

Nill's book is based on a thesis prepared under the supervision of Professor Gagarin of the University of Texas at Austin. In it the term 'morality', we are told, is to be understood restrictively, as meaning 'other-regarding behaviour involving regard for the interests and welfare of others.' Plato was concerned to show that acting morally benefits agents and promotes their self-interest, and so can be fully justified from the point of view of self-interest, and Nill argues that he inherited this problem from his predecessors, especially Protagoras, Antiphon and Democritus. These can be seen as constituting a logical progression in their reactions to the problem of the relation between morality and self-interest.

The discussion of these three thinkers is elaborate, learned and sophisticated, not least because we have to distinguish at almost every stage between two intertwined threads, namely first what were the basic moral and political doctrines in each case, and secondly how these basic positions stand in relation to the problem of morality and self-interest, given that none of the three seems explicitly to have treated the problem framed in just these terms.

For Protagoras we have rather more evidence than for the
other two, but the overall interpretation of his moral and political views, above all his doctrine that Man is the measure of all things, remains a matter of profound disagreement among modern scholars. Yet for Nill's purposes nothing less than precise interpretation will do, and precise interpretations based on detailed study of the texts are what he provides. Briefly, on the basis of the Theaetetus he argues that in perception Protagoras was a 'non-skeptical relativist'- what each person perceives is true because each person perceives qualities actually (objectively) present in the phenomenal world - but he is a 'skeptical relativist' in all ethical matters, because we are told that whatever a community thinks is just is just for so long as the community thinks it is just. (A possible objection to this is that Plato tells us that this is the view of those who do not exactly hold Protagoras' own position.) Judgments about advantages are however not 'skeptically relative' for Protagoras, and so one man is and can be objectively wiser than another man. In the Protagoras on the other hand minimal moral requirements are grounded in natural necessity, whereas in the Theaetetus all particular moral requirements are grounded in the community will. In both dialogues an implied bridge is the need to secure the survival of the community in order to secure the self-interest of the individual, the community will being an expression of this need.

This seems to me to be very much along the right lines. But Nill seems to think that it does not go far enough since the securing of the mere survival of the community requires only limited