When trying to recover the genuinely historical doctrines of Protagoras, we are faced with the paradoxical situation of having both too little and too much material available. On the one hand, we have too little authentic material since there are only a few Protagorean fragments extant, in the form of quotations and lists of titles of what were presumably prose treatises. On the other hand, we have too many second-hand reports from later Greek thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, whose own anti-sophistic agendas cast some doubt on the reliability of their accounts. In addition to Plato’s *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*, we can also find a comic parody on Protagorean teaching in the *Clouds* of Aristophanes, where he stages an eristic contest between the Just and Unjust Logoi, presumably by way of imitation of sophistic competitions. The problem for modern scholars is how to give a plausible interpretation of all this secondary material that makes sense of the sparse primary material.

In addressing such a hermeneutical problem, I suggest that we can enlist the help of an anonymous sophistic treatise, called *Dissoi Logoi*, which may be taken to reflect the theory and practice of Protagorean paideia.

Within the confines of this short article, however, I want to argue that Protagoras offered a new type of paideia, as distinct from the traditional poetic paideia, which was designed to impart to young men the debating skills that were necessary for political success in democratic Athens. An important part of this paideia consisted of teaching these students how to argue on both sides of every question or topos. Such an argumentative technique is suggested by the reported title (*Antilogiai*) of a treatise of Protagoras and by the putative contents of another treatise called *Trial over a Fee*. I hope to elaborate on these tantalising hints by drawing extensively on an extant treatise called *Dissoi Logoi*, which we have some reason to believe was directly influenced by the pedagogical practice of Protagoras. This treatise seems to be an original document dating from the

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1 This point has already been made by de Romilly (1992: 76–77), who sees *Dissoi Logoi* as a blueprint for teaching methods in the Protagorean mode.
3 Versényi (1962: 181n7) has provided a good summary of the reasons for the general scholarly consensus that *Dissoi Logoi* was influenced by Protagoras.
end of the fifth century, which can provide us with a unique insight into both the content and format of sophistic treatises.

Scholars have long recognised that one ostensible purpose of such treatises was to advertise the intellectual wares of some sophist who was trying to attract rich young men as students. But the suggestion I want to develop is that another function of these treatises was to serve as textbooks for the teaching activity of the sophists themselves, who encouraged their students to memorise the competing arguments. This does not appear so strange if we recall that traditional modes of education for young aristocrats included memorising and reciting Homeric poetry, as well as performing in the chorus of a Greek tragedy. What was different about the paideia of the sophists was that students were asked to memorise not oral poetry but rather written ‘commonplaces’ that could be used to generate opposing arguments on any topic. Just as in the case of poetry, of course, mnemonic techniques were relied upon for the task of memorisation but what was truly revolutionary about this new sophistic education was the analysis and evaluation of dialectical reasoning in prose format which lay at its core. This marks the transition from the poetic culture, which depends on repetition and mimicry, to the prose culture of analysis and argumentation which resulted from the literate revolution that swept through ancient Greece in the sixth and fifth centuries.4

I. Protagoras as a Teacher of Civic Virtue

Let us start from Plato’s representation of Protagoras as proudly claiming to be a teacher of civic virtue, while keeping in mind what this claim meant within the context of fifth-century Athenian democracy. We should also, perhaps, recall the well-attested historical fact that Protagoras was chosen as the official lawgiver to a pan-Hellenic colony at Thurii which Athens founded in 443 BC. This signal honour bestowed on a foreigner testifies to the high reputation which Protagoras enjoyed at Athens, both as a lawgiver and educator—roles which were closely linked in the popular mind that was shaped by the poetry of Solon and Tyrtaeus. Despite reports about Protagoras being subsequently charged with impiety, we have every reason to believe that he continued to enjoy a successful career as an educator not only at Athens but also in other Greek cities. Thus the open questions which I want to consider are the following: What did he teach? How did he teach it?