

PLATO, *PROTAGORAS* 319a10- b1

ἐγὼ γὰρ τοῦτο, ὦ Πρωταγόρα, οὐκ ᾤμην διδακτὸν εἶναι, σοὶ δὲ λέγοντι οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως [ἄν] ἀπιστῶ.

“Denn ich war nicht der Auffassung, Protagoras, daß das lehrbar sei. Wenn du es aber sagst, sehe ich nicht, wie ich dir nicht glauben soll.”

The text is that of John Burnet’s Oxford edition; the translation is Bernd Manuwald’s<sup>1</sup>. The deletion of ἄν is due to Heindorf, who recognized that ὅπως ἄν followed by the subjunctive is found only in final clauses and that the subjunctive here is deliberative<sup>2</sup>. Heindorf is undoubtedly correct, for which reason (among others) all subsequent editors have followed him. There is still a difficulty, however, with the text as emended. The logical implication of “I didn’t think X, but now that you say that X is the case there is no way I can disbelieve you” is “I now think that X is the case”. But in the very next sentence the speaker, Socrates, offers to explain why he does not now think that X is the case: ὅθεν δὲ αὐτὸ ἡγοῦμαι [n.b.] οὐ διδακτὸν εἶναι μηδ’ ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων παρασκευαστὸν ἀνθρώποις, δίκαιός εἰμι εἰπεῖν. He goes on to argue (319b-320b), first, that the practice of the Athenians, who are widely reputed to be especially wise, shows that they do not believe that *arete* can be taught and, second, that prominent individual Athenians have not in fact managed to teach their own sons the *arete* that they themselves possess. Socrates concludes his speech by reiterating his conviction that *arete* is not teachable (οὐχ ἡγοῦμαι [n.b.] διδακτὸν εἶναι ἀρετήν, 320b4-5), but at the same time noting, as he did at the start of his speech, that he finds it difficult to reject the wisdom and authority of Protagoras, who holds that it is indeed teachable. Socrates therefore invites his interlocutor to demonstrate (ἐπιδείξαι... ἐπίδειξον, 320b8-c1) the teachability of *arete*, an invitation that Protagoras gladly accepts (ἐπιδείξω, 320c3). It is only after the sophist’s lengthy exposition that Socrates finally

<sup>1</sup> Burnet 1903; Manuwald 1999, 24. Likewise Hubbard-Karnofsky 1984, 14 (“I didn’t think that this was something which could be taught. But now that you say it is, I don’t know what to do but take your word for it”) and Guthrie 1956, 50 (“The fact is, I did not think this was something that could be taught, though when you say otherwise I cannot doubt your word”). I should like to thank my colleagues Kirk Sanders and Marina Terkourafi for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Heindorf 1810, 497, comparing *Men.* 91d2 οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως σοὶ πιστεύσω and *Euthphr.* 11b6-7 οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε ὅπως σοὶ εἶπω, cf. also *Lg.* 696d7 οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως εἶπω, *Hp. mi.* 376b7 οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως σοὶ συγχωρήσω, *Euthd.* 307a1-2 οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως προτρέπω, *Phd.* 107a8-9 οὐδ’ αὐτὸς ἔχω ἔτι ὅπη ἀπιστῶ, *Phdr.* 241a7-b1 οὐθ’ ὅπως... ἐμπεδώσει ἔχει, *R.* 368b4 οὔτε γὰρ ὅπως βοηθῶ ἔχω. For this manner of expressing the impossibility of disbelief or noncompliance, see *PV* 640 οὐκ οἶδ’ ὅπως ὑμῖν ἀπιστήσαι με χρή, *Thuc.* 1.91.1 οὐκ εἶχον ὅπως χρή ἀπιστήσαι, *Soph. Phil.* 1350 πῶς ἀπιστήσω λόγοις;

professes (328e1-3) to be satisfied that he was mistaken in thinking that *arete* could not be taught: ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐν μὲν τῷ ἔμπροσθεν χρόνῳ ἠγούμην [n.b.] οὐκ εἶναι ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπιμέλειαν ἢ ἀγαθοὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ γίνονται· νῦν δὲ πέπεισμαι.

The context, then, shows that Socrates cannot at 319a10 say that he did not think (οὐκ ᾔμην) that *arete* could be taught. There are two circumstances in which one can say “I did not think X”, neither of which is the case here: when one no longer thinks X, as at 328e1-3, or when one’s present view of the validity of X is no longer relevant. The former circumstance is illustrated, for example, at *Apology* 36a4, where Socrates says that he did not think (οὐ γὰρ ᾔόμην) that the vote to condemn him would be as close as it turned out in fact to be. Similarly, at *Gorgias* 499c2-4 Socrates tells Callicles that he did not think at the start of the conversation (οὐκ ᾔμην γε κατ’ ἀρχάς) that he would be subjected to deliberate deception, but now he sees that he was mistaken (νῦν δὲ ἐψεύσθην). Likewise, at *Gorgias* 497c4 Socrates congratulates Callicles on having been initiated into the greater mysteries before having been initiated into the lesser, something that he had not thought was permissible (οὐκ ᾔμην θεμιτὸν εἶναι). The “mysteries” in question are metaphorical, but that has no bearing on the logic or the grammar of the passage. The other circumstance in which one can say “I did not think X”, namely when the speaker’s current views regarding X are no longer pertinent, is illustrated by a passage in the *Seventh Letter*. At 347e4-5 the author of the letter explains that he stopped discussing Dion’s affairs with Dionysius because he no longer thought there was anything to be gained by doing so (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔτι πλεόν ᾔμην ποιεῖν). The verb is imperfect indicative not because the writer has now changed his mind about the advisability of conducting conversations with Dionysius, but merely to explain the frame of mind that caused him to act as he did at the time.

There are, then, two problems with the text of *Protagoras* 319a10-b1 as transmitted in our manuscripts: the logic of οὐκ ᾔμην is at odds with the context and the word ἄν has intruded into a construction in which it does not belong<sup>3</sup>. It is, however, always a useful principle that two problems are better than one. For a consideration of the one might provide a solution to both. And such, I believe, is the case here. I suggest that Socrates said οὐκ ἄν ᾔμην διδασκτὸν εἶναι, σοὶ δὲ λέγοντι οὐκ ἔχω ὅπως ἀπιστῶ, “I should

<sup>3</sup> Nor is it immediately apparent what the cause of the intrusion might have been. Manuwald (1999, 158) alone among commentators suggests an explanation, namely that ἄν may have been inserted “wegen des kurz zuvor gebrauchten ὅπως... ἄν (319a1 f.)”. But that was ten lines earlier and involved ἄν with the optative (twice).

not have thought that it was teachable, but I do not know how I can doubt you when you say that it is”. That is, ἄν has been displaced from the one place in the sentence where it makes good sense to another, where it is ungrammatical. The particle ἄν is very frequently omitted in one or more of the manuscripts of Plato<sup>4</sup>. What would seem to have happened, then, is that ἄν was accidentally omitted from the ancestor of our manuscripts and then added later, perhaps in the margin. Subsequently, it was unthinkingly inserted in an adjacent line, ὅπως ἄν being so common a combination that the scribe was tempted to believe that this was where it belonged. If Burnet’s text of *Republic* 352e-353a represents accurately what Plato intended, something exactly comparable seems to have occurred there: at 352e9 all manuscripts read ἄν, which Burnet deletes, following a suggestion by James Adam; at 353a1 manuscripts ADM omit the ἄν which is preserved only by Stobaeus and manuscript F. That is, manuscripts ADM preserve the particle in a place that is separated from the place where, according to Burnet, it belongs by a distance of 42 letters. If my proposal regarding *Protagoras* 319a10-b1 is correct, the distance is 39 letters. This would be consistent with A. C. Clark’s suggestions that the ancestors of the main manuscripts of *Protagoras*, BTW, had between 35 and 50 letters per line<sup>5</sup>.

The sentence now conveys, what the context requires, that Socrates claims to be confronted with a dilemma, namely his difficulty in reconciling his conviction that *arete* cannot be taught with his respect for the wisdom of Protagoras, who holds that it can be taught. In the same way I might humor a colleague who sought to convince me that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was a modern forgery by saying, “I shouldn’t have thought it possible that it could be the product of fraud, but I don’t know how I can doubt so eminent a scholar as yourself”. I might then, like Socrates, go on to explain why I do not, in fact, believe that the hymn was fabricated in the modern era.

The construction that is here proposed finds an exact parallel, not with οἶμαι but with δοκεῖ, at the start of Pericles’ funeral oration (Thuc. 2.35.1): ἐμοὶ δὲ ἀρκούν ἄν ἐδόκει εἶναι ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ἔργῳ γενομένων ἔργῳ

<sup>4</sup> In Burnet’s text I find the following instances: *Euthphr.* 13d9, *Cri.* 53c8, *Phd.* 93a8, 93b1, *Prm.* 160a1, *Smp.* 221e3, *Phdr.* 232c2, 239b8, *Alc.* I 134e8, *Alc.* II 143b2, *La.* 187e10, *Men.* 89b4, 97c9, 100b3, *Hp. Ma.* 290e9, 295a5, *R.* 352c3, 353a1, 386c1, 457d9, 586c8. I do not record the many cases where one or more editors have inserted the word, under the conviction that it has been omitted from all the manuscripts.

<sup>5</sup> Clark 1918: the ancestor of B had between 40 and 50 letters per line (402), of T about 35 per line (411-13), of W about 43 per line (417). Similarly, according to Boter 1989, 92, an ancestor of manuscript D (which does not contain *Prot.*) “had about 45 letters per line”; compare the omission of 42 letters, not readily attributable to corruption arising from *saut du même au même*, that Boter (94) notes at *R.* 335c9-12.

καὶ δηλοῦσθαι τὰς τιμάς, “I should have thought it sufficient, in the case of men who demonstrated their valor in deed, to pay them public tribute in deed as well”, that is, “I should not have thought it necessary to supplement public action with public speaking”. Pericles does not want to say, particularly in the course of delivering a funeral oration, that he considers the practice of delivering funeral orations a bad idea, although that is precisely what his words convey.<sup>6</sup> His proem indulges in a variety of standard rhetorical strategies. One is that the magnitude of the accomplishments to be memorialized is beyond the capacity of mere words to convey. Another is the way in which a speaker surreptitiously enhances appreciation for his rhetorical skill by affecting to minimize either his experience or his suitability for the task or, as here, his conviction that the speech is even necessary: the hearer is invited to imagine what a magnificent oration the speaker could have produced under ideal circumstances, given how skillfully he has managed at present. So here, Pericles devotes the opening paragraph of his speech to an enumeration of the reasons he appears reluctant to speak<sup>7</sup>, concluding his introductory remarks by saying that, since the practice of delivering a funeral oration is approved by longstanding custom, he is obliged to adhere to custom and make an attempt (χρῆ καὶ ἐμὲ ἐπόμενον τῷ νόμῳ πειρᾶσθαι..., 2.35.3). Pericles thus expresses his criticism of age-old tradition, suggesting reasons for his belief that the custom is superfluous, in the same way that Socrates, at *Protagoras* 319a10-b1, cautiously challenges a distinguished visitor’s firmly held conviction that *arete* can be taught.

This use of a secondary tense of the indicative with ἄν is generally designated “past potential”<sup>8</sup>. It is especially common with verbs of thinking or perceiving, in which connection Schwyzer describes it as “formelhaft”<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, Plutarch cites τὸ “οὐκ ἄν ᾄμην” (*De tranquill. an.* 474e) as one of the stereotypical expressions that the man who is fully prepared for the vicissitudes of fortune can dispense with. Still, the status of this past potential construction has, with some justification, been questioned, and it

<sup>6</sup> Rhodes (1988, 218) notes, “here Pericles is made to carry awareness of the difficulty [of the speaker’s task] to the point of doubting the desirability of the custom”. Marchant (1891, *ad loc.*) comments: “*censeam*, often instead of *censeo*, as a polite expression ‘I am inclined to think’; if I had to settle the matter I should hold”; cf. Classen-Steup’s explanatory εἰ ἐμοὶ μόνῳ κρίνειν ἐξῆν (1914, *ad loc.*).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the topoi involved, see especially Krischer 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Rusten 1989, 140 (*ad Thuc.* 2.35.1), referring to Smyth 1956, §1784 and Kühner-Gerth I 212 and comparing 2.49.5 ἠδιστα τε ἄν ἐξ ὑδάω ψυχρὸν σφᾶς αὐτοὺς ῥίπτειν, where the present infinitive represents an imperfect indicative (but this type is better analyzed as iterative; see Wakker 2006, 169).

<sup>9</sup> Schwyzer 1950, 347.

will be worth while to discuss it briefly here. To begin with, the other expressions that Plutarch cites, as parallel to οὐκ ἄν ᾤμην, are indicative expressions with no modal particle (τὸ “ἄλλ’ ἤλπισον” καὶ τὸ “ταῦτ’ οὐ προσεδόκων”), that is, leaving open the possibility that the particle in οὐκ ἄν ᾤμην relates not to the verb next to which it appears but to the infinitive to be supplied<sup>10</sup>. And a great many of the instances of “past potential” indicatives with ἄν cited in the grammars involve verbs whose subject is either indefinite τις or a generalized second-person singular, corresponding to Latin *videres*, *putares* or the like. In the most careful and thorough examination of this phenomenon, Gerry Wakker has concluded that, “in fact, only stereotyped cases such as ᾤετο ἄν τις (‘one might have thought’) are possibly real past potentials”, while those instances usually described as past potentials “can in virtually all cases also be interpreted as a counterfactual”<sup>11</sup>. Wakker’s analysis of the situation is convincing, but she leaves one issue unresolved, namely the matter of why a speaker or writer might choose to employ a construction of this type. For there is a certain illogicality in representing as contrary-to-fact something that one regards as being in fact the case. As we have seen, Edgar Marchant provided a counterfactual interpretation of Thucydides 2.35.1 (above, n. 6), in effect having Pericles say, “If I had to settle the matter I should judge the practice of delivering funeral orations to be superfluous”. But the matter is not for Pericles to settle, and Pericles’ subsequent words make it clear that he is leaving open the possibility that he did not, and perhaps still does not, regard the practice of delivering funeral orations a necessary element in the honoring of those who died honorably in battle. Why, then, does he express himself in such a way that he might be interpreted as saying, “If I had to settle the matter, I should believe X”, one possible implication of which is, “Since I am in no position to settle the matter, I do not believe X”?

There is a similar use of an imperfect indicative with ἄν in a fragment of Cratinus’ *Boukoloi* (fr. 17 K.-A.), the entire text of which reads as follows:

ὃς οὐκ ἔδωκ’ αἰτοῦντι Σοφοκλέει χορόν,  
τῷ Κλεομάχου δ’, ὃν οὐκ ἄν ἠξίουεν ἐγώ  
ἐμοὶ διδάσκειν οὐδ’ ἄν εἰς Ἀδώνια.

<sup>10</sup> For other instances of this first-person expression with the dependent infinitive left to be expressed, see *E. Alc.* 1088, *Men. Epit.* 369, *PCG Adesp.* 1017.18 K.-A., *Polyb.* 10.32.12; for third-person τις ἄν ᾤετο, *X. An.* 1.5.8, *HG* 5.3.20. For the tendency of ἄν to gravitate toward second position in its clause, see the copious documentation in Wackernagel 1955, 62–70.

<sup>11</sup> Wakker 1994, 166; see also Wakker 2006. A similar conclusion is reached by Pearson (1903, 201–202, *ad E. Hel.* 587, approving the conjecture ἄμ’ for the transmitted ἄν). Neither Wakker nor Pearson refers to *Thuc.* 2.35.1.

“who did not grant a chorus to Sophocles when he applied, but granted one to the son of Cleomachus<sup>12</sup>, whom I shouldn’t have thought worthy of producing a play for me, even at the Adonia.”

There can be no question of the (repeated) modal particle going with the infinitive διδάσκειν rather than with the imperfect indicative ἤξιουν, as that construction with ἄξιω is not found<sup>13</sup>. It is not entirely clear how to take ἐμοὶ διδάσκειν in the last line. Douglas Olson (2007, 177) translates, “to serve as my διδάσκαλος, my trainer,” but goes on to note, “but the term is routinely used of the poet..., whether he trained the chorus himself or not”. One could interpret the lines as a counterfactual statement by taking ἐμοί to mean, “if I were archon”. The implication, then, might be, “But I am not (or “was not”) archon, therefore it is not (or “was not”) the case that I think Gnesippus unworthy<sup>14</sup>. But it is clear that the speaker thinks Gnesippus unworthy of having his plays performed at the Adonia, not to mention at the Dionysia.

Another passage from fifth-century drama tells a similar story. In Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris*, Iphigeneia expresses her unwillingness to believe that Artemis, the goddess who refuses to accept sacrifices from those who are polluted by contact with murder or childbirth, herself demands human sacrifice (380-384). The priestess of Artemis continues (385-386): οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὅπως ἔτεκεν ἂν ἡ Διὸς δάμαρ / Λητώ τοσαύτην ἀμαθίαν, “There is no way Zeus’ consort Leto would have bred such a monstrous inconsistency”. Pearson (1903, 202) considers the text corrupt and believes that Porson’s ἔτικτεν should be read in place of ἔτεκεν ἂν. As far as I am aware, however, every editor in the last hundred years has retained ἂν. Pearson objects to the supposed past potential, but here too it is possible to interpret the lines as implicitly counterfactual, presupposing a proposition of the form, “If X had been the case, Leto would surely not have bred such a monstrous inconsistency,” one possible implication of which would be, “But X was not

<sup>12</sup> I.e. the tragic poet Gnesippus; cf. fr. 276 K.-A. The reading Κλεομάχου is Dobree’s correction of Κλεομάχῳ, the reading of the manuscript of Athenaeus.

<sup>13</sup> For the repeated ἂν, which “is especially frequent in the quasi-spoken language of the fifth century, i.e. tragedy and Old Comedy” (Slings 1992, 102), compare Anaxagoras fr. 6.5-6 D.-K. οὐκ ἂν δύναίτο χωρισθῆναι, οὐδ’ ἂν ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ γενέσθαι, S. *El.* 697 δύναίτ’ ἂν οὐδ’ ἂν ἰσχύον φυγεῖν, Eurpolis fr. 219.1 K.-A. οὐς δ’ οὐκ ἂν εἴλεσθ’ οὐδ’ ἂν οἰνόπτας πρὸ τοῦ, Ar. *Nu.* 118 = 1250 οὐκ ἂν ἀποδοίην οὐδ’ ἂν ὀβολὸν οὐδενί, 425 οὐδ’ ἂν διαλεχθείην γ’ ἀτεχνῶς τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐδ’ ἂν ἀπαντῶν, Pax 1223 οὐκ ἂν πριαίμην οὐδ’ ἂν ἰσχάδος μίᾳς.

<sup>14</sup> Counterfactual conditions with an imperfect indicative can have either present or past reference (Wakker 1994, 146-150).

the case, and so Leto *did* give birth to so great an inconsistency”<sup>15</sup>. But in the immediately following lines (386-390) Iphigeneia says in no uncertain terms that she believes that the mortal inhabitants of the region have attributed their own moral failings to the goddess. In other words, she is convinced that Leto did not give birth to so great an inconsistency.

What the passages we have been discussing have in common is that they all represent disagreements with or criticisms of authorities: ancestral Athenian custom (Thuc. 2.35.1), the eponymous archon of Athens (Cratinus fr. 17 K.-A.), Tauric ritual practices carried out in the name of the goddess Artemis (E. *IT* 385-86) and the distinguished visiting sophist Protagoras (Pl. *Prt.* 319a10-b1). In each instance, the disagreement would have taken the form, if expressed bluntly and directly, of a statement containing or implying a negative: “funeral orations are not necessary”, “Gnesippus is not worthy”, “Artemis does not require human sacrifice”, “*arete* is not teachable”. But in each instance the speaker employs a similar array of politeness strategies to serve as a pragmatic hedge, in order to soften the criticism, thereby reducing the potential threat to the “face” of the addressee<sup>16</sup>. One of those strategies is known as “Neg-Raising”, or the application of a negative to a matrix verb rather than to a subordinate verb, with which it seems more logically to belong, as in “I don’t think your reasoning is valid” as opposed to “I think your reasoning is not valid”<sup>17</sup>. Another such strategy, seen in Pl. *Prt.* 319a10-b1 if my proposed reading is correct, is the use of a past-tense indicative verb accompanied by the modal particle ὄν, a construction normally used to express a counterfactual condition referring either to the past or the present. This is one of the many attested strategies, found in several languages, for minimizing the potential threat to the “face” of an addressee, strategies which include the use of modal verbal expressions, hypotheticals or counterfactuals<sup>18</sup>. And that would seem to be the case with the instances we have been considering. While they are not fully expressed

<sup>15</sup> It might appear that the “emphatic periphrastic negation” (Mastrorarde 2002, 199, *ad E. Med.* 171) οὐκ ἔσθ’ ὄπως is incompatible with the uncertainty or indefiniteness of a conditional or potential expression, but the locution is elsewhere found in such circumstances: Ar. *Av.* 628, V. 212, Pl. *Euthphr.* 15d4-5, *La.* 184c2-3, *Smp.* 223a3-4, Isoc. 11.5, 12.156, 250, 269, 15.206.

<sup>16</sup> Marchant (above, note 6) long ago invoked politeness in connection with Thuc. 2.35.1. Since that time, considerable attention has been paid to politeness strategies in discourse, the standard work on politeness theory being Brown-Levinson 1987. See Lloyd 2006 for a terse and lucid statement of the basics of the theory and for application to the work of a Classical author (Sophocles).

<sup>17</sup> For Neg-Raising, see Prince 1976, Horn 1978.

<sup>18</sup> Simpson 1989, 176-177; Gea Valor 2000, 63-80; Locher 2004, 129-130.

as contrary-to-fact conditions, they suggest that some conditional clause is to be supplied, which would render them counterfactual. One of the passages that Michael Lloyd (2006, 236) cites as illustration of this type of “indirect formulation” of criticism is Haemon’s address to Creon (*S. Ant.* 755): εἰ μὴ πατὴρ ἦσθ’, εἶπον ἄν σ’ οὐκ εὖ φρονεῖν, “If you were not my father, I would say that *you* were lacking in good sense”. But Creon is his father, and Haemon does consider his father to be lacking in good sense, as is clear from his penultimate word in the play (μαίνη, 765). By expressing himself counterfactually, however, he enables one possible interpretation of his sentence as conveying the implication, “But as it is you are my father, and so I would not say that you are lacking in good sense”. That is not, of course, what Haemon means, nor is it intended to deceive his father. Rather, it is an accepted – although illogical – means of directing criticism against someone whose status makes criticism problematic.

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