things' (§15); but that is simply to say that it was the infatuated Helen who did them and was responsible for doing them. 'Love did it' is not incompatible with 'The lover did it'; on the contrary, the two sentences mean the same.

Aquinas develops the Aristotelian view. Actions done from fear, he says ‘are, if one considers it rightly, rather voluntary than involuntary’ (*Summa Theologiae* 1a 2ae 6.6 resp.); and ‘we should say that lust does not cause the involuntary but rather makes something voluntary; for something is called voluntary from the fact that the will is carried towards it; and by lust the will inclines to willing that which is lusted after’ (ibid. 6.7 resp.). Fear does not remove responsibility; lust only adds to it. But Aquinas allows a relaxation of his hard doctrine: ‘if lust totally removes knowledge, as happens in those who become lunatic because of lust, it follows that lust removes the voluntary’ (ibid. 6.7 *ad* 3); and the same, surely applies to those paralysed by terror. Love sometimes is ‘unbearable’; and the strength of our emotions—or the power of their inevitable physical manifestations—may close to us all paths of action but one. Sometimes emotion overpowers us; and if that is so, and if we are not responsible for getting ourselves into that unfortunate situation, then (I suppose) we are not morally responsible for our passionate actions. Sometimes, at least, lovers and cowards, Casanova and Falstaff, are not to be blamed or praised.

So far I have endeavoured to defend Gorgias: deeds done exclusively by chance, or exclusively by force, or exclusively by passion, are not to be held against their perpetrator. But a vast range of actions remains; and if Gorgias’ argument is to succeed, they must all fall under the third of his categories: persuasion. In §8, ‘the sophist now enters his temple—we reach the very marrow of the pamphlet’;<sup>15</sup> *logos*, the rhetorical sophist’s engine and delight, is ‘a great potentate (*meḡas dunastēs*)’ (§8), and if it ‘persuaded and deceived’ Helen, then evidently she bears no responsibility for her actions;

For the *logos* which persuaded, compelled the soul it persuaded both to obey what was spoken and to approve what was done (467: §12).

*Logos* is comparable to *bia* (§12);<sup>16</sup> it works on the soul as drugs work on the body (§14).

Gorgias refers to deceit, to falsehood, to persuasion; and it is customary to construe his remarks as bearing properly upon his own craft: §§8–14 argue that if Helen was deceived by a lying speech, she was not responsible for her betrayal of Menelaus. That construe gives sense to §§ 8–14, but removes all sense from the *Helen* as a whole; for it leaves open and untouched the evident possibility that Helen thought out and decided upon her betrayal by herself. The ‘persuasive *logos*’ is not just the wily speech of the professional orator, and the references to deception and falsity are inessential. *Logos* covers any ratiocination; and Gorgias means that if Helen was influenced by argument, then she was not responsible for her acts. Thus rationally explicable actions, the only type of act not embraced by §6, §7, or §§15–19, are stigmatized as irresponsible. Gorgias is utterly correct in calling *logos* a *meḡas dunastēs*; and his illustrations of the power of *logos* are apt and true. Yet how does the *logos* remove responsibility from the logical agent? To answer that question we must bring out a skeleton which has long been rattling its bones in the cupboard, the skeleton of causal determinism. Suppose that *a*  $\phi$ s, or Helen runs to Troy. Then, Gorgias assumes, there is some true proposition of the form ‘*b* brings it about that *a*  $\phi$ s’ or ‘*b* brings it about that Helen runs to Troy’. If *b* rings it about that *a*  $\phi$ s, then *b* is causally responsible for *a*’s  $\phi$ ing; and if *a* is not

causally responsible for his  $\phi$ ing then he is not morally responsible either. Now a survey of the possible springs of action yields just four types of substituent for  $x$  in ' $x$  brings it about that  $a$   $\phi$ s': chance, a constraining agent, *logos*, passion. In every case,  $a$ , the  $\phi$ er, and  $b$ , the cause of  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing, are distinct:  $b$  is causally responsible for  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing;  $b$  is distinct from  $a$ ; hence  $a$  is not causally responsible for  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing; hence  $a$  is not morally responsible. Suppose that Helen read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and was impressed by its argument: then the argument was causally responsible for Helen's flight; and Helen was guiltless.

In the cases of chance, force, and emotion it is possible to defend Gorgias' stance; I can find no defence for the case of *logos*. Moreover—and this is the important point—the general line of argument which Gorgias relies on is fatally flawed. Gorgias assumes that we can always find a cause for  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing; he argues that we can always find a cause for  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing distinct from  $a$ ; he tacitly assumes that if there is a cause of  $a$ 's  $\phi$ ing distinct from  $a$ , then  $a$  did not cause his own  $\phi$ ing; and he implies that if  $a$  is not causally responsible for his  $\phi$ ing then he is not morally responsible either. The schema is plausible; but we should not succumb to its attractions. I allow that if  $a$   $\phi$ s then for some  $x$  distinct from  $a$   $x$  brings it about that  $a$   $\phi$ s. But I deny, first, that this entails that  $a$  does not bring it about that he  $\phi$ s: if  $x$  is  $a$ 's lust, say, then if  $x$  brings it about that  $a$   $\phi$ s,  $a$  brings it about that  $a$   $\phi$ s. And further I deny that causal irresponsibility entails moral irresponsibility.

Gorgias' *paignion* fails. Yet it is a signal piece of philosophy: it introduces the problem of determinism to moral philosophy; and it anticipates, *in nuce*, many of the bad arguments subsequently advanced with such force and at such length by the passionate opponents of human freedom.

#### (d) Democritean ethics

Of the three hundred surviving fragments of Democritus, some 220 are given to ethical matters.<sup>17</sup> Such an unparalleled treasury raises high hopes: we may surely expect to discover a systematic moral philosophy in Democritus; and to discern a close connexion between his moral and his physical philosophies. Both hopes will be dashed; yet it is worth briefly conning the fragments in order to see why and to what extent that is so. I begin with the quest for an ethical system.

If anyone attends intelligently to these maxims (*grômai*) of mine, he will do many things worthy of a good man and he will leave undone many bad things (468:68 B 35).

The key word is '*gnômê*': the vast majority of Democritus' ethical fragments are maxims, brief and pithy sayings of an exhortatory and moralistic nature:

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

It is fine to prevent a wrongdoer; if not, not to do wrong with him (**469: B 38**).

One should either be or imitate a good man (**470: B 39**).

Some of the maxims are, as it were, potentially interesting: thus Democritus stresses the moral importance of the will:

It is not refraining from wrong-doing, but not even wishing it that is good (**471: B 62**; cf. **B 68, B 89, B 96**);

and he anticipates a doctrine of the ‘mean’:

In everything the equal is fine: excess and deficiency do not seem so to me (**472: B 102**; cf. **B 233**).

And he sometimes shows a flash of wit:

To speak sparingly is an adornment for a woman; and sparingness in adornment is a fine thing (**473: B 274**).

Most of the *gnômai* are trite,<sup>18</sup> but some reveal an idiosyncratic judgment: Democritus dislikes sex (**B 32**) and would not indulge in procreation (**B 275**: cf. Antiphon, **87 B 49**). His political pronouncements, whether or not they reveal a democratic inclination,<sup>19</sup> show him a severe and uncompromising judge; e.g., **B 260**:

Anyone who kills any cutpurse or pirate, whether by his own hand, by ordering it or by voting for it, let him be free of penalty (**474**).

In his collection of *gnômai* we may perhaps discern a consistent outlook, but we shall look in vain for a systematic ethics.

Many live in accordance with *logos* although they have not learned *logos* (**475:853**).

Perhaps the *gnômai* are guides for the many, and a *logos*, or systematic account, was provided for the intellectual few?<sup>20</sup> Democritus did set up a *telos* or ‘end’ of life, a goal for human striving:

The Abderites too teach that there is an end; Democritus, in his book on the end, makes it *euthumia* which he also called *euestô*. And he often adds: ‘For pleasure and lack of pleasure is the boundary’ (**476: Clement, B4**).

The word ‘*telos*’, though the doxographers repeat it (Diogenes Laertius IX.45=A **1**; Epiphanius, **A 166**), is probably not Democritean; but the notion is, as **B 189** shows.

Democritus gave his *telos* various names: it is *euthumia* and *euestô*; *athambia* (Cicero, **A 169**; cf. **B 215**, **B 216**) or *athaumastia* (Strabo, **A 168**) or *ataraxia* (Stobaeus, **A 167**); *harmonia* or *summetria* (Stobaeus, **A 167**); *eudaimonia* (Stobaeus, **A 167**). *Euthumia* ('good heartedness') and *euestô* ('well-being') give nothing away. *Athambia* and *athaumastia* ('lack of wonderment') and *ataraxia* ('tranquillity') indicate an Epicurean penchant for the quiet life, undisturbed either by the startings and starings of superstition or by the jolts and jostlings of practical activity. And *summetria* and *harmonia* point in the same direction:

[He says that] *euthumia* is the end, not being the same as pleasure (as some wrongly interpret it) but a state in which the soul lives calmly and in a stable fashion, not disturbed by fear or superstition or any other passion (**477**: Diogenes Laertius, IX.45=A 1).

The state is achieved by not engaging in much business, either private or public, and by not trying to exceed one's capacities (**B 3**); it depends on one's mental and psychological state and 'does not live in cattle or in gold' (**B 171**; cf. **B 170**); to reach it you 'must not take your pleasures in mortal things' (**B 189**). Above all, you must practise moderation (**B 191**).

All that is very dull and depressing; but we may find a little more joy in the suggestion that 'pleasure and lack of pleasure is the boundary' (**476**); or rather, that

Pleasure and lack of pleasure is the boundary of the advantageous and the disadvantageous (**478**: **B 188**).

For we should

Deem nothing pleasant unless it is advantageous (**479**: **B 74**),<sup>21</sup>

If pleasure as such is advantageous—indeed the only advantageous thing—it does not follow that we should recklessly pursue all pleasures:

Inopportune pleasures produce displeasures (**480**: **B 71**),

and some pleasures produce wretchedness (*kakotês*: **B 178**). Bodily pleasures in particular are followed by 'many pains' (**B 235**), and we should become masters of sexual pleasure and not be slaves to women (**B 214**). Well-being depends on a wise discrimination among pleasures (Stobaeus, **A 167**). Observe moderation in joy (**B 191**), for

Temperance increases the enjoyable and makes pleasure greater (**481**: **B 211**).

Great joys come from contemplating fine works (**482**: **B 194**: noble deeds? or beautiful works of art?).

It follows that:

One should choose not every pleasure but that which has the fine as its object (**483: B207**).

And we should find our pleasures not in ‘mortal things’ (**B 189**) but rather in the joys of the mind (**B 146**).

A life without festivity is a long road without an inn (**484: B 230**),

but Democritean festivity will be a fairly sober and earnestly intellectual business, a symposium rather than a pub-crawl.

All that amounts, I suppose, to a moderately coherent plan of life; and we may, if we wish, call it a practical system. Lovers of anachronism (among whom I happily enrol myself) may begin to think of a Benthamite Utilitarianism: if he did not invent and advocate a felicific calculus, at least Democritus prepared the way for one, and Bentham’s great moral system was adumbrated at Abdera. But that suggestion is wholly mistaken: Democritus’ hedonism has nothing at all to do with morality; it does not pretend to tell us what, morally speaking, we ought to do, or how to live the moral life. It is a recipe for happiness or contentment, not a prescription for goodness: the system sets up a selfish end for the individual and counsels him on how to attain it; it does not set up a moral goal and offer advice on its achievement. If Democritus’ *gnômai* offer an unsystematic set of moral maxims, his reflexions on *euesto* offer no moral speculations at all; instead, they offer a systematic theory of prudence.

There is nothing particularly objectionable in presenting a recipe for personal well-being: there is no reason why all practical advice should be moral advice. Yet I confess that I find Democritus’ recipe, like that of Epicurus after him, peculiarly unappetizing. Calm and placidity are tedious virtues; moderation in all things leads to a confoundedly dull life. I do not hate the Persian apparatus; and *nil admirari* is a prescription for *ennui*. We can hardly take Democritus seriously.

So much for the homiletic side of Democritean ‘ethics’; I do not care for it. What, next, of the other great question? How does Democritus the practical philosopher fit with Democritus the physicist? Scholars are radically divided:<sup>22</sup> some see a coherent and self-conscious unity in Democritus’ work; some discern only a loose compatibility; others detect downright inconsistencies. A brief and negative survey must suffice.

Of the systematists, some interpret the practical *telos* of *euestô* in an Aristotelian vein as the ‘theoretical’ or philosophical life; they then pronounce Democritus the natural philosopher to be the living embodiment of Abderite ethics. At best that is a very weak way of interlocking practical and theoretical philosophy; and in any case the evidence for taking *euestô* to consist in ‘theorizing’ is tenuous. Others point out that *euestô*, being a state of the soul, must be determined by some arrangement of its atomic constituents. That is no doubt true; but there is no reason to think that Democritus the scientist speculated about the precise nature and cause of *euestô*, nor, again, would such speculations constitute much of a connexion between ethics and physics. Others, finally, turn from atomism to anthropology: Democritus, they say, tried to ground morals on nature or *phusis*; in particular, certain features of animal behaviour, by revealing what

*phusis* really is, point a moral for men. (Camels do not copulate in public: neither, then should we.)<sup>23</sup> Again, the evidence that Democritus offered any such view is nugatory; nor would it unite, in any significant way, his natural and his practical philosophy.

A different sort of connexion has been sought between ethics and physics: there seems to be a parallelism, of which Democritus was conscious (cf. **B 69**),<sup>24</sup> between the role of pleasure in ethics and the role of perception in physics. In ethics the unreflecting man goes all out for immediate pleasure; in physics he believes his senses. In ethics, reason replaces pleasure while yet relying indirectly upon it; in physics, reason replaces perception while yet relying indirectly upon it. I find it hard to care much about that: the parallelism between ethics and physics is not as neat as my brief sentences suggest; and in any case the parallelism hardly amounts to a systematic connexion between physics and ethics.

Democritus' practical philosophy has no metaphysical or physical basis. Nor should we really expect it to have one. For what, after all, would a physical basis for ethics look like? Ethics and physics, so far as I can see, have no systematic interconnexion at all; in many boring little ways a man's natural philosophy will rub off on his moralizing, but no general or systematic influence is even conceivable. The long scholarly discussion of the possible 'materialistic foundation' of Democritus' ethics is empty: it follows a will-o'-the-wisp.

Physics and ethics can, however, be inconsistent; and many scholars find an inconsistency at least potentially present in Democritus: physically, Democritus is a thorough-going determinist (above, pp. 323–6); yet 'his moral precepts are given on the assumption that man is free to act as he will'.<sup>25</sup> Epicurus was acutely conscious of the dilemma:

If someone makes use of the theory of Democritus, saying that there is no free movement in the atoms because of their collisions with one another, whence it is clear that everything is moved necessarily, we shall say to him: Do you not know, who ever you are, that there *is* a kind of free movement in the atoms which Democritus did not discover but which Epicurus brought to light, being an inherent swerve as he proves from the phenomena? The most important point is this, that if destiny is believed in, all advice and rebuke is done away with (**485**: Diogenes of Oenoanda, fr. 32 Ch.=**68 A 50**).

There is no trace of the scandalous swerve in Democritus: 'by the time of Democritus this great question was apparently not even simmering and he proceeds to lay down his directions for the moral life with a simple *naïveté*, unconscious of the problem which he himself had raised by his insistence on the supremacy of "necessity" in the physical world'.<sup>26</sup>

But by Democritus' time the 'great question' *was* simmering: the briefest reflexion upon Heraclitus' philosophy would suggest it, and we know that Democritus was a student of Heraclitus; Gorgias had raised it explicitly in his *Helen*; and it was implicit in many of the problems canvassed on the Euripidean stage. Yet no fragment and no doxographical report indicates any discussion of the question by Democritus. He may have held that the emission of moral precepts does not require a 'free will'; he may,

alternatively, have held that determinism and free will are compatible. Both views have, after all, been defended by eminent thinkers. But had Democritus sketched any such view, we should surely hear of it; and I incline to the sombre conclusion that physics and ethics were so successfully compartmentalized in Democritus' capacious mind that he never attended to the large issues which their cohabitation produces.