

Abstract: In this paper I argue that Protagoras' method of poetic interpretation was technical, dialectical, and constructive. A re-examination of the evidence for his work on the *Iliad* shows that he used technical tools of criticism to build constructive interpretations, as we should expect from the ideas about the educational role of poetry ascribed to him in Plato's *Protagoras*. I argue that we can supplement the direct evidence for the technical tools available to Protagoras by comparing the Platonic parody of his method in *Protagoras* 339-41 and Aristophanes' reworking of sophistic hermeneutics in the battle of the prologues in *Frogs* 1126-96. These results point to a positive interpretation of Protagorean hermeneutics, even if its precise form remains beyond our grasp.

Technical tools in the *Protagoras*

Problem:	the poem contains a contradiction between lines 1 and 13: <i>either it is hard to be good or it is not hard to be good</i>	[structural problem]
Solution 1:	line 1 refers to <i>becoming</i> good while line 13 to <i>being</i> good <i>it is hard to become but easy to remain good</i>	[disambiguation]
Objections:	it isn't easy to remain good the next lines of the poem contradict solution 1	[ethical objection] [artistic objection]
Solution 2:	line 1 takes 'hard' as 'difficult' while line 13 as 'bad' <i>Pittacus is represented as saying it's bad to be good</i>	[dialectal ambiguity]
Objections:	he isn't represented as saying that it's bad to be good if he were the next line would give that good to gods	[linguistic objection] [ethical objection]

Technical tools in the *Frogs*

Case 1:

Euripides:	paternal = Agamemnon's	κράτη = defeat:	<i>Hermes overlooks Ag.'s murder</i>
Aeschylus:	paternal = Zeus's	κράτη = power:	<i>Hermes oversees Z.'s power below</i>
Garvie:	paternal = Agamemnon's	κράτη = power:	<i>Hermes oversees Ag.'s power below</i>

Case 2:

Euripides:	come back = return	[artistic objection]
Aeschylus:	come back ≠ return — exiles 'return'	[linguistic counter]
Euripides:	— exiles 'return' if legally authorized	[factual objection]

Case 3:

Euripides:	Oedipus was happy (i.e. fortunate) but became <i>wretched</i>	
Aeschylus:	Oedipus was never <i>fortunate</i> — so there was no reversal	[structural problem]
[Euripides:	Oedipus was at one time <i>happy</i> (i.e. fortunate) but later <i>wretched</i>]	[syntactic ambiguity]
[Aeschylus:	Oedipus was never <i>happy</i> (blessed), even when he was lucky]	[disambiguation]

Minimal Bibliography

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Simonides *To Skopas*

ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν μὲν³ ἀλαθῶς⁴ γενέσθαι¹ (1)
χαλεπὸν² χερσίν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόωι
τετράγωνον ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον·

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οὐδέ μοι ἐμμελέως τὸ Πιττάκειον (11)
νέμεται, καίτοι σοφοῦ παρὰ φωτὸς εἰ-
ρημένον· χαλεπὸν φάτ' ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι.⁵
θεὸς ἂν μόνος τοῦτ' ἔχοι γέρας, **ἄνδρα**⁶ δ' οὐκ ἔστι
μὴ οὐ κακὸν ἔμμεναι, (15)
ὄν **ἀμήχανος**⁷ συμφορὰ καθέληι·

πράξας γὰρ εὖ⁸ πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός,
κακὸς δ' εἰ **κακῶς**⁹...
[ἐπὶ πλεῖστον δὲ καὶ **ἄριστοι**¹⁰ εἰσιν
οὓς ἂν οἱ θεοὶ φιλῶσιν.] (20)

τοῦνεκεν οὐ ποτ' ἐγὼ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι
δυνατὸν διζήμιενος κενεὰν ἐς ἄ-
πρακτον ἐλπίδα μοῖραν αἰῶνος βαλέω,
πανάμωμον ἄνθρωπον, εὐρυεδέος ὅσοι
καρπὸν αἰνύμεθα χθονός· (25)
ἐπὶ δ' ὑμῖν εὐρῶν ἀπαγγελέω.
πάντας δ' **ἐπαίνημι**¹⁴ καὶ φιλέω,
ἐκῶν¹¹ ὅστις ἔρδηι
μηδὲν αἰσχρόν· **ἀνάγκαι**¹²
δ' οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται. (30)

...
...

[οὐκ εἰμί φιλόψογος, ἐπεὶ ἔμοιγε ἐζαρκεῖ
ὄς ἂν μὴ κακὸς ἦι] μηδ' ἄγαν ἀπάλαμνος εἰ-
δώς γ' ὄνησίπολιν δίκαν, (35)
ὕγιης ἀνήρ· οὐ ἴμην' ἐγὼ
μωμήσομαι· τῶν γὰρ ἠλιθίων
ἀπείρων γενέθλα.
πάντα **τοι καλὰ**¹³,
τοῖσιν τ' αἰσχρὰ μὴ μέμεικται. (40)

*Ed. by D. Page 1962 (PMG 542)
Lineation acc. Page.*

a. For a man it's hard truly to become good (1)
—perfect in hands, feet, and mind,
built without a single flaw;

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...
...
...
...
...

b. But for me that saying of Pittacus doesn't (11)
ring true (even though he was a smart man): he says
“it is hard to be noble”;
only a god can have that prize; but a man, (14)
there's no way he can help being bad when some
incapacitating misfortune takes him down.

c. Any man's good when he's doing well in life,
bad when he's doing badly...
[and the best of us
are those the gods love most.] (20)

d. So I'm not going to throw away my dole of life on
a vain, empty hope, searching for something there
cannot be, a completely blameless man—at least not
among us mortals who win our bread from the broad
earth. (25)
(If I do find one, I'll be sure to let you know.)
So long as he does
nothing shameful willingly I give
my praise and love to any man.
Not even the gods fight necessity. (30)

...
...

e. [I'm not a blame-lover, since for me, a man's good
enough as long as he's not bad] or too helpless, and
has the sense of right that does cities good; a solid
guy. I won't find fault (36)
with a man like that. After all, isn't there
a limitless supply of fools?
The way I see it, all's fair
if there's no shame in it. (40)

*Trans. Beresford 2008 (arr. & rev. by Brittain).
Sections a-e are divided by sense, not meter*