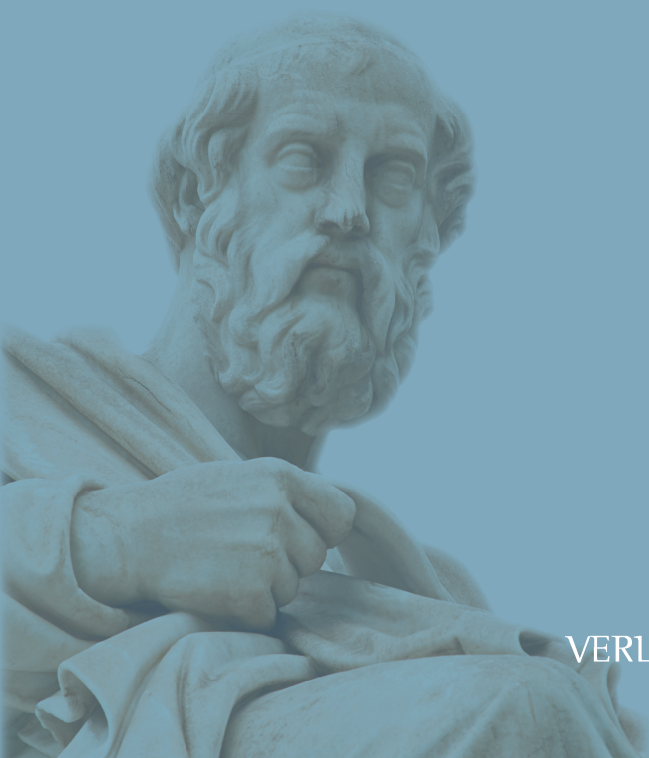


Luc Brisson | Edward C. Halper | Richard D. Parry [Eds.]

Plato's Sophist

Selected Papers of the Thirteenth Symposium Platonicum



VERLAG KARL ALBER



International Plato Studies

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Volume 42

Luc Brisson | Edward C. Halper | Richard D. Parry [Eds.]

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Introduction

It is a testimony to the ongoing interest in Plato and to the strength of Platonic scholarship that the thirteenth *Symposium Platonicum* took place in July 2022. Not a year had passed since the twelfth *Symposium* when the world was plunged into pandemic in March 2020. We debated whether to postpone *Symposium XIII*, but at that point and for some time afterwards it was unclear how long a postponement would need to be. So, when we issued the call for abstracts a year later, we announced that the meeting would be hybrid. Papers could be presented either in-person or online to an audience that would be both online and in person. By the time the *Symposium* took place, the incidence and toxicity of covid was substantially diminished, and many people were indeed able to attend in person. However, a nearly equal number attended the meeting remotely by Zoom. Excellent facilities at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business and the assistance of a number of philosophy students allowed the in person and the remote audiences to interact. The result was an excellent *Symposium*. It was, therefore, difficult to select the limited number of papers that we could include in this volume. The editors ranked and discussed the papers at some length. There was disagreement about many, but in the end a selection had to be made.

Each *Symposium Platonicum* is devoted to a single dialogue or a small group of dialogues. *Symposium XIII* was dedicated to the *Sophist*. This dialogue constitutes an essential landmark in Plato's work and a key reference for Platonism in general. As its title indicates, the *Sophist* seeks to define the sophist. It uses a method that understands itself as scientific: dialectic. Yet, finding the sophist means distinguishing him from the philosopher as Plato conceives of him. This requires a review of previous positions on the question of being. Thus, the dialogue contains the oldest doxography in the history of philosophy. Plato marshals this doxography to propose *dynamis* as the essential mark of all beings. However, he cannot find a common character without also discovering marks that distinguish beings from each other, and so the dialogue arrives at the five 'greatest kinds': Being, Rest, Motion, Same and Other. The kind of the Other allows Plato to leave behind the Parmenidean opposition between being and not-being; hence, the famous parricide that sets the history of philosophy in motion once again. Not-being is no longer defined exclusively by non-existence: it can also be considered as Difference, that is, the Other. Thus, an image is itself an instance of Being,

but it is Other than that of which it is an image, which is itself also a Being. This makes it possible to take false discourse into account. Error is no longer eliminated as a non-discourse, that is, as a discourse on what does not exist; it is a discourse that says something other than that which really exists, even while having its own Being. This enables a definition of the sophist who takes pleasure in error by producing simulacra.

This dialogue has provoked a wide range of readings. Many scholars working in the Analytic tradition have focused on the dialogue's treatment of language and truth. Other scholars have been more concerned with the ontological significance of the definitions of Being and Non-Being. There has been quite a bit of discussion of the method of division as well the definitions of the 'noble sophist' and the concluding definition. Then, the dialogue makes reference to and invites comparison with a number of other philosophers. All of these dimensions and others were represented at the *Symposium Platonicum*, and we wanted them to be represented in the volume. One achievement of the International Plato Society's triennial *Symposia* is that they bring together scholars from a wide variety of perspectives. As readers of Plato, we appreciate the value of dialogue among these various perspectives, we believe that we succeeded in fostering dialogue in our *Symposium*, and we offer this volume as a way to continue this dialogue and to grow from it.

The *Symposium* as well as this volume of selected papers was made possible by the generous support of many. We are grateful to the University of Georgia and especially to its Terry College of Business for making its facilities available to the IPS. In addition, the Provost's Office, through its 'State of the Art' conference support program, covered the travel expenses of our plenary speakers. The President's Office, Vice President for Research, and the University's Willson Center for Humanities and Arts provided essential support. The Department of Philosophy supported our web site development, the student assistants who were essential for the Symposium, and the graduate students who helped with the editing. Finally, we thank the Cornelia de Vogel Foundation for travel support.

We are grateful for Jonathan Greig's help with the IPS website, for Amin Amouhadi's setting up the conference website, and for Danielle Kotria's help with early editing. Thanks are also due to Quentin Murphy for his work editing this volume. Of course, we are most grateful to the Symposium's contributors and participants whose papers provoked discussions and whose discussions improved the papers. We all came away from the Symposium with new insights and a deeper appreciation of the *Sophist*.

Finally, we note the sad loss of Maurizio Migliori after the *Symposium*. Maurizio was a fine scholar and a stalwart contributor to our Society who is dearly missed. His paper was edited by us for style.

Luc Brisson
Edward C. Halper
Richard Parry

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I. Philosophers and Sophists

Socrate citateur d'Homère dans le prologue du *Sophiste*: considérations morales et *elenchos* ¹

François Renaud

Université de Moncton, Canada

In the *Sophist* Socrates plays an unusual subordinate role: while in the prologue he proposes the subject of discussion and the Eleatic Stranger's interlocutor, Theaetetus, he remains a mere listener for the rest of dialogue. How should we understand this seeming anomaly? Can the Homeric quotations (*Od.* IX.269-71, XVII.483-7) dominating the prologue contribute to explaining it? In terms of the fictive, or dramatic, chronology, the *Sophist* is evidently linked with the *Theaetetus* and the *Statesman*, which seek to define the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher. It also belongs, however, to another group of dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*, that deal with the trial and condemnation of Socrates. The significance of the Homeric passages as adapted and combined by Socrates appears at least twofold. First, it indicates that the subject of the dialogue is not simply the sophist, as is often assumed, but the philosopher too, more specifically the difficulty in distinguishing between the two. Secondly, it suggests that the philosopher differs from the sophist in his concern to differentiate between better and worse, and in the fact that, unlike the sophist, the philosopher uses the *elenchos* as practiced by Socrates (226a-231b; cf. 216b6). While the Socratic *elenchos*, often confused with the eristic and so with Sophistry, is inseparable from the condemnation of the philosopher by the city, it also includes elements of continuity with the Homeric notion of shame (ἐλέγχω).

prologue, Homer, citations, ethics, *elenchos*

1. Cadres dramaturgiques et sujet de la discussion

Le *Sophiste* est l'un des dialogues, en style direct, dans lequel Socrate est présent, mais joue un rôle subalterne. Dans le cas du *Timée-Critias* et des *Lois*, son effacement, puis son absence respectivement, peut s'expliquer par le fait que ces dialogues portent sur des sujets - physique et législation - étrangers aux préoccupations du Socrate historique. Cela n'est pourtant pas le cas du *Sophiste*, ou du *Politique*. Bien au contraire. Socrate propose, en un certain sens, le sujet de la discussion et même l'interlocuteur, Théétète, qui en quelque sorte le remplacera. Pourquoi ce choix de mise-en-scène ?

1 Je tiens à remercier l'auditoire pour ces judicieuses questions et remarques.

Selon la chronologie fictive, le *Sophiste* a lieu le lendemain du *Théétète* (*Sph.* 216a1-2), et quelques heures avant le *Politique*. Tel semble donc le cadre global dans lequel il faut lire le *Sophiste*, selon la plupart des commentateurs². Cependant, selon cette même chronologie, le *Sophiste* se rattache, en outre, à un autre groupe de dialogues : l'*Euthyphron*, l'*Apologie*, le *Criton* et le *Phédon*. Car à la toute fin du *Théétète*, Socrate affirme devoir « se présenter au portique du Roi, pour affronter l'accusation (γραφῆν) de Méléto »³. Ce deuxième cadre dramaturgique est habituellement ignoré des commentateurs. Le *Sophiste* est donc lié, d'une part, aux dialogues cherchant à définir le sophiste, le politique et le philosophe respectivement (dont le dernier ne fait pas l'objet d'un dialogue distinct, comme pourrait s'y attendre le lecteur), et d'autre part, à ceux ayant rapport au procès et à la condamnation de Socrate⁴. Le prologue du *Sophiste* contient - et c'est mon hypothèse - des éléments éclairants sur le sens du dialogue et son rapport aux problèmes que soulèvent ces autres dialogues. Le prologue est en effet très riche, mais si complexe que son interprétation est, à bien des égards, malaisée, notamment en raison des citations et allusions homériques qui le traversent. Je ne proposerai donc ici que quelques pistes.

Le prologue présente la rencontre entre Socrate et le nouveau protagoniste, l'Étranger (ξένος) d'Élée. Qui est cet étranger ? Il restera jusqu'à la fin anonyme et mystérieux. Théodore le présente à Socrate comme appartenant au cercle des disciples de Parménide et de Zénon, et comme très philosophe (μᾶλα φιλόσοφον, 216a2-4). Mais Théodore, mathématicien de profession, est-il en mesure de reconnaître un vrai philosophe ? Les répliques de Socrate visent précisément à souligner la difficulté que pose l'identité de l'Étranger et celle du philosophe⁵.

Selon la plupart des commentateurs, le sujet du dialogue est le sophiste⁶. Semblent le confirmer le titre du dialogue ainsi que le thème de la discussion tel que l'annonce l'Étranger au début de l'enquête (218b6-c1). En revanche, la présentation de l'Étranger, par Théodore, en tant que philosophe ainsi que les réactions dubitatives de Socrate à cette présentation soulèvent la question

2 Voir par exemple Gill 2021, 145.

3 210d2-4, trad. Cordero.

4 Cf. Rosen 1983, 61-63 ; Grasso 2008, 308 et *passim*.

5 Cf. Delcomminette 2014, 5.

6 Cf. par exemple Casadesús Bordoy 2013.

de la différence, délicate à établir, entre le philosophe et le sophiste (ou le politique)⁷.

C'est au moyen de références homériques que Socrate fait ressortir la difficulté à distinguer le philosophe et le sophiste. Nombre de commentateurs traitent ces références homériques, à tort, comme de simples ornements littéraires, et les laissent le plus souvent de côté⁸. Car d'abord, le dialogue non seulement s'ouvre, mais aussi se clôt sur des citations homériques, créant ainsi une manière d'unité et de symétrie⁹. L'importance de ces références se voit, en outre, dans le fait qu'elles sont associées à des termes qui joueront un rôle clés dans la discussion technique de l'Étranger, tels que γένος, διακρίνειν, φαντάζεσθαι. Entrons maintenant dans le vif du sujet.

2. Passages homériques adaptés et fusionnés

Théodore annonce donc à Socrate l'arrivée d'un étranger d'Élée qu'il estime éminemment philosophe. La réaction de Socrate surprend : il se demande si l'étranger que Théodore amène ne serait pas plutôt un dieu (θεός) réfuteur déguisé. Socrate en appelle à l'opinion d'Homère, qu'il cite librement, en prose, en fusionnant deux passages issus de l'*Odyssée*. Dans le premier passage homérique (*Od.* IX, 269-271), Ulysse s'adresse au cyclope Polyphème, le priant de respecter Zeus compagnon et protecteur des étrangers-hôtes :

« (Ulysse) Crains les dieux (αἰδεῖο), brave ami, tu vois des suppliants / Zeus se fait le vengeur du suppliant, de l'hôte (Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετῶν τε ξείνων τε) / Zeus est l'Hospitalier, qui amène les hôtes et veut qu'on les respecte (ξείνιος, ὃς ξείνοισιν ἄμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ) » (*Od.* IX, 269-271, éd. Allen 1907, trad. Bérard).

Le second passage homérique (*Od.* XVII, 483-487) concerne le retour d'Ulysse, déguisé en mendiant, que frappe Antinoos, aussitôt critiqué par l'un des prétendants de Pénélope pour sa démesure, et cela au nom des dieux (au pluriel) protecteurs des étrangers :

« Antinoos, frapper un pauvre vagabond ! insensé, quelle honte (οὐ κάλ') ! Si c'était par hasard quelqu'un des dieux du ciel ! / Les

7 Notomi 1999, 68-71; cf. Gill 2021, 145. Le terme φιλόσοφος apparaît à trois reprises avant même la première occurrence de σοφιστής. L'Étranger admettra plus tard (253c6-9) qu'en recherchant le sophiste ils ont peut-être trouvé d'abord le philosophe.

8 Voir par exemple Langbein 1911, 8-9, Szlezák 2011, Collobert 2020.

9 Pour un survol sur la définition et les fonctions de la citation chez Platon, voir Renaud 2021, 86-90.

dieux prennent les traits de lointains étrangers (θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἑοικότες ἄλλοδαποῖσι) / et, déguisés de toutes sortes de manières (παντοῖοι τελέθοντες), s'en vont de ville en ville (ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας), / surveillant (ἐφορῶντες) aussi bien la démesure des hommes que leur équité (ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην) » (Od. XVII, 483-487, éd. Allen 1907, trad. Bérard 1924 mod.).

Socrate, dans sa première réplique, fusionne librement ces deux passages homériques comme suit :

« S'il en est ainsi, Théodore, l'étranger que tu amènes, ne serait-il pas – même si tu l'ignores – un dieu (τινα θεὸν), pour adopter le mot d'Homère (κατὰ τὸν Ὅμηρου λόγον) ? Car celui-ci disait, en effet, que les hommes qui respectent la justice sont accompagnés par des dieux, mais c'est surtout le dieu des étrangers (τὸν ξένιον) qui observe (καθορᾶν), chez les hommes, aussi bien 'la démesure' que 'l'équité' (ὕβρεις τε καὶ εὐνομίας [Od. XVII, 487]). Toi aussi, peut-être viens-tu escorté par l'un de ces êtres supérieurs qui, étant donné la faiblesse de nos arguments (φαύλους ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις), nous regardera et nous contredira (ἐλέγξων) comme s'il était un dieu de la réfutation (θεὸς ὢν τις ἐλεγκτικός) » (Sph. 216a5-b6 ; éd. Burnet, trad. Cordero mod.).

Socrate reprend donc à son compte la notion du dieu des étrangers (ici au singulier) qui observe (καθορᾶν au lieu de ἐφορῶντες) la conduite des humains (ὕβρεις τε καὶ εὐνομίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων), en y ajoutant la réfutation (ἐλέγξων) comme mode de châtement. Toutefois, Théodore dit à Socrate que telle n'est pas la manière de cet étranger, qu'il est plus mesuré (μετριώτερος) que ceux prenant part aux joutes éristiques (ἐριδας), et qu'il n'est pas non plus un dieu, quoiqu'il soit un être divin comme le sont tous les philosophes. Socrate insiste, proteste une fois de plus, et développe plus avant l'image homérique qu'il vient d'esquisser :

« Mais il est probable que son genre (γένος) n'est, pour ainsi dire, guère plus facile à discerner (διακρίνειν) que le genre du dieu. Car ces hommes prennent les apparences les plus diverses (παντοῖοι φανταζόμενοι [au lieu de παντοῖοι τελέθοντες]), en raison de l'ignorance populaire (διὰ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν), pour 'aller de ville en ville' (ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας), et ceux qui sont réellement des philosophes (ὄντως φιλόσοφοι) – et non pas ceux qui le sont faussement (πλαστώς) – surveillent (καθορῶντες [au lieu de ἐφορῶντες]) de leur hauteur (ὑψόθεν) la vie (βίον) des gens d'ici-bas. C'est ainsi que, selon certains, on ne peut leur concéder aucune valeur, tandis que pour les autres ils sont dignes de tout. Ils prennent l'ap-

parence (φαντάζονται) tantôt d'hommes politiques (πολιτικοί), tantôt de sophistes (σοφισταί), ou bien encore ils peuvent sembler complètement fous (μανικῶς). Voilà pourquoi, s'il lui plaît de me répondre, j'aimerais entendre l'étranger nous dire (ἡμῖν ἡδέως ἂν πυνθανοίμην) ce que l'on pense chez lui de ces individus, et comment ils les nomment (ἡγοῦντο καὶ ὠνόμαζον) » (216c4-217a1, trad. Cordero mod.).

Socrate évoque, pour une seconde fois donc, le passage homérique concernant la métamorphose des dieux et la surveillance qu'ils exercent sur les conduites humaines (*Od.* XVII, 485-487), contestant ainsi, en autant de fois, le propos de Théodore. Cette fois les philosophes sont décrits comme observant « de leur hauteur (ὕψοθεν) la vie des gens d'ici-bas ». Le terme ὕψοθεν, dont il s'agit de la seule occurrence chez Platon, n'est pas rare chez Homère, où il désigne le plus souvent Zeus¹⁰. Tous ces éléments soulèvent la question de la nature du philosophe, méconnue des non philosophes.

Le double usage de ce passage de l'*Odyssee* pose diverses difficultés, dont deux. Premièrement, ce passage homérique est également cité en *République* II (381d1-e1)¹¹, où il est condamné, alors que Socrate ici l'approuve. En *République* II, il est dit que les dieux ne peuvent changer d'apparence ni tromper parce que cela est incompatible avec leur perfection. Deuxièmement, la manière dont Socrate évoque et utilise l'image homérique consiste à affirmer la proximité, et non simplement la différence, entre le sophiste et le philosophe. En somme, les philosophes, et pas seulement les sophistes (ou les dieux homériques), assument des formes diverses, leur nature véritable étant méconnaissable au commun des mortels. Toutefois, cette multiplicité de formes n'est-elle pas incompatible avec la nature divine du philosophe, comme dans le cas des dieux dans la *République* ?¹² Ou s'agit-il plutôt de la vérité des mensonges d'Homère, après relecture allégorisante ou métaphorique ? Autrement dit, le philosophe se masque-il délibérément¹³ ; ou ses diverses apparences sont-elles plutôt dues à l'ignorance des non philosophes¹⁴ ? J'aimerais traiter de cette question de manière plus générale : comment peut-on distinguer le sophiste du philosophe, si faciles à confondre ?

10 Cf. *R.* VI, 500e3-501a7 (θεῖον παράδειγμα), ainsi que 500b9-cl.

11 Cf. 382a1-2.

12 Cf. par exemple Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 18-21.

13 Rosen 1983, 61 ; Dixsaut 2001, 293-294.

14 Notomi 1999, 70.

3. Réfutation et préoccupations éthiques

La question de la réfutation (ἐλέγχος) apparaît ici capitale. D'abord, comme nous l'avons vu, Socrate, inquiet, se demande si l'Étranger ne serait pas un dieu déguisé venu le réfuter : « Toi aussi, peut-être viens-tu escorté par l'un de ces êtres souverains qui, étant donné la faiblesse de nos arguments (φαύλους ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις), nous regardera et nous contredira (ἐλέγξων) comme s'il était un dieu de la réfutation (θεὸς ἐλεγκτικός) ». Tandis que les dieux observent la démesure et l'équité des mortels, et les punissent en distinguant entre le meilleur et le pire, le philosophe punit par la réfutation. La réfutation apparaît, en effet, comme la méthode philosophique par excellence, en l'occurrence celle de Socrate. Celui-ci administre à ses contemporains le châtiment (ou la correction) de la réfutation, comme c'est expressément le cas par exemple dans le *Gorgias*¹⁵. La sixième définition du sophiste proposée par l'Étranger (226a-231b) décrit très exactement la méthode réfutative de Socrate (230d-231b), que l'Étranger appelle la sophistique de noble descendance (ἡ γένει γενναία σοφιστική, 231b7-8). Mais Socrate est-il véritablement un sophiste aux yeux de Platon ? Ou s'agit-il plutôt d'une erreur de discernement de la part de l'Étranger, erreur qui confirmerait la grande difficulté, évoquée dans le prologue, de distinguer le philosophe du sophiste ? Comme nous l'apprend l'*Apologie* (23d), l'accusation de Socrate, avancée par ses anciens accusateurs, réside dans le fait que les Athéniens n'ont pas su distinguer le philosophe du sophiste. Dans le *Sophiste*, l'Étranger réfuteur défend-t-il ou, au contraire, accuse-t-il Socrate ? Dans le prologue, Théodore, pour sa part, ne semble pas discerner la différence entre réfutation dialectique et réfutation éristique (216b7-8). En va-t-il de même de l'Étranger ? Pourtant, celui-ci a identifié et séparé, un peu plus tôt dans la suite de définitions, le genre éristique (ἐριστικόν, 225c-d). Il est toutefois frappant qu'il ne choisisse pas, parmi les six définitions qu'il avance du sophiste, celle qui lui semble la meilleure, d'autant que celles-ci ne sont pas toutes compatibles les unes avec les autres. Il en donne peut-être la raison, à la fin de son parcours, après avoir résumé les six définitions :

« N'as-tu pas remarqué que lorsque quelqu'un, qui semble maîtriser plusieurs connaissances, n'est nommé que par le nom d'une seule technique, cela signifie que l'apparence qu'il a n'est pas saine, ce qui nous montre que, par rapport à n'importe quelle technique, il ne voit pas quel est le but

15 Cf. Renaud 2022, 14-16, 177-190, 273-282. Dans la *République* (VII, 534b8-c5), la réfutation est encore en un certain sens la méthode de la philosophie.

de toutes ses connaissances (οὐ δύναται κατιδεῖν ἐκεῖνο αὐτῆς εἰς ὃ πάντα τὰ μαθήματα ταῦτα βλέπει), et c'est pour cela (διὸ καὶ) que l'on donne à celui qui possède ces connaissances, plusieurs noms au lieu d'un seul (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασιν ἄνθ' ἑνός) ? » (232a1-6, trad. Cordero mod.).

Pourtant, l'*elenchos* socratique, selon la sixième définition, distingue le meilleur du pire, en visant la purification de la double ignorance, libération estimée « la chose la plus pure et la meilleure pour celui qui aspire au véritable bonheur (ταῦτα ἃ καθαρώτατον καὶ κάλλιστον ἔπρεπε τὸν ὄντως ἐσόμενον εὐδαίμονα εἶναι) » (230e2-3). C'est pourquoi, en outre, le philosophe socratique ne prétend pas tout connaître (πάντα ἐπίστασθαι), contrairement au sophiste (232e-233a). En somme, il est possible que l'Étranger ne soit pas en mesure de distinguer la réfutation philosophique de l'éristique sophistique, et cela peut-être parce que son art de la division est d'ordre exclusivement logique et ontologique, dénuée de toute considération morale¹⁶. Or l'éthique apparaît centrale à la philosophie, y compris dans la description qu'en fait Socrate dans le prologue. Les vrais philosophes (ὄντως φιλόσοφοι), contrairement à « ceux qui le sont faussement (πλάστῳς), surveillent de leur hauteur la vie (βίον) des gens d'ici-bas » (216c5-7). La philosophie, dans la mesure où elle s'intéresse à la vie des hommes, aurait donc pour objet premier la question de la justice et, partant, de la piété. En cela elle prendrait appui sur la poésie homérique, laquelle repose notamment sur des considérations morales, à commencer par l'opposition entre la démesure et l'équité (cf. ὕβρεις τε καὶ εὐνομίας, *Od.* XVII, 487 ; *Sph.* 216b3).

Il y a plus, semble-t-il. Selon la sixième définition, l'*elenchos* tel que pratiqué par Socrate implique le sentiment de honte (αἰσχύνῃ, 230d1), que provoque la contradiction avec soi-même. La question se pose de savoir quel peut être le rapport de l'*elenchos* pratiqué par Socrate à la poésie homérique. Comme l'indique Chantraine (1968-1980), *elenchos* chez Homère signifie la honte ressentie dans l'incapacité de démontrer sa valeur (ἐλέγχω : « faire honte de », p. ex. *Il.* XI, 313), et plus tard, dans le grec savant, « prouver, réfuter ». De plus, le terme apparenté αἰδώς, et les mots de même famille (cf. αἰδομαι), apparaît dans le premier passage homérique auquel fait allusion Socrate : Ulysse face au cyclope évoque Zeus l'Hospitalier : « Crains les dieux, brave ami (ἀλλ' αἰδεῖο, φέριστε, θεούς) » (*Od.* IX, 269). La notion homérique d'*elenchos* signifie le sentiment de l'honneur, parfois la crainte du blâme d'autrui. En somme, le lien entre l'*elenchos* socratique et la honte

16 Cf. Mouze 2020, 178.

s'inscrit, consciemment chez Platon semble-t-il, dans une certaine continuité avec la vision homérique, et lui est peut-être même redevable¹⁷.

17 Cf. Chantraine 1968-1980, 335, ainsi que Dorion 1990, 312-317, et Renaud 2022, 164-170, 312-317.

The *Sophist*, Sophists, and Socrates

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A riposte to those who think that Plato thought well enough of sophists ever *seriously* to suggest that Socrates the philosopher could be one of them.
sophistry, division, philosophy, Socrates, knowledge

There was in Plato's mind such a thing as 'sophistry', an activity carried on by 'sophists'. This is what the main speaker in *Sph.*, the Visitor from Elea ('EV'), proposes to investigate. He does so by using the method Socrates himself recommends in *Phdr.*: 'collection and division'. 'Collection' is a matter of

perceiving together and bringing into one form (*eidos*) items which are scattered in many places, in order that one may define each thing and make clear whatever it is [that one is investigating]. (*Phdr.* 265d3-5)¹,

which I take to describe the same process as that described, in Socrates' earlier defence of love, as a matter of

comprehend[ing] what is said by reference to *eidos* [i.e., roughly, what is said universally], arising from many sensations and being collected together into one² through reasoning. (*Phdr.* 249b7-c1).

That process occurs at least seven times in the *Sph.*, i.e., once for each of the seven accounts of the sophist. Each of the seven attempts to give an account of the sophist is a matter of 'bringing into one form items that are scattered

1 Translations of *Phdr.* are from Rowe 2005.

2 That is, I suppose, one *eidos*. This is not, of course, itself a collection: the 'taking together' (*sunairein*) makes what is 'taken together' into a single item, i.e., a 'form', to which reference is already made when we speak of any one of the things 'taken together', these being 'said by reference to form'. Ten ostriches each reported as an ostrich, or as two, three ... ostriches, when 'taken together' give us 'ostrich', singular. As he begins the investigation of the sophist by looking at anglers, EV is of course already looking at something *kat' eidos legomenon*, as we do just by identifying someone as an angler. There will then be many more than seven 'collections' going on in the conversation. It is 'division', as I shall suggest, that is the more difficult, and the more important, part of the process called 'collection and division'.

in many places', or 'collect[ing] into one through reasoning' what 'aris[es] from many sensations', which is what is involved in understanding terms that refer to 'forms'. Each of the accounts of the sophist is an account of a form, or, as we may put it more transparently, a type: a type, that is, to which the sophist allegedly belongs but – until the seventh account – without the description of that type capturing his *essence*.

So much for collection. The process of division divides forms, often but not always into two further 'forms', choosing one of these two or more to persevere with, and so on until a plausible candidate account of the definendum appears. Division is used throughout all seven attempts at defining the sophist, but plainly the most important division is that between the six failed accounts and the one that finally replaces them – finally, that is, so far as the dialogue is concerned: in principle the seventh account itself might be replaced. (There are no guarantees in the business of dialectic. I will later justify my inclusion of the sixth attempt among those that 'fail'; the manner of its 'failure' is rather different from that of the others.)

The outcome here in *Sph.*, with the seventh account, resembles the one described late on in *Phdr.*, with a reference back to the beginning of Socrates' defence of love and its identification of four beneficial sorts of madness:

the [second speech] led us to the parts of madness on the right-hand [i.e., good] side, and discovering and setting forth a love that shares the same name as the other but is divine, it praised it as the cause of our greatest of goods (266a6-b1).

The situation is not quite the same, since the first six accounts of the sophist (or at least the first five: the sixth, again, is different) all give us aspects of the sophist, not different sophists in quite the way that the *Phdr.* account offers four different madresses: it is just that each *would be* a different sophist if the relevant account in each case captured the essence of sophist. The trouble with these accounts is that they pull in varieties of non-sophists as well as sophists: others could be 'fee-earning hunters of human beings', 'importers-exporters of lessons in excellence', 'retailers' of such lessons, or manufacturers of them, or could earn a living from competitive speaking. As for the sixth account, it will drag in – so I shall propose – the quite different type, the philosopher, so being in the end not about the sophist at all.

Why, then, does EV apparently make out that it is? This is a question that has perennially puzzled readers of *Sph.*, or at any rate those readers who

recognise that for the Plato of this dialogue, and indeed of the whole corpus,³ the sophist is an object of contempt, and sophistry merely the outcome of bad choice, not to mention ignorance.⁴ Why is the sixth account set up as an account of the sophist if it is really an account of something else? EV himself says that the sixth account, in ‘putting him down as a cleanser ...’,⁵ is by way of a ‘concession’ to the sophist, as it must be when he has remarked only a few lines before that the resemblance between this ‘cleanser’ and the sophist is like that between dog and wolf (231a: the dog being what helps protect the sheep and goats from the wolf). So why make such a concession?

Many have been tempted⁶ by some apparent similarities between this type and that mostly silent presence in the dialogue, Socrates, to suppose a reference to the stage parodies of the great man as a sophist. So, for example, Gregory Vlastos calls it ‘an authentic, if partial, representation of Socrates [in the “Socratic” dialogues]’.⁷ But there are also major dissimilarities.⁸ For one thing, Socrates’ chief aim is always something more than ‘cleansing’ others of beliefs that stop them from learning – namely to *find the truth*, and find it with them; or, in case that should be a contentious claim,⁹ everyone must surely agree that it is not true of Socrates’ interlocutors that they respond

3 *Sph.* apart (and perhaps *Prt.*, which takes one sophist’s – supposed – position with apparent seriousness), it is hard to think of a single dialogue that suggests the least affinity with the breed. Thomas Slabon, in discussion in Toronto (where I gave a version of the present paper), pointed to *Smp.*, where a remarkably Socrates-like Eros is represented as both philosopher and sophist (actually ‘clever magician and sorcerer and sophist’, 203d7); but (a) Plato’s own use of the slippery term ‘sophist’ varies; (b) Socrates has *something* in common with sophists (a connection with *sophia*: he looks for it, they mimic it); and (c) he is neither magician nor sorcerer, except to the puzzled onlooker.

4 Compare the dismissal in *Plt.* of all contemporary politikoi as ‘the greatest sophists among sophists’, ignorant as they are, and ‘the greatest imitators and magicians’: 303c3-5 (translation from Rowe 1995).

5 ‘The sixth [thing we found him being] was controversial, but all the same we made a concession to him [*autôi*, the sophist, *sunchôrêsantes*] and put him down as a cleanser in relation to soul of beliefs that prevent it from learning [*doxôn empodiôn mathêmasin peri psuchên kathartên*]’ (*Sph.* 231e5-6 [translations from the *Sph.* are from Rowe 2015]). The word order puts ‘in relation to soul’ as much with the learning as with the cleansing, a point that will later be relevant to my argument.

6 Like some participants at the Symposium, as became apparent in several discussions.

7 Vlastos 1994, 17-18.

8 See Rowe 2015², to which the present essay is in many respects a sequel.

9 George Rudebusch prefers, in correspondence, that we stick to ‘Socrates’ own words’ about himself in *Ap.*, where ‘his highest purpose is to convert others to philosophy (this is the content of his service to god as a reverent human being)’. My short response to this is that *Ap.* is only ‘Socrates’ own words’ in that it is a monologue; Plato is not generally a Boswell to Socrates’ Johnson.

to his 'treatment' by 'becoming angry with themselves but less aggressive towards others' (230b9-c1). If there are interlocutors who are 'cleansed', in the relevant respect, in the dialogues (Meno?), they were never inclined to aggression in the first place, and any who do get angry are neither cleansed nor angry with themselves, only with Socrates (Callicles, Thrasymachus). In this respect, the most we can say is that the sixth account describes someone who succeeds in doing what Socrates typically, signally, and repeatedly failed to do. So there both is and is not a reference to Socrates. (As I shall immediately go on to argue, the method the sixth 'sophist' uses *seems* to belong to the sophist, which is what allows him at least to appear to join the company of the preceding five, but on closer examination does not.) So now the question will be: why does Plato tease us in this way?

An important part of an answer is to be found, I propose,¹⁰ in an insight by Monique Dixsaut:

There exists, then, a noble way of employing sophistic: that is, in this sixth definition, centred on antilogy, a version of which the *philosopher* is capable but the *sophist* is not ... In this way sophistic finds itself ennobled, and if it were practiced by a Socrates we see what it could amount to: a purification from ignorance, an understanding of the pitfalls of language and the unfounded nature of all opinion [*doxa*] (Dixsaut 2000, 306).¹¹

In other words, according to Dixsaut, the sixth type of sophistry is sophistry *as it would be* in the hands of a philosopher. By assigning sophistry suddenly to the *genos*¹² of philosophy, the Visitor ennobles it. The sixth definition or account of sophistry, as Dixsaut understands it, makes it a useful thing instead of the useless, even damaging, thing it is as we see it in action in the world around us: if this is what sophistry, and antilogic, really were, the world would be a better place, because it would 'purify' or cleanse souls of ignorance.

There is, however, one important point on which I part company with Dixsaut. On her analysis what is described in the sixth account is, I think, still meant to be sophistry: sophistry 'ennobled', but sophistry nonetheless. But that appears to me contradicted by what the Visitor says at 231a-b, part of which I have already referred to:

¹⁰ See Rowe 2015².

¹¹ My translation from the French.

¹² Or *eidos*: the two terms are interchangeable in *Sph*.

EV: For myself, I'm fearful of saying that they [the type described in the sixth account] are sophists.

THEAETETUS: Why so?

EV: Because to do so would be to attribute too great a status (*geras*) to them.

THEAETETUS: All the same, what has just been described does bear quite a resemblance to someone of that sort.

EV: Yes, and a wolf has quite a resemblance to a dog – the most savage of creatures to the gentlest. To be safe, one must be particularly on one's guard when it comes to similarities; for similarity is the most slippery of kinds [*genê*]. But still, let them stand as sophists; for the dividing lines on which the dispute will turn will, I think, be no minor ones, when they [those who match the description in the sixth account] guard their territory as they should (*Sph.* 231a1-b1).

While the first five accounts each picked out a feature of sophists and tried to make that what defines a sophist, the sixth account instead picks out another feature of them (their skill at producing contradiction) and imagines that feature being used in a way other than the way in which sophists in fact use it. Or rather: the sixth account picks out the sophists' skill at producing contradiction, i.e., causing others to contradict themselves ('antilogic', 225b, 232b), and implicitly compares it with the superficially similar but really quite different process of revealing to people the shifting nature of their beliefs. Their beliefs contradict one another because *they*, the owners of the beliefs, 'wander about', *planôntai*:

EV: They [the 'sophists' of the sixth account] ask questions on whatever someone thinks he's talking sense about when in fact he's talking non-sense; and then, because the people whose beliefs they are examining are continually shifting their position, their task is easy. They use the conversation to collect those beliefs together and put them side by side, thereby revealing them as contradicting one another not just on the same subjects but in relation to the same things and in the same respects (*Sph.* 230b4-8).

The contradiction-*producing* sophist, the antilogician, is not interested in what people think, or in changing it, as the contradiction-*revealing* 'sophist' here is (being in the business of 'cleansing' them of those *doxai* that impede their learning, i.e., acquiring new and less contradictory *doxai*). An observer like Aristophanes can call Socrates a 'sophist', noticing his interest in contradiction but not recognising the superficiality of the resemblance (that

most slippery of kinds). Revealing contradictions is different from producing them, not least because it is differently motivated: contradiction-producing is for winning, or winning and making money, while contradiction-revealing is for a cleansing that will ideally clear the way to knowledge.

Sophistry, then, I claim, for Plato in *Sph.* has no positive side; there is no such thing as good sophistry. This, I propose, is the chief point in introducing the sixth account. If there *were* to be such a thing as good sophistry, it would have to be something quite different from what it is in fact. The sixth ‘sophist’ is not even a mirror image of sophistry. It is not sophistry *at all* (nor is Socrates a sophist *at all*). The sixth kind does vaguely involve, or gesture at, ‘antilogic’, which is the pretext for introducing it; but *its* antilogic is a matter of discovering contradictions that already exist, in what people believe¹³ rather than getting someone who starts with one position, on any subject, to a point where they assert the opposite of that position. Sophistry, then, is unlike *politikê*, which will be the subject of *Plt.*: there are, or could be, true *politikoi*, experts in a real and important *technê*, and there are so-called *politikoi* who mimic the true ones and their expertise. But there is no such thing as a good sophist. Rather, sophists pretend to be something else, namely the wise (as the name *sophistês* suggests), or the philosopher, whereas the philosopher (even Socrates) never practises sophistic, or anything that resembles it in any but the most superficial way.

The superficiality of the resemblance between sophist and philosopher is already guaranteed by the fact that the former has no interest in the one thing that preoccupies the latter: truth. But the difference between the two types as they are described in *Sph.* goes deeper.¹⁴ According to EV at *Sph.* 231b5-6, the activity that defines the sixth type is ‘challenging [*elenchos*] that takes place in relation to empty belief in one’s own wisdom’. This recalls Socrates’ challenging of his interlocutors, in *Ap.* and elsewhere, and the chief sort of ignorance he reveals in them: the one he himself lacks, his lack of it being his only claim to wisdom. So much so Socratic. But the context in *Sph.* also includes an analysis of *kakia*, badness, contrasting a popular account of it in terms of ‘disagreement’ between different elements in the soul with an analysis that attributes such disagreement to a failure of reason:

13 Or what they think: ‘beliefs’ will include long-standing ones, whereas *doxai* will include what it merely occurs to someone to say when asked a question.

14 For a full justification of the radical interpretation of the sixth account I am about to propose, see Rowe 2015².

that is, to a different kind of ignorance.¹⁵ In the case described here in *Sph.*, the ignorance that is removed by the revealing of contradictions is ignorance of a failure of reason itself – a failure that has resulted in a soul that is unnaturally divided against itself. Those examined ‘are angry with themselves but ... less aggressive towards others ... and are liberated from those great, obstinate beliefs about themselves’ (230b8-c2): they are angry with themselves, I propose, precisely because of those beliefs they had until now ‘*about themselves*’. What they recognize is that they are in truth rational creatures, potentially one and not many, and they blame themselves for the way they have been leading their lives up till now.¹⁶ Compare Socrates at the beginning of *Phdr.*: he has no time to worry about the truth of myths like the one about Boreas and Oreithuia because he is

not yet capable of ‘knowing myself, in accordance with the Delphic inscription ... I inquire ... into myself, to see whether I am really a beast more complex, more typhonic than Typhon, or both a tamer and a simpler creature, because I share by nature some divine and un-typhonic portion’ (*Phdr.* 229e5-230a6).

Insofar as this is a real question for him, he is the examinee as much as the examiner. Someone who realises, as he presents himself as realising, that they are that ‘tamer (*hêmerôteros*) and simpler [i.e., more unified?] creature’ will indeed be angry (*chalepainein*) with themselves, i.e., their former self. They will also become ‘less aggressive’ (EV), or ‘be tamed’ (*hêmêrousthai*, *Phdr.*), in relation to others; compare the description of the black horse of

15 *Sph.* 227e13-228e5. The difference between the two analyses is introduced as a difference between 1. *kakia* understood as disease (‘when people are in poor condition, don’t we observe beliefs disagreeing with desires, anger with pleasures, reason with pains, indeed all of these with each other’, 228b2-4: this is disease insofar as disease is ‘disagreement in what is naturally akin, because of some sort of corruption’, 228a7-8), and 2. *kakia* understood as ugliness, or things being out of proportion. The ‘things’ in this case (still, as in 1., beliefs, desires, anger, and so on) ought to share the same target but miss it because they are out of kilter – this last part being my proposed interpretation of a controversial sentence at 228c1-5. (‘Don’t we observe beliefs disagreeing with desires’, etc., *in diseased individuals*: this state, then, is only ‘what *the many* call *ponêria*’ [228d7], because, after all, who would judge the truth of things by reference to defective cases?)

16 Or rather would, if there were any actual cases of such conversion (which would depend on there actually being exemplars of the type described in the sixth account of the sophist).

the human soul – or of some human souls¹⁷ – in the myth of *Phdr.* as *hubreôs* ... *hetairos* (253e3), or *hubristês* (254c3).

The idea of the sixth sophist (so-called) of *Sph.* as bringing about self-realisation in his interlocutors recalls some thoroughly Socratic ideas (about ignorance, about challenge, and so on). But what is proposed is a project far larger than anything our familiar Socrates ever proposed: nothing less than a complete, Damascene reorientation. And the distance between this ‘sophist’ and the actual, eristic sophist could not be greater, as the next part of the dialogue will confirm. The sophist deals in what is not, while by implication, because of his interest in the truth, our sixth ‘sophist’ (the one who is not a sophist at all) deals in what is.

To sum up so far. We have five types each of which shares something with the sophist, but none of which captures his essence; and we have a sixth that uses a method (or would use it, if there were any actual exemplars) that superficially resembles that of the real sophist, but that turns out to be the type that the sophist mimics: the gentle, domesticated dog rather than the wolf, advancing the cause of knowledge rather than subverting it. If only sophists *were* like this, using their expertise in contradiction to positive ends rather than destructive ones. But for that they would need expertise in soul-cleansing, and so in the soul itself, to enable them to ‘remove those [of their ‘patients’] beliefs that obstruct the lessons to be learned, and render them clean and pure, thinking they know only the things they do know and no more’ (230d2-4). If this is Socrates, it is Socrates recast after the model of the sophist’s skill in antilogic. But simultaneously it is the sophist recast, *per impossibile*, as having a care for his interlocutor/patient, and the expertise to prepare them for learning. Prominent among beliefs that such expertise would target, I propose, are, first, that the soul is naturally in a state of internal *stasis* (228a5, with b2-4), and secondly that the treatment required is *kolastikê*, ‘corrective expertise’, i.e., punishment (229a3-5).¹⁸ Cleansing from such beliefs will involve a complete rethinking of the subjects’ understanding of themselves, under the guidance of the expert soul-cleanser, armed as he is with his understanding of the natural unity and rationality of the whole soul.

17 I.e., of diseased ones, to use EV’s language in *Sph.*

18 Which Theaetetus claims is ‘in accordance with *anthrôpinê doxa*’ (229a6-7: cf. n.15 above); to which EV responds ‘Would *didaskalikê* not be the most appropriate *technê* for dealing with any *agnoia*?’ (a8-9).

The form or kind, sophist, then, is bad through and through.¹⁹ But if so, how can there be a *form* of sophist at all? A passage from *Phdr.* I referred to at the beginning of the present paper, describing collection (249b7-c1), continues: ‘And this is a recollection of those things which our soul once saw when it travelled in company with god and treated with contempt the things we now say are, and when it poked its head up into what really is (c1-4). Not long before, Socrates has described this region ‘above’ as one of truth, ‘occupied by being which really is (*ousia ontôs ousa*) ... observable by the steersman of the soul alone, by intellect, and to which the class (*genos*) of true knowledge relates’, and so on (247c6-8). Does the *eidos/genos* sophist then reside there, too, in the region beyond the heavens, alongside justice, moderation, even knowledge (three examples given at 247d of those contents)? Surely not, when the sophist as antilogician comes close to denying, if he does not actually deny, that anything is true apart from the claim that nothing is (true). After all, in the story the soul’s wings are supposed to be nourished by the sight of the things there, and the soul’s wings stand above all for its identity as a *reasoner*: how would the sight of the arch-denier, of the very type that *misuses* reason, help with that?²⁰

The commonest modern solution to this puzzle, at least implicitly, is probably still to suppose that Plato has moved on by the time of writing of *Sph.*: forms are no longer what they once were, in *Phdr.* or *R.*, *eidê* and related terms now referring rather to ‘kinds’, without the old metaphysical connotations. That is certainly a way of dealing with the issue, but the question then arises about the basis on which the new Plato will maintain his commitment to truth and the possibility of knowledge, especially in the ethical and aesthetic spheres. That commitment is no less visible in what are surely later dialogues like *Tht.*, *Sph.*, *Plt.* and *Ti.* than it is in earlier ones; it is grounded in those earlier ones (I include *R.* among them) in talk about forms, and we find no indication in the trilogy *Tht.-Sph.-Plt.* or in *Ti.* that the

19 Thomas Slabon asked (in Toronto) why the discussion in *Sph.* should be restricted, as it evidently is, to eristics like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus; might not including a Protagoras, say, make a difference to the equation sophist = bad, period? My answer is that the Plato of *Sph.* seems to have decided that the two brothers and their sort are the real sophists. If others do not fit the description, then presumably they are not sophists, but something else: pretenders to the rhetorical art, perhaps? (But as such they too will at least have a foot in antilogic.) Cf. also point (a) in n.3 above.

20 It is true, as Verity Harte pointed out to me in discussion at the Symposium and later, that insofar as the sophist is a pretender to *sophia* we need to understand what *sophia* is in order to understand him. But to understand what *sophia* is, we presumably have no need of the sophist (who does not even understand *sophia* himself).

old metaphysics has been abandoned – that is, apart from the fact that forms appear to be talked about, and handled, in new and different ways. Or has Plato just decided that he has new things to do, and new things to talk about, leaving the metaphysics to one side?²¹

The latter is surely the least plausible explanation, when *Sph.* itself contains its own metaphysical interlude, starring ‘friends of forms’ who think that nothing else really *is* at all. What this interlude ultimately suggests is not a move away from treating forms as *to ontôs on* but rather an attempt to spell out the implications of giving them such a status. Again, the connections between *Sph.* (later) and the *Phdr.* (earlier), specifically in relation to the method of collection and division, are plain enough.²² *Phdr.* warmly recommends the method of collection and division, with *Phdr.* 265c-266c giving us the most extensive explicit description we have of the method, while *Sph.* includes Plato’s most single-minded application of it: that, surely, is enough to make my own continuing treatment of them together more than plausible.²³

If, as I began supposing, the process of ‘perceiving together and bringing into one form items which are scattered in many places’ (*Phdr.* 265d3-4) is the same as the one described in the myth in Socrates’ second speech on love, as ‘comprehend[ing] what is said by reference to *eidōs*, arising from many sensations and being collected together into one through reasoning’ (*Phdr.* 249b7-c1), ‘and this is a recollection of those things which our soul once saw’ (c1-2), collection and division can evidently coexist with ‘the theory of recollection’,²⁴ and the full-blown ‘theory of Forms’ (as it is typically named, and understood), because it does in *Phdr.*; and if it does in *Phdr.*, why should it not in *Sph.*? In any case we need an explanation of how the two things can co-exist, given that there is at least one dialogue where they do.

21 For a useful treatment of some of the issues here see Alikan 2017.

22 For the building blocks of the method *Phdr.* uses *eidōs* and *idea*, *Sph.* mostly *eidōs* and *genos*; proponents of a change in Plato’s metaphysical thinking implicitly use the last term, *genos*, to bolster their case, talking about the ‘kinds’ of *Sph.* in contrast to the ‘forms’ of *Phdr.* But if *eidōs* and *genos* are interchangeable in *Tht.*, *eidōs* and *idea* are so in *Phdr.*, and I find no clear evidence that *eidōs* is used differently in the two dialogues.

23 On the relative date of *Phdr.* see, e.g., Thesleff 1982, Tomin 1988, Usacheva 2012 (and especially the bibliography in the last). Not many – among those for whom chronology matters – would protest strongly, on whatever grounds, at the claim that *Phdr.* was written not so long before *Sph.*

24 Even if in the context of a myth; but what are Platonic myths for, if not to give an indication of the direction in which the truth lies (or themselves to form part of the argument, as in *Plt.*)?

According to *Phdr.* (if, again, ‘bringing into one form’ and ‘collecting things into one through reasoning’ refer to the same sort of process) all humans engage in collection, *qua* human. There is nothing extraordinary about the process itself; it is just part of being human to be able to ‘see things together’.²⁵ The difference from the employment of the philosophical method called ‘collection (and division)’ is just that while non-philosophers do the ‘seeing together’ unreflectively, the philosopher does it systematically and purposefully – ‘in order that one may define each thing and make clear whatever it is’ (*Phdr.* 263d4-5). The problem lies with that ‘most slippery of kinds’, similarity (*Sph.* 231a8): similarities can always deceive, which is one reason why division is as important to the method as collection. We may all be capable of ‘bringing things together into one’, but there is no guarantee that the ‘one’ we construct really is a one, or the one we were looking for. This is why we need method, and the philosopher: in *Phdr.* it is the *philosophical* lover’s experience of beauty that is being described; in *Symp.*, too, the lover who comes to see Beauty Itself in a sea of beautiful things is under expert guidance. But even the non-philosopher has a dim notion of what beauty is, which the *Phdr.* story attributes both and simultaneously to recollection and to our inborn capacity for collection.

‘Recollection’ here is an expression of what Sarah Broadie calls Plato’s ‘realism about values’:²⁶ there is such a thing as beauty (the form) that exists out there, as it were, unchanging, not a matter of opinion, and so on. There are similarly forms of good, justice, moderation. But then, to go back to the question in hand, is there also a form of *sophist*? We evidently need the philosopher to hunt him down, given that it takes even EV seven passes to capture him (if he does). But the difficulty with the sophist is not the same as with beauty, or justice. Everyone knows there are sophists. The problem is with pinning them down, exactly, because they share features with multiple other types. What makes a sophist different from – a statesman, for example, since apparently existing *politikoi* are also sophists?²⁷ Or from Socrates, if Socrates is a philosopher? Are sophist, statesman and philosopher the same, or three distinct kinds (*Sph.* 217a-b)? ‘Sophist’ could be a shifting signifier, or just a contested category, and perhaps that is what *we* might want to say of it. But these are not available options in *Sph.*: the creature is assumed to be lurking somewhere, hidden, yet in plain sight.

25 ‘Recollection’ thus merely theorises a plain fact.

26 Broadie 2021, 211.

27 *Plt.* 303c3-5 again.

Some things do not require a method to find them. ‘When someone utters the name of iron, or of silver’, Socrates asks Phaedrus at *Phdr.* 263a6-7, ‘don’t we all have the same thing in mind?’ But then

What about the names of just, or good [i.e., the names that properly belong to what is actually just or good]? Doesn’t one of us go off in one direction, another in another, so that we disagree both with each other and with ourselves? (a9-10)

Beauty, *to kalon*, is another similarly disputed item (love, too, according to *Phdr.*). Everyone uses the names that belong to such things, but there is little agreement about what to apply the names *to*. ‘Sophist’ seems to present a similar level of difficulty, but with this difference: that questions about what is just or good or beautiful are not only with us all the time, but pressing in a way that the question about the nature of the sophist is not. We need to know, on a regular basis, whether *this, now* is just, or good, or beautiful²⁸, and in the first two cases at least there are no visible examples we can point to for help – the laws, maybe, but have *they* been laid down knowledgeably (*Plt.*)?

There is another, even more important difference between an investigation into the sophist and investigations about the good, the just and the beautiful: the former is completable, whereas the latter are not. There *can be* no complete account of any of them, such that answers about the justice, goodness or beauty of any individual item can be read off from it. No two situations in life will be exactly alike: nothing, in any life, can be decided in advance, about what is to be done or not to be done *here, now*.²⁹ The content of the forms of justice, goodness and beauty will not be expressible by simple formulae, or even by a list of individual just, good and beautiful actions. No

28 It suits Socrates’ argument in *Phdr.* to claim that beauty is the exception, shining out even among the objects of sense. But elsewhere the *kalon* is itself a contested item, even in individuals.

29 I am here combining *Plt.* with lessons I have learned from Broadie 2021. Gerson 2022 objects to ‘[a] critical methodological assumption’ of the book, that ‘a dialogue such as *R.* has to be interpreted within its own limits’ (307). This is a misunderstanding; rather, Broadie sets out to understand a particular image (the good as sun-like) in *R.* within the context of the argument of that dialogue. No general methodological principle is in play, except the reasonable one that an image introduced in a particular context might be illuminated by that context; and my own immediate experience suggests that what Broadie discovers, in one dialogue by itself, has the capacity to illuminate corners of other dialogues too (in the present case, *Sph.*). Sarah Broadie was too meticulous, too much of the *philosophos*, to make the assumption claimed without having shown for herself how it might be true. She is and will be much missed.

such list would be completable; there would always be more material to be collected, more division to do.

Significantly, even the gods in *Phdr.* are not in continuous contact with this level of reality, feasting on its contents in each circuit they make of the heavens, 'then descending back into the region within the heavens and going home' (*Phdr.* 247e). Between them, the twelve gods cover a range of human types, each of those human types imagined as caught by Eros and lifted up by him to catch at least a glimpse of Beauty (even if only once, and even if only in the remotest past ...); but only followers of Zeus, being of a similar sort to him, become philosophers and, I take it, acquire something of his superior wisdom. The others miss the chance offered to them by their sight of truth and become anything from a 'law-abiding king' to a sophist or demagogue, or, worst of all, a tyrant. In this story, the forms sighted by gods or human souls (justice, self-control, knowledge, 247d) appear to be beyond and above even the highest agents in the Platonic universe.³⁰ This is not an arbitrary piece of Platonic 'doctrine', but rather a consequence of the fact that the full content of such forms will be unknowable even by a divine intellect. It will be unknowable because it will have to encapsulate all past, present, and future instances of the good, the just, ... as they appear in the infinitely large quantity of differing concatenations of circumstances.³¹ Nevertheless, despite their elusiveness, the good, the just and the rest remain the ultimate standards for, or goals of, divine activity, whether locomotion or intellection. Together they constitute (the objects of) the knowledge described by Socrates as

not that knowledge to which coming into being attaches, nor the knowledge that strangely differs in different items among the things that we now say are [i.e., sensible particulars], but that which is in what really is and which is really knowledge (*Phdr.* 247d7-e2).

These forms, I claim, the good, the just, the beautiful and so on, are on a different level from all others.³² Their separateness is a consequence both

30 Compare the way the divine Craftsman of *Ti.* takes them, or more specifically the good, as his point of reference in building the cosmos.

31 What, then, defines divinity if not complete knowledge? Their unchangeability, I suggest, and their unchangeable rationality: they have nothing to make them forget the good and the just, even if they are not in permanent contact with them; their horses are merely a mode of transport, with no capacity for diverting the divine attention. If 'gods' stands for divine intellect, the same will go for it.

32 Even from the *megista genê* of *Sph.*, which are *megista* because of their ubiquity (nothing threatens the status of the good, the just and the beautiful). Cf. Socrates'

of their infinite depth and of their importance for both human life and for the cosmos. Contrast the sophist, just above tyrant, lowest of the low, in the list of lives in *Phdr.* It is not even clear whether the form, sophist, will be a permanent thing, when its exemplars are a consequence of merely contingent human failings (philosophers, by contrast, or the just, whether people or actions, being rooted in the organizing principles of the cosmos). If history repeats itself after a Great Year, then the same mistakes will go on being made, and sophists will always be with us. But if Plato were seriously wedded to the idea of the cycle of history, that would undermine what I take as his most important project of all: for the reform of society.

This project surfaces in *Sph.* itself, if I am right in supposing that the sixth account of ‘sophist’ is in fact an account of something quite different: i.e., a type committed to knowledge and truth. In *Plt.*, the next dialogue in the series, the reform of society will take centre stage, in the guise of a community overseen by an expert statesman able to rely on his own judgement instead of inherited and/or democratically established laws, so bringing order to it as the Demiurge once brought order to the cosmos – and I take it, thanks to a comparable understanding of the good and the just. After all, EV, who presides in both *Sph.* and *Plt.*, is compared to a god in the opening conversation (*Sph.* 216a-d) – a god attending on humans, in a curious reversal of the image in *Phdr.* of human lovers each following their own divinity.

To be clear: it is not in the least my intention to deny that there is a form, sophist; rather the reverse – unless being eternal is a necessary part of being a form. If it is, then Plato will apparently be happy to use the same term, *eidōs*, to refer to two different things in the same context. I prefer to suppose that *eidē* are the ‘ones’ produced by (philosophical) collection in any and every context, and that some of them are eternal, some not. The ones that are eternal are those that provide the content of Plato’s ‘realism about values’ (plus those that underpin the structure of things, like being, sameness and difference); that he is a realist about (the forms of) values does not entail that he is a realist about other forms. There are people that are called, and are, sophists, and that is enough, I propose, for there to be a Platonic form of sophist – just as there is, unfortunately, a contemporary, modern, type of the same ilk.

proposal that the good is ‘even beyond being, superior to it in dignity and in power’ (*R.* 509b8; on which see Broadie 2021).

Similarities between the Sophist and the Philosopher

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Plato's *Sophist* primarily addresses the most important question, 'What is a sophist?' The difference between a sophist and a philosopher is hardly obvious, and in this dialogue, Plato attempts to resolve the problem of how to dissociate the sophist from the philosopher by raising a fundamental question about the similarity between the two. This paper revisits this problematized notion of similarity and proposes a further reflection on this issue. First, I carefully examine the initial exchange between Theodorus and Socrates, which focuses on the various images of philosopher, especially in relation to the *Phaedrus*. The allusions to the *Phaedrus* point to the real issue of the confusion of philosopher and god. Next, in the first outer part of the dialogue, when six definitions are completed, the Eleatic visitor points out the slippery nature of the concept of similarity. This theme is related to the rhetoric of the sophist, discussed in the *Phaedrus*. I suggest that the problem of similarity has already been examined in the *Parmenides*, which offers important suggestions on how to understand 'similar' as affection that participates in 'the same'. In the *Sophist*, this consideration suggests that the art of dialectic, by dealing with sameness and difference, can distinguish between similarity and dissimilarity. It is on this basis that the sophist and the philosopher are ultimately distinguished in relation to god in the second outer part. Finally, I suggest that the sophist and the philosopher are distinguished at three levels: theoretical, performative, and philosophical. The dialogue *Sophist* aims to make us, the readers of the dialogue, true philosophers, by confronting the 'sophist within us'.

sophist, philosopher, similar, same, dialectic

1. The sophist matters

What matters in Plato's dialogue, the *Sophist*? Of course, the sophist matters, I believe. However, many commentators do not take the theme of the sophist seriously but tend to ignore it as the nominal subject of the dialogue to discuss what they see as more important and fundamental metaphysical issues. I contend with this common view and maintain that Plato's *Sophist* deals primarily with the question of utmost importance, namely, 'What is the sophist?'

First, I would like to introduce a conversation I had with my supervisor at Cambridge, Myles Burnyeat. During a supervision at his office, I asked for his opinion about the chapter of my doctoral thesis that I had just finished, in which I proposed the new concept of a 'sophist within us'. I said, 'This phrase is not Plato's. Is it alright to write this in the thesis about Plato?'

My teacher told me something like this: 'You are entitled to put this. You have already discussed so many things'. Even though this is not what Plato actually stated, I was convinced that Plato had really meant it.

On another occasion, Myles asked me, in a slightly relaxed tone, 'Noburu, do you think Plato doubted that he was a philosopher?' I answered, 'By definition, yes. I take the philosopher as someone who suspects that he may be a sophist. Because I believe Plato was a real philosopher, he must've had a doubt'. Myles smiled and said nothing.

I tried to clarify this point in my book, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist*, published in 1999. When I discussed the image of the sophist and philosopher, I introduced the ethical difficulty, namely, 'Who is a sophist, and who is a philosopher?' I wrote that 'Finally, what are you and I who read the *Sophist*? We readers may be asked whether or not we are sophists if we participate in the enquiry; we are not ourselves exempt from this serious question.'¹ In a later chapter, I came back and saw this difficulty as the core of the problem:

Those who ignore the sophistic counter-attack on philosophy cannot really see philosophical issues in the *Sophist*: for to ignore the sophist is to avoid examining ourselves. In my view, real philosophy is impossible without serious confrontation with the sophist. The sophist is not an opponent standing outside you and me, but lives within ourselves, or he may be ourselves. This cross-examination of ourselves is the only way, I suggest, to save the philosopher in us.²

The question of what the sophist is must be the most important philosophical problem. By this, I mean it is not *one* of the important philosophical issues but the very issue that challenges philosophy itself. In other words, we do not address this issue within the discipline of philosophy, but we ourselves are asked if we engage in philosophy and whether we ourselves are philosophers. The possibility of philosophy is at stake here.

This is what I demonstrated in my monograph published twenty-three years ago. But that was just a leitmotif for an important project. In this paper, I move forward and revisit the core project of defining the sophist. To this end, I must discuss the similarities between the sophist and the philosopher once again.

1 Notomi, 1999, 72-73.

2 Notomi, 1999, 204.

2. Who should be distinguished?

We are confused about philosophers, not only in ancient Greece but also today. Many people may assume that philosophers are found in universities or philosophy departments, but they soon become lost as to where to find one. In our society, philosophers are probably confused with scholars, teachers, journalists, spiritual leaders, and politicians. A large difference between us and Plato is that we no longer use the term 'sophist', so few people raise the question about the difference between a sophist and a philosopher today.

To consider how to find a philosopher, let us examine where Plato started in the dialogue *Sophist*. The initial exchange between Theodorus and Socrates focuses on the various images of a philosopher. The adjective 'φιλόσοφος' is stated twice by Theodorus in the first two paragraphs. First, he introduces the visitor from Elea as 'very much a philosopher (μάλα ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον)' (216a). However, in response to Socrates' mysterious identification of him with the god, Theodorus again underlines that he is godlike (θεῖος), because 'φιλόσοφος' is so called (216c). Here, before the main topic of the sophist is introduced, a deep confusion between philosopher and god is revealed. But which god is being considered here?

Although Homeric quotations by Socrates are often discussed by commentators, I think we should not miss the shadow of the *Phaedrus* in the introductory conversation. Socrates first says that Homer says that 'gods generally attend on all humans who show due respect', and that 'the god of strangers and visitors attends on (συννοπαδόν) us humans and observes us as we overstep the mark or keep in line' (216b, trans. Christopher Rowe). We notice that the word 'συννοπαδός' is rare and used only twice in the classical and earlier periods, both in Plato. Another example occurs in the *Phaedrus*. In the myth of the heavenly procession of the souls, the ordinance of Necessity is that 'whichever soul follows (συννοπαδός) in the train of a god and catches sight of part of what is true shall remain free from sorrow until the next circuit' (248c, trans. Rowe).

The myth of the *Phaedrus* describes what love is. In heaven, the souls of philosophers are among the followers of Zeus (Διὸς ὀπαδῶν) (252c). By investigating whether their beloved is doing philosophy (loving wisdom), he endeavours to realise the nature of the lover (252e).

If it is from Zeus that they draw, like Bacchants, they pour the draught over the soul of their loved one and make him as like their god as possible (ποιοῦσιν ὡς δυνατόν ὁμοιότατον τῷ σφετέρῳ θεῷ). (253a-b)

The god accompanying the philosopher turns out to be Zeus.

Compared with Plato's use of 'συνοπαδός', the verb 'ὀπηδέω' is seen more often in Homer³: for example, when the elder Phaeacian advises the king Alcinoos to entertain the visitor (ξείνος), he says that 'we may pour libations also to Zeus, who hurls the thunderbolt; for he ever *attends upon* (ὀπηδεῖ) reverend supplicants'. (*Od.* 7. 164-165, trans. A. T. Murray)

The initial conversation of the *Sophist* with reference to Homer suggests that Zeus accompanies the philosopher, instead of the philosopher's accompanying Zeus as in the *Phaedrus* myth. In this image, the Eleatic visitor, the alleged philosopher and follower of Zeus, is mistaken for the god Zeus. Theodorus tries to correct this conflation and suggests that they separate the divine philosopher from the god. But does he make a clear distinction?

Another shadow of the *Phaedrus* is seen shortly after, where Socrates adds that 'philosophers might give the impression that they are completely mad (μανικῶς)' (216d). This points to the divine madness that philosophers possess in the *Phaedrus*. We see that the philosophers' madness is mentioned later when the Eleatic visitor asks the third favour of his interlocutor: he is afraid that he would seem *mad* (μανικός) to Theaetetus for doing an immediate about-turn (242a). But such 'about-turns' are necessary steps for philosophers pursuing dialectical arguments. The initial conversation alluding to the *Phaedrus* points out that the philosopher and god are being confused.

3. How are they distinguished?

It is no easier to distinguish (διακρίνειν) the philosopher than the god, since both present all sorts of appearances because of the ignorance of others (216c). Socrates then raises the question of how to think about the three kinds, namely sophist, statesman, and philosopher. The Eleatic visitor replies that people in Elea believe that they are distinct, so he and his young interlocutor, Theaetetus, begin to define the sophist first. Here, the problem is clearly stated, that although these three kinds are divided (διαιρούμενοι), it is not easy to determine (διορίζεσθαι) what each is (217b). There are three types of difficulty:

The first is how to understand the relationships between the three kinds. Are they all different and independent of each other, as people in Elea assumed? Or is it the case, as Michael Frede suggested, that there are only two kinds? Frede, somewhat dogmatically, states that:

3 Nine examples: *Il.*, 2.184, 5.216, 17.251, 24.368, *Od.*, 7.165, 181, 8.237, 9.271, 19.398.

‘Clearly Plato’s own view is not that there are, as it were, three natural kinds, the philosopher, the sophist, and the politician, on a par with each other. Plato’s own view seems rather to be, very roughly, that there are real philosophers and that there are false or mock-philosophers, namely sophists, easily mistaken for the real thing; and that politicians are either real philosophers or false or fake philosophers and hence sophists, though it is the real philosopher-politicians who easily get mistaken for sophists.’⁴

I share this view, but I believe that Plato treated the relationship between the philosopher and the statesman more carefully in the *Statesman*.⁵

The second, as we saw in the initial conversation, pertains to the difficulty in distinguishing between god and humans. Here we must note that the quoted passage of *Odyssey* 17, 485-497, was severely criticised by Socrates in *Republic* 2, 381d, since he insists that gods never make various appearances. On a larger scale, we will observe a basic difference between divine king and human statesman in the great myth of the *Statesman*. I suggest that also in the *Sophist*, the distinctions between god, philosophers, and sophists are a hidden issue.⁶ If the philosopher is one who makes him or herself as like the god as possible, what do we think of the relationship between the sophist and the god?

A third difficulty is how to distinguish between the sophist and philosopher. Although this is what the entire dialogue is officially addressing, some commentators question whether the distinction is being proposed, or if it is, whether it is being proposed successfully. I strongly disagree with this view, because both the concluding remark of the Eleatic visitor at the end of the dialogue and the introductory conversation of the *Statesman* clearly indicate confidence in the definition. Let us now examine the dialogue itself.

4. Similarity is slippery

The early enquiry into the sophist depicted six kinds of the sophist: [1] a hunter for rich young men (221c-223b); [2-4] a merchant, a retail dealer, and a manufacturing trader of learning (223c-224e); [5] a fighter in private arguments (224e-226a); and [6] a purifier of wrong opinions in the soul by means of refutation (226a-231b). However, these appearances are not sat-

4 Frede, 1996b, 149.

5 I suggested the latter option in Notomi, 2017.

6 One of the final division is between divine and human, *Sph.* 265b-266d; cf. Notomi, 1999, 287-299, 287-300.

isfactory achievements but imply crucial defects. There are several questions regarding this result:

- (1) Why were so many definitions produced instead of just one?
- (2) Are they all correct descriptions of the sophist? Or are some of them wrong, and therefore not definitions of the sophist?
- (3) If they are all definitions, what relation can be found between them? Are they part of a single overall definition? Or are they independent (in which case, how can we think of ‘definition’)?
- (4) If they are definitions, are they equally valid? Or are some more important than others? Which are the most important, and why?

Since this doubt is expressed immediately after the six definitions are completed, we can understand that the last one is the main cause of these troubles. The sixth definition reveals the purifier of the soul who, by using refutations, gets rid of the dislearnability (ἀμαθία) of the ignorant. Immediately after this definition, Theaetetus raises the question:

Tht. All the same, what has just been described does bear quite a resemblance (προσέοικε) to someone of that sort.

EV. Yes, and a wolf has quite a resemblance to a dog—the most savage of creatures to the gentlest. To be safe, one must always be particularly on one’s guard when it comes to similarities (περὶ τὰς ὁμοιότητας); for similarity is the most slippery of kinds. (231a)

Similarity is slippery. Whenever we say that A and B are similar, we sometimes have to say that A and B are dissimilar because every pair has common characteristics and differences. For example, we can say that a wolf and a dog are similar (in appearance and kind), but we must also say that they are quite dissimilar (in nature). Therefore, without specifying the aspects in which any two are similar and dissimilar, the sophist will easily mislead us into confusion and contradiction. It should be noted that similar and dissimilar are deemed contradictory in Zeno’s argument in the *Parmenides*: Zeno says that ‘If beings are many, then they must be both *similar* and *dissimilar*, but that is impossible; for dissimilar things cannot be similar or similar things dissimilar’ (127e, trans Gill & Ryan).

Obviously, deception through similarities is a major technique employed by the sophists, who are experts in rhetoric. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates explains this:

Soc. Then clearly those who hold beliefs contrary to the things that are (παρὰ τὰ ὄντα) and are deceived have this kind of thing creeping in on them through certain similarities (δι' ὁμοιοτήτων τινῶν).

Phdr. It does happen that way.

Soc. So is there any way in which a man will be expert at making others cross over little by little from the thing that is (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος) on each occasion, via the similarities (διὰ τῶν ὁμοιοτήτων), leading them away towards the opposite (τοὔναντίον), or at escaping this himself, if he has not recognized what each thing that is actually is?

Phdr. No, never. (262b, trans. Rowe, slightly modified)

We should remember that deception by the sophist is discussed in the first part of the *Sophist*. In the first six definitions of the sophist, each appears to have some similarities to the previous one. Gradually shifting the focus, the enquiry eventually presented a dubious sophist, called the 'sophist of noble lineage', who may be a Socrates. There, moving little by little, the enquiry reaches the opposite. Therefore, sophists can easily make use of this tool to produce apparent contradictions. However, it is not easy to show how contradictions are merely apparent. For generally speaking, any two things in this world are similar *and* dissimilar.

5. Similarity is defined

We may expect that the concept of similarity will play a key role in the *Sophist*, but strangely, Plato uses these words only in a few places. The adjective 'ὅμοιος' is used four times and the noun 'ὁμοιότης' is used twice.⁷ Of these six examples, three appear in the explanation of separative art (διαίρετική), and another is used to describe a simile. Although the art of separating like from like (ὅμοιον ἀφ' ὁμοίου, 226d), which is said to have no common name, may well be associated with dialectic, I find this strange because if Plato seriously tackles this concept within the dialogue, he should have used these words more frequently. This leads me to the hypothesis that some basic consideration, and maybe a solution as well, must have already been given in the earlier dialogues. I suggest that it was in the *Parmenides*.

7 'ὅμοιος', 226d2, 3, 252d1, 259d4; 'ὁμοιότης', 227b3, 231a7; cf. 'ὁμοίωμα', 266d7, 'ἀφομοιωθέν', 221c2, 'ἀφωμοιωμένον', 240a8; 'συγγενές', 221d9, 227b1, 1, 228a8, b6, 264b2.

In the paper that I presented in the last IPS symposium in Paris,⁸ I discussed and showed that the *Parmenides* examines the concept of similarity. When Zeno first introduces it in his *ad absurdum* argument against pluralists (128e-129b), Socrates suggests that positing the Forms of Similarity and Dissimilarity will solve the difficulty. However, in the infinite regress argument (132c-133a), the concept of similarity that represents the relation between Forms and sensibles, as between models and copies, turns out to be a cause of serious difficulties.⁹ Therefore, in the second part of the *Parmenides*, similarity is discussed extensively as one of the features to examine in relation to the One, and Parmenides gives the following definition of ‘similar’: τὸ ταῦτόν που πεπονθὸς ὁμοιον (139e).

The Greek is very hard to translate, but literally, it means ‘that which is affected the same is similar’.¹⁰ This definition, in terms of Sameness, must be a critical hint as to how to solve the similarity problem. Here, it might be interesting to see how Aristotle took over this definition. He defines ‘similar (ὅμοια)’ in two passages in *Metaphysics*, in slightly different ways. In Chapter 9 of Delta (the so-called philosophical lexicon), he distinguishes three senses of ‘similar’:

We call similar (ὅμοια) both things whose affections are the same (τὰ¹¹ ταῦτὸ πεπονθότα); and things more of whose affections are the same than other (τὰ πλείω ταῦτὸ πεπονθότα ἢ ἕτερα): and those whose quality is one. (Δ 9, 1018a15-17)

The first definition is exactly the same as Plato’s, which was probably fashionable in the Academy, whereas the other passage in Chapter 3 of Iota presents four senses (1054b3-14) without using the phrase ‘ταῦτὸ πεπονθός’.

While the *Parmenides* does not explain why ‘ταῦτὸ πεπονθός’ means ‘similar’, the *Sophist* gives us important clues for understanding this definition.

6. Affection means participation

In the *Sophist*, the verb ‘πάσχειν’ and its noun ‘πάθος’ are used in the critical examination of Monists (especially Parmenides himself). The Eleatic visitor examines the relationship between ‘one’ and ‘whole’ in the following way:

8 Cf. Notomi, 2022.

9 For this argument, I follow the interpretation of Schofield, 1996.

10 Gill & Ryan, 1996, translate: ‘whatever has a property the same is surely like’.

11 Manuscript A^b and Alexander’s commentary add πάντη, probably to balance with the next one.

EV. Now something divided up into parts is not in any way prevented from having oneness as an affection (πάθος) covering all its parts, and from being in this way, one is both being all (πᾶν) and a whole (ὅλον).

Tht. Of course not.

EV. But is it not impossible for something affected (πεπονθός) in this way to be, itself, that one by itself? (245a)

In this argument, the Eleatic visitor introduces the two types of ‘one’, that is, the one itself (which has no part, nor is ‘a whole’) and one thing (which participates in Oneness and has parts as being ‘a whole’). He argues that if being is one and a whole by having the affection (πάθος) of the one (πεπονθός), then being is no longer one (because it has many parts). This perplexing and strange argument aims not only to reject the monism of Parmenides but also to provide the basic scheme of treating the relationships between kinds. Being affected (πεπονθός) or having an affection (πάθος) means the thing’s participation in Form. This condition of ‘being affected’ separates one thing from the one itself.

This terminology plays a crucial role in later dialogues. In *Timaeus* 37b, in discussing the World Soul as consisting of Sameness, Difference, and Being, Timaeus says, ‘She (sc. the World Soul) declares with what thing, in what manner, how, and when that wherewith anything is the same, or than which it is other, *is and is predicated to be* (εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν)’ (37b, trans. A. E. Taylor).¹² A. E. Taylor translated ‘πάσχειν’ as ‘is predicated to be’, and commented that such use of πάσχειν as the sense ‘to have a certain predicate’ is also seen in *Prm.* 139e, 140a, and *Euthphr.* 8d.¹³

Proclus commented on this extremely difficult passage and explained the expression ‘εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν’ in the following way:

For Plato often signifies ‘to participate (μετέχειν)’ by ‘to be affected (πεπονθέναι)’, as we have learned in the *Sophist*, that when he states that to a thing affected a whole is one, it is not the one itself but that which participates in one... Then, he himself is accustomed to signify participations by ‘to be affected’, and to call all ‘that participates in’ being affected that in which it participates. (Proclus, *In Tim.* ii, 304.19-22, 26-28. Diehl)

12 W. R. M. Lamb: ‘that each thing *is and is acted upon*’; D. Zeyl: ‘they are the same or different and are characterized as such’.

13 Taylor, 1928, 177.

We can also confirm this explanation by looking at the *Parmenides* 129b, where Socrates puts forward the theory of Forms:

But if he shows that things that participate (μετέχοντα) in both of these have both affections (πεπονθότα), there seems to me nothing strange about that.

Klaus Corcilius, in the examination of this part of the *Timaeus*, follows Proclus' interpretation and relates this passage to *Sophist* 245. He says that 'Plato speaks of the participation of the many in the one in terms of affection or 'undergoing' (πάθος, 245a1, πεπονθός, a5).' Correspondingly, the expression 'εἶναι καὶ πάσχειν' in the *Timaeus* 'can be taken to cover both intrinsic being (*einai*, *F*-ness) and what things are in virtue of partaking in intrinsic being, what they 'undergo' (*paschein*, being *F*-things).'¹⁴

It should be noted that in the later dialogues, 'participation (μετέχειν)' is not restricted to the relation between sensible things and Forms. Forms also participate in other forms.¹⁵

If, as suggested so far, Plato used the word 'be affected (πεπονθός)' for the participation relation, the definition of similarity will be understood. Just as a thing that participates in the one has an affection of a whole, so things that participate in Sameness are *similar*. This analysis strongly suggests that there is no Form of 'whole' because whole is an affection but not a Form. The same is true for 'similar'. I think this is why the Form of Similarity no longer appears in the dialogues in the *Sophist* or any subsequent one. This means that we can and should avoid using this confusing notion but explain 'similarity' in terms of sameness and difference.

Concerning 'πάσχειν' and 'πεπονθέναι' in this part, Fiona Leigh tried to show that it is the passive state of causation (ποιεῖν).¹⁶ In the *Phaedo*, the Form is considered a cause of being in the sensible world. Although the pair of πάσχειν and ποιεῖν plays an important role in the Gigantomachia argument, I suspend the judgement as to whether 'affection', used in the refutation of Monists, implies the causal relation of Form on the things which participate in it.

¹⁴ Corcilius, 2018, 69.

¹⁵ Therefore, the word 'wholes' is used for the relation between kinds in 253c-d.

¹⁶ Leigh, 2010, 63-85.

7. The art of dialectic explicates similarities

It is important that the *Parmenides* defines similarity not as an independent, basic concept but as a derivative from Sameness. Sameness has played a key role in the theory of transcendent Forms as well as in the combination of the greatest kinds in the *Sophist*.

In the earlier dialogues, Forms are grasped by focusing on *the same* form over many sensible things, and this focus leads us to the contemplation of the Forms. For example, in the *Meno*, Socrates asks the question of ‘What is it?’, and suggests that virtue as the object of enquiry should be one and *the same* form (ἐν τι εἶδος ταῦτόν, *Men.* 72c), and *the same* over all (ταῦτόν ἐπὶ πᾶσιν, 75a).¹⁷ Thus, Sameness is a criterion of the Forms over many sensible things. Further, the concept of sameness represents the self-identity of Forms and implies each Form’s contrariety to its opposite Form (*Euthphr.* 7a)¹⁸.

If we apply the definition of ‘similar’ to particular cases, we can reconstruct the argument of how to understand similarities and dissimilarities:

[Similar things] A sensible thing A participates in Beauty itself, and another thing B participates in Beauty itself. The Form of Beauty is the same with itself. Therefore, beautiful A and beautiful B are similar.

[Dissimilar things] A sensible thing A participates in Beauty itself, and another thing B participates in Ugliness itself. The Form of Beauty and the Form of Ugliness are different (not the same). Therefore, beautiful A and ugly B are dissimilar. In this case, even if one thinks that A and B are similar in beauty, that similarity is merely apparent.

How, then, can we understand the similarities and differences between the sophist and the philosopher? In the concluding remark of the combination of kinds, the Eleatic visitor criticises those who confuse the same and different. He says:

17 Bees are *the same* (ταῦτόν), although they are of many kinds (72c); health is *the same* (72d-e); strength is *the same* in respect to *the same* form (sc. strength) (72e). Further, in the *Symposium*, Diotima says to Socrates, ‘It is quite mad not to regard the beauty in all bodies as one and *the same* (ἐν τε καὶ ταῦτόν)’ (*Smp.* 210b). Socrates argues that all instances of courage are *the same* in all the cases (ἐν πᾶσι τούτοις ταῦτόν, *La.* 191e) and that all instances of piety are *the same* (ταῦτόν) and have one form (μίαν τινὰ ιδέαν) in all the pious actions (*Euthphr.* 5d).

18 By contrast, the preservation and continuity of a thing is not absolutely the same, but that it leaves something new of that sort that it was (*Smp.* 208a-b).

EV. Every time someone claims that a thing is the same when it is different or different when it is the same, we should understand just what way he means, and in what respect he is claiming it to *be affected* (πεπονθέναι) one or the other. To claim the same to be different, the different the same, the big small or the like, unlike in any old way, and delight in this sort of thing, forever countering with opposites in one's arguments. (259c-d)

If we consider that the verb 'be affected' expresses participation or predication in what partakes of Forms, the first advice is understood as clarifying the aspect and manner in which these predicates are applied. The opponent confuses the same and different, big and small, and similar and dissimilar. This statement indicates that the art of dialectic can distinguish between Sameness and Difference, and thereby observe relations between kinds. The Eleatic visitor described the dialectic as follows:

EV. Are we not going to claim that dividing according to kinds (κατὰ γένῃ διαιρεῖσθαι), and not thinking either that the same form is different or, when it is different, that it is the same (μήτε ταὐτὸν εἶδος ἕτερον ἡγήσασθαι μήτε ἕτερον ὄν ταὐτὸν), belongs to expertise in dialectic? (253d)

However, the opponent ignores these differences and confuses them. He must be a sophist.¹⁹ Thus, if we can correctly understand sameness and participation through dialectic, the confusion caused by similarities can be eliminated. Then, we can state the way and in which respect two things are similar or dissimilar. We will no longer be bothered by the assertion that one thing is at once similar and dissimilar to another.

8. Now we can determine the noble sophist

Now, let us move forward to the distinction between the sophist and the philosopher. To distinguish between them, it is still crucial to understand the sixth definition of the sophist, namely the purifier of the soul. Is the so-called 'sophist of noble lineage' a real sophist or a philosopher like Socrates? Difficulties in 'similarity' arose when this definition was completed.

The Eleatic visitor compared this to the situation in which 'a wolf has quite a resemblance to a dog—the most savage of creatures to the gentlest'. The wolf and dog pair may be a common example to illustrate the difficulty

19 This person is called 'late-learner', who might well include Antisthenes.

of distinction. However, this pair is reminiscent of the pair of a sophist and a philosopher. The dog is generally a tame and clever animal, and is mentioned as a simile for the philosopher-rulers in the *Republic*. By contrast, wolves are known as wild, dangerous, and cunning. The poetic phrase ‘as wolves love lambs’, spoken by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*,²⁰ evokes the image of a sophist hunting young men. The sixth definition also states that the character ‘gentle towards others’ (cf. ἡμερούνται, 230b) belongs to those whose ignorance can be removed by the method of refutation. Thus, the pair of wolf and dog signifies the difficulty of dissociation between the sophist and the philosopher. The fact is that the sixth definition presents serious difficulties as to whether this specialist is considered a sophist or a philosopher.

We can see an important expression of this in the description of ‘refutation (ἔλεγχος)’. Thus, the purifiers of the soul are described:

EV. They use the conversation to collect those beliefs together and put them side by side, thereby revealing them as *contradicting* (ἐναντίας) one another, not just on the same subjects but in relation to the same things and in the same respects. (230b)

Is this the genuine method of refutation, such as that employed by Socrates, or is it a fake method of apparent refutation? If we have the right understanding of sameness and difference, we will confidently say that it is authentic.

This description evokes the law of non-contradiction, but in the final definition, the sophist turns out to be the maker of apparent contradictions that disguise genuine contradictions. I therefore proposed in my book that the sophist of noble lineage is a *Socratic* philosopher,²¹ which turns out to be the case *after* a dialectical examination of the middle part of the dialogue.²² Until this lengthy discussion, the sixth definition has not yet been determined.

9. How do we distinguish between the sophist and the philosopher?

Can we now distinguish between the sophist and the philosopher? I believe not yet, for the relationship between them is not so simple as to participate

20 *Phdr.* 241d. Perhaps a Homeric allusion.

21 Here the dialecticians proposed and represented by the Eleatic visitor may be philosophers of a different kind, albeit brothers.

22 The evidence for this claim is the list of the sophists in the first outer part in 265a, which does not include the sixth definition. See Notomi, 1999, 275-277.

in different Forms. One might suppose that the philosopher participates in wisdom, whereas the sophist does not (but maybe participates in ignorance). However, there are reasons to be sceptical. As Socrates consistently reminds us, human beings do not possess wisdom or knowledge about the most important things (e.g. justice, beauty, and goodness). If so, we cannot say that the philosopher participates in wisdom, but we should say that philosophers seek wisdom with full awareness of their own ignorance. The sophist, by contrast, is not a possessor of wisdom either, but he pretends to know everything with faint awareness and suspicion. Therefore, to distinguish between the two, it is necessary to consider god as the third factor. In the *Sophist*, it is confirmed that god alone possesses the wisdom of all things (233a).

God (wise)



<imitating>



Human beings

Philosopher ← <pretending> ← Sophist

becoming like a god *false appearance of a god*

[Scheme 1: Relationship between god, philosopher, and sophist]

This triangular scheme is illustrated by the paradigm of two kinds of image-making:

Original



<imitating>



Image (εἶδωλον)

Likeness (εἰκών) ← <pretending> ← Apparition (φάντασμα)

being like *not being like*
(true appearance) appearing to be like *(false appearance)*

[Scheme 2: Relationship between original, likeness, and apparition]

Thus, the essence of the philosopher lies in the ‘imitation of god’, as the *Theaetetus* (176a-b) and other dialogues show. We remember that in the myth of the *Phaedrus*, the philosopher’s soul is said to seek to become like the god. Although the dialogue *Sophist* does not state that philosophers belong to likeness-making, I believe that, as long as they are contrasted with the sophists as apparition-making, it is reasonable to see this contrast within image-making art.

10. Can we be philosophers?

The sophist and the philosopher are to be distinguished on three levels. First, their distinction is made in the theoretical enquiry given in the dialogue. However, this distinction is not in isolation but is dependent on the other two. Second, the inquirers must demonstrate that their method of argumentation, including its definitions and distinctions, is philosophical and clearly different from sophistry. Otherwise, the enquiry itself will fail, and the distinction will collapse. Therefore, this performative level grounds the theoretical level. Third, the inquirers’ attitude towards enquiry should be philosophical, that is, ‘gentle’ in the face of cross-examination and refutation, as opposed to the stubborn resistance of the sophist. This attitude is well illustrated in the concluding part of the *Theaetetus*. Socrates says to Theaetetus:

Soc. And if you are barren, you will be less overbearing to those who keep company with you, and gentler (ήμερώτερος), because you’ll have the sense not to think you know what you don’t know. (210c, trans. Rowe)

Now, we can clearly see that this gentleness is the condition of the philosopher, who is freed from dislearnability by the refutation of Socrates.

Like other dialogues, Plato’s *Sophist* is not just a theoretical treatise discussing philosophical issues. We know that the *Phaedo* urges its readers to rid themselves of irrational fears and purify their souls.²³ Similarly, the *Republic* expects its readers to transform their own souls through their imaginations.²⁴ I believe that the later dialogues are also intended to encourage us, the readers of the dialogues, to practice dialectic.²⁵ The practice of dialectic and making us philosophers is the real purpose of discussing the distinction between the sophist, statesman, and philosopher.

23 Notomi, 2018.

24 Notomi, 2019.

25 *Plt.* 285d, 287a clearly states this aim.

If everyone, including Socrates and Plato, is suspected of being a sophist, we must prove through the correct method of dialectic that we are engaging in philosophy. Defining the sophist is an important part of that huge project, and if we succeed in this first task, we will become more like god and we will live a better life as philosophers. To do this, we must be aware of our own ignorance and take care of our souls. The dialogue *Sophist* must be the ideal guide for this project. The real target is definitely ‘us’. We must confront the sophist within us.

Of Dogs and Wolves, Fathers and Sons, Sophists and Philosophers

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By analyzing the first six definitions, this paper argues that in the *Sophist* it is not easy to distinguish between the philosopher and the sophist. The difficulty is especially clear in the sixth definition, which associates Socrates the philosopher with the sophists not only in terms of methods but also in terms of practices. Socratic *elenchos* and sophistical antilogic turn out to be much closer than expected; in addition, the evidence of Aristophanes' *Clouds* shows that Socrates and the sophists also share the same pedagogical methods. This parallel will also serve to clarify what is at stake in Parmenides' parricide and will shed further light on the relation between Socrates' *elenchos* and Plato's dialectical methods.

elenchos, dogs and wolves, Plato and the sophists, patricide, the noble sophist

Dogs and Wolves

1.

Ancient Greeks loved to hunt. Even more, they loved to hear hunting tales where everything is elusive and ambiguous; where the prey disappears and reappears in the most unexpected ways and then escapes again, leaving the hunters bewildered; where the hunter also risks becoming prey, as happened to Actaeon, who was mauled by his dogs. After all, in the Greek imaginaire, dogs are faithful hunting companions, but they are also potentially infernal and very dangerous animals. Confusion is great while hunting, everything becomes uncertain, the roles always in danger of overturning.

Dogs and wolves are also mentioned in a well-known passage of the *Sophist*. It is a decisive moment in the dialogue, occurring at the end of the sixth division:

ELEATIC STRANGER: For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we have to say that refutation (τὸν ἔλεγχον) is the principal and most important kind of cleansing. [...].

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

ELEATIC STRANGER: Well, then, who are we going to say the people who apply this form of expertise are? I'm afraid to call them sophists.

THEAETETUS: Why?

ELEATIC STRANGER: So we don't pay sophists too high an honor.

THEAETETUS: But there is a similarity between what we've been talking about and a sophist.

ELEATIC STRANGER: And between a wolf and a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest. If you're going to be safe, you have to be especially careful about similarities, since the type we're talking about is very slippery. Anyway, let that description of them stand. I certainly don't think that when the sophists are enough on their guard the dispute will be about an unimportant distinction (Pl. *Sph*, 230d7-231b1; trans. White (in Cooper), slightly modified).

The reference is interesting for Plato's readers. It can be paralleled with many other important texts from some of the most important dialogues, from the *Republic* to the *Phaedrus*.¹ In some cases the opposition between dogs and wolves is clear, but in other cases it is nuanced. In the *Phaedrus*, the false lover who corrupts the young beloved is like the wolf chasing the lamb (Pl. *Phdr*, 241d). The opposition cannot be clearer in the *Republic*, where the sophist Thrasymachus, Socrates's main opponent in Book 1, is described as a wolf (to which the tyrant will be later compared at; see Pl. *R*, 336b and 565d). As for the dog, it is well known that the first occurrence of the term *philosophos*—a term whose importance need not be underlined—is applied to the dogs in the dialogue. Insofar as they know (or need be trained) to distinguish the good from the evil, dogs display a philosophical nature, and they turn out to be the ideal guardian and protector of the herd (*R*, 375a, 376a-b). As we read in an ancient testimony, the dog is a “διακριτικὸν ζῷον” because he distinguishes the friend from the stranger (*Scholia in Aristotelem* 23b16-23 Brandis). Likewise, in the *Parmenides*, Zeno compares Socrates's critical attitude to the female dogs of Laconia that are always in search, following traces (Pl. *Prm*, 128c).

However, the opposition is more nuanced in other occasions. In the *Republic* (539b), for instance, young dialecticians who play with words and want only to contradict are described as cubs playing with bones. More dangerously, it can also happen that dogs ally with wolves (Pl. *Lg*, 906c-d); even worse, dogs can turn into wolves if they are not well educated. The dog—the benevolent, well-meaning, kindly ally—can thus become a wolf, a savage master (ἀντὶ συμμάχων εὐμενῶν δεσπότηαις ἀγρίοις; Pl. *R*, 416a-b).²

1 Mainoldi 1984, 187-200; Arruzza 2019, 206-208.

2 Ferrari 2007, 185-186. The same happens also in the case of the tyrant, see 566a.

When we turn to the *Sophist*, the opposition between the two animals seems to be clear. But perhaps it also mirrors a similar ambiguity of roles. A distinction between the dog and the wolf is implied; however, taken literally, the text also presents some ambiguities, and it seems to suggest that the animal associated with the sophist is the dog, and the animal associated with the practitioner of the purificatory arts is the wolf.³ Of course, it might be objected, nothing impedes us from reading the text *ad sensum* and inverting the attributions. Or, as several scholars have suggested, it is not even necessary to take the analogy literally and, despite the many parallels, read it as if the reference to dogs and wolves was introduced only to indicate an opposition, without further implications.⁴ It might be, yet the phrase remains intriguing. This quick comparison seems to mirror the same uncertainty distinctive of the whole first part of the dialogue and, most notably, of this last section, the sixth division. Sure, the sophist and the philosopher are assumed to be different. And they differ, of course, as dogs and wolves differ. But what does their difference consist of? How are we to distinguish them? This is a serious problem. It is the problem under investigation from the beginning of the dialogue; at the end of the sixth division, it seems to be almost impossible to solve (231b9-c2).

With a tone “serious and sympathetic” (Kerferd, 1954, 84), different from the tone of the other divisions, the two interlocutors have indeed described the sophist as an expert in the *diakritike techne*, the art of discrimination (226c8), who is engaged in purifying the soul of the interlocutors from ignorance by cross-questioning their opinions. This is what education, *paideia*, properly amounts to. Clearly, this is a “sympathetic” description of the sophist; so much so that some scholars, most notably Francis Cornford (1935, 180-182) and J. Trevas

kis (1955), even doubted that it was describing the sophist, arguing instead that it was presenting Socrates.⁵ Ingenious as it is, Cornford’s proposal is not convincing—it is not clear why Plato would have added a digression in this section of the dialogue without any indication and no further function.⁶ As

3 Kerferd 1954, 85, who rightly underlines the inversion of the two terms in Cornford’s translation.

4 Kerferd 1954, 85; Bluck 1975, 42-43; Fronterotta 2007, 74 n. 273.

5 Other supporters of this reading are listed in Notomi 1999, 65, n. 72; see also Dorion 2012, 252. Other hypotheses are that the persons referred to were neither Socrates nor the sophists but “inferior imitator of Socrates’ dialectic” (Taylor, 1949⁶, 381) or Plato himself in his earlier dialogues (Robinson 1941, 12-13).

6 Incidentally, I also notice that we are here speaking of teachers, and Socrates notoriously denies this role for himself, see for instance *Pl.* *Ap.* 33a.

a matter of fact, in this section the investigation concerns the sophist, and there is no reason to assume that something has changed, given that the two interlocutors do not say anything to that end.⁷ Indeed, as Notomi (1999) rightly remarked, this description of the sophist is in continuity with the preceding definitions (“the sixth definition is the successor of the previous definitions and develops some positive features in them”, 65). That the sophist is concerned with, and is directed to, the soul was already stated in the second definition (223e2; 224d1); again, in the second division (and in the third and fourth) it is also said that he deals with *mathemata* (224b1 and b6; 224e3), and that he deals with *logoi* reminds us of the fifth definition where mention is made of the sophist as a fighter in discourses (225c7-9). The sixth division takes up and expands elements of the previous ones.

But it is true that in the sixth division the sophist’s method unexpectedly turns out to have close similarities to Socrates’s *elenchos*, as we know it from the dialogues. Notoriously, Socrates also opposes those who think that they know, and he does it by means of cross-questioning and refuting their views. The most striking parallel is perhaps with the *Theaetetus*, the dialogue preceding the *Sophist* in the dramatic fiction, where the *elenchos* plays a prominent role as what is distinctive of both Socrates and philosophy (see Giannopoulou, 2022). Just think of the midwife section to begin with (Pl. *Tht.*, 148e-151d). Like the noble sophist, Socrates the midwife also removes psychic entities. A few pages later, in the so-called Apology, Protagoras explains to Socrates that the real teacher, who sets aside any polemical or agonistic attitude, should examine whether the thoughts of his pupil “agree with one another or are at variance,” and conflict with one another (Pl. *Tht.*, 154d-e). This is an interesting passage, given that the sophist Protagoras is speaking; again, there seems to be a methodological affinity between Socrates and the sophists. Indeed, Protagoras is acting like the noble sophist of the *Sophist*’s sixth definition.⁸ In so doing, the real teacher will cause her pupils to experience the effects described in the *Sophist*, and his interlocutors will loathe themselves for their mistakes, just as those associating with the noble sophist get angry at themselves.⁹ It is precisely what happens at the end of the dialogue when Theaetetus, finally freed from this ignorance

7 See for instance Kerferd 1954.

8 Giannopoulou 2022, 173.

9 “If you observe this distinction [by being serious in the discussion], those who associate with you will blame themselves for their confusion and their difficulties, not you. They will seek your company and think of you as their friend; but they will loathe themselves and seek refuge from themselves in philosophy”: Pl. *Tht.*, 167e-168a.

and from the illusion that he knows what he does not know, will become “gentler” (ἡμερώτερος).¹⁰ This is probably the most striking parallel with the *Sophist* insofar as it marks a substantial difference with the other dialogues, whose interlocutors often become angrier at their refuter.¹¹ In other words, it is as if the sixth definition was describing Socrates’s (or the ideal philosopher’s) activity in the *Theaetetus*. The sixth definition concerns the sophist but fits well also with Socrates, and vice versa.¹² It is for this reason—because it seems to extend the genre of the sophist to also include Socrates (in other words, because it confuses together the sophist and Socrates, who in the dialogues always stands for the philosopher)—that the result of the division is so puzzling.¹³

2.

As it turns out, such an uncertainty about the sophist is nothing new in the dialogue and has been present from the very beginning. The initial exchange between Socrates, the Eleatic Stranger, and Theodorus is very eloquent in this regard. In the very first sentence of the dialogue, Theodorus emphatically presents the Eleatic Stranger as a real philosopher (μάλα δὲ ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον; 216a4). A few lines later, however, Socrates will discretely observe that it is not easy to find this kind of person, saying, “It is no easier, I imagine, to distinguish (διακρίνειν) this kind of person than it is to distinguish gods” (Pl. *Sph*, 216c2). The problem is not so much whether the Eleatic Stranger is a god or a man, but what it means that he is a philosopher.¹⁴ To Socrates, the description of the Eleatic Stranger as an *aner philosophos* immediately evokes the *elenchos*: Perhaps, he observes, the Eleatic Stranger came to refute us (ἐλέγξων), he is a “θεὸς ἐλεγκτικός,” “a sort of god of refutation,” a god watching over us and coming to examine us (216b6). What does he mean precisely? Theodorus, followed by some important scholars such as Cornford (1935, 169) and Taylor (1949, 584), read Socrates’s association in negative terms.¹⁵ By implying an association

10 Pl. *Tht*, 210c; cf. also Pl. *Tht*, 151c-24; see Brown 2018, 94-95.

11 Blundell 2002, 384; Dorion 2012, 253, n. 4.

12 Giannopoulou 2022, 166.

13 Pace Kerferd 1954, 88, who excludes any real reference to Socrates, see Trevaskis 1955, 39.

14 Rosen 1983, 63.

15 See the evaluation of Zeno in Pl. *Phdr* 261d6-8.

between the *elenchos* and eristics, he reassures Socrates that the Eleatic Stranger is not that kind of person. Theodorus's assumption is indeed surprising. By identifying eristic and *elenchos*, he implies that philosophy has nothing to do with the *elenchos*, but Socrates's association is hardly negative—is it a surprise to hear him talking about the *elenchos*? Quite the contrary, as Francisco Gonzalez noticed, this description recalls Socrates's mission in the *Apology* (Gonzalez, 2001, 163). If needed, a clear confirmation comes from the Homeric quotations. By combining two passages from two different episodes—Polyphemus in Book IX and the suitors in Book XVII (480-487; interestingly these verses are criticized and explicitly banned in Pl. *R*, 381d)—Socrates had equated the philosopher to the gods who travel among the human beings, supervising their deeds and misdeeds and administering justice. Like the god, the philosopher also helps the others by exposing their ignorance and limits (“how bad we are at speaking,” φαύλους ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις, 216b5). Being paralleled with the divine activity, the *elenchos* seems to have a positive function. In more detail, if we consider the second quotation (216c5-9), we can further observe that Theodorus is discretely compared to the infamous Antinous, who proves incapable of seeing what is in front of him, whereas Socrates is like the younger, anonymous suitor who admits his ignorance. In other words, the Homeric comparison seems to confirm Theodorus's unfamiliarity with philosophy, an unfamiliarity which was already known to the reader of the *Theaetetus*.¹⁶ As for Socrates, like the young suitor, he typically does not know, and the question remains open, as in the Homeric quote. Who is the stranger? And more importantly, who (or what) is the philosopher, then, who takes all forms (216c4; φανταζόμενοι, see 231b9-c2; διὰ τὸ πολλὰ πεφάνθαι)? How do we distinguish him from the sophist (and the politician)? The anonymity of the Eleatic Stranger certainly does not help (Blondell, 2002, 318), and the fact that it is Theodorus who presents him as a philosopher does not either. Indeed, it is not easy to understand what and who we are talking about, given that the ambiguity is great.

This is the problem we find at the end of the sixth definition—in the two sections of the text the same terms and notions occur. The reference to the elenctic activity (ἐλέγξων, ἐλεγκτικός, 216b7), the emphasis on the need to distinguish (διακρίνεν; 216c4), and the emphasis on the danger of ignorance (ἄγνοια; 216c6) all play a decisive role in the prologue, as they will all be decisive components of the sixth definition. There is clearly a

16 Pl. *Tht*, 146b; see Rosen 1983, 64; Zuckert 2000, 66-67; Blondell 2002, 315.

strong connection between these two strategically important sections of the dialogue.

And it is not only the prologue. Ambiguities and uncertainties run throughout the whole first part of the dialogue in all of the divisions. Previously, I have noticed, along with Notomi, that there is a continuity between the sophist as he is described in the sixth division and the preceding definitions. All in all, the same also holds in the case of Socrates and the philosopher.¹⁷ There remain, of course, some differences (the most apparent being that Socrates, unlike the sophist, does not accept any salary), but the affinities are also considerable. Also Socrates is often presented as a hunter chasing young people, as in the first division; to be sure, the identification is not complete because, when we get to the final division, Socrates seems to fall in the genus of the *erotike technē* (and not in that of those who are making money from their chasing, see 222e3-4).¹⁸ But the difference is minimal in comparison to the affinities: both the sophist and Socrates appear to be hunters, attracting young people with speeches about virtue (Zuckert 2000, 72). As many other scholars have also remarked, the reference to the *adolesches* in the fifth division serves as an ironic reference to Socrates (225d11; see Gonzalez 2001, 164-165). However, not all scholars have noticed that this identification also implies a virtual association between Socrates and the eristic. As it turns out, the activity of the *adolesches*, to dispute about the just and the unjust, is just one version of eristic—a variation, as Michel Narcy brilliantly remarked, that reminds us of the activity of the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* (Pl. *Tht.* 175a-6), with the same distinction between those who engage in disputes about wrong suffered or committed as opposed to those who freely explore the problem of justice: “If one takes the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus* together, it seems that philosophy and eristic are one and the same thing” (Narcy 2013b, 66).¹⁹ Besides, as in this section of the *Sophist*, Socrates is also often described as a fighter in words (see Pl. *Tht.* 167e-168b: *agonizomenos*) and, occasionally, when needed, he does not hesitate to play dirty and to deceive his interlocutors (for instance, see Pl. *Phdr.* 261e-262c).

It is not a matter of Socrates alone, of course. The two most distinctive metaphors used for the sophist in the divisions, fighting and hunting, characterize the philosophical investigation of the *Sophist* as well. The Eleatic Stranger and his friends are also described as hunting and fighting, just

17 Wolff 1991, 45-47; Centrone 2008, xix-xx.

18 On this *technē* see Pl. *Smp.* 203d and *Phdr.* 240a.

19 After all, in the *Euthydemus* Socrates announces that he wants to learn eristic (272b9-10).

like the sophist.²⁰ Each time the sophist appears to be like the philosopher: both are hunters, both take care of the soul, both fight in argument, and both teach the young. The problem at stake at the beginning of the dialogue was not so much to define the sophist as to distinguish him from the philosopher. It does not seem they have succeeded.

Fathers and Sons

1.

Who is chasing whom, then? The starting assumption was clear: the sophist and the philosopher are different.²¹ Needless to say, this is a recurrent theme in Plato's dialogues. But in the *Sophist*, the hunt turns out to be less easy than expected. We were looking for the sophist, yet we also found the philosopher. Given their proximity, the problem is to understand why they can be so easily confused with each other. If this is the issue, the sixth definition plays a decisive role by showing where the main difficulty is, and the difficulty seems to concern the method. The affinity between the two does seem indeed to be grounded in their methods.

Traditionally, scholars oppose the Socratic method to some, not better defined, sophistical method. But what this method consists of, and what the opposition amounts to, is not clear. To be sure, the opposition cannot be the opposition between long speeches on the one side and questions and answers on the other because, in several dialogues, the sophists also claim that they can easily engage in a dialogue with the speaker.²² Indeed, that this is the case is further confirmed in the sixth definition.

An alternative proposal is that there are different methods of engaging with and opposing the interlocutor's views. On the one side there is the Socratic method (the *elenchos*), and on the other side a sophistic method, identified with antilogic, as the Eleatic Stranger also says a few lines after in the *Sophist*. But antilogic and *elenchos* are closer than is originally claimed.

20 Philosophy as hunting: 218d2-9, 226a6-b2, 231c3-6, 235a10-c7; philosophy as fighting: 231c6, 261a6-8.

21 Morgan 1993, 90-92, referring to Isocrates and other historical figures such as the Theban Epaminondas (considered as a sort of Pythagorean philosopher), suggests that the need to clarify the distinction between philosophers, sophists, and politicians implied concrete references to contemporary events.

22 See also Pl. *Grg*, 449b-c; *Prt*, 335a; *Euthd*, 272d. Besides, the Eleatic Stranger does not exclude the possibility of long speeches, see 217e4-5.

One famous scholar who argued for the difference between *elenchos* and antilogic is George Kerferd. In the footsteps of Henry Sidgwick and George Grote, Kerferd tried to draw a distinction between sophistry and philosophy (that is, between Socrates and Plato) by emphasizing that their methods have different goals. The sophistical method seeks victory in the debates; while the Socratic method is instead concerned with the search for truth.²³ But this is too simplistic a distinction. As Alexander Nehamas rightly remarked, in the case of Socrates the only criterion the Socratic method has in order to prove the validity of its investigation is the interlocutor's agreement—that is, victory in the discussion (in other words, *homologia*). This implies that “both Socrates and his opponents necessarily aimed at victory” (Nehamas, 1999, 113-115). Consequently, “Even in Plato's own eyes, the elenctic method is not sufficient to distinguish clearly between Socratic and sophistic inquiry” (Nehamas, 1999, 119). Moreover, neither of the two methods seems to be able to reach positive results. In sum, if method is the sole or most important criterion for establishing their difference, there seems to be no neat difference.

Interestingly, the ancients also traced back the invention of Socrates's method to a sophist: Protagoras, as we learn from Diogenes Laertius, who writes, “He was the first to introduce the Socratic form of arguments” (τὸν Σωκρατικὸν εἶδος τῶν λόγων πρῶτος ἐκίνησε, D.L. 9.53=80A7 D.K./31D14 L.-M.). For the ancients, too, Socrates and the sophists were closer than we used to think. Again in 370 BC, or even later in 345 BC, Socrates could be easily referred to as a “sophist.” In the public discourse he continued to be perceived as closely connected to those in Plato's dialogues who are portrayed as his most bitter and dangerous opponents.²⁴ That this happened with some reason was clear also to Plato, as the *Sophist* also shows. But this leads us to another issue.

2.

This proximity was already clear in the exchange a few lines above, when *paideia* was introduced.

ELEATIC STRANGER: One part of the kind of the teaching that's done in words is a rough road, and the other part is smoother.

23 Sidgwick 1872 and 1873; Grote 1875.

24 See Isocrates, *Helen* 1 and Aeschines, *In Timarchum* 173. Interestingly Aeschines's description of the sophist as someone who “wandered about town hunting for young men” echoes Plato's *Sophist* (see 231d2-3).

THEAETETUS: What do you mean by these two parts?

ELEATIC STRANGER: One of them is our forefathers' time-honored method of scolding or gently encouraging. They used to employ it especially on their sons, and many still use it on them nowadays when they do something wrong. Admonition would be the right thing to call all of this.

THEAETETUS: Yes.

ELEATIC STRANGER: As for the other part, some people seem to have an argument to give to themselves that lack of learning is always involuntary, and that if someone thinks he's wise, he'll never be willing to learn anything about what he thinks he's clever at. These people think that though admonition is a lot of work, it doesn't do much good.

THEAETETUS: They might be right about that.

ELEATIC STRANGER: So they set out to get rid of the belief in one's own wisdom in another way.

THEAETETUS: How?

ELEATIC STRANGER: They cross-examine someone when he thinks he's saying something though he's saying nothing. Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently, these people will easily scrutinize them. They collect opinions together during the discussion, put them aside, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects (Pl. *Sph.* 229e1-231b6).

Not much attention has been given to these lines, but what is happening here is not without importance. Two different methods of education, one traditional and one innovative, are clearly opposed, and the practice of confutation is taken to be distinctive of the new method. On this point Socrates and the sophists are really on the same side of the barricade. This is historically correct, and the consequences are not secondary. After all, this is the same idea found in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, a comedy which played an important role in Socrates's life, as all readers of the *Apology* know. Even though Plato knew Aristophanes's comedy very well—so much as to write that it played a decisive role in Socrates's condemnation—there are no clear references to that text in this section of the *Sophist*.²⁵ But the confrontation between just and unjust speech at the end of the comedy reproduces the same opposition as in the above-quoted passage. On this point Socrates and the sophists are again on the same side. On the one hand, there is the traditional education (τὴν ἀρχαίαν παιδείαν; N, 961) based on exhortations and admonishing; on the other hand, the new methods (γνώμας καινάς,

25 Unless we consider the art of picking lice at 227b5.

896; ῥηματίοισιν καινοῖς, 943) based on confutation (ἐλέγξω, 1043) and contradiction (ἀντιλέγειν, 902). Further, there is also a generational battle at stake between the generation of the fathers and that of the sons—this is the main subject of the comedy, and it is well known that Aristophanes’s main point was that the new education of the sophist Socrates, by teaching young people not to respect their fathers, will corrupt the city. On the one side is the traditional education of the fathers (ἀρχαιοπρεπὲς πᾶτριον, 229e4), and on the other side is the new education that, insofar as it opposes this traditional, paternal method, risks turning out to be a kind of patricide—this is indeed the *logos* of a patricide: πατραλοίας (913), as the just speech shouts.

Interesting as it is, this parallel with Aristophanes or, more simply, the occurrence of a reference to the tradition of the fathers at 229e4 has gone almost unnoticed in the scholarly debate. And yet the similarity is worth noticing because, in the dialogue, the reference to fathers is not isolated. It occurs again in one of the most famous passages of the dialogue, the section of Parmenides’ patricide, with Aristophanes’ same words:

ELEATIC STRANGER: Then, I’ve got something even more urgent to request.

THEAETETUS: What?

ELEATIC STRANGER: Not to think that I’m turning into some kind of patricide (πατραλοίαν).

THEAETETUS: What do you mean?

ELEATIC STRANGER: In order to defend ourselves we’re going to have to subject father Parmenides’s (τοῦ πατρὸς Παρμενίδου, 241d5) saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that that which is not somehow is, and then again that that which is somehow is not.

THEAETETUS: It does seem that in what we’re going to say, we’ll have to fight through that issue.

ELEATIC STRANGER: That’s obvious even to a blind man, as they say. We’ll never be able to avoid having to make ourselves ridiculous by saying conflicting things whenever we talk about false statements and beliefs, either as copies or likenesses or imitations or appearances, or about whatever sorts of expertise there are concerning those things – unless, that is, we either refute Parmenides’ claims or else agree to accept them.

THEAETETUS: That’s true.

ELEATIC STRANGER: So that’s why we have to be bold enough to attack what our father says (πατρικῶ λόγῳ; 241d1-242a1)

The parallels between the two sections are striking. From the very beginning, Parmenides the father is introduced as an elderly person speaking to chil-

dren (237a4-6). The same opposition also occurs later, at 242c8-9, in an interesting passage in which Parmenides and the other older (Presocratic) thinkers are criticized for telling stories: “They each appear to me to tell us a myth, as if we were children” (242c8-9; these stories are not very useful for a proper division, see 242c5).²⁶ The term calls to mind the traditional education of the sixth division, where one of the of typical activities is “παραμυθεῖν μαλθακοτέρως” (230a2; cf. also Pl. *R*, 476e1: παραμυθεῖσθαι...ἡρέμα). On the other hand, just like the noble sophist in the sixth division, we have the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus practicing the *elenchos*. In this section, there is also a sense of dramatic urgency, with the Eleatic Stranger underlining the audacity of what he is going to do (τόλμα, 237a3). Not only is he going to disobey his father, but he will even assault him (242a1) and fight against him (241d, 242a, 258c).

The parallels between the two sections are indeed eloquent. In both cases, we have an opposition between two methods, one traditional method based on stories, the other more innovative and based on refutation and cross-questioning. On the reasonable assumption that in the sixth definition the content of the teaching is the same in both cases (in the sense that the noble sophist investigates the traditional values which were the object of traditional teaching), the parallel becomes even more noticeable. In both cases we have, on the one side, one teacher telling a story; on the other, a teacher exploring (and refuting) the content of that story with his pupil. Even more remarkably, just like in the sixth division (and before in the prologue), the emphasis is on the *elenchos*, which is mentioned four times in only a few lines (241e1, 242b1-2, 242b4; see also *basanizein* at 241d6). In the structure of the dialogue, this is a clear reference to the prologue and the sixth definition—it is only in these three passages that the *elenchos* is mentioned. In one word, the Eleatic Stranger seems to act like Socrates and the noble sophist of the sixth definition, or like Socrates in Plato’s dialogues, or like the sophist Socrates of Aristophanes’s *Clouds*. How should we interpret these parallels?

Unlike the instance of the unjust speech in Aristophanes, Plato is respectful. “Attacking one father is the ultimate crime,” it has been remarked²⁷, and indeed the Eleatic Stranger is careful not to present what he is going to do as a patricide. Something, however, happens. During the fighting and the hunting, the sophist exploited Parmenides’s doctrine to defend himself; in

26 See Fronterotta 2007, 339, n. 156, on the meaning of *mythos* in this passage.

27 Blondell 2002, 320; see Pl. *Cri*, 50e-51c; *Euthphr*, 113e-114a; *Lg*, 931a-e; *R*, 465a-b, 574bc.

order to defeat him and find him, the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus are now forced to abandon the father, and do not respect his injunction.²⁸ In this new world where everything is confused, the philosopher is forced to abandon this strict opposition if he wants to find his own way. For it is only when we abandon Parmenides and his sharp divisions that we can finally enter that world of appearances in which the sophist is hiding and working. As the Eleatic stranger will admit, they have betrayed him:

ELEATIC STRANGER: You know, our disbelief in Parmenides has gone even farther than his prohibition.

THEAETETUS: How?

ELEATIC STRANGER: We've pushed our investigation ahead and shown him something even beyond what he prohibited us from even thinking about (Pl. *Sph*, 258c7-11).

Methodologically, and pedagogically, this is worth a mention. As Ruby Blondell has remarked, throughout the dialogue the Eleatic Stranger seems to adopt a hierarchical pedagogy based on the principle of authority. This is certainly true for most of the dialogue, and most notably in the relationship with Theaetetus (and with Socrates the young in the *Statesman*; see Blondell, 2002, 345). But we cannot help but notice that this approach contrasts with the treatment of the father Parmenides. The Eleatic Stranger adopts a very different stance in the central section of the dialogue, which is the most intellectually stimulating part of the dialogue. All his caution notwithstanding, by challenging the paternal authority he inverts the Parmenidean authoritarian approach and echoes Socrates' critical attitude towards the tradition.²⁹ *Pater Parmenides, sed magis amica veritas*, one might observe, paraphrasing Aristotle (who was, on his turn, paraphrasing Plato), but with an important addition: it is not a matter of Socrates only, since this elenctic approach is also distinctive of the (noble) sophist, for the *elenchos* is distinctive also of the (noble) sophist. Once again, and unexpectedly, the boundaries between

28 Centrone 2008, xxviii: "il sofista chiama Parmenide a suo alleato, costringendo lo straniero a rivoltarsi contro suo padre."

29 Blondell 2002, 349: "In his willingness to refute his teacher in this fashion, he echoes the elenctic Socrates's critical attitude towards tradition, his refusal to accept human authority without question, and his subordination of personal ties to the search for impersonal truth." Consider *e contrario* Theodorus and Protagoras at Pl. *Tht*, 162a: "Protagoras was my friend...I could not consent to have him refuted through my admissions."

the Eleatic Stranger, Socrates, and the sophists are opaquer than expected. When hunting the wolf, the dog became more like him, and it is not so bad.³⁰

Philosophers and Sophists

But this is not Plato's last word. This small drama also has another story to teach us. Indeed, this is only one single episode of the whole drama, and the dialogue will end with a different conclusion. At the end, a definition of the sophist will be provided, and this will distinguish him from the philosopher. This can perhaps tell us something about another "father" and "son" relationship: the relationship between Socrates and Plato.

The Eleatic Stranger and Socrates, especially the Socrates of the *Theaetetus*, do indeed share many common traits. Just to list some of them, both are philosophically gentle, collaborative, and courageous (like the Eleatic Stranger attacks Parmenides, so does Socrates in the *Parmenides*; see also Pl. *Tht.*, 183e-184a); both are aware of their own ignorance and of the limits of their methods (249e); philosophically, they seem to share the same interests and similar research questions (what is x: Pl. *Sph.*, 217b3, 218c1, and 6-7), as well as concerns (for a general and comprehensive definition as opposed to lists of examples, see Pl. *Sph.*, 232a, 240a). Remarkably, the notion of *aporia* plays a key role in the Eleatic Stranger's investigations as it did it in Socrates' (236e, 238a, 239c, 241b, 243b, 249d-e, 249d, 250e, 264c). And of course, they both practice refutation and cross-questioning, the *elenchos*.

But it is precisely at this last point that we also encounter a major difference, for the association of this method with not only Socrates but also the (noble) sophist does not go without consequences and tensions. As we

30 Incidentally, I would like to remark that this intermingling is even more interesting if we consider Porphyry's testimony about Protagoras: "By chance I ran into Protagoras' discourse *On what is* against those who introduce the thesis that what is is one, and when I read it I discovered that he [Plato] makes use of the same kind of replies. For I took the trouble to memorize the terms verbatim. And after he has said this, he provides numerous proofs" (80B2 DK). Protagoras's relevance in the *Sophist* has been rightly remarked by Notomi 1999 and Corradi in this volume, who argued that he was somehow exploiting the Eleatic arguments in order to refute the Eleatic philosophy. Porphyry's testimony seems to suggest a more explicit stance—with Protagoras apparently arguing *in propria persona* against Eleatic monism and Plato being charged for plagiarizing him. This would imply that Plato was somehow following Protagoras in his defense of ontological pluralism (thus a co-implication of being and not-being, in Eleatic terms) against monism. In this case, the proximity between the Eleatic Stranger, Socrates, and the sophist is even stronger. However, intriguing as it is, it is hard to say more.

have seen, the adoption of this method did not prove sufficient to mark the distinction between the sophist and the philosopher Socrates, and this suggests another direction that the interlocutors will take in the second part of the dialogue. If difference must be—if we want to find a solution to the issue at hand—we need to go in other directions, as the Eleatic Stranger did. The problem is once again methodological. The philosophical research, as opposed to the false *sophia* of the sophist, must also have some positive content—this was the major limitation of Socrates’s (sophistical) *elenchos*. The *elenchos*, in other words, turns out to be a preliminary “cleansing” that has to be integrated by positive teaching. The *elenchos* proved the limits of the old (Parmenidean, and Presocratic) way of doing philosophy, but also turned out to be insufficient. It is not by accident that in the dialogue, and more generally in Plato’s later writings, the new method of dialectic will integrate and progressively take the place of the *elenchos*. Here is the real distinction from sophistry, and this is the only way to save philosophy. “The visitor’s account of elenchus thus values it highly, but at the same time incorporates it into a larger range of methodological and pedagogical possibilities, as just one of the many methods each of which may have its proper place.” This late celebration of the *elenchos* also betrays a distancing, and “the visitor thus becomes a vehicle for Plato’s resistance to his own ‘intellectual’ father.” Like The Eleatic Stranger, Plato continues to take his “father” very seriously, incorporating him into the discourse. In so doing, he invites us not so much to criticize or reject Socrates himself, but to situate his various attributes into a larger scheme (Blondell, 2002, 385-386). As the Eleatic Stranger did with Parmenides, Plato is likewise ready to “gently kill” his father by setting him aside. More is needed. Socrates’s teaching, important as it is, does not suffice to solve the riddle of the dialogue and account for philosophy. *Pater Socrates, sed magis amica veritas*. Only by recognizing both their similarities and their differences will it become possible to distinguish the dog from the wolf, and the philosopher from the sophist.

The Sophist's Invisibility vs The Philosopher's Invisibility

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In this paper I will compare the sophist and the philosopher from the point of view of their visibility and invisibility. The paper has three parts: In the first part I will discuss a passage in the *Sophist* that associates the sophist with darkness and the philosopher with light; as will become clear, light is a metaphor for knowledge and being, while darkness is a metaphor for ignorance and non-being. In the second part I will consider a passage from the analogy of the cave in the *Politeia* where Sokrates compares the transition from light to darkness and the transition from darkness to light; I will suggest that the darkness of non-being in which the sophist dwells is similar to the darkness of the cave, while the light of being in which the philosopher dwells corresponds to the region outside the cave. In the third and last part I will adduce a couple of passages from other dialogues that deal with the difficulty of perceiving the philosopher as a philosopher (*Sophist* 216c, *Kratylos* 403a, *Phaidon* 81a, 64a, *Theaitetos* 149a, *Symposion* 215ab). The point I will try to make is that Platon describes both the sophist and the philosopher as being invisible but that their invisibility is due to different reasons.
light, being, philosopher, sophist

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1.

That visual perception is a central theme of the dialogue the *Sophist* is a point that doesn't need to be particularly stressed. Platon describes the sophist as a producer of empty images, a shameless impostor, and a master of deceit whose main competence is to delude unexperienced people. At

234c–235a the sophist is called a magician or a wizard and his target public is said to be mainly made of people who are not familiar with truth and real being.¹ Magic, that is to say the skill of making empty images seem real or actual things seem mere images, is a dangerous weapon because it undermines the ontological difference between appearance and reality. Someone who can make things appear and disappear at will, the Guest from Elea says, seems to be able to do anything (πάντα ποιεῖν, *Sophist* 234b).² However, the ultimate trick by which any magician proves himself a magician is the act by which he makes *himself* disappear. Therefore, in Plato's dialogue the *Sophist* the difficulty to delineate, approach, and get hold of the protagonist is a direct consequence of his ability to disguise and dissimulate himself.

The starting point of my comparison between sophist and philosopher is the following passage, in which I emphasize the Greek expressions denoting sight, light, visibility and the opposite thereof:

It is difficult to get a clear sight (χαλεπὸν ἐναργῶς ἰδεῖν) of the philosopher but this difficulty is of a different kind than the difficulty of [seeing] the sophist. [...] The sophist runs off into the darkness of non-being (εἰς τὴν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος σκοτεινότητα) because he is used to cultivating it, and he is difficult to spot (χαλεπὸς κατανοῆσαι) because of the obscurity of the place (διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν τοῦ τόπου). [...] The philosopher on the other hand, who in his thoughts is always concerned with the nature of being (τῇ τοῦ ὄντος ιδέα), is not at all easy to discern (ὀφθῆναι) either, though this is due rather to the brightness of the region (τὸ λαμπρὸν τῆς χώρας) [in which he dwells]; for the soul's eye of the crowd (τὰ τῆς τῶν πολλῶν ψυχῆς ὄμματα) cannot possibly bear to regard the divine (τὸ θεῖον ἀφορῶντα). (*Sph.* 254a)³

At first blush, these lines deal with eyesight and its limits, namely the failure to perceive a specific visual object due to either the lack of light or the excess of light. Plato's point is to indicate that, although the effect of too little or too much light upon the eye is roughly the same, it is not immaterial to know which of the two causes prevents the eye from perceiving. The reason is that the two 'objects' under consideration, namely the philosopher and the sophist, are not accidentally but essentially connected with light and

1 See also Mx. 235a; R. 598b–d; Plt. 291bc. On the meaning of γόης see Burkert, 1962, 41–3; on the sophist as a magician see also de Romilly, 1975, 27–32.

2 At Grg. 466bc the power of orators is compared to the omnipotence of the tyrant.

3 All translations are mine unless otherwise mentioned.

darkness, respectively: the philosopher dwells in the light, while the sophist dwells in darkness.

However, a closer look at these lines reveals that Plato is not interested here in eyesight and light *per se* but uses these terms rather ambiguously as metaphors for knowledge and being. To see the sophist means to recognize that he is not the wise man he pretends to be but an artful juggler, while to see the philosopher means to realise that someone who has access to the divine and the eternal is no ordinary man. In both cases, the danger of mistaking someone for someone else is acute.⁴ The remedy against this kind of confusion is not the sensible eye, which makes no distinction between sophist, philosopher and anyone else, but the inner eye, or the eye of the soul (ὄμμα τῆς ψυχῆς). The invisible light that makes the soul's vision possible is the divine radiance of being. It is in the light of being that the soul's eye perceives the difference between appearance and reality and that the world of appearances in which the sophist dwells appears as darkness.

2.

The terms in which the sophist and the philosopher are compared in these lines recall the simile of the sun in the *Politeia*, a passage where the cognitive faculty of the soul is likened to the eye, the knowledge of ideas to eye perception, the ideas themselves to the sensible visual objects, and the idea of good to the sun. The parallels between the *Sophist* and the *Politeia* are well-known and I will not insist upon them – one may consider for instance the ontology of the image in Book 10.⁵ What I would like to draw attention to, however, is a *Politeia* passage dealing with the same two kinds of visual impairment mentioned in the *Sophist*, caused by either the absence of light or the overabundance of light. In his comments on the analogy of the cave, Sokrates famously says:

If a man were intelligent he would remember that there are two kinds of disturbances of the eyes (ὄμμασι), stemming from two sources – when they have been transferred from light to darkness (ἐκ φωτός εἰς σκότος) and when they have been transferred from darkness to light

4 Arist. *Metaph.* 1004b16–9: “dialecticians and sophists have the same appearance (τὸ αὐτὸ ὑποδύονται σχῆμα) as the philosophers; but sophistry is only apparent wisdom.” On the similarities and differences between sophist and philosopher see also Derrida, 1972, 120–36; de Romilly, 1975, 36–7.

5 Else, 1972, 26–31; Notomi, 2011, 311–26; Zucchetti, 2020.

(ἐκ σκότους εἰς φῶς). And if he held that these same things happen to a soul too, whenever he saw (ἴδοι) one that is confused and unable to discern (ἀδυνατοῦσάν τι καθορᾶν), he wouldn't laugh without reasoning but would go on to consider (ἐπισκοποῖ) whether the soul comes from a brighter life (ἐκ φανότερου βίου) and is in darkness (ἐσκότῳται) for want of being accustomed, or whether it goes from lack of learning to greater brightness (εἰς φανότερον) and is dazzled by the greater brilliance (ὑπὸ λαμπροτέρου μαρμαρυγῆς). (R. 518a)

Here, too, the soul's eye is likened to the sensible eye, and the transition from light to darkness is said to affect both visual perception and intellectual cognition in a similar way as the transition from darkness to light. Needless to say, the contrast between darkness and light is constitutive of the cave analogy, with the darkness of the cave representing the world of appearance and the outside sunlight representing the world of pure being.⁶ It is worth noting that Plato is here eager to emphasize the same point as in the *Sophist* passage, namely that despite the two transitions between light and darkness having a similar effect on the visual and cognitive faculties it does make a difference whether one goes from darkness into light or from light into darkness. In the terms of the cave analogy, the condition of a prisoner who managed to escape from the cave and, seeing the daylight for the first time, is overwhelmed by the awareness of a superior ontological level is quite different from the condition of a free man who is well acquainted with real being and who, having decided to go back into the cave, must inevitably grope around in the dark and make a fool of himself among the cavemen.

Now, if we put together the two passages in the *Sophist* and the *Politeia* – and I think that the numerous points of contact between them entitle us to put them together – it follows that the darkness in which the sophist, in the former passage, is said to dwell is very similar to the darkness of the cave.⁷ The sophist is invisible because he operates in the dark where he successfully deludes his fellow cavemen into believing that he knows everything and can do anything. The dialogue the *Sophist*, whose aim is to unmask the master of deceit, reads, therefore, like a descent into the cave: the Guest from Elea and his interlocutors, or rather Plato himself, decided to deal with the world of appearance and to explain to the uninitiated public the emptiness of the king of this world. From this point of view, the difficulty of the hunt for

6 On the so-called Lichtmetaphysik see Beierwaltes, 1957; Bremer, 1973.

7 This has also been suggested by Classen, 1959, 63–4.

the sophist illustrated by the numerous successive definitions appears like a groping in the dark by someone used to dwell in the light of being.

But, if it's true that the sophist's invisibility is a constant theme in the dialogue devoted to the sophist, what about the philosopher's invisibility? Since there is no dialogue by Plato devoted to the philosopher in which to read about this, it may seem questionable to lay too much stress on a casual remark occasioned by the investigation of the sophist, even if this remark seems to echo such an important passage as the cave analogy in the *Politeia*.

3.

In the remainder of this paper I will, therefore, look for more hints regarding the difficulty of recognizing the philosopher as a philosopher and I will attempt to support the claim that the Platonic philosopher is, like the sophist but in a different way than him, invisible, too.

The first passage I would like to mention is the brief dialogue between Sokrates and Theodoros in the opening lines of the *Sophist*. Here, Theodoros introduces the Guest from Elea to Sokrates and praises him as a true lover of wisdom, or philosopher. Sokrates suggests, with no apparent reason, that the Guest could well be a god in disguise, to which Theodoros replies that his friend from Elea, albeit no god, is surely a divine man, as are all philosophers. Sokrates then continues:

I'm afraid that philosophers, as a category, are not easier to make out (διακρίνειν) than gods; this is because these men – and I mean the true lovers of wisdom, not the fake ones – appear (φανταζόμενοι) 'in all sorts of shapes,' due to the ignorance of the others about them, when 'they come to the cities,' they look down (καθορῶντες) from above on the lives of those below and to some they seem to be worth nothing at all, while others appreciate them more than anything else. They appear (φαντάζονται) sometimes as statesmen, sometimes as sophists, and sometimes people believe that they are completely mad. (*Sph.* 216c)

The visit of a truly wise man to a city, for instance that of the Guest from Elea to Athens, reads here like a descent into the cave: coming from another dimension, namely the world of the divine, the philosopher 'looks down from above on the lives of those below'. In the darkness of the cave, he appears to the common eye as something else than what he really is. Unlike the sophist, who changes shape on purpose and takes advantage of his

disguise,⁸ the philosopher's true nature is not visible because – and I think these are the key words here – ‘because of the ignorance of the others.’ Let me note in passing that in most comments on the opening lines of the dialogue these words spoken by Sokrates are not given the importance they deserve.⁹ In my opinion, the Guest from Elea alludes to this detail later on in the conversation between Sokrates and Theodoros when he says, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this paper (254a), that “the soul’s eye of the crowd cannot possibly bear to regard the divine.”¹⁰ To believe that the philosopher is many-shaped in virtue of his nature is to commit the same mistake as those who believe that the god is many-shaped.¹¹ Both Sokrates and the Guest from Elea agree, therefore, that the reason why the philosopher is, as a philosopher, not visible to the others lies in the eye of the uninitiated.

Another passage where philosophy is directly connected with invisibility is the interpretation of the name ‘Hades’ in the *Kratylos*. The god of the netherworld is invisible (ἀ-ιδής), Sokrates says (403a). He explains that this is the origin of the fear of death because most people cling to the visible and the sensible, and, therefore, naturally loathe what they cannot perceive with the senses. Unlike them, the philosopher not only does not fear death but actually looks forward to the realm of invisibility because he knows that the other world is the only place where the souls, having laid off their material covers, can effectively pursue their pure love of wisdom. Moreover, Sokrates is convinced that Hades, the invisible master of the kingdom of invisibility, entertains the souls that visit him with lectures on virtue and describes him as a ‘sophist’, a ‘benefactor of mankind’, and a ‘philosopher’. In the same line of thought, the *Phaidon* (81a) explains the love of wisdom, or philosophy, as

8 At Euthd. 288b Sokrates compares the sophists Euthydemos and Dionysodoros with the many-faced sea god Proteus – actually, he says that they imitate him (μυμείσθον) –, he points out that they bewitch (γοητεύοντε) their interlocutors and, moreover, calls Proteus a sophist (τὸν Αἰγύπτιον σοφιστήν).

9 Rosen, 1983, 65–6; Notomi, 1999, 23; Casadesús Bordoy, 2013, 16–8 (the latter provides a very useful discussion of the sophist’s many-facedness).

10 See also the reference at Sph. 232c to the “divine things that are invisible to the many” (τὰ θεῖα, ὅς’ ἀφανῆ τοῖς πολλοῖς).

11 R. 380d: “Do you think that the god is a wizard who insidiously shows himself in various forms – be it that he himself changes his appearance and takes different aspects, be it that he just deceives us into believing such things about him – or is he simple, that is to say he is the last thing that would change his form?”. For the contrast between (good) simplicity and (bad) multiplicity – which is nothing else than the ontological contrast between eternal idea and individual things – see also R. 445c, 507b; Grg. 482a; Cra. 405c, Plt. 297c.

a rehearsal of death (μελέτη θανάτου), that is to say a preparation for the moment when the soul will have direct access to that which is like itself: the immortal, the divine, and the invisible.¹²

The notion that philosophy is not just an aspiration to reach the invisible but is itself invisible is present in different forms in more than one dialogue. Let us take a look at the passage *Phaidon* 64a where Sokrates says, "I'm afraid that those who practise philosophy properly study unbeknownst to others (λεληθέναι τοὺς ἄλλους) nothing else than dying and being dead." The point is here that people who are not trained in philosophy do not really understand what philosophy is all about, that laymen do not really 'see' what philosophers are ultimately doing. Sokrates, the prototype of a Platonic philosopher, speaks these words in jail after having been mistaken for a sophist who corrupts the youth. He is therefore the most glaring example of invisibility. In the *Theaitetos*, the following dialogue between Sokrates and Theaitetos takes place:

Sokrates: Have you not heard that I'm the son of a noble and burly midwife called Phainarete?

Theaitetos: Yes, I have heard that.

Sokrates: And have you also heard that I practise the same art?

Theaitetos: No, never.

Sokrates: But I assure you it's true; only do not tell on me to the others, for it isn't known (λέληθα) that I possess this art. Other people, since they do not know it (οὐκ εἰδότες), do not say this of me, but say that I am a most eccentric man and drive people to puzzlement (ἀπορεῖν). (*Tht.* 149a, transl. Fowler modified)

Sokrates' midwifery is invisible to the others in the same way the essence of philosophy is invisible to laymen. It is worth noting that Sokrates uses here the same verb λανθάνω as in *Phaidon* 64a. If we pick up the etymological connection between λανθάνω and ἀλήθεια we may conclude that the truth of philosophy (ἀλήθεια τῆς φιλοσοφίας) escapes (λανθάνει) most people. Like the philosophers who in the first lines of the *Sophist* appear to others as madmen, Sokrates appears to others as an eccentric man *because of their ignorance* (οὐκ εἰδότες).

In the *Symposion* (215ab), Alkibiades compares Sokrates with the statues of ugly silenoi that bear inside beautiful images of gods. This is a metaphor for Sokrates' and Plato's philosophy which teaches the superiority of the unseen,

12 I have discussed these two passages in more detail in Enache, 2008.

the divine, and the pure over the sensible, the vulgar, and the impure.¹³ Just as Sokrates' invisible soul is more valuable than his unattractive visible aspect, so too invisible beauty is infinitely superior to everything the sensible eye can perceive. In contrast, sophistry dazzles the sensible eye with its garish appearance but all it has to offer is non-being. Commenting on these words of Alkibiades, Erasmus writes:

This indeed is the nature of truly noble things: they keep hidden and concealed deep in themselves (*in intimis recondunt abduntque*) their most precious side while showing only their most worthless aspect to others; they keep their treasure enveloped in a cheap cover (*vili cortice dissimulant*) and do not allow indecent eyes (*profanis oculis*) to see it. The manner of common and shady things (*vulgarium et umbraticarum*) is however very different: they try to impress with their outer appearance (*summa specie blandiuntur*) and quickly show off (*obviis ostentant*) their most beautiful side; but if you look inside (*introspectas*) you will find nothing of what they pretend to be at first sight. (*Adagia* 3,3,1 771c)

I cannot continue this discussion here. My purpose was to show that the Platonic sophist and the Platonic philosopher represent two paradigms of invisibility and that their comparison bears on some of the most important motifs of Plato's philosophy.

13 Interestingly enough, when Alkibiades joins the party at Agathon's house he seats himself next to Sokrates but does not see him: ἐπίπροσθε τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἔχοντα, οὐ κατιδεῖν τὸν Σωκράτη "although he [sc. Alkibiades] had Sokrates before his eyes, he did not see him" (Smp. 213a).

Invisible epiphanies in Plato's *Sophist* (253c-254b)

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Plato's *Sophist* 253c-254b is an interlude between two scenes of intense dialectical reasoning. There the Visitor produces two epiphanies of the philosopher and the sophist. They are constructed as each other's foil and they both share the property of invisibility for entirely opposite reasons. This competition of portraits is performed through structural mirroring, verbal replacement, reverse word order, in a manner suggestive of the best Gorgianic figures. My paper focuses precisely on the relationship between these two as presented in their respective invisible epiphanies. I argue that one of Plato's objectives for constructing this visual counterpoint is the translation in narrative terms of the five greatest kinds soon to follow: Being (τοῦ ὄντος 254a8), Rest (ἀεὶ...προσκεείμενος a8-9), Motion (ἀποδιδράσκων a4), Sameness (ἰδεῖν μὲν χαλεπὸν 253a9 = οὐδαμῶς εὐπετὴς ὁφθῆναι 254a9-10), Difference (ἕτερον μὴν τρόπον a1). The description draws on familiar Platonic tropes of manifestation of divine (or not) entities, mostly from the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, and the *Protagoras*. My second point relates to the intratextual web of this *agon eikonon* beyond the *Sophist*. A couple of pairs that immediately comes to mind as a possible parallel is that of the philosopher and the tyrant in the *Republic* and Socrates and Meletus in the *Apology*. One might be inclined to see in all these cases a Platonic replay of the Prodikos' Herakles' Choice of Life. Unlike Virtue and Vice, though, the Platonic competitors share common ground that makes it almost impossible to sever all ties between them. In the case of the *Sophist*, in particular, the sophist, as the arch-impostor, may easily capitalize on their epiphanic invisibility and persuade the multitude that he is the real philosopher. Plato, invisibility, epiphany, sophist, philosopher

1. I want it that way (Plato says)

In terms of the *definiendum* of the *Sophist*, the digression on the philosopher (253c-254b) looks like a textually innocent interlude: a little more than a kind of respite between two scenes of intense dialectical reasoning, namely the section on the communion (κοινωνίαν 250a9) of entities and the ambitious taxonomy of the five greatest kinds (μέγιστα γένη). It isn't. For a start, throughout the dialogue only twice do we hear of what the philosopher ought to know and argue for: in a solitary remark in anticipation of the Communion of the Forms (249c-d) and in this excursus. Second, the philosopher enters the stage out of the blue. The reader could not possibly have guessed that a detailed description of the art of dialectics would neces-

sarily lead to the appearance of the philosopher, so that he may, for all practical purposes, be identified with the dialectician. The more so, since a few pages earlier the philosopher has been defined not in methodological but in doctrinal terms, as someone who accommodates both Being and Whole (τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφότερα λέγειν d4).¹

2. Double invisible epiphany

More importantly, Plato treats his audience to a couple of unusual quasi-epiphanies, namely the portraits of both the philosopher and the sophist. At first the Visitor admits that, while on the verge of tracking down the sophist, he and Theaetetus may have incidentally and accidentally come across the philosopher (κινδυνεύομεν...ἀνηυρηκέναι τὸν φιλόσοφον 253c8-9). His main argument is that a prerequisite for any proper definition of the sophist is the knowledge of the method of division provided by the science of dialectics (τῆς διαλεκτικῆς...ἐπιστήμης d2-3). The only person in possession of such a knowledge is the one who philosophises in a pure and just manner (τῷ καθαρῷ τε καὶ δίκαιως φιλοσοφοῦντι e5-6). At this point, he reveals that they have unexpectedly discovered the habitat (ἐν τοιούτῳ τινὶ τόπῳ e8) of the philosopher. And then the Visitor makes the startling remark that, even if one happens to enter his den, the philosopher would be extremely hard to be seen (ἰδεῖν μὲν χαλεπὸν e9). In fact, he is as difficult to be spotted and looked at as the sophist himself.

This is by no means a claim one would expect to find aired in a Platonic dialogue - let alone stated almost categorically, without any further argumentation or challenge. True, nothing could be more different than what causes the invisibility in each case: the sophist cannot be seen because he is covered by the darkness (σκοτεινότητα 254a4-5) of Not-Being, whereas it is the brightness (τὸ λαμπρὸν a9) of Being that practically blocks anyone's view of the philosopher. There is also a huge discrepancy in reference to the intentionality of the invisibility on the part of its 'beneficiaries'. The sophist indulges in hiding himself from the rest of the world and this is the reason why he takes refuge in Not-Being: his disappearance into the realm of nothingness is both a choice and a treat. On the other hand, the philosopher's indiscernibility is merely a collateral product of his assimilation into the land of Being: he did not make it happen, it just did. All these factual remarks,

1 Discussions of the passage may be found in Notomi 1999, 234-40; Molas and Villarroel 2013; Priou 2013; Miller 2016; Oberhammer 2016, 172-78.

however, do little to refute the main premise of the passage, namely that both the champion of ontological light and the counter-hero of the ontological night are equally inaccessible to the common eye. The digression on the philosopher then is rounded off with two snapshots featuring him and his arch-enemy in their respective abode. For there may be little doubt that the culmination of the section is this contest of portraits, a kind of *agon eikonon* as it were, between the original and its fake.

The importance of this passage is hard to miss. To begin with, this is the last time we hear of the *φιλόσοφος* in the *Sophist*, while he is never to be mentioned in the sequel dialogue of the *Statesman*. Since the **Philosopher*, the final piece of that (supposedly) prospective trilogy (*Sph.* 217a3) was never written, this epiphany takes on the significance of a statement: the philosopher's main rival is neither the king nor any leader of a state but the sophist alone – owing to the latter's ability to assume multiple identities. Their competition is articulated in the form of condensed narratives, in which their absolute antithesis contrasts with their common denominator, namely their invisibility. Most importantly, the oppositional juxtaposition of the content finds its perfect reflection in the contrapuntal structure of the respective descriptions. Both sentences (254a4-6, 254a8-10) may be broken down into four pairs of phrasal units, interconnected through structural mirroring (all pairs), verbal replacement (pair C) and reverse word order (pair D).

	A	B	C	D
Structural mirroring	ὁ μὲν ἀποδιδράσκων εἰς τὴν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος	σκοτεινότητα τριβῇ προσαπτόμενος αὐτῇ	διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν τοῦ τόπου	κατανοῆσαι χαλεπός
Verbal replacement	ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος τῇ τοῦ ὄντος	αἰεὶ διὰ λογισμῶν προσκεείμενος ιδέα	διὰ τὸ λαμπρὸν αὐ τῆς χώρας	οὐδαμῶς εὐπετὴς ὀφθῆναι
Reverse word order			διὰ τὸ σκοτεινὸν τοῦ τόπου διὰ τὸ λαμπρὸν αὐ τῆς χώρας	κατανοῆσαι χαλεπός οὐδαμῶς εὐπετὴς ὀφθῆναι

3. A whiter shade of pale

This carefully projected isomorphism between the two portraits provides the digression on the philosopher an emphatic, even if enigmatic, closure. The digression itself has variously been interpreted as a proof that Plato intended to write the **Philosopher* or an implicit definition of the essence of the philosopher. In either reading this ‘contest of portraits’ is not treated separately but usually considered part of the rhetoric of the digression as a whole. Such an approach, however, does little justice to the rich textual dynamics of this authorial choice. Therefore, I would wish to suggest two further reasons for Plato’s constructing this *agon eikonon* in the *Sophist*. First, in its immediate context, it seems to offer a visual narrative that foreshadows the argumentative section soon to follow. This section features the discussion on the *megista gene*, those intellectual entities necessary for reaching a valid definition of any *definiendum*: Being, Rest, Motion, Sameness and Difference (254b-260d).²

A close reading of the ‘duel’ between the sophist and the philosopher may reveal that all five of them have a role to play in that narrative. The philosopher seems to hold fast to the Form of Being (τῇ τοῦ ὄντος...ιδέα 254a8-9), while experiencing a state of permanent Rest (ἀεὶ...προσκειμένους a8-9). The sophist, in turn, finds himself in constant Motion (ἀποδιδράσκων a4), while partaking in the existence, whatever this may be, of the Not-Being (τοῦ μὴ ὄντος a4). The pejorative connotations of his movement are hard to miss, since he is depicted in terms of a fugitive, even a runaway slave (cf. *Prot.* 310c3), who takes refuge in the safe haven of darkness. Earlier in the dialogue the ‘multi-headed sophist’ (ὁ πολυκέφαλος σοφιστής 240c4) had been compared to well-known mythic monsters, such as the Hydra, the Scylla or the Chimaira. Himself a shape-shifter he could easily play the part of the champion of Difference fighting against his great opponent, the champion of Sameness. Yet they are both equally invisible to the eye of

2 It is a familiar authorial trope on Plato’s part that his characters, either in their actions or narratives or both, exemplify the arguments discussed in the course of the dialogue – whether pro- or analeptically. For an example of *prolepsis* one may point to the condensed reference to the war between Athenians and Atlantians at the beginning of the *Timaeus* (21a-26e), a story to be narrated in elaborate detail in its sequel dialogue, the *Critias*. An instance of *analepsis* may be found in the mirror scenes of riotous entrance in Agathon’s house (*Smp.* 212c-e ≈ 223b) or Socrates’ description *post eventum* of how his divine voice prevented him from crossing Ilissos (*Phdr.* 242b-d).

the beholder— regardless of the radically different reasons that generate this feature (ἕτερον μὲν τρόπον 254a1).³

4. Intratextuality

My second point relates to the intratextual web of this *agon eikonon* beyond the *Sophist*. It is true that Plato here hints at the manifestation of divine (or not) entities in dialogues such as the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*. One pair that immediately comes to mind as a possible parallel is that of the philosopher and the tyrant in the *Republic*. Despite the vast difference in scale and the connection with the main argument of their respective dialogues, in both cases the contestants exemplify modes of life almost ontologically incompatible.

Yet the *Republic* connection may go deeper than one might at first think. The phrase *ιδεῖν χαλεπὸν / χαλεπὸν ἰδεῖν* is attested quite a few times in Plato but, as a rule, in its negative version ('it is not difficult to see'). The only occurrences of the affirmative form are the extract from the *Sophist* (253e9) and the section featuring the most famous Platonic dictum of the *Republic*; namely, the aphorism that the cities will always suffer from all kinds of evils unless the rulers become philosophers and/or the philosophers rulers. This is how Socrates' last words on the relevant section (473e4):

χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὅτι οὐκ ἂν ἄλλη τις εὐδαιμονήσειεν οὔτε ἰδίᾳ οὔτε δημοσίᾳ.

For it is difficult to see that there is no other way a man could find happiness either in his private or public life

The analogy is more than telling: for the vast majority of people it is equally difficult both to see the philosopher in his full glory and accept that the philosophical administration is the only way to happiness for all the inhabitants of a city. In a sense the philosopher of the *Sophist* experiences in a pure,

3 The common ground between the philosopher and the sophist is well brought out by Dominick 2019 and Esses 2019. According to Bossi 2013, 167 the opposition between the bright abode of the philosopher and the dark one of the sophist is 'evidence of the effect of a certain Parmenidean legacy' upon Plato. On the multilayered significance of brightness in Plato see Sassi 2020. For the epiphanies in the ancient Greek world see Petridou 2015 and Petraki 2022. On mythical monsters and shapeshifters see Murgatroyd 2007; Konstantakos 2017; Syropoulos 2018; Mawford 2020.

undiluted manner the happiness Plato's ideal city in the *Republic* was meant to guarantee for its citizens in their private and public affairs.⁴

5. A darker shade of blue

There also appears to be a sinister, darker side lurking behind the description of what does the sophist do as soon as he reaches the land of Not-Being: he seems to perform a perverted version of the intercourse the philosopher has with the Form of Beauty in the *Symposium*. There the Form impregnates the philosopher with beautiful thoughts, ideas, speeches, and so on, to which the philosopher will give birth as soon as he finds his beautiful philosophical *eromenos*. Here the sophist attaches himself to and touches the (grammatically female) darkness of the Not-Being through physically rubbing (τριβῆ) himself on her.

If σκοτεινότης (a Platonic coinage?) here – and this is a big if – replays the dark Night from Hesiod's *Theogony* (Νύξ ἐρεβεννή 214), then a gloomy question looms over the readers of Plato: what about the sophist's offspring? The Hesiodic text provides two possible scenarios, both deeply disturbing for different reasons. According to the first one, Night conceives asexually, in the manner of parthenogenesis, and gives birth to a number of fearful and loathsome deities, such as Death, Distress, Old Age (211-225). If the sophist's τριβή is a mock penetration, then any offspring of his will have only a 'biological' mother without a father. The sophist's lack of a permanent identity and the fact that two of Night's kids are called Ἀπάτη and Ἔρις might be suggestive of what is going on in the Platonic text. On the other hand, option (b) is even more devastating. Night has sex with Pitch-Black (Ἐρεβος) and gives birth to Aether and Day (οὓς τέκε κυσαμένη Ἐρέβει φιλότῃ μιγείσα 125), the producers of light for mortals and immortals alike. But very few propositions would be quintessentially anti-Platonic than claiming that the brightness of the Being has somehow originated in the darkness of Not-Being – yet the hypothetical possibility is there.

4 I follow Slings' latest OCT edition who prints ἄλλῃ (in the dative) following the reading of a 15th century manuscript. In the earlier OCT Burnet had printed the adjective in the nominative ἄλλῃ, following all major earlier manuscripts. On this reading the meaning of the sentence would be that the only city capable of attaining happiness for its citizenry is the Kallipolis. My argument applies equally to both available textual variations.

6. *The Well of Fortune*

Another possible intratext is the *Theaetetus*. The way the Visitor introduces the philosopher in this digression has a striking similarity with a couple of elements from the (in)famous Thales story, narrated by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, the prequel of the *Sophist* in dramatic terms. A comparison between the passages may speak for itself:

Sph. 253c7-9

(ΞΕ.) ἢ πρὸς Διὸς ἐλάθομεν εἰς τὴν τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἐμπεσόντες ἐπιστήμην, καὶ κινδυνεύομεν ζητοῦντες τὸν σοφιστὴν πρότερον ἀνηυρηκέναι τὸν φιλόσοφον;

(VISITOR) Or, for heaven's sake, **without noticing** have we **fallen into the knowledge** that **free people** have? Maybe we've found the philosopher even though we were looking for the sophist?

fallen into: Charalabopoulos stumbled on N. P. White

Tht. 174a4-8

ΣΩ. "Ὡσπερ καὶ Θαλῆν ἀστρονομοῦντα, ὃ Θεόδωρε, καὶ ἄνω βλέποντα, πεσόντα εἰς φρέαρ, Θράττα τις ἐμμελὴς καὶ χαρίεσσα θεραπαινὶς ἀποσκῶψαι λέγεται ὡς τὰ μὲν ἐν οὐρανῷ προθυμοῖτο εἰδέναι, τὰ δ' ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ καὶ παρὰ πόδας **λανθάνοι** αὐτόν.

SO. They say Thales was studying the stars, Theodorus, and gazing aloft, **when he fell into a well**; and a **well-proportioned and gorgeous** Thracian servant-girl made fun of him because, she said, he was wild to know about what was up in the sky but **failed to see** what was in front of him and under his feet.

well-proportioned and gorgeous: Charalabopoulos witty and amusing: Levett rev. by Burnyeat

While the Milesian philosopher falls into a well, finds nothing and fails to see what is going on next to his own feet, the Visitor and Theaetetus have fallen into the knowledge of free men, find the abode of the philosopher and take a glimpse of the bright realm of Being. In both Platonic dialogues the motif of *katabasis* is parodied since falling is not a matter of free choice but necessity. And, to make matters (slightly) worse, the territory of Being seems to be 'located' somewhere down under (not Australia!), the traditional area that belonged to the gods and inhabitants of the Netherworld.

One might also be inclined to see in all these cases a Platonic replay of the Prodikos' Herakles' Choice of Life. Unlike Virtue and Vice, though, the Platonic competitors share common ground that makes it almost impossible to sever all ties between them. In the case of the *Sophist*, in particular, the sophist, as *the* arch-impostor, may easily capitalize on their epiphanic invisibility and persuade the multitude that he is the real philosopher.

II. The Method of Division

Division and Metaphysics in Plato

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Building upon earlier work that distinguishes kind (*genos*) from form (*eidos*), we present the metaphysics entailed by the method of division, referring to the Stranger's paradigmatic division to the Angler and two antecedent Homeric divisions. We show that the Stranger's simile of a sacrificial animal (*hiereion*) has the virtues of entailing that such a kind is different from its subkinds, that it persists through division, that *to be a kind of* is a transitive relation, that *to be an immediate subkind of* is non-transitive, that *members* are the ultimate results of a process of division, that there are three forms of identification for those ultimate results, that division is appropriate relative to its purposes, that the *hiereion* is apt in relating extension to intension, and that such kinds are unlike natural kinds but like thought experiments. We conclude by considering the metaphysical respectability of such kinds.

Plato, division, kinds, forms, *hiereion*

1. Introduction

Twentieth century philosophical accounts of Plato struggled to give an account of what were seen as his 'later' method and metaphysics. Plato celebrates the method of division in the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus*. Plato identifies the method with dialectic and presents it as the key not only to his theories of love, sophistry, political expertise, and the good, but also to being itself and the greatest kinds and forms. The puzzle for twentieth century interpreters was to understand why the method is so important for metaphysics. Interpreters were unable to give Plato's method the metaphysical importance that Plato believed it held. Instead of first place in doing metaphysics, the method seemed to have an uncertain place. No doubt, the main reason for the uncertainty was the difficulty in finding a consistent interpretation of the most crucial item for the method: what Plato meant in those dialogues by the word '*genos*', which we translate as 'kind'. A kind is what is divided by the method, and more kinds, that is, subkinds, are also what are produced by the division.

Elsewhere we defend an account of kinds as neither intensional forms nor extensional classes but as like bodies in possessing both an extension and

an intension.¹ Here we present the metaphysics entailed by the method of division. We begin by reviewing the Stranger’s paradigmatic division with its Homeric antecedents.

2. The paradigmatic division and its Homeric antecedents

There is an antecedent to the Stranger’s division of kinds in Homer. The Catalog of Ships in book 2 of the *Iliad* was an oral performer’s *tour de force*. ‘Of the Boeotians Peneleos and Leitus were captains, and Arcesilaus and Prothoënor and Clonius. . . . Of these there came fifty ships, and on board of each went young men of the Boeotians an hundred and twenty’ (*Il.* 2.494-510, trans. Murray). The poet goes on to divide the Greek fleet into 29 ethnic contingents from 164 settlements under 46 captains, and then to subdivide the contingents into 1,186 ships of 120 men each. Thanks to the power of division, the poet thus catalogs ‘all them that came beneath Ilios,’ by this reckoning 142,320 men (see Figure 1).

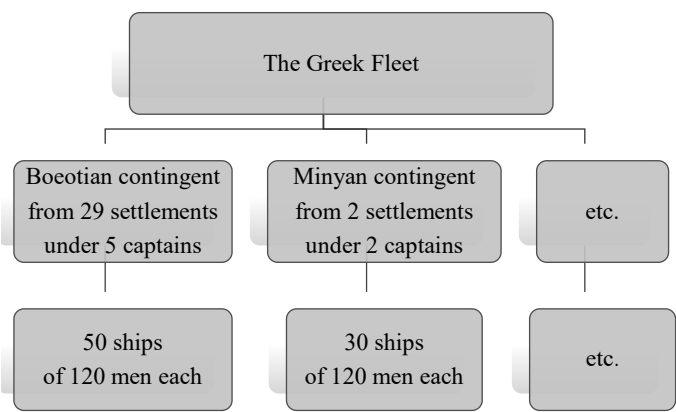


Fig. 1 Catalog of Ships

Another division, with a different function, also appears in the same chapter of the *Iliad*. Rather than cataloging, the poet here recounts Nestor’s advice

1 See Muniz and Rudebusch 2018 and 2023.

how to marshal troops: ‘Divide thy men by tribes, by clans, Agamemnon, that clan may bear aid to clan and tribe to tribe’ (see Figure 2).²

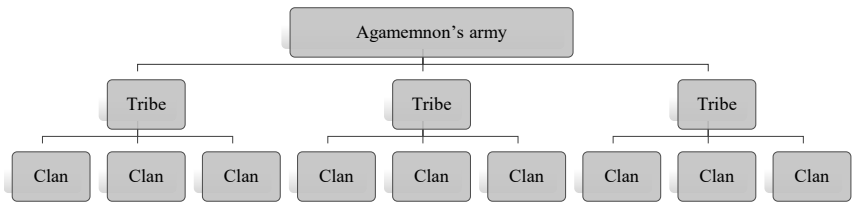


Fig. 2 *Division of troops*

Here Homer uses the same verb of division, *krinein*, that Plato’s Stranger will centuries later use with a prefix, *diakrinein*. It is often noticed that Plato’s *Sophist* is full of allusions to Homer. The Homeric precedents for the method of division provide one reason for the allusions and set bounds to interpretations of the Stranger’s method.

The Stranger’s ‘paradigm’ (*paradeigma*) of his method takes as its target something that is ‘easy to know and of small importance but having an account no less than things of great importance’—the angler (*Sph.* 218d8–e4). The first division is of expertise into ‘productive’ expertise (*poiētikēn*, 219b11) and ‘acquisitive’ expertise (*ktētikē*, 219c7). The Stranger continues as in Figure 3, in a division that proceeds from left to right according to the spatial metaphor the Stranger uses at 221b.

2 *Il.* 2. 362–3. Unless otherwise noted, translations are ours.

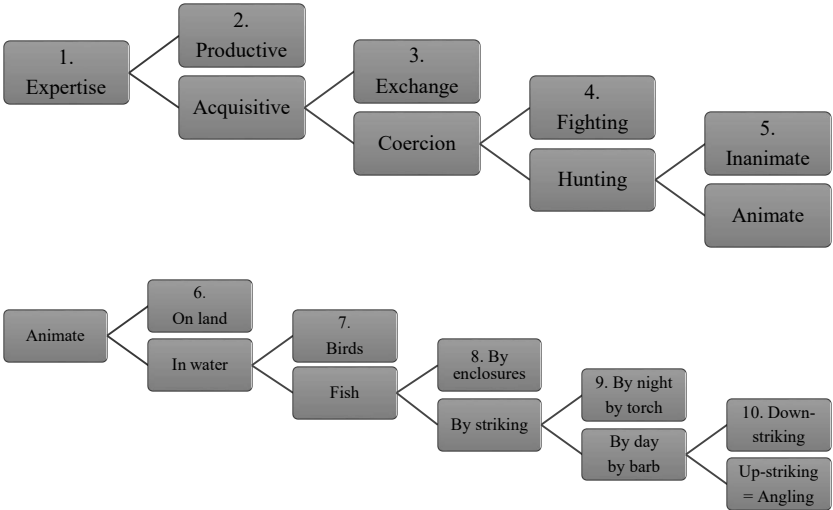


Fig. 3 Paradigmatic Division to Angler

The point of the division is to ‘uncover a path’ (*Plt.* 258c3) from kind to subkind, dividing again and again in order to define a given expertise, here Angling.

3. Metaphysics of the simile

Our account of the kinds divided by the method and the kinds produced by the divisions is guided by the Stranger’s simile for a kind as ‘like a *hiereion*’ (*Plt.* 287c3).³ A *hiereion* was a sacrificial animal offering, and the step-by-step dismemberment was performed upon the dead body after killing it. In this simile what corresponds to a kind is the sacrificial body and what corresponds to the subkinds are its members after the sacred butchering is complete and the various portions have been distributed to gods and mortals. The Stranger’s simile echoes Socrates’ famous butcher metaphor in which he describes the division of a kind as ‘by forms, to cut through by joints which it has by nature, trying not to shatter any part using the method

3 Moore 2015 also uses the simile to interpret the method, although she does not reach our conclusions.

of a bad butcher' (*Phdr.* 265e1-3).⁴ The simile is apt in making the Stranger the hierarch whose sacred act of division of the *hiereion* creates a hierarchy. Leaving aside many literary riches suggested by the simile, we aim here to develop aspects of the simile that reveal details of the metaphysics of the division of kinds.

First, a kind is **different from its subkinds**. For example, the one kind Acquisitive Expertise is different from its two subkinds, Expertise at Acquisition by Exchange and Expertise at Acquisition by Coercion, even though the one kind and the two subkinds comprise the same members, such as Angling, Spear Fishing, etc. Likewise, the *hiereion*, being one, is distinct from the two parts it is divided into after the liver has been detached from the rest of the body, even though both the one body and the many parts comprise the same members.

Second, a kind **persists through division**. As Homer continued to speak of the very same Greek fleet throughout his divisions of it into contingents and ships, and as Agamemnon's army remained the same army even as he marshaled it according to Nestor's advice by tribe and clan, so also the kind Expertise remained the same kind even as the Stranger divided it again and again into subkinds. We take it that in the Stranger's simile the *hiereion* persists in the same way as and after it is divided 'member by member' (*kata melē*). For purposes of identification, ordinary English does not have a precise vocabulary for the words 'infant', 'child', and 'adult', but it is roughly accurate to say that the *infant* is in existence or persists only for the first year or so of life, that the *child* persists from about the second year to the eighteenth or so, while the *adult* persists for the remaining span of life. If we identify them in terms of persistence conditions, each of these objects is distinct, even though all three—infant, child, and adult—are made of the same flesh and bone and are divisible into the same head, torso, and limbs. And the *human being*, persisting for the full span of seventy or so years, is distinct in its identity from each of its stages of life, although it too is made of the same stuff and comprises the same parts. In the same

4 Butchery in ancient Greece was predominantly religious and therefore of a *hiereion* (see Berthiaume 1982, 62-70 and 79-93, and Eckroth 2007). Accordingly, Socrates' metaphor, like the Stranger's simile, is of a *hiereion*. In addition to the *Phaedrus*, Socrates also in the *Philebus* gives an implicit reference to a *hiereion* as a conception of division when he speaks of 'dividing members (*melē*) and parts (*merē*)' at 14e1. Such members and parts would belong to a *hiereion*. In the remainder of the paper, when we speak of kind membership, following the Stranger we refer to a relation like body membership, not the relation set membership.

way, although ancient Greek did not have a precise technical vocabulary for naming the stages of a *hiereion*, it is roughly accurate to distinguish *hiereion* from *victim*, *carcass*, and *body parts*. For the Stranger's simile to be most apt, the *hiereion* would come into existence at the initial designation of a living animal as victim and persist through its slaughter and division into the final assignment of portions to gods and mortals, as Agamemnon's army existed before and after being marshaled according to Nestor's advice.⁵ The victim, in contrast, persists only from designation to slaughter, for after slaughter there exist only the remains of the victim, that is, the carcass. And the carcass persists only from slaughter to dismemberment. After dismemberment, there exist only the remains of the carcass, apportioned for sacrifice, in Greek the *tomion*. A kind, then, for the Stranger's purposes, is like a *hiereion*—and unlike a victim, carcass, or *tomion*—in persisting from its moment of designation (at the fourth step of the process of collection) throughout its subsequent division into subkinds.

A third feature is that **to be a kind of is a transitive relation** in a hierarchy. According to Figure 3 above, the following argument is valid: Angling is kind of barb fishing; barb fishing is kind of strike fishing; thus, angling is kind of strike fishing. In like manner the following argument about the parts produced by butchery is valid: A loin chop is a cut of loin; the loin is a cut of the lower torso; thus, a loin chop is a cut of the lower torso.

Fourth, the Stranger's *hiereion* simile fits the **non-transitivity of immediate subkinds** in a hierarchy. For example, at the third level in Figure 3 the Stranger divides the kind Expertise at Acquisition into the kinds Expertise at Acquisition by Coercion and Exchange. These two kinds are immediate

5 According to LSJ, the meaning of *hiereion* is victim, animal for sacrifice. An anonymous referee once stated that the word has a clearly restricted meaning: 'a ἱερεῖον is the animal victim of a sacrifice and does not persist through the division "limb by limb" [*kata melē*]. But the Stranger appears to use the word *hiereion* in a less restricted sense, as suggested by his using the word to refer to the body of the dead animal victim as it undergoes the cutting. Detienne and Vernant (1989: 27) seem to recognize this less restricted sense of the word when they speak of 'the distribution of parts of the sacrificial victim', i.e., the *hiereion*. Xenophon seems to use the word in this less restricted sense when he refers to the carcass after it is cut open for inspection, such that 'favorable omens appear upon the *hiereion*' (*An.* 6. 5. 2 lines 2-3). Likewise, Xenophon refers to the butchered remains of a sacrifice of many *hiereia*, sent about and feasted upon: 'Cyxares had *hiereia* sent in to each company, and as they were passed around each one of us got three pieces (*krea tria*) or even more' (*Cyr.* 2. 2. 2 lines 5-7: here *krea* is used as a count noun with *hiereia* [LSJ κρέας A]). Again, pseudo-Xenophon describes how after a sacrifice of many *hiereia* 'the feasting citizenry (*ho demos ho euōchoumenos*) distributes by lot the *hiereia*' (*Ath.* 2. 9. 5-2. 10. 1). We have not found evidence to establish the assertion that the word has only a restricted meaning.

subkinds only of the second level kind Acquisitive Expertise, not of the first level kind Expertise. Likewise in the case of Agamemnon's army, each clan is an immediate division of a tribe, not of the army as a whole. Just so in the simile, the order of division followed by the priestly butcher produces division parts, level by level. For example, one level of division might produce a leg from the torso, while at the next level the upper leg is produced. In this example, the upper leg is an immediate division part of the leg only and not of the whole carcass.

Fifth, the Stranger's *hiereion* simile fits the features of **membership**. In the marshaling of Agamemnon's troops, Nestor ceases to divide when he reaches individual clans, while Homer ceases his catalog of the fleet when he reaches enumerable ships. Again, the Stranger ceases to divide in his paradigm when he reaches Angling. In general, hierarchies cease to divide at certain points—at clans, at numbers of ships, at Angling—and the points at which it ceases to divide are the members of the kind. Moreover, an individual clan is a member both of its tribe and of its army, and a ship is a member both of its contingent and its fleet, and the expertise Angling at level ten in Figure 3 is a member not only of the kind Expertise but of every kind on the path leading from Expertise to Angling: Acquisitive Expertise, Expertise at Acquisition by Coercion, etc. A *hiereion* is like a kind in having such members. For a given form of butchering at certain points ceases its divisions, and the points at which it ceases to divide provide its members: the individual chops, shoulders, shanks, etc.

As a sixth shared feature, it follows that there are **three forms of identification for the results** of the final division alike of the clan, the numbers of ships, the kind Angling, and the shoulder chop. Each of these is an *immediate division part* respectively of tribe, contingent, Barb Fishing, and shoulder. Each is also a *division part* of the first-level whole—respectively, the army, fleet, expertise, and *hiereion*—as well as of every whole on the path leading from it to the first-level whole. And each is also a *member* of the same wholes or kinds.

A seventh shared feature of the division of kinds into a hierarchy is that it is **appropriate relative to the purposes** of the division. The division of a kind may be to catalog for purposes of exposition (as in Homer's catalog of ships), or to marshal troops for battle (as in Nestor's advice to Agamemnon), or to define Angling (as in the Stranger's paradigm of division). Just so, a priest's divisions of a *hiereion* will be appropriate relative to the kind of religious rite. The poet and seer divide aiming to produce a complete set of members, respectively, of the fleet and army. The Stranger, by contrast, is intent only upon one member, namely the individual expertise Angling, as

he makes divisions of the kind Expertise. He divides like a butcher aiming to produce but a single shoulder chop, say, from the carcass. Nevertheless, as we interpret him, the Stranger refers to the members of a kind in the first step collecting it. For example, we take the members of Productive Expertise to be the items he lists in the first step of his collection of that kind: whatever is an attendance for any living, composite, or molded body and whatever is an imitative expertise (219a10-b1). Again, we take the items he lists in the first step of his collection of Acquisitive Expertise to be the members of that kind: whatever is learning, recognition, moneymaking expertise, combat, or hunting (219c2-4). As it happens, the Stranger's form of division in his paradigm is dichotomous, so that each subkind will in turn have exactly two subkinds, until the target, Angling, is reached as in Figure 3 above. Such a form of division we take to be appropriate relative to his purpose, which is to give a paradigm of how he plans to divide in order to answer Socrates' question—*Are Sophist, Statesman, and Philosopher one, two, or three kinds?*—but we leave aside here the question why that purpose is best served by the use of dichotomy in the paradigm of the Angler.

Eighth, the *hiereion* is apt in **relating extension to intension**. The Stranger's third step of collecting a kind brings the items in the extension (namely, the members indicated in the first step) together under a head with their shared intension (as identified in the second step). A *hiereion* is an extension of flesh and bone identified as one according to the intension of the word *hiereion*. That intension distinguishes the *hiereion* from other bodies that happen to be made of the same flesh and bone and even from other bodies that necessarily are made of the same flesh and bone, such as the victim, the carcass, and the *tomion*. A kind, like a *hiereion*, possesses both an extension and an intension. Just as the extension of the Greek fleet was a mass of soldiery that divided into contingents and ships, and just as the extension of Agamemnon's army was a mass of troops that divided by tribe and by clan, so also a kind divides into its subkinds in respect of its extension. As shown above, for example, the extension of the kind Acquisitive Expertise is a mass of expertise—whatever is learning, recognition, money-making expertise, combat, or hunting, including in particular Angling—and it is in respect of that extension that Acquisitive Expertise divides into subkinds, as in Figure 3. And as the intension of a *hiereion* gives it an identity distinct from other bodies, even from some that necessarily have the same extension of flesh and bone, so the intension of a kind gives it an identity distinct from other kinds, even if some necessarily share the same extension. For example, the Stranger's kinds Same, Other, and Being are numerically different, even though they share the same extension.

Finally, a *kind as a body* is different from what philosophers today call a *natural kind*. A *hiereion* has different identity conditions from the animal that becomes a *hiereion*. Unlike the animal, a *hiereion* only comes into being when it is designated as part of a ritual. In this respect, the Stranger's kinds are unlike what philosophers today call *natural kinds*. The Stranger's kinds are more like *thought experiments* and *illustrative examples*.⁶

3. Conclusion: too dirty?

Moravcsik (1973, 167) and Cohen (1973, 182) playfully spoke of different extensional models as 'clean' and 'superclean,' with intensional models implied in contrast to be *dirty* or even *superdirty*. Their use of the metaphorical hygienic contrast is based upon their Quinean assumption that sets are relatively perspicuous metaphysical objects while intensions, such as Plato's Forms, are relatively obscure. It is possible that they might also consider the body simile a dirty model, since it incorporates intensions in a way that remains unclear. But the hygienic contrast is inapt. Of course, there remain metaphysical mysteries about bodies as well as intensions, but there are also mysteries about extensions like sets.⁷ In particular, sets require an explanation of how they manage to be one while containing many members. Ultimately, it may turn out that hylomorphism will provide the best account of that feature of sets, as Johnston proposes (2006, 652), and sets as much as kinds would then be like, and as dirty as, bodies. Without a cleaner account of what makes a set one, then, for a set theorist to call the Stranger's body simile dirty would be like the pot calling the kettle black.

6 See Bird and Tobin 2016 for an overview of current philosophical thought about the identity of natural kinds.

7 And, likewise, there are mysteries about how each 'fusion' of classical mereology manages to be a one while its parts are many. See Harte 2002, 23 for discussion.

What is the Process of Division for?

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This paper examines the introductory section of the dialogue (216a–219a) to consider the purpose of the method of division. Most scholars have assumed that division plays a substantial role in discovering the essential properties of a target object. Against this, the paper argues that at least in the *Sophist*, it is *not* introduced for discovering the definition of a target object, but rather for demonstrating the pre-determined definition to those interlocutors who do not grasp or believe it yet.
collection, division, definition, discovery, explanation

1. Introduction

Collection and division appear as a principal dialectical method in Plato's later dialogues, but it is not easy to understand exactly how the method is supposed to work. Traditionally, scholars have taken it to be a series of processes for discovering definitions: collection is for identifying the genus of a target object, and division is then for discovering its definition by dividing that genus into species, those species into sub-species, and so on. According to this traditional interpretation, therefore, the process of collection is the first step towards discovering a definition, and subsequent division produces the definition.

Some scholars have recently argued against the traditional interpretation, suggesting that collection does not necessarily precede division, and that the two processes operate in conjunction with one another at every point along the way.¹ Their point is that, when one divides a genus into species, one needs to define each of those species by collecting its various instances into one form. It is true that collection can be used to define other species and sub-species. Still, they seem to agree with the traditional interpretation that the definition of a target object is discovered as a result of the process of division.

This paper argues that the method of division, at least in the *Sophist*, is *not* introduced for discovering the definition of a target object, but rather

1 Hackforth 1945, 142–3; Henry 2012, 229–55.

for demonstrating the pre-determined definition to those interlocutors who do not grasp or believe it yet. To defend this view, I shall focus on the introductory section of the dialogue (216a–219a), which is important for understanding for what purpose the Visitor employs the method. Although I do not have enough space to discuss the subsequent passages in which division is actually employed, the analysis here will give us good reason for reconsidering the objective of division not only in the *Sophist* but also in its successor, the *Statesman*.

2. The Visitor's Task

The *Sophist* starts with the scene in which, on the day after the discussion in the *Theaetetus*, Theodorus introduces to Socrates a visitor from Elea who is a friend of the followers of Parmenides and Zeno. Wondering about the fact that different people have different views of philosophers—some treat them as statesmen, and others as sophists—Socrates asks the Visitor whether people in Elea think of sophists, statesmen, and philosophers as different kinds. The Visitor answers that they think of them as different, but that it is difficult to distinguish clearly what each of them is. Then, Theodorus reports that the Visitor himself says he has heard the issues discussed well enough and still remembers the discussion, which leads to the following exchange:

Socrates: Well, stranger, this is the first request we've made of you, so please don't turn us down. Just tell us this: when you want to demonstrate (ἐνδείξασθαι) something to someone, are you usually happier going through it just by yourself, with a long speech, or by means of questions? I was there once, in my youth, when Parmenides himself used the latter method, and to quite splendid effect; he was by then very old indeed.

Visitor: Doing it through conversation with someone else is the easier, Socrates, provided the person one's talking to causes no trouble and is easily led; if not, it's easier the other way.

Socrates: Well, you may choose whichever of those here you want, because they will all go along with you quietly; but if you take my advice, you'll choose one of the younger ones: Theaetetus here, or one of the others if you prefer. (217c1–d7, trans. Rowe²)

2 All translations of this paper are from Rowe 2015, but are modified when necessary for clarification of my argument.

Having thus selected Theaetetus, the Visitor tells him to begin by discussing the sophist. But they have only the name in common and, so, need to agree on the definition of what the sophist is as well. However, since this is a very difficult task, they should practice the method necessary for it, namely, the method of division, with a less important and more familiar object. They choose to discuss the activity of angling first, and it serves as a model for discussing the sophist by means of division.

This opening scene (216a1–219a3) provides important information about what task the Visitor is expected to undertake. Let us begin with the exchange at 216d3–217a9, where Socrates expresses his wishes to learn from the Visitor about the sophist as well as the statesman and the philosopher. It is clear that his request is not for the Visitor to search for what each of the objects is, but to explain what his countrymen think about that question. So Theodoros reports to Socrates at 217b5–9 the Visitor’s admission that he has heard about it well enough and still remembers. This is why in the following exchange, cited above, Socrates asks the Visitor which way he generally prefers when “demonstrating” (ἐνδειξασθαι) something, by means of a long speech just by himself or of questions and answers with someone else. This makes it clear, although the precise meaning of ἐνδειξασθαι is not definite, that Socrates does *not* expect the Visitor to search for and discover the answer to the question, but rather to show either way what he has already in mind.

However, some scholars have suggested that the task the Visitor is about to undertake is basically such a co-operative search for truth as Plato’s Socrates professes to conduct.³ It is true that at 218b7–c1 the Visitor tells Theaetetus “to investigate the sophist together with him” (κοινῇ ... μετ’ ἐμοῦ σοι συσχεπτέον), “searching for and revealing what he is” (ζητοῦντι καὶ ἐμφανίζοντι λόγῳ τί ποτ’ ἔστι). But, strictly speaking, the subject of this investigation is grammatically Theaetetus alone, which may well imply that the Visitor himself does not search but intends only to guide him to search for the definition of the sophist. We need to notice the Visitor’s suggestion made in the passage cited above, that, although he eventually chooses to discuss the matter with Theaetetus, he *could* also demonstrate it with a long speech by himself. His choice is based upon “a kind of shame” (αἰδώς τις, 217d8) at “giving a display speech” (ἐπίδειξιν ποιούμενον, 217e2–3) by prolonging his speech excessively and leaving behind the listeners. This does not mean, however, that he is unable to do so. It is therefore more natural to suppose that the Visitor possesses such a sufficient grasp of the nature of

3 Cornford 1957, 170; Bluck 1975, 33.

the sophist at this initial stage as to be able to deliver a demonstrative speech about it.

There is another element in the above passage that strongly indicates that we should not read into the dialogue a Socratic joint search for the definition of the sophist. For the Visitor comments there that he can accomplish his task more easily if his interlocutor “causes no trouble” (ἀλύπως) and “is easily led” (εὐηγίως). To him, then, Socrates responds that all those who are present will go along with him “quietly” (πρᾶως) in discussion. We can thus see that the Visitor’s attitude towards his interlocutor is rather different from Socrates’, because Socrates typically welcomes the difficulties his interlocutors pose, to examine whether his opinion is correct (cf. *Grg.* 486d–488b).⁴ In the middle dialogues, such as the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, Socrates’ main interlocutors—Simmius and Cebes and Glaucon and Adeimantus—are all those who challenge Socrates’ positions with substantial counter arguments and ask him for thorough proofs of his views. In the *Sophist*, in contrast, Theaetetus simply follows the Visitor’s lead in the whole process of division without raising serious objections.⁵

It is clear that the notion that the Visitor is seeking a definition of the sophist assumes that he resembles Socrates in engaging in dialectical inquiry. But we can account for Plato’s changing the main speaker from Socrates in the *Theaetetus* to the Visitor in the *Sophist* by supposing that he is depicting the Visitor as possessing knowledge of the matter and explaining it to Theaetetus and the others.

3. The Role of Division

If, though, the Visitor already knows what the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher are before starting the discussion, why does he not give their definitions to Theaetetus straightaway rather than undertaking to conduct a long discussion with him? The Visitor repeatedly notices at the beginning

4 Cornford 1957, 167, suggests that the Visitor chooses to have “a genuine conversation, to which the respondent makes a real contribution.” But it seems clear that he does not expect such a contribution from Theaetetus.

5 There is one occasion (222b2–c2) on which the Visitor seems to entrust Theaetetus with the task of deciding how to divide a generic kind (hunting footed animals) into its species (hunting tame animals and wild animals). But this at most suggests that the Visitor has some flexibility about how to advance the process of division. In any case, Theaetetus ends up agreeing with the way in which the Visitor intends to divide that generic kind.

that clarifying the nature of those three objects is not a small task and requires a very long discussion (217b2–4, e3–5, 218a8–9, c5–7, d3–4). This claim, as we have seen above, does not mean that he has not yet grasped their essences and is therefore commencing a joint search for them. There must be some other reason why the ensuing discussion demands much more than simply offering the definitions in question.

The most probable explanation, I suggest, is that explaining what each object is involves not only giving its definition but also showing why or how that definition is satisfactory. Let us see here what the Visitor says when starting the discussion with the question what the sophist is:

As things stand at present, the only thing you and I have in common between us on the subject is the name, and we may well each have our own private view of the thing (τὸ ἔργον) we call by that name. But the rule ought always to be, in relation to anything, to agree together (συνωμολογήσθαι) about the thing itself (τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτό) through talking about it, rather than agreeing just about its name without any account to go with the name. (218c1–5)

What the Visitor is prepared to do is not merely to inform Theaetetus what he knows about the sophist but to reach an agreement about its essential nature. (Notice that τὸ ἔργον and τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτό are used here without distinction to mean the essence of the object.) Theaetetus already has some ideas about the sophist, which the Visitor assumes to be different from his own. Given the role he plays in leading the ensuing discussion, it is highly unlikely that the Visitor expects to change his mind as a result of it. It is more faithful to the text to suppose that, since the Visitor possesses knowledge of what the sophist is, he is attempting to persuade Theaetetus that his view is correct. This persuasion is evidently a more difficult task than merely giving the definition as information, which itself does not give any reason why Theaetetus needs to approve of it.

What, then, does the persuasion in question consist in? We should remember here the ultimate objective of the whole discussion, which is said to “distinguish” (διορίσασθαι, 217b2–3) clearly the philosopher, the sophist, and the statesman by showing what each of them is. For Socrates says that the philosopher takes on “all sorts of shapes” (παντοίοι, 216c4), appearing sometimes as sophist and sometimes as statesman. The point is that the three professions in question are similar to each other and also to many others (223c2, 226a6–8, 231b9–c2). Sophistry itself is also said in the subsequent discussion to be quite complex expertise, resembling many sorts of expertise. This points to the idea that demonstrating a definition of sophistry

requires showing what kinds of expertise sophistry resembles but differs from, and in what respects it resembles and differs from them. This endeavour is substantially more involved than merely providing the definition. It is true that a proper definition should include all the necessary differentiae that distinguish the target object from all the rest. But each differentia by itself does not necessarily make clear what other objects it is intended to distinguish the target object from, and how it does so. For example, even if we are given the definition of the man as ‘biped animal’, we do not thereby know what feature the differentia ‘biped’ is contrasted with (having no legs, four legs, or more than two legs?) and what animals it distinguishes the man from (insects, reptiles, or other mammals?). But it is necessary to know these elements to understand that the given definition suffices to distinguish the target object from all the other similar objects properly.

My suggestion is thus that the process of division is introduced exactly for this instructive purpose, namely making the interlocutor(s) systematically understand that a given definition can certainly distinguish the target object from all the similar objects. This is corroborated by the following passage, where the Visitor is distinguishing the sorts of expertise in cleansing the soul from those in cleansing the body, the latter of which he is saying consist of both important and unimportant sorts of expertise.

Visitor: Yes indeed, Theaetetus. And yet in our method of argument (τῇ τῶν λόγων μεθόδῳ), it matters not a bit less, or indeed any more, whether we’re dealing with sponging people down or administering medicines, or whether the cleansing in question does us a little good or a lot. Our method aims at acquiring understanding, by attempting to grasp what is akin and what is not akin among all the various expertises (πασῶν τεχνῶν), and for this purpose it values all of them equally. (227a7–b2)

The “method” (μέθοδος) referred to here is no doubt the method of division. The passage indicates that its objective is for Theaetetus to have a better understanding of the similarities and dissimilarities in all sorts of expertise. This does not mean, however, that he is expected to learn all the essences so as to complete the classification of all sorts of expertise. Although the method could well be used for that purpose, the visitor’s suggestion is rather that Theaetetus should understand in what respects a target object resembles, but is distinguished from, all the other objects. At the stage of division the above passage marks, he is shown that the sophist resembles, in the respect of cleansing something, the various sorts of experts in bodily cleansing, whatever that group may be called, but is distinguished from them because all of them are concerned with cleansing the body. This level

of understanding cannot be achieved merely by specifying the sophist as expert in psychic cleansing even though that differentia is appropriate. The process of division is thus also the instructive process of gradually revealing what the target object is *not* by confirming which features its differentiae are contrasted with. This exclusion is important for understanding that its completed definition certainly excludes all the similar objects one might mistake it for.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that the process of division in the *Sophist* is not introduced for discovering the definition of the sophist but for demonstrating it to the interlocutor(s). Still, one might wonder what kind of instructive process this demonstration by division is more precisely.⁶ The process of division is clearly not concerned with such a deductive demonstration that yields scientific knowledge, as Aristotle supposes. He criticizes the method of division for being unable to deduce that a target object has an essential property and for begging such a conclusion. (*APr* I.31, *APo* II.5). According to Aristotle, for example, when a divider wants to establish that the man is mortal rather than immortal, he does not prove that the man is mortal, but merely asks and obtains his interlocutor's assent to that proposition. The fact that Aristotle assumes division to be a method of proof supports my view that Plato basically intended division to be a pedagogical method rather than a heuristic one. But I agree that division cannot prove any logical necessity for the target object to have a certain property. That is not its purpose.

However, this does not mean that the method of division is purely pedagogical, namely intended only to persuade the interlocutor(s) of whatever a divider might think about a target object, without any contribution to establishing what it really is. In this paper I argued that persuasion by means of division involves gradually revealing the essence of the target object by showing what objects differ from it and how they differ. The process starts by distinguishing a target object (e.g. the man) from the least similar group of objects (e.g. plants) by specifying its most generic essential property (e.g. 'animal') and continues until one completely distinguishes it from all similar objects by specifying all its differentiae. This gradual process, I suggest, helps one to examine rationally whether a given definition is satisfactory, as

6 I thank Pauline Sabrier and Verity Harte for putting to me this question in the Symposium.

Aristotle similarly points out (cf. *APo* II.13, 96b25–97a6). For example, if a divider proceeds from ‘animal’ to ‘biped’ to distinguish the man from all the other animals, one will find that this definition is not yet adequate because it does not distinguish the man from birds. But if he then moves from ‘biped animal’ to ‘land’ to distinguish it from birds, one will find that this is not adequate either because it will make the man closer or more similar to birds than to non-biped land animals such as chimpanzees. As a result, one can thereby understand that we have first to proceed from ‘animal’ to ‘land’ to distinguish the man from birds, fish and so on, and then to specify some differentia(e) of ‘land animal’ to reach a better definition. This should be one of the possible ways in which the method of division can demonstrate definitions without appealing to deductive inferences. Although Aristotle is largely critical of the method, he sees such a verifying process as useful for establishing definitions. Here I would like to add that the process will also help the divider himself in the sense that he can thereby confirm whether his pre-determined definition is adequate. But taking the role of division as consisting in verification and confirmation is different from the view I rejected in this paper, that it lies in discovering the definition of a target object by dividing its genus into species and identifying its differentiae.

However, making a fuller answer to this question requires discussing more instances of division in the subsequent passages of *Sophist* and clarifying its difference from the role of ‘collection’. I need to keep this task for another occasion.⁷

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Dialectical Know-How: A Deflationary Approach to *Sophist* 253b-254a

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The paper offers a deflationary approach to the description of dialectical knowledge at *Sophist* 253b-254a, arguing that its focus is dialectical knowing, the condition of a dialectical knower, and that this condition is best understood as a form of know-how, constituted by the ability to individuate kinds and a grasp of the permissible ways kinds combine, the permissible relations between them. It is a mistake to expect to be able to identify specific kinds as referents for designations such as “a single character”. Instead, what we find here are placeholders for any kind standing in the relevant relation. The paper concludes with a speculative suggestion that in two of the four distinguished relations we find two different part-whole relations.
Plato, *Sophist*, dialectic, know-how, part-whole

1.

Plato has a habit of lauding dialectic with vague praise. “Descriptions” of dialectic show it to be important and valuable but are notably vague as to what dialectic is.¹ This is certainly true of *Sophist* 253b-254a, where ES and Theaetetus stumble upon the philosopher while looking for the sophist. It is not only true there, but a pattern.

The pattern is seen outside of dialogues with developed interest in either collection and division or the communion of kinds. Consider Socrates’ cryptic account of “the power of dialectic” in the line analogy (R6, 511b2-c2). While Socrates returns to dialectic in discussing the guardians’ higher education, one can only sympathize with Glaucon’s questions (R7, 532d8-e1) as to the “manner” (*tropos*) of this power, the “forms” (*eidē*) into which it may be distinguished, and the “paths” (*hodoi*) it involves. Socrates says more about what he calls “the dialectical pursuit (*methodos*)” (R7, 533c8), but explicitly denies answering Glaucon’s questions.

Among dialogues with developed interest in collection and division or communion of kinds, the pattern continues. The *Phaedrus* singles out and

1 On dialectic in the corpus, see Larsen, Haraldsen and Vlasits edd. 2022.

opaquely “describes” two activities whose one-sentence “descriptions” are usually taken to characterize “collecting” (*Phdr.* 265d3-5) and “dividing” (*Phdr.* 265e1-3), using Socrates’ own shorthand (*Phdr.* 266b3-5). Those with the relevant insight he calls “dialecticians” (*Phdr.* 266b5-c1).²

The *Philebus* describes and illustrates the “Promethean Method” at elaborate length (16c-18d). Notably, this passage is said only to portray a “dialectical” as opposed to “eristical” way of proceeding in the give and take of discussion (*Phlb.* 17a3-5). Context suggests this could encompass discussion about the subject matter of many *technai*, including those used to illustrate the method: *grammatikē* and *mousikē*. Here, “dialectical” denotes an adverbial manner that can attach itself to other branches of knowledge. In this adverbial mode, dialectic compares to mathematics, an independent discipline whose manner can inform other disciplines.

Later in the *Philebus*, Socrates mentions “the power of dialectic” (*Phlb.* 57e6-7) defending its claim to maximal purity in its orientation towards truth. Here, dialectic seems a discrete form of knowledge, not an adverbial manner.³ But Socrates says little about what it involves beyond a familiar, but unelaborated focus on permanent, stable beings (*Phlb.* 58a1-5 and 59a7-c7).

That such studied vagueness is true of the *Sophist* passage, especially the cryptic portion most explicit in offering a “description” of dialectical knowledge (253d1-e2), scarcely needs argument.⁴ The sheer volume of creative and ingenious commentary testifies to its opacity.

Why so coy, Plato?⁵ Plato seems likely to think dialectic more a matter of showing than telling. This is not a novel point. It is a *general* point, without commitment as to what we are shown, or how and where we are shown it. At the same time, the opacity of any given passage is a function of what we expect of it. This is the angle I explore regarding *Sophist* 253b-254a. Far from

2 “Insight”: “*horan*” at 266b6. This need not be inarticulate.

3 It is unclear in context whether dialectic is a *technē*, an *epistēmē*, or both.

4 “Most explicit” in view of “dialectical *epistēmē*” at 253d2-3 and “the dialectical element” at 253e4. The demonstrative tasks outlined at 253b10-c3 *may* be components of dialectical knowledge, but they may equally be things a dialectical knower can correctly demonstrate “as they journey through the arguments” (253b11) without being part of their dialectical knowledge.

5 Some (e.g., Szlezák 2004) think Plato generally coy, drawing on the *Phaedrus* and the (dubiously Platonic) *Seventh Letter*. Even if Plato deliberately withheld certain matters, one might wish to understand what he *does* say, on the evidence of the dialogues.

proposing some novel key to its meaning, I will explore the shape of the lock from some less well-trodden directions.

2.

A translation of my focal passage, divided into sections to aid discussion:

i. 253b9-c5: a knowledge requirement on demonstrating the answer to certain questions

ES: What about this? Since we have agreed that the kinds too take part in mixing along such lines,⁶ won't it be necessary for the one who is going to correctly display/demonstrate (δείξειν) which sort harmonize with which and which sort are not receptive to one another to proceed through the arguments with the aid of some sort of knowledge (μετ' ἐπιστήμης τινός)? And, moreover, [who is going to make known] whether extending through them all (διὰ πάντων) there are certain ones holding them together so that they are able to intermingle, and in turn in cases of division/distinction (ἐν ταῖς διαιρέσεσιν) whether there are others extending through wholes (δι' ὅλων) that are causes of division/distinction (τῆς διαιρέσεως αἷτια).

T: Yes of course, it requires knowledge, and presumably the sort that is pretty much most important!

ii. 253c6-10: what to call the knowledge required

ES: Then, in turn, what shall we now call this knowledge, Theaetetus? Or, by Zeus, did it escape our notice that we have stumbled upon the knowledge that is characteristic of free men and may we, perchance, while seeking the sophist, have first discovered the philosopher?

T: What do you mean?

iii. 253d1-4: what is characteristic of dialectical knowledge

ES: To divide/distinguish according to/into kinds (τὸ κατὰ γένη διαιρεῖσθαι) and/i.e. (καὶ) neither to think the same form (εἶδος) different nor one that is in fact different the same, surely we will say that this is characteristic of dialectical knowledge (τῆς διαλεκτικῆς ... ἐπιστήμης)?

T: Yes, we shall say so.

iv. 253d5-e3: what dialectical knowledge enables

ES: Surely, then, the person capable of doing this (ὁ... τοῦτο δυνατός ὄν) adequately discerns (ικανῶς διαισθάνεται) a single character (μίαν

6 Reading κατὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα (BW) in place of κατὰ ταῦτα (T, followed by Duke et al.).

ιδέαν) stretched out on every side throughout many (διὰ πολλῶν) each one lying apart (κειμένου χωρίς); and many (πολλὰς) [sc. characters] different from each other being encompassed from without (ἔξωθεν περιεχομένης) by one (ὑπὸ μιᾶς) [sc. character]; and, again (αὖ), a single (μίαν) [sc. character] having been joined together into one (ἐν ἐνὶ συνημμένην) through/by means of many wholes (δι' ὅλων πολλῶν); and many (πολλὰς) [sc. characters] having been thoroughly marked off in every way as separate (χωρὶς πάντῃ διωρισμένης). But this is to know how to discriminate kind by kind (διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι) in what way (ἥ) each of them is able to combine (κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται) and in whatever way (ὅπῃ) not [capable].

T: Absolutely.

v. 253e4-6: assigning the “dialectical element”

ES: And yet, I suppose, you will not grant the dialectical element (τὸ διαλεκτικόν) to anyone except the one who engages in philosophy (τῷ... φιλοσοφοῦντι) purely (καθαρῶς) and with rectitude (δικαίως)?

T: How could one give it to anyone else?

3.

A comment on my title “dialectical know-how”.⁷ I take dialectic, in the *Sophist* and possibly elsewhere, to be a “know-how”. This is not a novel point.⁸ I mean to be minimal in making it. I presuppose no specific theory of know-how, either as a philosophical matter of its relation to other types of knowledge or as an exegetical matter regarding the specific understanding one should have here. Instead, I use the term in what I trust is a familiar way. I use it broadly enough to encompass, for example, knowing-which.

A know-how is an expertise relating to some, potentially broad domain of objects and/or activities. It grounds capacities for practical engagement therein, where practical engagement is understood broadly enough to include acts of cognition, as in mathematical forms of know-how such as

7 For the general idea of dialectic as a know-how, I am indebted to conversation at NYCAP, especially with Mary Louise Gill and Tim Clarke. Gill 2012 defends a *Theaetetus*-based theory of dialectic as an expertise, but this is not what I have in mind.

8 At 253e1-2, Cornford translates “*diakrinein... epistasthai*” by “*knowing how to distinguish*” (my emphasis, Cornford 1935 *ad loc.*) He is followed in this by Gill 2012, 212, who writes of dialectic as both a “skill” and an “expertise”.

calculus. In Platonic contexts and in view of the close association between know-how and the Greek term “*technē*”, being in possession of a know-how implies a certain standing, both epistemically (being expert) and potentially socially (as a recognized teacher, for example).⁹

Here are some reasons to think that dialectical knowledge (*epistēmē*) as characterized at *Sophist* 253e-254a is a know-how.

Though the term “*technē*” is not used directly of dialectical knowledge in this passage, dialectical knowledge is compared to the *technai*, *grammatikē* and *mousikē*. These *technai* are evidently know-hows.

Like these *technai*, dialectical knowledge enables its possessor to do certain things, centrally including the cognitive act(s) described at 253d1-3 (§iii): “dividing/distinguishing (*diairein*) according to/into kinds (*kata genē*)”,¹⁰ “not thinking the same form different nor one that is in fact different the same”.¹¹ These cognitive acts are deeds, as shown by the verb “*dran*” at 253d5 (§iv).

The person capable of these cognitive deeds “discerns adequately” (*hikanōs diaisthanetai*, 253d7, §iv, my emphasis). Dialectical knowledge is thus a threshold notion. A threshold notion seems appropriate for a know-how. Elsewhere, regarding the comparands, *grammatikē* and *mousikē*, it is explicitly allowed that someone might fall short of adequacy without lacking all knowledge in the relevant domain. At *Phlb.* 17c, for example, it is allowed that a person could *know* (*eidōs*) the basic threefold division of musical pitches without being *wise* in relation to *mousikē*, without having the know-how.

Finally, it is assumed that dialectical knowledge goes along not only with recognizing certain things for oneself, but with the ability to display or demonstrate them—to another, I assume. The use of “*deixein*” at 253b12 (§i)

9 I remain neutral on whether dialectical knowledge (*epistēmē*) is (also) a *technē*. That it is an *epistēmē* is explicit, though I do not here ask what makes it so. Though the term “*technē*” is used with broad scope in the *Sophist*, at 253b-254a Socrates could be read as reticent about *calling* dialect a *technē* as opposed to an *epistēmē*. On the relation between *epistēmē* and *technē* in Plato, see Parry 2021. My claims are limited to my focal passage.

10 I am not persuaded by Dixsaut 2001: 157 that “*kata genē*”, at 253d1, should be rendered “kind-by-kind”. However, “*kata genos*” (with singular noun) at 253e2 is plausibly read so. This encourages keeping the two points distinct (as Dixsaut herself urges regarding “*diaireisthai*” and “*diakrinein*”). For the option “into kinds”, on which I remain neutral, see Brown 2010.

11 One act or two? The “*kai*” at d1 could be epexegetic. The singular “*touto*” at d5 does not require, but would support this.

suggests this view. The ability correctly to display which sort of kinds harmonize with which is listed as something made possible for someone whose progress through the arguments (or discussion, the *logoi*) is accompanied by dialectical knowledge.¹²

4.

A description of dialectical know-how might focus on various things. I mention three central possible foci, without claim to be exhaustive. A description might focus on the subject-matter of the know-how. A description might focus on how the know-how is exercised, some method or technique it involves. A description might focus on the epistemic condition of an individual with the know-how.

From what vantage point does ES “describe” dialectical knowledge? His focus is the epistemic condition of the individual with such know-how (the philosopher, as it turns out).¹³ Indeed, I suspect this is generally true of “descriptions” of “the power of dialectic”.

For example, while the *Philebus*’ “Promethean method” is labelled a “method”, and Socrates himself describes it as a “path” (“*hodos*”, 16b5), one would be hard pressed to *follow* it based on Socrates’ description.

<The ancients said that> given that these things [sc. whatever are said to be, 16c9] are organized in this way [sc. according to the ancients’ saying of 16c9-10] we must investigate by on each occasion positing one character (*mian idean*) in connection with everything, since we will find it if/because it is present; if we got hold of it, after one we must examine two, if there are so many, but, if not, three or some other number, and <we must> in turn <examine> each of these ones likewise until one should see with respect to the one at the start not only that it is one and many and

12 As Tim Clarke suggests to me, this fits well with the context, in which ES and Theaetetus are “demonstrating” (*apodeiknumi*) something to Parmenides (258c11), as part of the ES’ overall “demonstration” (*endeiknumi*) by means of “holding conversation with” another (*prosdialegomai*) (217c1-d3).

13 I do not say this epistemic aspect of the philosopher exhaustively captures the philosophical disposition. (Thanks to Ronna Burger for inviting this clarification.) Following my focal passage, ES proposes only that this is the “sort of region” (*toioutos tis topos*, *Sph.* 253e7) in which they may hope to discover the philosopher. Given the motivational aspects one may expect of the philosophical disposition, the reference to someone engaging in philosophy “purely and with rectitude” (253e5, §v) is striking, but undeveloped.

without limit but also how many <it is>; that <we should> not apply the character of what is without limit to the plurality until one should discern the entire number of it [the plurality] between both what is without limit and the one, at that point leaving be each one of them all, having released them into what is without limit. (*Phlb.* 16c10-e2)

This is not so much a map as an aerial view of what is true of someone in possession of the relevant know-how and thereby enabled to follow the path that such possession enables. The passage may in some sense relay a method, but it does not offer a step-by-step technique that someone could implement based on its description. Instead, the focus is the epistemic accomplishments of an expert in possession of the know-how.

Something similar is true of ES's "description" in the *Sophist*. This "description", though methodical, is less overtly methodological than the *Philebus* passage. ES articulates various cognitive deeds that dialectical knowledge either consists in or enables in its possessor.¹⁴ Here too these are characterized through the lens of the epistemic achievement of the dialectical knower. The extent to which the description gives us information about *what* the dialectical knower knows and about *what* their knowledge enables is limited.

In the immediate context of the passage, the Stranger's focus is not on *what* the dialectical knower knows at all. It is, in the first instance, on the *fact* of their knowing. This, at least, is the central argumentative point of the comparison with *grammatikē* and *mousikē* (252e9-253b8).

The comparison has two dimensions, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. The metaphysical dimension is the point that just as only some phonetic or musical elements combine, and others do not, so only some kinds combine, and others do not.¹⁵ However, this metaphysical point is not the comparison's argumentative focus. It cannot be, because the comparison is itself based on prior agreement that some kinds combine, and others do not.¹⁶ The argumentative focus is epistemological, using the metaphysical

14 I return to this distinction below.

15 "The point" as the only affirmed point of comparison between *all three* comparanda: the scope of intermingling of phonemes, pitches, or kinds.

16 The possibility of vowel-like kinds picks up the mention of the special combinatorial role of vowels, but the comparison is not used to establish this possibility (let alone the *actuality* of any such kinds). The possibility of kinds that are causes of division (253c3, §i) is raised without any explicit analogue in the comparands. Both possibilities are trailers for what is to come in the discussion of five greatest kinds, but they are not the metaphysical basis for the comparison between *grammatikē*, *mousikē* and dialectical knowledge, nor do they ground the inference to knowledge being required to answer questions regarding the combination of kinds.

point of comparison already established as leverage. Competence in relation to the permissible combinations between kinds and in determining roles for certain kinds in bringing about or undoing them will require know-how, just as it does in relation to the permissible combinations of phonemes and pitches.

That knowledge is required: this is what carries the weight of the argument at 253b10-11 (§i) when ES suggests that a journey through the arguments to demonstrate the permissible combinations *will require some specific knowledge*. That this knowledge requirement carries the weight is confirmed by Theaetetus' reply, at 253c4-5 (§i), *yes, knowledge will be needed*.

Further, in saying that knowledge is required, the point is that the person must journey through the arguments *as a knower*. Attention is focused on their epistemic condition, not on *what* they must know. While considering what to call the knowledge this knower must possess, ES does go on to talk about what this knower must know and what their knowledge enables. But he continues to do so from the perspective of their *knowing* it, their epistemic condition.

So, what is "characteristic of dialectical knowledge", at 253d1-3 (§iii), is certain intellectual insights/acts (including acts of omission): "distinguishing", "thinking", "not thinking..." when thinking so would be mistaken. Similarly, at the centre of the fourfold list at 253d5-e1 (§iv), the list that has commanded so much scholarly attention, is a cognitive verb: "*diaisthanetai*".

However we should understand the list of things this individual "adequately discerns", what we are told explicitly is that each is a matter of *adequate discernment*, a characterization of the epistemic condition of this dialectical knower. Likewise, the summary, at 253e1-2 (§iv), focuses explicitly on the knower knowing: "knowing how to discriminate..."

In summary, everything said about *what* the dialectical knower knows or *what* their dialectical knowledge enables is said through a characterization of them as *knowing* it.

In the remainder, I comment on three aspects of how ES articulates this dialectical knower's knowledgeable condition: its structure, scope, and subject-matter. I conclude with a speculative suggestion.

5.

First, structure. I have talked, without distinction, of "*what*" the dialectical knower knows and of what their knowledge "*enables*". In principle, these may differ. What possessing a given know-how enables may extend beyond

the reach of direct exercises of that know-how. *Grammatikē*, the know-how that enables literacy, offers a ready example: reading or writing are *direct* exercises of the know-how, but reading and writing are a gateway to many other intellectual (and other) acts.

It is not clear that dialectical knowledge has this “gateway” structure, so I do not insist on this. There is, however, *some* structure indicated by the ES’ “description”, even beyond the list of four discrete things the dialectical knower “adequately discerns” at 253d5-e1. This structure merits attention. Where two passages seem to describe what possession of the knowledge enables, a third seems to capture the knowledge that does the enabling.

I start with the latter (§iii). 253d1-3 identifies certain intellectual activities as “characteristic of” dialectical knowledge: “dividing/distinguishing according to/into kinds” and “not thinking the same form different nor one that is in fact different the same”. One could take the second to specify the first (taking “*kai*” at 253d1 as epexegetic), but one need not do so.¹⁷ These activities are said to be “characteristic of” dialectical knowledge. I understand this to mean they are characteristic of the dialectical knower’s knowing.

These activities may be characteristic of that knowing without exhausting it. They may also be characteristic of dialectical knowing without requiring that, whenever someone avoids thinking the same form different, they do so in virtue of dialectical know-how. Not thinking the same form different sounds easier than it is, in a shorthand like this. How could the *same* form be *different*? But the requirements on not thinking the same form different in the manner of a dialectical knower are demanding and take work to achieve. It takes both the *Sophist* and *Statesman* (at least) to address this task for sophist, statesman, and philosopher (*Sph.* 217a6-b4).

The fourfold list of what the dialectical knower “adequately discerns” at 253d5-e1 (§iv) is introduced as true of one “capable of doing this”, where “this” looks back to the characterizing knowledge of 253d1-3. One might understand the various acts of adequate discernment as further elaboration of what is involved in being capable of doing “this”, so that these various acts unpack the characterizing knowledge of 253d5-e1.¹⁸ But I think it more natural to understand this second passage as pointing to intellectual activi-

17 Not doing so is consistent with thinking them closely related, e.g., of the second as necessary for the first.

18 So McCabe 2000: 212-13 with n50.

ties *enabled* by possessing the characterizing knowledge and not as further articulations of that knowledge.¹⁹

This is consistent with these various acts of adequate discernment being direct exercises of dialectical know-how, as acts made possible in virtue of those that characterize such knowledge. There may be structure *within* a single know-how. It would also allow for the gateway structure mentioned earlier, dialectical know-how being a gateway for these acts.

253e1-2 (§iv) resumptively summarizes the various acts of adequate discernment as a group. Separating these enabled acts from the enabling acts said to be characteristic of dialectical knowledge encourages following scholars who distinguish the talk of “dividing/distinguishing according to/into kinds (*to kata genē diaireisthai*)” at 253d1 from the talk of “know[ing] how to discriminate (*diakrinein*) kind by kind (*kata genos*) ...” at 253e2.

The third passage to situate regarding the structure of dialectical knowing is first to appear (§ii): the demonstrandum of 253b12-c3 the correct display or demonstration of which is said to require (what turns out to be) dialectical knowledge. Monique Dixsaut has rightly emphasized that this is organized into questions: which sorts of kinds harmonize with which, which do not admit one another, and so on.²⁰ The first two questions relate to the resumptive summary of the enabled act of discernment at 253e1-2 (§iii) in their shared interest in where there is combining of the relevant sort and where there is not.

That summary explicitly picks up *only* these first two questions (§ii). This is reason to be cautious in taking the various acts of adequate discernment to tie directly to the identification of candidate vowel-like kinds or of kinds that are causes of division/distinction, notwithstanding that this second pair of questions will be a focus of their subsequent exploration of five of the greatest kinds.

There is another, more subtle distinction between the list of questions and the acts of adequate discernment. The answers to the questions posed will be given in terms of *kinds*: which sorts harmonize, and which sorts do not;

19 What difference does this (admittedly subtle) distinction make? On the unpacking view, every activity in §iv must be understood as, and so constrains the understanding of the activities, “dividing/distinguishing according to/into kinds” and “not thinking the same form different nor one that is in fact different the same”. On the enabling view, there is no such constraint.

20 Dixsaut 2001: 157-8. This allows that the exercise of dialectical knowledge *can* be regarded as operating within a question-and-answer framework, appropriate to the conversational aspect of “*dialegesthai*” and to Platonic interest in philosophical question-and-answer.

which kind(s), if any, enable mingling; which kind(s), if any, are cause of division. The list of acts of discernment is focused on *relations* between kinds as opposed to the kinds that may stand in one or another relation. I will return to this point.

In general, one reason not to bring these two passages too closely together is their perspectives on dialectical knowing. The summary at 253e1-2 (§iii) encapsulates the dialectical knower's *own* enabled acts of adequate discernment. But the question-passage (§ii) focuses on the questions, answers to which the dialectical knower is enabled by their knowledge to display *to another*.²¹ Being in possession of dialectical knowledge is required of anyone in a position to offer an answer to these four questions correctly. But that does not mean that answering these four questions is all that dialectical knowledge enables.

Contextually, our interest in dialectical knowledge may arise because dialectical knowledge is needed to answer these questions. That is different from thinking our interest in these questions arises because they are illustrative of dialectical knowledge.

All told, we can view ES' articulation of *what* the dialectical knower knows as having a threefold structure. Certain intellectual acts are characteristic of dialectical knowledge. This characterizing knowledge enables various acts of discernment by the dialectical knower, acts that may themselves be (further) part of dialectical knowing. Together, this characterizing knowledge and the sorts of acts of discernment it enables are prerequisites for correctly displaying to another the answer to the four questions listed at 253b12-c3.

My second comment concerns scope. As is well known, the passage has provoked two main lines of interpretation. According to one, the description of dialectical knowledge outlines the method of division illustrated in the example of angling and their hunt for the sophist.²² According to the second, the description anticipates the subsequent, more detailed discussion of the communion of five most important kinds and is focused on their interrelations, especially the roles attributed to the kinds, being and other.²³ Aptly enough, there are also those who, in the spirit of the "children's prayer" (*Sph.* 249d3), ask for both.²⁴

21 Oddly, in what a reader could be misled into thinking is a complete *translation* of this third passage, Gill 2012: 211-12 mentions only the second pair of questions and ignores the focus on *display* or *demonstration* ("deixein").

22 Stenzel 1940 is representative of this family of views.

23 Gómez-Lobo 1977 is representative of this family of views.

24 Ionescu 2013 is a recent example.

I am sympathetic to the latter, more generous view. But it may still be under-ambitious. The structure of the description of dialectical knowledge gives us latitude to pick apart elements of what dialectical know-how involves and enables without requiring that every example of its exercise involve each act of adequate discernment its possession enables, let alone answers to each question such a knower is equipped to demonstrate. This opens the way to finding examples of dialectical know-how throughout the *Sophist* even in passages not specifically engaged in the method of division exemplified by identifying the angler or in the systematic kind combinatorics exemplified by their consideration of five greatest kinds.²⁵

The flip side of this point about under-ambition is a point about overambition. It seems overambitious to eke out from ES' "description" anything as concrete or specific as all and only the precise moves involved in the complex activity exemplified by the search for the angler or to zero in on which specific kind is the single character identified by the various acts of discernment dialectical know-how enables.

Consider the act of intellectually "dividing/distinguishing according to/into kinds", part of what characterizes dialectical knowledge (§iii). It is natural to connect this to the methodical procedure of progressively dividing up kinds exemplified in the search for the angler. But to draw this connection does not require *identifying* that methodical procedure with the intellectual act of dividing/distinguishing according to/into kinds. It requires only that that intellectual act, however understood, should be used as an element of that methodical procedure, as it evidently is (in fact, repeatedly).²⁶

Drawing this connection is consistent with that same intellectual act being used in other contexts, including their investigation of the five kinds. ES draws attention to one example of this, observing that the nature of the kind other has been "chopped up" in the same fashion as knowledge (257c7-8). Each admits of parts that may be marked off and given their own designation.²⁷ To see the same intellectual activity at work in both contexts is not to identify the larger intellectual contexts it contributes to, nor to insist on any

25 Though sympathetic to the maximally generous view of the scope of dialectic of Dixsaut 2001, who understands it as the form of philosophical thought, I do not follow her on specifics.

26 *Sph.* 235b8-c7, reflecting on how they will proceed, underscores this point, indicating *both* that what they are doing involves "dividing/distinguishing" (forms of "*diairein*" at 235b8 and 235c3) *and* that this is a *repeated* act ("*diairountas aei*", 235c3).

27 For "marked off" ("*aphoristhen*" at 257c11), compare, e.g., "*aphorisassthai*" at 227c5, the active verb, used for what ES and Theaetetus are trying to do as they divide off some kind (and cf. "*aphorisantes*" at 240c8).

specific relation between those contexts. Nor need these be the only contexts to which this intellectual activity may contribute.

My caution against overambition is not readily disentangled from the question of the subject matter of dialectical knowledge as the Stranger “describes” it. This is my third topic for comment. I focus on the four acts of adequate discernment mentioned at 253d5-e1 (§iv).

Evidently, the subject-matter of dialectical know-how involves kinds. But what, more specifically does the dialectical knower know? Certain specific items—those that would be candidates for being the various “single characters” mentioned? That these items *play* these roles? Or is what the knower knows the various *roles* or *relationships* possible for kinds, so that, for any given set of kinds, the dialectical knower can explore the ways in which they do or do not relate to one another?²⁸ I have already telegraphed my preference for the final option.

Consider the comparison with *grammatikē*, the know-how enabling literacy. The literate person knows how phonemes do and do not combine to make syllables and syllables words. What does such know-how involve? Does the literate person keep some mental record of *all* permissible combinations between phonemes into larger units of speech? That seems to me doubtful.²⁹ Anyhow, such a list would not, on its own, give all the information needed to use the available combinations in permissible ways to make up units of speech.

Certainly, the literate person will need to know the phonetic alphabet for the language involved, and the organization of these alphabetic types into groups, such as the vowel. But knowing that a vowel is needed for any combination in speech is not yet to know *which* vowel is needed in this combination, nor *how* to combine it. The literate person will need to know the *ways* alphabetic types combine, where such “ways” will not reduce to a list of examples of things so combined.

The best evidence that this is a helpful way to interpret what we are offered at 253d5-e1 (§iv) is ES’ resumptive summary of the four acts, at 251e1-2,

28 Ionescu 2013 suggests the focus is “the kinds of relations among forms that division can disclose when carried far enough” (58). I agree that the focus is on *relations*. However, Ionescu muddies the waters by going on to talk, as if equivalently, of “rules governing the combination of kinds” (61, my emphasis). Gill 2012: 212-13 says this passage “describes four relations between forms” (212). But the focus of her explication is on the *forms* thus related and not the *relations* as such.

29 This is no strawman: Gómez-Lobo 1977: 37-8 is explicit in adopting such a view. Of course, the range is *types* rather than *tokens*. Even so the view seems implausible.

as knowing how to discriminate kind by kind *in what way* each is able to combine and *in whatever way* not. We have been given an account of certain *ways*, some constituting ways of combining and at least one constituting a way of *non*-combining. That is, we have been given schemas for certain possible *relations* between kinds, not an account of *kinds* standing in certain relations.³⁰

More tentatively, I understand “*hekasta*” (*Sph.* 253e1) to range across all kinds (or, better, all *groupings* of kinds), without requiring that every (relevant) kind be inside the scope of the knowing (at least, not actively so).³¹ Dialectical know-how enables one to know what are the available relations in which any given kind may stand to other kinds, without this requiring that one know *for every kind* which relations it does in fact stand in to *which other kinds*. Equipped with dialectical know-how, this is something one could *investigate*, but need not know in advance. Further, such investigation need not range over *every* kind on any given occasion. Context may determine *which* are the *kinds* relevant to the investigative project undertaken. Context may also limit *which* of the various *relations* outlined prove to be applicable.

If ES’ list of things the dialectical knower adequately discerns is focused on *relations* between kinds, it becomes more explicable that he talks in such opaque terms of some “single character”, “many characters”, “many wholes”, “many things”, since these are placeholders for the relata. It also becomes less incumbent upon us to think that examples we may find of some specific kind standing in one of these relations give exclusive insight into how, when and by what the relation is satisfied.³²

A point of objection might be raised here. One might be skeptical that one could have, or that Plato would be likely to have, a conception of relations that is *independent* of the items that stand in them (or vice versa).³³ I am sympathetic to this objection and do not mean to suggest these relations are *primitives*, independent of their relata. But it is consistent with this that dialectical know-how consist in and enable a relatum-independent grasp of

30 Buchheim 2013 rightly emphasizes that we are given “Weisen” here.

31 Dixsaut 2001: 201-2 observes the significance of the plural.

32 As Tim Clarke suggests to me, the studied vagueness may serve another contextual objective. Theaetetus easily arrived at the conclusion that kinds, like phonemes, are selective in their combination. The comparison with *grammatikē* and *mousikē* shows the task arising, understanding the combination of (selected) kinds, requires know-how. Socrates’ studied vagueness shows the know-how needed for *this* task is demanding, appropriate to its dialectical character.

33 Thanks to Pauline Sabrier for the objection. On relativity in Plato and others, see Duncombe 2020.

various relations at a level of some generality, while allowing that within a given domain exploring those relations in full specificity would go hand in hand with exploring relevant relata as well. Indeed, such *generality* might help to explain why such knowledge belongs to the *dialectical* knower.³⁴ It is also part of my point that such exploration can work piecemeal, without requiring a *full* list of all permissible relata for any relation in question. I also think we *do* have evidence, in the corpus, of Plato showing highly general interest in some, specific relations, as *relations*.³⁵

6.

The points I have made so far are deflationary. As a “reading” of the passage, they are seriously incomplete. I have not attempted to identify the relations that the dialectical knower adequately discerns. In this, there is truth in advertising: I have, as promised, focused on the shape of the lock, not the key.

I close, however, with a speculative suggestion about *two* of the relations involved. These are the relations second and third on the list: the relation involved in “many characters different from each other being encompassed by a single character from without” and the relation involved in “a single character having been joined together into one through/by means of many wholes”.³⁶

The second relation—containment from without—seems to me (as it has to others) to be illustrated by the way in which “change” and “rest” are said to be encompassed by “being” (*Sph.* 250b8-10). I take this to be only one example of things standing in the relation. The passage offers as important corollary that “being” cannot be said to change or rest “according to its own nature” (*Sph.* 250c6-7). This is consistent with it being permissible to speak of “being” as changing and/or at rest but not according to its own nature. It

34 I owe the suggestion to David Charles and that talk of philosophizing “purely” at *Sph.* 253e5 may reflect this aspect of dialectical knowing.

35 The *Parmenides*’ gymnastic exercise is good evidence of this. Harte 2002 explores that exercise’s interest in the part-whole relation and comparable interest elsewhere in the corpus.

36 The “*au*” at 253d8 is often taken to link and contrast the first pair on the list of acts of adequate discernment from the second (e.g., Miller 2016). But it is sometimes taken to link and distinguish the second and third acts on the list, especially by Francophone writers. See, for example and other references, Dixsaut 2001: 192-3. This would be congenial to my suggestion.

is also consistent with it being permissible to speak of “change” or “rest” as being, each in accordance with its own nature.

The third relation—a joining into one through/by means of many wholes—seems to me (again, not uniquely) to be illustrated by the unification of “half-parts” to make up angling (*Sph.* 221b2-c3). Again, I take this to be only one example of things standing in the relation, though it may be that every example involves an item appropriately arrived at by act(s) of dividing. I take the reference to joining “through/by means of many wholes” to point not to the single character having *many wholes* as its constituents, but to *many wholes* being partitioned to arrive at the single form that is joined into one. Another example would be the relation between change and being or between rest and being, *if* each can be said to be according to its own nature.³⁷

In each of these relations we have something we could, but ES does not, call a “whole of parts”: the encompassing kind, on one hand, and, on the other, the single character joined together into one. In the *Parmenides*, the “encompassing” verb, “*periechein*”, is used as a stand-in for the relation of a whole to its parts in posing various puzzles about that relation.³⁸

It is well known (a point of agreement in seminal papers by Moravcsik 1973 and Cohen 1973) that in the divisions of the *Sophist* and *Statesman* we are faced with candidate “parthood” relations open to a potentially confusing mix of extensional and intensional treatments. My suggestion is that the second and third relations ES isolates here distinguish between an extensional relation of inclusion and an intensional relation of containment.³⁹

Thinking about ES’ fourfold list, I am reminded of a passage tucked inside the *Parmenides*’ second deduction, whose generality is striking. At 146b2-5, Parmenides announces that “each thing is related to each thing whatsoever”

37 Gill 2012: 152-3, 206-11 argues against the antecedent. Such a relation between change or rest and being could be a limit case, with only two “wholes” in view: being and (for change) rest or (for rest) change. Or it could be that, if one’s project were to come up with a suitably unified account of change, one would not immediately divide being into change and rest, so that there would be other steps *between* being and change. The fact that the pursuit of angling and sophistry are characterized as *pursuits* allows that the divisions that are apt are sensitive to the target. As is well-known, the hunt for the statesman in the *Statesman* begins with a different division of *technē* than did the hunt for the sophist.

38 E.g., *Prm.* 145b8-cl. Cf. Harte 2002: 90-100.

39 It is a separate question whether the language of “extensional” and “intensional” is apt to serve as more than shorthand for the distinction. I do not pursue this question here, nor how Plato might formulate the relevant distinctions needed.

in one of four ways: they are the same or they are different and, if they are neither the same nor different, then either they stand as whole to part or as part to whole. ES' list seems to me similarly general and similarly focused on relations (specifically, in the context, available relations between *kinds*). It differs, however, rather importantly, in allowing for two *distinct* ways in which something appropriately regarded as a whole might stand to its parts.⁴⁰

40 Thanks to Ed Halper and the IPS Executive Committee for the invitation to give a Plenary Lecture at the *Triennial Symposium on Plato's Sophist* in Athens, Ga, in July 2022; to the audience, especially Béatriz Bossi, Lesley Brown, Ronna Burger, Marko Malink, and Noboru Notomi, for questions/comments. Special thanks to Lea Schroeder for research assistance in the paper's early stages, and to David Charles, Tim Clarke, MM McCabe, Pauline Sabrier, and Glenn Zhou for comments on a draft.

Dynamis, Definition and Division in Plato's *Sophist*

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This paper aims to investigate the existence of a philosophical criterion by which Plato distinguished the last definition of sophistry from all the others in the *Sophist*. According to my thesis, the notion of *dynamis* provides such a criterion. In examining the occurrences of this term in the *Sophist*, I will note that its meaning is always related to sophistry's essential features, particularly the "productive art" in the last definition. Moreover, the *Statesman* will serve as an example to demonstrate how the use of *dynamis* in the *Statesman*'s division is similar to that in the *Sophist*. In conclusion, I will attempt to provide an ontological explanation for *dynamis*' presence in the divisions by linking it to the "*dynamis* proposal" of *Sph.* 247e. division, definition, *dynamis*, essence, Form.

Introduction

In the *Sophist*, as a result of seven divisions, the Eleatic Stranger (herein referred to as "ES") proposes seven definitions of sophistry. Plato does not seem to have established, at least explicitly, a criterion according to which each is more or less valid. The problem is evident: how can the same tool (the διαίρεσις) produce, on the one hand, one true definition and, on the other, six false definitions? A first glance suggests two possibilities: either all definitions, including definition VII, are well-crafted and, presumably, true, or only the last division actually gives the true answer since the division in the first six definitions was not performed correctly.¹ The only information we have is found at the end of the *Sophist* (268d), where the ES states that, through the last description of the sophist, the absolute truth (τἀληθέστατα) has been stated.

The aim of this paper is to explore the existence of a philosophical criterion according to which, in the *Sophist*, Plato distinguishes the last definition of sophistry from all the others. My thesis is that such a criterion can be found in the notion of δύναμις. The section of the dialogue in which the notion of δύναμις κοινωνίας is introduced allows Plato to elaborate definitions

1 Cf. Cornford 1935, 173; Notomi 1999, 296-301; Fronterotta 2007, 52-60; Crivelli 2012, 22; Gill 2012, 146-147.

that are methodologically grounded in a precise ontological conception. Since I am dealing with two of the more problematic sections of the *Sophist*, I do not pretend to develop all the implications of my interpretation in a few pages: I simply intend to chart a line of research and offer some clues about the possibility of linking the notion of δύναμις as the definition of being and the δύναμις as the ‘nature’ of a Form sought by division.

The seven definitions

The knowledge of Forms and their relations is the object of a dialectical investigation. If the philosophical task of the method is exhausted once it has found the essential features of F, the final goal of a διαίρεσις must be to produce a definition of F, namely a formula showing the essence.² Each division in the *Sophist* aims to elaborate a definition of sophistry by grasping its οἰκεία φύσις (*Sph.* 264e3-4). But if it is possible to show the essence of F by a single definition, as in the angler’s division, why are there several definitions of sophistry?

A possible answer to this question is that sophistry differs from any other Form because it is multifaceted and cannot be collected into a single kind.³ This hypothesis, nonetheless, seems to be disproved by the example of the *Statesman*. In his division of the τέχναι of the city in *Plt.* 303b-c, the ES makes full use of the last definition of the sophist: he refers in both contexts to the sophist as a γοῆς (*Sph.* 235a1, *Plt.* 303c4), and, most importantly, the mention of εἰδῶλων μεγίστων προστάτης (*Plt.* 303c2-3) can only refer to the εἰδωλοποιικὴ τέχνη (*Sph.* 235b9, 260d9) constituting the heart of definition VII of the *Sophist*. Indeed, the ES distinguishes (in the *Statesman*) the sophist from the statesman because (in the *Sophist*) an already established and true definition of the sophist exists.

2 The idea that the Sophist and the Statesman seek the ‘definitions’ of sophistry and political science is defended by Brown 2010, 154-155 and El Murr 2016, 117-133, among others.

3 Cf. Brown 2010, 157-163.

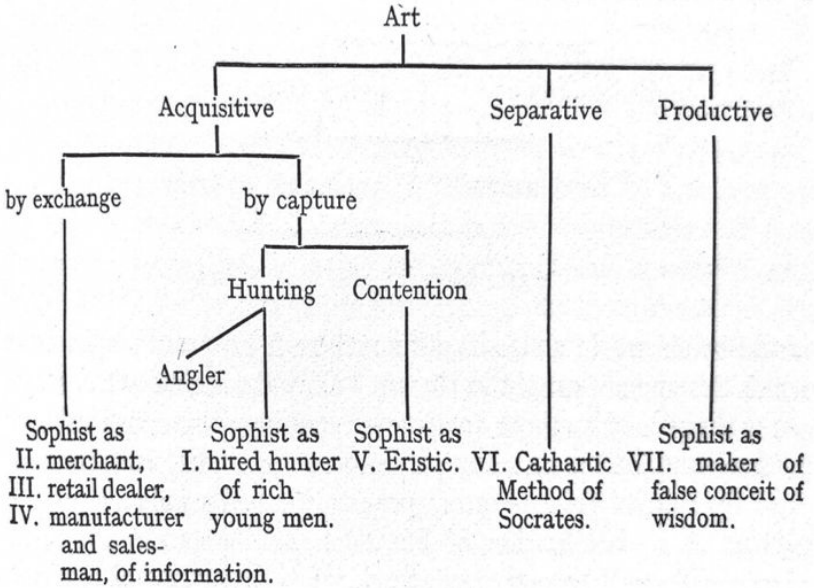


Image by Cornford (1935: 171)

My premise will be, then, that only the last definition encompasses the essential characteristics of sophistry. If several definitions of the sophist are proposed, the division procedure must have then failed to grasp, in some way, the essential features of the object sought. It would not be surprising for such a failure to occur in the *Sophist* because this is what we see in the *Statesman*. In the *Statesman*, however, the error is purely operational: the cut leads to an incorrect definition, which only the cosmogonic myth can reveal as such because the king is not a “shepherd of men”. Whereas nowhere in the *Sophist* does Plato state that an operation error has been made, since from a Platonic perspective a sophist can be described by all the seven proposed definitions. For instance, the art that “hunts young men and pretends to educate them for money” (as in definition I) undoubtedly corresponds to a certain Platonic conception of sophistry.

Therefore, there must be a criterion whereby Plato establishes a methodological distinction between the last definition and the others. One notable difference between the last definition and the previous ones is that sophistry was sought in the “acquisitive art” in the first five (definition VI has a unique status) and in the “productive art” in the last definition. Is it possible to find

such a criterion in this distinction? In the next section we will investigate this possibility.

Dynamis and definition in the Sophist

The key to understanding why the first six definitions of sophistry differ methodologically from the last one is, I propose, the notion of δύναμις. This term occurs 19 times in the *Sophist*: 9 times in the ontological context of the δύναμις κοινωνίας⁴, 5 times in the divisions⁵ and 5 times with a trivial meaning.⁶ To see if the term δύναμις might be a criterion which could indicate the essence of sophistry,⁷ I shall present the contexts in which the term appears in the divisions. Considering that the number of occurrences is not compelling and needs to be supported by a study of δύναμις in the *Statesman*, I will conceive this paper as a preliminary study of this hypothesis.

In the first five definitions, the ES begins the division from the “acquisitive art” (τέχνη κτητική). Since the “acquisitive nature” represents a feature admitted by Plato as belonging to sophistry, the ES does not explicitly refer to these five divisions as being wrong.⁸ Even if their results seem insufficient to capture the sophist, it is in definition V that we find an interesting mention of δύναμις. Note, however, that this occurrence is significant precisely because it does not concern the acquisitive nature of sophistry, but comes out when the ES attributes the τέχνη ἀντιλογική to it (*Sph.* 231e2-4):

ἀτὰρ δὴ τὸ τῆς ἀντιλογικῆς τέχνης ἄρ' οὐκ ἐν κεφαλαίῳ περὶ πάντων πρὸς ἀμφισβήτησιν ἰκανὴ τις δύναμις ἔοικ' εἶναι.

Well, does it not seem, after all, that what concerns the art of dispute is a sort of δύναμις capable of arguing about every argument?

In fact, δύναμις is mentioned in a crucial point of the inquiry since an entirely true definition can be given afterwards only by interweaving the

4 *Sph.* 247d8, 247e4, 248b5, 248c5, 248c8, 248c9, 251e8, 252d2, 254c5.

5 *Sph.* 219a6, 219b9, 232e4, 233a8, 265b9.

6 At *Sph.* 226b1, 244b7, 263b1 δύναμις is preceded by the prepositions εἰς or κατά, meaning ‘as far as possible’; cf. Lefebvre 2018, 45-54 for this kind of expression. At *Sph.* 227b7 the term δύναμις indicates the ‘faculties’ of the body, and at *Sph.* 236b5 it simply means ‘capacity to see clearly’.

7 *Sph.* 219a6 will not be included because it refers to the division of the angler (whose definition, by the way, is presented as valid).

8 Vlasitis 2023, 22-25 persuasively argues that a division does not require, in order to be corrected, showing essential properties.

τέχνη ἀντιλογική with the other essential characteristics. Having found this feature is hence necessary to commence the seventh and last definition.

I certainly do not intend to attribute any particular theoretical force to this simple mention. But it seems significant that the notion of δύναμις appears in the divisions when an essential feature of the object sought has been found. We might say that talking about the τέχνη ἀντιλογική in terms of δύναμις in definition V invites us to pay attention to δύναμις as a criterion for the inquiry of the sophistry. Thus, definition V, albeit not exhaustive, succeeds in finding an essential element of sophistry even though the διαίρεσις had managed to grasp only one such element.

The inquiry takes a new turn precisely at this point. By recalling the term ἀντιλογικός (*Sph.* 232b6), the ES can explicitly ask a question about the sophist's δύναμις slightly later at *Sph.* 233a8:

Τί ποτ' οὖν ἂν εἴη τὸ τῆς σοφιστικῆς δυνάμεως θαῦμα;

Then, what might be the wonder [enacted] by the δύναμις of the sophistry?

This question is a second crucial step to elaborating the last and true definition because it leads to introducing the “productive art” (τέχνη ποιητική) and attributing it to the sophist.⁹ In fact, if we suppose that the last definition is the only essential definition, the passage from acquisitive art to productive art is necessary to produce the essential definition of sophistry. Note, however, that the notion of δύναμις turns to be involved precisely at this point; it is hence plausible that the ES, in seeking the δύναμις of F, is looking for the essential features of F. To put it another way, it is only when the question “τί ἔστι F?” is understood as “τίς ἔστι τοῦ F δύναμις” that enquiry can identify the productive art, starting from which it will be possible to provide the true definition.

Finally, the term δύναμις appears one last time at the end of the dialogue when the ES emphasises how his research has been directed from the beginning towards δύναμις precisely in reference to the productive art. At *Sph.* 265b8-10, the ES says:

Ποιητικὴν, εἴπερ μεμνήμεθα τὰ κατ' ἀρχὰς λεχθέντα, πᾶσαν ἔφαμεν εἶναι δύναμιν ἣτις ἂν αἰτία γίγνηται τοῖς μὴ πρότερον οὖσιν ὕστερον γίγνεσθαι. Every productive art, if we remember what was said at the beginning, has been defined as the δύναμις which is cause for entities that did not exist before their subsequent coming into being.

9 Cf. *Sph.* 233e-234d.

Indeed, mention has already been made of the δύναμις. At *Sph.* 219b8-9, when the text had not yet begun upon the division of sophistry, certain “productive arts” had been mentioned, and among them is the “imitative art” (μιμητικὴ τέχνη), which will be used afterwards to define the essence of sophistry:

Τὰ δέ γε νυνδὴ <ᾧ> διήλθομεν ἅπαντα εἶχεν εἰς τοῦτο τὴν αὐτῶν δύναμιν.
That is the reason (*i.e.* because they bring to being) why every art we have just examined (*i.e.* agriculture, the art of caring for the body, the imitative art, etc.) has its δύναμις (*i.e.* the δύναμις of the “productive art”).

Therefore, the distinction between productive and acquisitive arts is not just an operational fact, but it implies a methodological evaluation, because it determines the success of the inquiry itself. Indeed, the earlier divisions fail because they make sophistry acquisitive and omit its essential productive δύναμις. So, if it is not a coincidence that the term δύναμις appears in the divisions of sophistry when an essential feature is sought (as in *Sph.* 233a8) or has been found (as in *Sph.* 231e2-4, 265b8-10), the failure of other divisions derives from their lack of content, but also from their method, which consist in not having seek the δύναμις of the sophistry.

Dynamis and definition in the Statesman

We will now briefly compare these clues with an example from the *Statesman*. This dialogue is a long division of the statesman that culminates in a determination of the statesman’s δύναμις (περιλαβόντες τὴν δύναμιν, *Plt.* 305e4-5). At the end of the dialogue, the statesman’s definition has been established by distinguishing political science from rhetoric, military science and judicial science (*Plt.* 303e6-305e6). These sciences are associated with political science because they take part, as direct causes, in making the statesman’s product. The division aims at discovering whether these sciences correspond to the statesman’s nature. The result is the same for each science: the nature of the statesman differs from that of the rhetorician, the strategist and the judge, because the statesman’s function consists of directing their tasks by indicating the opportune moment to carry it out.

We can point out that in the *Statesman* too δύναμις serves as a criterion to determine the definition of F. The division proceeds specifically by distinguishing the δύναμις of each science as if the notion of δύναμις correspond-

ed to the essence of the object sought.¹⁰ In paraphrasing the text of this section of the dialogue, the ES describes rhetoric as δύναμις τοῦ πείθειν (*Plt.* 304c7-8), military science as δύναμις τοῦ πολεμεῖν (*Plt.* 304e3-6), and judicial science as δύναμις τοῦ δικάζειν (*Plt.* 305b1-2). This distinction will lead the ES to propose a definition of the statesman that brings out his essential characteristics beginning from his relationship with the three sciences. Since the statesman's function is to direct the work of the three sciences, his nature is based on the 'directive capacity'. In fact, at the end of the dialogue, the ES says that the statesman possesses the δύναμις ἐπιστατική (*Plt.* 308e6), namely the capacity to direct other sciences to make a good product.¹¹

Grasping the essence of a Form

We have noted that the sophistry's final division is possible through understanding its "productive δύναμις" on which the ES can then base the final definition. We have also seen how a similar procedure is carried out in the *Statesman*, where δύναμις is the criterion for determining the "directive nature" of political science and thus distinguishing it from its subordinate sciences. A question then arises: Can we suppose a metaphysical background of these definitions based on the notion of the δύναμις? In my opinion, a possible answer can be found in the definition of Being as δύναμις proposed at *Sph.* 247e3-4.

I contend that section 247d-249e of the *Sophist* has to be interpreted as a genuinely Platonic theoretical proposal and that a proper definition of intelligible reality is elaborated in this context.¹² At *Sph.* 247e3-4, the ES says: "I give as a definition (ὅρον) that Being (τὰ ὄντα) is nothing other than δύναμις" referring to the "capacity to act on and be affected by other things" (δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ παθεῖν) mentioned just prior. If this is a proper definition of Being, it must be linked to the δύναμις κοινωνίας of *Sph.* 254c5, the capacity of Forms to commune with each other. Thus, being is to have a relational capacity.¹³ The hypothesis I would like to propose via my brief inquiry is that dialectical research of F, in order to be ontologically

10 Cf. Dixsaut et alii 2020, 20-22.

11 Cf. Lane 2021, 139-146.

12 As defended by Fronterotta 1995, 317-341; Leigh 2010, 76-81; Gill 2012, 96-7; Lefebvre 2018, 315-6, 323-4, among others.

13 Note that I am not stating that Forms are powers in a contemporary dispositional sense. I think, instead, that their essence consists of having the capacity to act and be affected (see Leigh 2012, 254-259).

grounded, must precisely seek the δύναμις of F, conceived as the capacity of a Form to commune.

Here I am obliged to clarify what I mean by the δύναμις of F. If we accept that the δύναμις κοινωνίας is the capacity to participate in the other Forms, each Form possesses a δύναμις relating it to a set of other Forms. But such a relational capacity can be interpreted not only as the mode of existence of all Forms (F is because it affects and is affected by other Forms) but also as the peculiar way in which each Form constitutes its nature by participation. Thus, we can argue, with Gill (2012, 230), that ‘the capacity of something . . . to act on and be affected by other things is the thing’s stable and definable nature.’ So, if dialectics is the instrument conceived to recognise relations in the intelligible domain, its primary objective must be to seek *how* one Form interrelates with other Forms; that is, to seek what peculiar δύναμις that Form has.

In the *Sophist*, the notion of δύναμις is developed from an ontological perspective, whereas in the *Statesman*, the concept seems to be conceived from a methodological perspective as a mark of the final definition. However, my idea is that we can link these two domains by suggesting that in the *Sophist* too the goal of the division is to find the δύναμις of the *Sophist*. If this were the case, we might define the division as an operation of distinction aiming at discovering the δύναμις of an intelligible object through the recognition of its essential participatory relations. Therefore, the enquiry on being and its definition on the basis of δύναμις κοινωνίας would not only aim to provide an ontological explanation of being, but also to clarify why a true definition of sophistry is only possible when it is directed towards its δύναμις: seeking the δύναμις of sophistry means seeking its being, that is the participatory relations which it has *qua* Form and which determine what it is.

Conclusion.

Suppose we accept the notion of δύναμις in the ontological context as the essence of F. In that case, we can argue that it is the criterion for elaborating a definition grasping the essential features of F. Let us draw some provisional conclusions:

When the *Sophist* uses the notion of δύναμις in a philosophical context, it concerns either the Forms’ capacity to interweave or the method of division.

The occurrences of the term δύναμις found in the divisions of sophistry properly concern the features present in the last definition, conceived by Plato as being completely true.

Plato may have used the term δύναμις in the divisions to indicate the path according to which it is possible to reach an ontologically grounded definition, which is hence completely true.

My suggestion would only be compelling if consistent with the role of the δύναμις in *Statesman's* divisions, a question I intend to study elsewhere.

Plato's *Sophist*: Rebarbative by Design?

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The dialogue on the sophist serves as a warning posted by Plato for his students and for posterity. Although the use of techniques such as the method of division were encouraged in the Academy by Plato himself for the purpose of training his budding philosophers, Plato had nevertheless become concerned that the training was turning into a self-standing pursuit. The philosophic life was at risk of degenerating into the merely scholarly life. In the essay, this point is made primarily by considering the dramatic irony to which Plato subjects the Stranger's choice of angling as the subject of a paradigmatic division.

value-neutrality, philosophic training, academicism, Eleatic dialogues, angling-paradigm.

A theme voiced in the *Parmenides* sets my agenda for what follows in this essay. Parmenides praises Socrates for seeking clarity about the beautiful, the just, and the good. Socrates, he says, is on a “noble,” even a “divine” course; but he is tackling the task too early, before he has had sufficient training (*Prm.* 134c-d). The training, then, does not itself count as a way of inquiring into values; it is only preparatory to such an inquiry. And indeed, all explicit talk of values is absent from the second part of the *Parmenides*, despite having been a significant feature of the discussion in the first part. Furthermore, this contrast of topic is reflected in a contrast of dialectical method. In the second part, Parmenides uses “didactic” dialectic on a mostly docile interlocutor, whereas in the first part it is Socrates's own views that are being put to the test, and found wanting. The dialectic there is “peirastic.”

These features of the *Parmenides* recur in the *Sophist* and *Statesman* — dialogues led by another philosopher from Elea. Indeed, the features are stepped up: now the dialectic is didactic throughout; and the Stranger positively boasts of how his technique of “collection and division” is indifferent to distinctions of value. An example he gives is that the technique makes nothing of the general's presenting a grander or more dignified figure than the lice-catcher — not insofar as each exemplifies the class of hunters (*Sph.* 227a-b).

That the method of division ignores questions of value is a contention that has not gone without scholarly response. Ruby Blondell protests that “since ‘sophist,’ ‘philosopher,’ and ‘statesman’ are all heavily laden concepts, even

to inquire about them is to inquire about values ... Distinctions of value cannot be *discovered* by division. But a prior understanding of such distinctions ... underwrites its successful practice" (Blondell, 2002, 359). How effective is this response? First of all, it is an open question whether the Stranger's practice of division is in fact successful. I for one am about to argue that the divisions he comes up with in the *Sophist* are quite superficial. And in any case, whatever we assume about the Stranger's prior understanding of distinctions of value, it remains the case that those values fail to appear in the divisions themselves; nor does the Stranger give any adequate account of his prior understanding. Accordingly, values are absent, for all intents and purposes, from the body of the discussion that is put before us. And they are absent despite the fact that the distinction between sophist and philosopher seems, *par excellence*, a distinction of value.

By putting values to one side, the *Sophist* leaves out what is crucial to the distinction between sophist and philosopher. And in this respect, the Stranger's paradigmatic classification of the angler turns out to be all too appropriate to the classifications of the sophist in which he then engages. After a preliminary classification of the angler as hunter of a particular kind of creature, the Stranger proceeds to analyse the angler's art in mechanical terms only — as a pattern of movements in a certain direction, using equipment of a certain shape. At no point are we given a sense of what the angler has to know in order to be an angler — what will enable him actually to catch a fish. The definitive factor is omitted. As Seth Benardete has pointed out,¹ the information the Stranger supplies about the angler's practice would suffice for a painter who wanted to produce a convincing picture of an angler; but that picture would give only a superficial idea of the actual practice. Above all, the division leaves unmentioned the manner in which the angler gets the better of the fish. All hunting, we are told, is clandestine — this is what distinguishes it from open combat (219e1-2). But the angler goes further: he deceives the fish by disguising one thing as another. Either organic bait or an artificial lure is presented to the fish as if it were simple prey.² If anything makes the angler's art the art that it is, this does. It is an art of disguise.

The relevance of this omission only comes into focus much later, when the Stranger stops treating the sophist's art as an art of acquisition and

1 Benardete, 1984, vol. 2, 79-81.

2 Book 3 of Oppian's *Halieutica* describes the variety of baiting, trapping, and other techniques used in fishing, all of them strategies of deception. For the possible use of artificial fishing lures in ancient Greece, see Haskins, 1891.

proposes instead that it is an art of imitation (231d-235a). The stranger chooses the angler for his practice-case because, he says, the angler's skill is mundane, familiar, and readily comprehensible, yet can take as long to classify thoroughly as a more difficult target such as the skill of the sophist would (218d-e). But soon enough the angler's skill turns out to be relevant as the skill that it is rather than just for its formal properties as a target of classification: both the angler and the sophist are hunters, the one of fish, the other of rich young men.

The Stranger treats this point as an unforeseen and lucky discovery (221d8-9); but even after making it, he still does not appreciate the full relevance of the angler's skill. The account of the angler was hollow for lack of attention to its element of deceptive imitation; no less hollow is the account of the sophist as hunter. Deceptive appearances almost beg to be dwelt upon as a factor in some of the categories produced by this first division of the sophist, which include persuasive talk, the seductive gifts of lovers, and the blandishments of flatterers. Describing the pleasure that flatterers provide for their hosts, the Stranger even uses the word for "bait" (δέλεαρ, 222e6). This, however, is an alert from Plato to the reader; the Stranger himself makes nothing of it.

Indeed, Plato the author has been toying with his character the Stranger from the moment the divisions began. Why did the Stranger feel that a practice-case was necessary in the first place? Because sophists as a class are "awkward and hard to hunt (δυσθήρευτον)"; so, we should begin with "easy," "small," or "trivial" cases, and only then proceed to work on the "bigger" or "biggest" one (218d). The dramatic irony is rich; the Stranger is oblivious to the implications of his own imagery. We are to use something small and trivial (σικκρόν, φαῦλον) to hunt down something bigger (μείζον, μέγιστον); and what do we choose? What else but the art that uses the small fry to catch the big fish! And yet this detail goes unmentioned in the division that the Stranger proceeds to develop. And even after the Stranger has noticed that, as it were, the small fry too is a kind of fish — that is, he has noticed that both the angler and the sophist can be described as hunters — still he misses the further fact that the sophist does not merely resemble the angler insofar as he too is a hunter; in addition, the sophist lends himself to being portrayed as the very same type of hunter that the angler is — namely, one whose art depends on deceptive mimicry.

Now, it is true that the Stranger does eventually come to treat the sophist as a deceptive mimic. Before he gets to that point, however, he runs through several further divisions that continue to treat the sophist's art as acquisitive rather than productive, locating him in different categories of acquisition

on the basis of his observed behavior. Thus, sophists can be found chasing after rich young men, or marketing their intellectual products in various ways, or fighting for prizes in public debate. And these markers of sophistry are mere external symptoms — as mechanically described, in their way, as were the angler's actions with rod and hook. Their superficiality is acknowledged when Theaetetus and the Stranger start speaking of the divisions as different ways in which the sophist has “appeared” to them (πέφανθαι, 231c1; πέφανται, 231d2). The very multiplicity of these appearances is then treated as itself a deceptive “appearance” (an unhealthy φάντασμα, 232a3). Thus begins the transition to the idea that the single art that is proper to the sophist is not acquisitive after all but productive; his art is a kind of production of images. The sophist is a deceptive imitator, and the false image he constructs is of himself as an authority. He is a mere image of the wise man. This is the result at which the final division of the sophist arrives (264c-68d; esp. 268c1).

And, thus, the dramatic irony at the Stranger's expense continues to the last; for, in effect, the Stranger is treating sophistry in this final division as imitative in the very way that angling is imitative; *yet he gives no sign of realizing that this is what he is doing*. That is, he gives no sign of recognizing that the angling-paradigm has become even more relevant than he at first suspected. The sophist in the final division captures his clientele by making himself their deceptive bait; he attracts them with a false appearance of authoritative wisdom. He is not simply hunting for prey; he is angling for prey. And like the angler, he is aware of the deception; the Stranger classifies him as an “ironic” rather than “simple” mimic (268a7-8).

Now consider the message that this development in the dialogue sends — a message from Plato to the reader. On the one hand, the Stranger is well aware that angling is a banal activity by comparison with sophistry, as we have seen. On the other hand, if his final analysis treats sophistry as no deeper or more complicated an activity than angling — as it does — and if he himself shows no awareness of this fact, then he has proven himself incapable of asking whether sophistry might not after all be something more than a kind of angling. He has neglected the deeper implications of the paradigmatic method that he himself introduced into the discussion, which demanded examination of the greater by means of the lesser. That is, the method demands a sense that the target is something of greater significance than the case selected to illustrate it. But the Stranger has instead reduced the big fish of sophistry to the small fry of angling. The final division, then, is no less superficial than the divisions that have preceded it. This would be what Plato is indicating to us.

What more is there to sophistry, then, than a kind of angling? This too is a question that the ending of the dialogue should prompt us to ask. And readers of the trilogy *Theaetetus-Sophist-Statesman* have already encountered an answer in the Protagorean section of the first dialogue in the trilogy, the *Theaetetus* — led, of course, by a maieutic Socrates, not by the didactic Stranger. Sophists traffic in appearances not simply in the banal sense of disguising themselves as authorities but in the deeper sense of exploring whether appearances are themselves the only authoritative factor for human beings, be it in social life or in their awareness of the world more broadly. By comparison to this idea, all of the divisions produced by the Stranger in the *Sophist* can be seen to remain on the surface of things. And this impression is only reinforced when we consider the dialogues from the middle period that feature sophists. These give us a sense of *how* the sophist turns himself into alluring bait for the young, not just *that* he does; they yield a far richer sense of what makes sophists “tick” than the *Sophist* itself does.

But why, it may well be asked, would Plato bother to produce such elaborately superficial attempts to understand sophistry, when he had already done better work on that score? One answer is this: the discussion in the *Sophist*, as is often noted, takes place under the shadow of Socrates's impending trial (mentioned in the final lines of the *Theaetetus*). In the *Apology*, Socrates insists that his mission as a philosopher has been misunderstood, and that the hostility his fellow citizens feel toward him derives from their having unfairly confused him with other kinds of intellectual, notably those known as sophists. The divisions in the *Sophist* are a veritable gallery of unflattering public images of the sophist; but when the Stranger comes to the relatively flattering portrait of a “noble” kind of sophistry — widely acknowledged to correspond to Socrates's own inquisitorial practice of philosophy — and a practice which the Stranger considers very different from the general run of sophistry, Theaetetus, who is becoming bewildered by the plethora of guises in which the sophist has appeared, insists that this noble sophistry nevertheless does bear some resemblance to the sophist as typically understood (231a-b). And even the Stranger, after all, does categorize the practice as a species of *sophistry*, however noble. Seen in this light, the divisions in the *Sophist* can be read as scrutinizing the social peril in which Socrates currently finds himself. Their superficiality would be their point; for they correspond to the superficial view taken of Socrates by his fellow-citizens.

That is one way to give the divisions point. Another is to note the many provocative details within the divisions that amount to a running commentary by Plato directed at the reader rather than serving to convey the Stranger's teaching to Theaetetus. An example comes when the Stranger

leaves out birds of the air from his classification of prey that hunters hunt, despite the fact that birds are caught in the air as well as on water (220a). Land and water are the only two elements considered (as happens again, by the way, in the *Statesman*: see *Plt.* 264c-e). Plato's hint here? That the Stranger's analysis is resolutely "down to earth," leaving no room for the Socratic hunt for philosophic souls which, like birds, long to take flight into the higher regions of thought (if I may use the imagery of *Phaedrus* 249d). The divisions are replete with such moments.

Those divisions, however, comprise only one part of the *Sophist*, and not even the largest part. There is the lengthy metaphysical discussion in its central pages to be taken into account, which prepares the ground for the final division. These pages have their independent validity. Unlike the divisions, they are not amenable to being treated as outright Platonic parody. Nor can they be explained as alluding to Socrates's trial. Their presence in the dialogue does need explaining, however, since, whatever their independent value, the position they occupy in the economy of the dialogue is strikingly awkward. For after we have finally made our way through their thickets, we learn that the purpose of these pages was merely to enable us to classify the sophist as an imitator without fear of embroiling ourselves in paradox over issues of non-being. Yet Plato in other dialogues is quite capable of writing about imitation and image-making without agonizing over problems of non-being, as he makes the Eleatic Stranger do. Even more awkwardly, the abstruse metaphysics of the mid-section does not in fact play any active role in the final division of the sophist. In making that final classification, the Stranger draws his distinctions within the category of imitation with a confidence that owes nothing to his having recently analysed non-being in terms of difference. In these ways, the dialogue's mid-section comes to seem dispensable.

Nevertheless, readers quite understandably come away from this dialogue with the impression that its massive mid-section is what gives the work as a whole its philosophic heft. *This* is how to deal with sophists, we think: dispelling their sophistries about non-being using the clear light of logical syntax. And the Stranger too seems fully invested in this aspect of his task. But here is the irony that results. The ostensible point of the mid-section is to prevent the sophist from evading capture; the Stranger fears that the sophist will wriggle free from analysis by challenging any references to "that which is not" (235b-c, 236e-37a, 241e). Yet the sophist ends up evading capture anyway, escaping under the cover of a logical and metaphysical investigation that begins instrumentally but ends up, it would seem, being elaborated independently. To put the matter bluntly, the dialogue on the

sophist never properly addresses what makes sophistry bad and philosophy good. In the dialogue's dominant mid-section, resolving scholarly *aporiai* has become an end in itself, only tangentially related to understanding what makes sophists tick. It seems as a result that, when questions of value are shunted aside, the philosophic life degenerates into the merely scholarly life.

In order to make sense of the dialogue as a whole, then — of its meta-physical digression no less than of its divisions — I adopt the following hypothesis. It is a hypothesis I take to apply also to the *Parmenides* and the *Statesman*. Plato wrote these Eleatic dialogues at a time when he had come to preside over an Academy well-stocked with clever youngsters and ambitious junior colleagues — mathematicians, astronomers, and dialectical jousters notable among them. Mathematics, astronomy, and the dialectical joust were disciplines that Plato himself had encouraged in the Academy, for the purpose of training his budding philosophers; but he had become concerned that the training was turning into a self-standing pursuit. That is, he had become concerned that the practitioners of these disciplines were more focused on paradox and on the cracking of puzzles than on what makes human life meaningful; had become keener on distinguishing one from many than evil from good.

The value-free “view from nowhere” that is the Stranger's stock in trade does, however, have its uses, which should not pass without acknowledgment.³ Divisions that rank louse-catching on a par with generalship; analyses of “Greatest Kinds” that are greatest not in the sense of being the most important of Forms but of being those of broadest application: the value-neutrality of these pursuits is a useful jolt to the conventional consciousness, and therefore good training for any apprentice philosopher. Nevertheless, such matters are only preliminary to the sense of values one should aim to acquire — and to be capable of vindicating — in philosophic maturity. (The idea underwrites the advice from *Parmenides* to the youthful Socrates of the *Parmenides*, which set the agenda for this essay.) Deprived of that ennobling aim, the techniques that the Stranger demonstrates to his young students come to resemble a box of tricks.

Many a reader of the Eleatic dialogues has been struck by their rebarbative qualities: their stiffness; their many oddities; their structural blemishes; the superficiality of their divisions. These matters are not something we should seek to mitigate and explain away. They are warning signs posted by Plato.

3 I am grateful to I-Kai Jeng for urging this point on me in a related conversation about the *Parmenides*.

And if all this is right, then in no sense are the classic Socratic dialogues of earlier periods transcended by those of the late-period, still less jettisoned.

Why Should We Assume There is Divine Productive Art?

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On the final pages of his *Sophist* in 265b6, Plato has the Eleatic stranger divide productive art (*poiētikē technē*) into two parts: divine and human. What are the stranger's reasons for claiming that it is through the craftsmanship of a god and this divine art (*theia technē*) that the things we find in the world—all animals, plants, and inanimate things in nature—come to be? In answer to this question, I will argue for the following three claims: (1) The stranger's reason for making his claim is based on the assumption that processes in nature and actions in the arts (*technai*) are structured analogously (= *analogy thesis*) and (2) on the more fundamental claim that we cannot but presuppose that knowledge of the world is possible (= *knowledge thesis*) once we embark on the project of explaining the world. I will contend that (3) once we see the connection between the analogy thesis and the knowledge thesis, we can recognize the truth of the latter even if the former is rejected. At the same time the analogy thesis allows us to see that processes in nature are structured in such a way that knowledge about them is possible at all.

knowledge, nature, technē/art, cause, divine craftsman

1. Overview

On the final pages of his *Sophist* in 265b6, Plato has the Eleatic stranger divide productive art (*poiētikē technē*) into two parts: divine and human.¹ The stranger does so in the course of his discussion of the art of imitation (*mimētikē technē*) as a certain kind of productive art (*poiētikē technē*), more precisely the art of producing copies (*eidōla*) (see 265a10–b3) which in the end leads to the final definition of the sophist (see 268c5–d4).

In this paper I will deal with the question of what the stranger's reasons are for claiming that there is this divine branch of productive art and that, as he claims, it is through the 'craftsmanship of a god'² (*theou dēmiourgontos*) and this divine art (*theia technē*) that the things we find in the world—all animals, plants, and inanimate things in nature—come to be. The stranger does not really present an argument for these claims.

I will argue for the following three claims: (1) The stranger's reason for making his claim is based on the assumption that processes in nature and

1 For the larger context, see *Sph.* 265a4–b6.

2 265c4; for translations from the *Sophist*, I use White, 1996, often with modification.

actions in the arts (*technai*) are structured analogously (= *analogy thesis*) and on the more fundamental claim that (2) we cannot but presuppose that knowledge of the world is possible (= *knowledge thesis*) once we embark on the project of explaining the world. I will contend that (3) once we see the connection between the analogy thesis and the knowledge thesis, we can recognize the truth of the latter even if the former is rejected.

Why should we deal with the stated question? After all, one might think that the assumption of a divine demiurge and his divine *technē* is also found in other works by Plato without any argument.³

The text, however, suggests that the assumption about there being a divine productive art that is responsible for the existence of animals, plants, and other things we find in the world needs further discussion; for when the stranger asserts that production should be divided into a divine and a human branch, Theaetetus says that he doesn't 'understand yet.'⁴ Theaetetus' lack of understanding induces the stranger to present arguments for this claim. The arguments are evidently inadequate for instead of wholeheartedly agreeing to the claim, Theaetetus points out that he often changes his opinion concerning the stranger's claim⁵ and adds, 'looking at you now and supposing that you believe they [i.e. the things in the world] come to be by a god, I also adopt that view.'⁶

For the stranger this response suffices because he knows that Theaetetus tends towards this option anyway and will not change his mind concerning this point, although he is clearly aware that more argument could be presented for his claim.⁷ For us, however, it is crucial to know more about the reasoning behind these assumptions because the claim that there must be a divine productive art and some kind of divine craftsman responsible for the things we find in the world is substantial and problematic. Against this background it is surprising that the commentaries and the literature do not really discuss it.⁸

In what follows I will therefore present what I believe to be the argument behind this reasoning and will argue for the three claims stated above.

3 The obvious case, of course, is the *Timaeus* (e.g., 28a6), but a divine craftsman is also mentioned elsewhere in Plato, for instance, in the *R.* 430a7 and *Phlb.* 27b1.

4 Οὐπω μεμάθηκα, *Sph.* 265b7.

5 See *Sph.* 265d1–2.

6 νῦν μὴν βλέπων εἰς σὲ καὶ ὑπολαμβάνων οἶσθαί σε κατὰ γε θεὸν αὐτὰ γίγνεσθαι, ταύτη καὶ αὐτὸς γενόμενα, *Sph.* 265d2–4.

7 See *Sph.* 266d5–e2.

8 See, for instance, Cornford, 1935, 325–326, Bluck, 1975, chpt. VIII, de Rijk, 1986, 213, Seeck, 2011, 130–131, and Crivelli, 2012, who do not discuss this passage any further.

2. The Analogy Thesis

Why should we assume that there is a divine productive art as the stranger claims? After Theaetetus indicated that he does not see why there must be a divine branch of production, the stranger presents what seems to be part of the reason for this assumption. He does so by asking the following question, clearly presupposing that the suggestion made by it is correct:

Now take all animals and everything mortal, all plants on the earth that grow from seeds and roots, and also the lifeless bodies, fusible and infusible, made up inside the earth. Shall we say that anything besides the craftsmanship of a god makes them come to be after previously not being?⁹ (*Sph.* 265c1–5)

The key phrase here is: ‘the craftsmanship of a god’ (*theou dēmiourgountos*). This means all these things are products of an art (*technē*), more precisely the divine productive *technē*.¹⁰ Since the only *technē* we know about directly is human *technē*, to speak of divine *technē* is to make a tacit analogy. The stranger’s claim that production may be divided into a divine and a human branch follows directly from the analogy.

When the stranger claims that ‘all animals and everything mortal, all plants . . . and also the lifeless bodies . . . made up inside the earth’ must be products of some divine *technē*, he implicitly presupposes the following claim to which I will refer as the *analogy-thesis*: the processes we find in nature that are responsible for the coming to be of these things are structured like a craftsman’s action, like *technē* actions.¹¹ Both the processes in nature and actions in the arts or crafts (*technai*) in the end lead to a product and

9 Ζῶα δὲ πάντα θνητά, καὶ δὴ καὶ φυτὰ ὅσα τ’ ἐπὶ γῆς ἐκ σπερμάτων καὶ ριζῶν φύεται, καὶ ὅσα ἄψυχα ἐν γῇ συνίσταται σώματα τηκτὰ καὶ ἄτηκτα, μὲν ἄλλου τινὸς ἢ θεοῦ δημιουργοῦντος φήσομεν ὕστερον γίγνεσθαι πρότερον οὐκ ὄντα;

10 That this must be what the stranger has in mind is also clear from 265e3, where he claims that ‘the things said to be by nature’ (τὰ μὲν φύσει λεγόμενα) in fact are made by divine art (ποιεῖσθαι θεία τέχνη).

11 Note that this claim does not necessarily imply that there must be a creator god that is a craftsman in the literal sense, but may be understood in a metaphorical sense just as in the case of the ‘likely story’ (εἰκὸς μῦθος, 29d2) in the *Timaeus*. For a discussion of this point with respect to the *Timaeus* see, for instance, Carone, 2005, 31, who distinguishes between a literalist reading, according to which what is stated in the *Timaeus* has to be understood literally, and a nonliteralist one, which focuses on ‘the abstract and more impersonal “demiurgic function” that he seems to represent in the universe, namely that of intelligent causation aiming at an end’ and ‘not so much on his anthropomorphic appearance’; for proponents of both views see Carone, 2005, 31, n. 19.

have their cause in some kind of craftsman. These processes in nature, thus, are structured like the *technē* actions, that is, like human actions. It is in this respect that the stranger presupposes an analogy between nature and action and the reason why he holds that processes in nature in principle may be explained in the same way as human actions, which means with respect to the ends at which these processes aim.

The claim of divine craftsmanship, and the analogy thesis it presupposes, are bold claims, and it is striking that the stranger barely gives any additional reason for making them, although he seems to be well aware that they are far from self-evident. What may be the reasoning behind this claim, however, becomes clearer when the stranger states what he thinks would be the only alternative to his view, the ‘common belief’ (*tōn pollōn dogmata*, 265c5) ‘that nature (*phusis*) produces’ all mortal living beings and the mentioned lifeless things in the world ‘by some spontaneous cause (*apo tinos aitia automatēs*) that generates them without any thought (*aneu dianoiās*)’ (265c7–c8). In other words, there is no other reason one may give for the existence of things beyond their having come to be by chance.

The stranger rejects this option without explaining why. However, he points out that something being brought into existence by divine craftsmanship means that it is produced ‘by a cause that works with reason (*meta logou*) and divine knowledge that comes from god’ (*epistēmēs theias apo theou gignomenēs*) (265c8–9).

To the stranger it seems obvious that the only way to explain why the things whose existence we mean to explain exist in the way they do and have the specific characteristics they do is to consider them products of some cause operating with reason and knowledge.

The reasoning behind this assumption must be that all the things he ascribes to divine productive art exhibit some kind of order or structure, a degree of rationality that cannot be the outcome of mere coincidence. To give an example: some of these things—living beings—are well functioning organisms all parts of which play a specific role for the working of this organism. This order or structure is intelligible in itself and, therefore, must have its cause in something that itself is rational and may thereby serve as the origin of its rationality. The assumption seems to be that without such a rational cause we cannot explain the rational structure we find exhibited in the world and the things therein. The stranger’s point is that without reference to god’s craftsmanship and, thus, a divine demiurge we would not be able to explain the world’s rational order.

Contrariwise, the proponents of the ‘common belief’ that things arise from chance are unable to account for the rational structure of the world. In particular, they could not explain the regularity found in the world. Certain events or patterns of events—such as certain cycles in the life of living beings or the seasons—occur again and again, and we are able to predict that things will happen in regular ways.¹² If the coming to be of things in the world were governed by coincidence, there would be no basis for any regularity and no explanation would be possible. It is not clear, however, whether these consequences would really arise for the proponents of the alternative view and many of us today would not accept the stranger’s argument. Given, for instance, what modern science tells us about how evolution works it seems reasonable to assume that animals and plants indeed developed by chance without any necessity for divine knowledge being involved, and it seems wrong to draw an analogy between nature and action. Against this background the stranger’s claims and argument seem rather problematic, and one may wonder what he would say in response.

3. The Knowledge Thesis

Although it is not stated in the text, the stranger may point out again that the ‘common belief’ according to which all mortal beings as well as inanimate things come to be ‘by some spontaneous cause that generates them without any thought’ cannot account for the existence of these things or, more broadly speaking, for the rationality we find in the world. He would hold that referring to coincidence as the cause of all coming to be and assuming that this is all that needs to be said here does not help us make sense of the coming to be of things in the world at all.

12 That the regularity in the world is an expression of its rational character is a thought also found, for instance, in the *Philebus*. There, Socrates and Protarchus agree that it is reason (νοῦς) and wisdom (σοφία) that have to be considered the cause (αἰτία) ordering and coordinating (κοσμοῦσά τε καὶ συντάττουσα) the years, seasons, and months (*Phlb.* 30c4–7), that is also, one could add, what is responsible for the regular changes that take place in the world. As Socrates points out, it is assumptions like these that let us see ‘that reason always rules the universe’ (ὥς ἀεὶ τοῦ παντὸς νοῦς ἄρχει, *Phlb.* 30d8). We also find a similar thought in *Laws X* where the Athenian stranger points out that we can only say why we may observe the regular motions of the heavenly bodies in the sky and why there are the ‘years, month, and all seasons’ (*Lg.* 899b2–3) if we assume that the world is governed by a good and rational world soul and that the processes it causes are accordingly structured (see *Lg.* 899b2–c1).

As I understand it, he would do so because he implicitly assumes a more fundamental claim that I will call the *knowledge thesis*. That is the claim that the world in principle is something we can make sense of, and that for this reason knowledge of the world and the things we find therein is possible. It is on the basis of the knowledge thesis that the stranger asks for the explanation of the coming to be of things in the first place. It is this assumption that leads him to claim that processes in nature and actions in the arts exhibit an analogous structure and that there must be a rational cause responsible for both kinds of processes, since it must be possible to explain them and gain knowledge about them. The knowledge thesis at the same time is what makes him reject coincidence.

The stranger does not explicitly state the knowledge thesis in the text but presupposes it as a given. Again, one may wonder why we should accept this claim and what would be stranger's reply if we point out that the world just is the way it is and assume the sceptical view that knowledge about the world is impossible and that the knowledge thesis is false or, at least, that it is unclear whether it holds.

We can only speculate, but it is hard to imagine the stranger's rejecting the knowledge thesis. He might say that the very fact that we reject the knowledge thesis shows that we already presuppose the knowledge thesis as a given. The reason is that by rejecting these claims we implicitly assume that they are inappropriate ways of making sense of the world, which would be impossible if we would not also assume that we can make sense of the world and, thus, that knowledge of some kind is possible. But this is just what the knowledge thesis claims. It is, thus, in a certain sense indubitable.

Once we seriously embark on the project of explaining the coming to be of things in the world and look for appropriate ways to do so, the stranger could argue, we already have accepted the knowledge thesis as given, even if we are not aware of this. The assumption that knowledge of the world *in principle* is possible for us (independent from the question of how to gain that knowledge) is a necessary condition for judging some answer to the question of how things came to be as correct or incorrect, which is why the stranger rightly presupposes the knowledge thesis.

This conclusion does not imply that the stranger is also right about the analogy thesis. Nor does it even imply that 'common belief' need be rejected. The knowledge thesis holds independently of these other claims and is more fundamental than they are. The stranger's discussion of divine art, however, helps us see the more formal point that not only does his analogy answer to the question about the cause (*aitia*) of the coming to be of things in the world implicitly presuppose the knowledge thesis, but 'common belief'

as well as modern answers to the question also presuppose the knowledge thesis. It is in this sense that Plato has us see what we always presuppose when we ask how it is that things ‘come to be after previously not being’ (265c4–5).

Of course, Plato’s works are committed to the analogy as well as to teleological accounts of nature, as we can see from the *Phaedo*.¹³ For Plato and the stranger, it is only by way of reference to human action and its teleological structure that we can make sense of the processes and things we find in the world. However, by presupposing the knowledge thesis and then drawing analogies between processes in nature and human action, Plato makes it possible to see that not only human actions but also processes in nature are structured in specific ways that permit knowledge about them, independent of whether the *analogy thesis* holds. Thus, Plato and his stranger develop a crucial insight fundamental to the notion that knowledge of the world, its scientific explanation, is possible and that holds independently from whether we accept the assumptions of the analogy thesis and divine craftsmanship.

4. Conclusion

What, then, are we to make of the stranger’s claim that it is through the craftsmanship of a god that all animals, plants, and other things come to be? First, I have shown that the stranger’s argument for the stated claim involves the *analogy thesis*, that is, the assumption that divine *technē* parallels human *technē*. The basis for this assumption must be that cosmos, collectively and individually, exhibits something of the sort of order we find in the products of human *technē*.

What is ordered is rational and must have its cause in something that itself is rational. The only possible answer, the stranger holds, is that this rational structure we find exhibited in the world and the beings that live therein must result from god’s craftsmanship. However, the analogy thesis is itself based on the *knowledge thesis*, that is, the claim that the world in principle is explainable and that knowledge of it is possible. The knowledge thesis, I have argued, is more fundamental than the analogy thesis and does not imply the analogy thesis or the claim about there being a divine art.

13 See *Phd.* 98b–99b, where Socrates, as scholars widely agree, discusses the explanation of human action to introduce teleological explanation as the only kind of appropriate explanation in nature and the cosmos. See, for instance: Gallop, 1975, 174–175; Ebert, 2004, 344; Frede, 2005, 106.

It is on the basis of the knowledge thesis that Plato has the stranger ask for the explanation of the coming to be of things, look for explanations that go beyond the assumption that the coming to be of things is the outcome of mere coincidence, and draw analogies between things occurring in nature and in the arts. Drawing this analogy, however, allows us to recognize that processes in nature exhibit structures that make them intelligible and, so, subject to knowledge. This crucial insight is fundamental for the possibility of scientific understanding of nature and holds even if we reject the analogy thesis and the claim about divine craftsmanship.

III. Eleatic Stranger and Noble Sophist

Philosophical *paideia* in Plato's *Sophist*

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The sixth division in Plato's *Sophist* (226a-231b) describes a type of apparent sophistry that practices refutation (*elenchus*) in a manner superficially resembling sophistic disputation, yet in pursuit of the therapeutic goal of dispelling the interlocutor's illusion of knowledge that stands in the way of achieving true excellence through genuine philosophizing. It equates this "noble" kind of sophistry with *paideia* (roughly, personality-forming education and culture), in opposition to instruction in specialized skills. So far, little attention has been given to this text as a source for Plato's views on *paideia*. This essay analyzes the conception of *paideia* in the sixth division and shows why it is not easy to reconcile with Plato's views on philosophical education in other dialogues or with the Visitor's own practice in the *Sophist*. To provide a basis for a correct assessment of the pedagogical function of "noble sophistry", the second part of this essay comments on what distinguishes personal, ignorance-revealing elenctic, serving as protreptic, from proposal-testing elenctic employed by the progressing philosopher. Philosophical *paideia* starts with the protreptic use of elenctic techniques, but then repurposes these techniques as an indispensable tool of constructive philosophical research.

education, elenchus, sophistry, protreptic, dialectic

The Sixth Division in the *Sophist* (226a-231b) claims to describe a type of sophistry that is "noble" since it practices refutation not for gain or victory but with a therapeutic goal. The Visitor characterizes this practice as *paideia*—a term designating personality-forming education and culture. Yet little attention has been given to this text as a source for Plato's views on *paideia*. My essay aims to address it as an account of *paideia* and show why it is not easy to reconcile this account with Plato's views on philosophical education in other dialogues or with the Visitor's own practice in the *Sophist*. To resolve this issue and enable a correct assessment of the pedagogical function of "noble sophistry", the second part of this essay will distinguish between two stages of philosophical formation and the different roles for refutation during these two stages.

The sixth division begins with an act of collection that introduces the generic kind of *separative* expertise (διακριτική) (226bc), which is then divided into two kinds: one tasked with separating similar items from each other, the other concerned with separating what is worse from what is better, casting off what is bad. This second kind is called “cleansing” or “purification”. The Visitor observes that purification can relate to bodies or souls. He then explores what it means to purify a soul. Since cleansing serves to remove what is bad, the analysis of psychic cleansing has to start from a consideration of the kinds of badness (κακία) in the soul (227d-228e). The Visitor distinguishes moral badness (πονηρία) from ignorance (ἄγνοια) or erroneous and illusory thinking (παραφροσύνη). He compares these forms of psychic badness to two analogous kinds of badness in the body, viz., to illness caused by conflict (στάσις) and to ugliness caused by a lack of measuredness or good proportion:

badness in the body	badness in the soul
illness (νόσος = στάσις ἐν τῷ σώματι)	moral badness (πονηρία)
ugliness (αἰσχος = ἀμετρία ἐν τῷ σώματι)	cognitive deficiency (ἄγνοια/παραφροσύνη)

The use of the political notion of *stasis* in connection with moral badness is easy to understand if we recall how the *Republic* described κακία as a condition of στάσις in the tripartite soul. The alleged analogy between ignorance and ugliness is much less compelling. The Visitor’s justification combines two ideas: He appeals, first, to the common Greek notion that beauty and ugliness are a matter of right or wrong proportions (συμμετρία//ἀμετρία, 228a10-1). Secondly, he describes the mental act of judging as an attempt that aims at the truth but can go awry and miss the target, resulting in false belief.¹ If an archer aims to hit a target but misses it, this is because of a lack of balance or proper coordination in the archer’s posture and bodily motion—a case of ἀμετρία. The Visitor claims that false judgment is likewise a result of an imbalance or disproportion in our cognitive apparatus, resulting in παραφροσύνη—a composite term that can denote a condition of derange-

1 228c10-d2: Τό γε μὴν ἄγνοεῖν ἐστὶν ἐπ’ ἀλήθειαν ὀρμωμένης ψυχῆς, παραφόρου συνέσεως γιγνομένης, οὐδὲν ἄλλο πλὴν παραφροσύνης; cf. *Phlb.* 38d5-10, *Cra.* 420b7-9, *Tht.* 189c3; Szaif 1996, 367-69.

ment, but literally means “thinking that goes awry”. He also emphasizes that such failing thought is always involuntary (ἄκουσα, 228c7). Nobody wants to be ignorant and make mistakes.

The next step is to specify what methods of purification (καθαρμός) correspond to these types of badness in body and soul (228e-229a). The main point here is the distinction between *discipline* as the cure for moral badness and *instruction* as the cure for cognitive deficiency.² The branch of “instruction” (διδασκαλία) is further divided according to two types of ignorance. One can be ignorant of, and receive instruction in, specialized practical or technical skills (δημιουργικαὶ διδασκαλῖαι). Yet the more fundamental kind of ignorance occurs when we lack knowledge but think of ourselves as having knowledge (τὸ μὴ κατειδότα τι δοκεῖν εἰδέναι). The Visitor calls this kind of illusion the root cause of all error (229c5-6). He and Theaetetus agree that the name for it is ἀμαθία (roughly: stupidity, lack of learning), whereas the word for its removal is *paideia* (229c8-d4). The linguistic background here is that this word, in contrast to mundane but socially useful competences that can be left to specialists (cf. *Prt.* 312a7-b4, 322a-d), connotes the kind of formation and culture (*Bildung*) that is indispensable for whoever aims at excellence and *eudaimonia* (230d9-e3).³ Conceit of knowledge prevents progress toward true excellence.

Next, the Visitor distinguishes two different ways of disabusing others of their conceit of knowledge: First, there is the rough, old-fashioned and paternalistic method of “admonition” (νουθετητική), which can take the form of “rebuke” (χαλεπαίνειν) or of encouragement (παραμυθεῖσθαι) (229e4-230a4). Yet a “smoother” (229e2) and more promising path is also available, a path that exploits the fact that no one errs willingly. The Visitor's description of it reminds us of the elenctic method practiced by Socrates in his refutational dialogues, especially in those that put the interlocutor in

2 Theaetetus refers to the claim that moral badness is cured by κολαστική as a popular “opinion”, which might signal some reservations on Plato's part (cf. Rowe 2015b, 241f). However, while Plato surely thinks that true virtue cannot come from external restrictions and punishment alone but requires intellectual growth and paideia, he also holds that most people won't attain a moral identity grounded in intellectual enlightenment. Thus he still sees a social need for restraining discipline.

3 παιδεία and τροφή, or their cognates, are often used together, but παιδεία emphasizes the idea of imparting culture and values (οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι = cultivated people); cf. Chantaine 1968-80, 849b.

a state of puzzlement (*aporia*).⁴ He highlights the following aspects of this method (230a-d): Its creators realized that ignorance (*ἄμαθία*) is involuntary but that people will remain unwilling to learn as long as they believe that they are already competent (*σοφός*). Since admonition (*νουθετητική*) is rather ineffectual as a way to unsettle someone's illusion of competence, they developed a method of questioning that relies on the fact that a person who is still ignorant and confused about a subject-matter cannot maintain a consistent position under skilled cross-examination. The statements proffered or conceded by the interlocutor will lead to some contradiction or absurdity and thus result in refutation. Yet the interlocutors will blame themselves, not the questioner. They will, supposedly,⁵ accept it as a most pleasant cure, realizing that it rids them of a deep-seated misconception about themselves (230a4-c4). Only a mind thus cleansed of its "idle conceit of knowledge" (*μάταιος δοξοσοφία*, 231b6) will be able to benefit from positive instruction (*ἔξειν τῶν προσφερομένων μαθημάτων ὄνησιν*, 230c9-d1). The Visitor and Theaetetus agree that this practice stands in sharp contrast to how sophists deal with their students. While the appearances are similar since sophists too make their interlocutors contradict themselves (cf. 268b3-5),⁶ its underlying motivation differs just as much as that of a protective dog differs from its predatory look-alike, the ferocious wolf (231a6-b1). Accordingly, if the label "sophistic" is to be applied at all, one should call it sophistic "of a noble lineage (*γένει γενναία*)" (231b8).

The first four divisions in the *Sophist* put much emphasis on the harm caused by sophistic teaching, characterizing it as a practice that "captures" rich youths with the promise of education in "excellence" (*aretê*) and sells knowledge like a commodity (223a4-5, 224c1-2, d1-2). The Seventh Division is going to claim that the sophists use their refutational skills so as to appear wise, motivated by profit. While such education is phony (*δοξοπαιδευτική* 223b4), the *paideia* conveyed by "noble sophistry" provides a real cure for the most harmful form of ignorance. The *ethos* behind the Socratic type of refutational practice accounts for its "nobility".

4 Cf. Zaks 2018, 372-79, for a recent defense of this reading. The text does not mention the word *aporia*, but the full realization of one's *μάταιος δοξοσοφία* (231b6) is clearly linked to an aporetic state.

5 In Plato's earlier Socratic dialogues, we see that repeated refutation often triggers animosity rather than a change of heart. The 6th Division talks about the *ideal* outcome of therapeutic refutation (cf. *Tht.* 167e-168c).

6 Cf. Taylor 2006 on how not only the 6th division but also the other divisions repeatedly mention aspects of sophistic practice that could also be attributed to Socrates.

The apparent identification of intellectual culture (παιδεία) required for *eudaimonia* with a practice of disabusing interlocutors of their illusion of knowledge could suggest the philosophical program of a skeptic. However, the Visitor also affirms that this critical practice will pave the way for the acquisition of knowledge (μαθήματα 230c8). Moreover, the dialogue *Sophist* as a whole demonstrates the Visitor's commitment to problem-solving. He instructs his interlocutors (and the readers) in constructive methods, such as the method of division and the modes of combination among certain foundational kinds (μέγιστα γένη). In a segment of the *Politicus* that refers back to the *Sophist* (*Plt.* 284b, 286b), he explains that both dialogues have the educational purpose of rendering us διαλεκτικώτεροι (285d6, 287a3), i.e., of honing our dialectical skills so that we may become "more capable of discovering accounts that clarify the things that are" (287a3-4). The Visitor, hence, explicitly aims for a constructive kind of dialectic, seeking to advance our understanding of the forms or kinds. But why then does his twofold division of the genus *instruction* fail to leave room for it? After all, constructive dialectic couldn't be classified as instruction in productive "crafts" (δημιουργική), and it also transcends the merely cathartic *paideia* of "noble sophistry".

Restricting philosophical *paideia* to an ignorance-revealing role would also be at odds with statements in two of Plato's other mature works. In the *Republic*, *paideia* encompasses the entire formation of character and intellect from infancy all the way to the highest forms of knowledge. The discussion of the various forms of knowledge and skill in the *Philebus* distinguishes, just like the *Sophist*, between mundane crafts and skills (τὸ δημιουργικὸν [μόριον]) on the one hand and *paideia* on the other (*Phlb.* 55d). But *paideia* now seems to include all the sciences that are practiced with a philosophical intention, viz., whenever someone pursues pure forms of knowledge without any consideration for practical utility (*Phlb.* 56d-59d). The *Philebus* points to dialectic and theoretical mathematics as such philosophical sciences. This is in fundamental agreement with the scientific curriculum in the *Republic*, which is designed for future philosopher-rulers whereas the mundane crafts belong to the producing class. The restrictive conception of *paideia* in the Sixth Division is, hence, an outlier. It recalls the plea in the *Apology* for a type of "human wisdom" that guides us to the realization of the limits of what we know, but it seems a poor fit for a dialogue that so vigorously promotes constructive, problem-solving procedures of dialectic.

This interim result makes it all the more urgent that we explore how the Visitor's constructive methods relate to the cathartic method described in the Sixth Division and what place, if any, "noble sophistry" has in Plato's broader conception of philosophical *paideia*.

Given the close connection with Socratic protreptic, a first option would be to attribute the "noble" use of elenctic techniques to a preparatory stage, as a means to raise awareness of their need for philosophy among those who are still in the grip of phony certainties. We could compare the elenctic *καθαρμός* especially to those early refutational dialogues that end in *aporia*. We could also cite how Socrates describes the benefits of refutation and puzzlement in *Meno* 84a-c. Since Socratic refutations don't shy away from dubious arguments, his practice is liable to be misperceived as malevolent sophistry, and this is why it is included among the "apparent" manifestations of sophistry but also sharply distinguished from sophistry proper.⁷

A second option would be to argue that for Plato elenctic testing remains an essential tool also for constructive philosophical research and the corresponding form of philosophical education. By way of a brief sketch, I am going to argue for something like this second option, yet with the crucial qualification that elenctic practice in the context of constructive philosophical dialectic differs substantially from the cathartic *ad hominem* refutations directed at those who haven't yet been initiated into philosophy.

We could begin by pointing to a passage in the *Republic*, 534b-d, where Socrates concludes his description of dialectic and emphasizes the need for elenctic testing as part of the cognitive ascent to the highest principle. Any tentative solution regarding the question of the principle would have to be tested, and only if it can withstand all objections "without a fall (*ἀπὸ τῷ λόγῳ*)" should it count as valid.⁸ This investigative process can involve others, but it is also a dialogue of the investigator with himself (*λόγον*

7 Cf. Robinson 1953, 84-88. A different way in which this practice can appear as sophistry is highlighted in *R.* 537e-539d: Young people, not discerning its correct motive, mistake it for, and *imitate* it as, a pleasure-seeking refutational knack (cf. Dorion 2016 and *Sph.* 225c-d on the *ἀδολεσχικόν* branch of eristic).

8 Dialectic is about grasping "the definition of the essence of each thing" and "giving an account (*λόγον διδόναι*)" to oneself and others (534b3-6). Applying these criteria to the grasp of the form of the Good as ultimate principle (b8-c5), he mentions the act of defining and the process of elenctic testing. These elenctic tests take the form of objections that aim to show that one cannot maintain a consistent position on the basis of the proposed formulation of the principle (Szaif 1996, 222-99).

αὐτῷ τε καὶ ἄλλω διδόναι). While the language here is still evocative of the personal elenchus of the earlier dialogues, the focus has shifted from *testing another person* to *testing a proposal*, and this can take place as an internalized dialogue and with respect to proposals entertained merely hypothetically.

The Visitor's practice in the *Sophist* likewise demonstrates that proposal-targeting refutation is an essential part of constructive, problem-solving dialectic. Not only is the Visitor introduced as potentially "some god of testing and refutation" (θεός τις ἐλεγκτικός, 216a5-b6),⁹ but the whole central part of the *Sophist* from 242 till 259 is also set up as a refutation (ἐλεγχος), targeting Parmenides' metaphysical principle (λόγος, 241d5, 242a2, b1) that being and not-being can never be combined—a principle that was itself introduced into the dialogue with the help of refutations that revealed the deeply aporetic character of any reference to non-being (ὁ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἐλεγχος, 239b2, cf. 237b-239a). Although this principle is attributed to "father" Parmenides, its refutation cannot have the character of a personal examination since Parmenides is not present. (In fact, he is no longer alive at the dramatic date of the dialogue.) Therapeutic, ignorance-revealing elenctic would require the actual presence of the person to be tested, just as a doctor cannot diagnose and treat a patient whose presence is merely imagined.¹⁰ The noun ἐλεγχος and its cognate ἐλέγχειν are used five times in the passage that formulates the refutational task (241c-242b). But the refutation will be attained through a demonstration (ἀπόδειξις, 242b4) of why, and in what sense, it is correct to say that that-which-is-not is and that-which-is is not.¹¹ The fact that the refutation does not resort to cross-examination but to a systematic analysis of the necessary combinations between being and not-being shows how the center of gravity has moved to constructive conceptual analysis and ontology. Yet when the Visitor, at the end of this long trajectory, insists that one should either accept the result or try to refute it (259a2f), he thus also

9 Theodorus' rejection of this characterization has been taken as an indication that the Visitor is not a practitioner of the elenctic method (e.g., Cornford 1935, 169; Frede 2004, 138). But Theodorus naively equates elenctic with the practice of the ἐριστικός (216b8), a mistake to be corrected in the 6th Division.

10 Here I part ways with Zaks 2018, who argues that the personal elenchus is still a characteristic feature of the *Sophist*.

11 At 241e1, Rowe 2015a, n. 61, rejects the lection ἐλεχθέντων in T adopted by previous editors, but it is clearly preferable not only as a *lectio difficilior* but also because the μήτε ἐλεχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων harks back to the analogous dual action in 241d5-7: ἐλεχθέντων takes up the claim that Parmenides' logos needs to be "painfully interrogated", "assailed", and "refuted" (241d6, 242a1, 8, b1); ὁμολογηθέντων refers to the resulting agreement that being and not-being combine (241d6-7, 242b4).

acknowledges that any constructive argument and proposal may still be in need of further refutational testing.

In comparison with personal, ignorance-revealing elenctic, the following general characteristics of proposal-testing elenctic as part of constructive dialectic emerge:

- 1) In proposal-testing elenctic, the proposal may have been introduced merely hypothetically, without an actual participant committed to the proposal, unlike the situation in a personal *elenchus* that needs to be based on what the interlocutor believes.
- 2) The refutation of a proposal can now take the form of an *a priori* demonstration of why its contradictory is true, without substantial involvement of the interlocutor. Consistency remains a key requirement for a theory's ability to survive elenctic testing (cf. Szaif 2000), but the main concern is with the truth-value of the theory, not with the cognitive state of an interlocutor.
- 3) Accordingly, the person of the interlocutor has become exchangeable and even dispensable for the development of the argument, as we can also tell from how the Visitor comments on alternative styles of exposition at his disposal and on how to pick a receptive interlocutor (217c-218b; cf. M. Frede 1996, 138-9).
- 4) The puzzles (*aporiai*) no longer have the character of a psychological state that arises in an interlocutor as the result of an elenctic examination by Socrates. They are philosophical puzzles or challenges serving as the starting-point for a constructive investigation and resolved at the end of the conversation.¹²

As a result, we can retain that the *elenchus* belongs to two stages of philosophical *paideia*, but its character changes substantially: As personal, ignorance-revealing elenctic it defines the initial cathartic and protreptic stage, when the interlocutors still need to be won over for serious engagement with philosophy; as proposal-testing elenctic, it assumes an essential role in constructive dialectic, serving to test possible solutions and remove misleading assumptions.

We still have reason to wonder why the Sixth Division fails to include instruction in the mathematical and philosophical sciences as a distinct, and

12 Cf. L. Brown 2018 on the use of *aporia* in the *Sophist*; Politis 2006a, 89, on kathartic versus zetetic *aporia*; Szaif 2018 and 2022 on the development of the aporetic method away from *ad hominem* argumentation.

higher, branch of *paideia*. These sciences are central to his conception of *paideia* in other dialogues. To be sure, the cathartic phase is said to prepare the ground for some unspecified positive learning (230c9-d1), but there is no node in the division of instruction that would relate to these sciences. This has to do, I surmise, with Plato's authorial strategy. Introducing the philosophical sciences already here, in the Sixth Division, would go beyond the scope of the discussion of appearances of sophistry. Plato waits until the central metaphysical part of the dialogue to grant us a glimpse at the true dialectician (253a-254b).¹³

13 This essay has benefited from critical comments by Fiona Leigh.

Erōs-Hunter in the *Sophist*: who chases whom, how and where?

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This paper aims at a global study of the main metaphor of the *Sophist*, namely hunting, in order to solve the problem of the identity of the Stranger from Elea, by defining what kind of hunter he is. To do so, we distinguish successively three kinds of hunters emerging from the text: the dialectician, the sophist, and the lover, with their respective prey, means, and hunting grounds. First, the Stranger and Theaetetus appear to be dialectically hunting the sophist as a beast incessantly fleeing into the dark and indefinite realm of non-being. This is because the sophist himself primarily appears to be rhetorically hunting young men, just as a lover hunting his beloved, governed as he is by the *epithumetic*, monstrous, and irrational part of his soul. A comparison with the *Phaedrus* shows finally that in trying to define and catch the sophist, by means of the best divisions and collections they can, the two protagonists reveal themselves as being a divine dialectician leading the young mathematician towards philosophy and contemplation of the beauty of the intelligible realm. By displaying such a complex hunt, led by a mysterious Stranger trying to catch the most elusive sophist, Plato the writer was at pains to make the reader himself participate in the hunt, believing that only through this agonistic and erotic process he will both overcome the sophist and become the philosopher.

erōs, hunting, philosophy, sophistry, dialectic.

Prologue: *erōs*, *thēra* and *paideia*

In Plato's time, whether in Sparta, Crete, or Athens, hunting (*thēra*) was closely linked to education (*paideia*). It aimed at developing the courage of young men and training them for the defense of the city during war¹. By fostering contact between young men and adult men, hunting was also the terrain and the common metaphor for *paidēastia*². Witness the rich iconography representing hunting itself, the return from the hunt, the gift of the quarry, and erotic hunting³.

1 *Lg.* I 632e-633b, VII 823b-824b. *Lg.* I 627c8-9, II 654e3-4: the whole dialogue is a hunt. See Louis 1945: 53-55.

2 *Ly.* 206a-b: Hippothales hunting Lysis; *Prt.* 309a: Socrates hunting Alcibiades. See Dover 1978, II, C, 4.

3 See Schnapp 1984 and 1997 who distinguishes between the "hunting-chase" (*thēra*), the "hunting-tracking" (*ikhneuo*), and the "hunting-catch" (*agra*) (1997, 102). Hence, the *Sophist* will be a total hunt.

In Plato's dialogues, the metaphor of hunting gains further extension and abstraction. Not only do we hunt there animate beings, be they wild or tame, including men themselves, but also inanimate beings, such as words, opinions, knowledge, Being and the Good itself⁴. It is because their main character, Socrates, is a skilled hunter (*thereutēs deinos*) like *Erōs*, whether he is a philosopher or a sophist⁵.

But in Plato's *Sophist*, the dramatic context obliges Socrates, who is precisely accused of being a "sophist", to silence, and gives floor to a Stranger from Elea, who is "a comrade (ἐταῖρον) of the circle of Parmenides and Zeno, and a man very much a philosopher"⁶ according to the mathematician Theodorus. During the night, the central metaphor has thus shifted from Socrates' midwifery of knowledge in Theaetetus' soul to the Stranger's hunting of the sophist together with Theaetetus⁷. But who chases whom in the *Sophist* actually? Indeed, the sophist himself will first appear as a hunter directly compared to a lover, and progressively revealing himself as the negative of the philosopher. So the hunter is significantly hunted⁸. Hence three types of hunting emerge at different levels of the dialogue: the dialectical chase of the Stranger hunting the sophist; the sophistic chase of the sophist hunting young men as a lover; and the true erotic chase of Socrates constantly lurking in the background. We propose to compare these three great types of hunters, namely the dialectician, the sophist, and the lover, by distinguishing their respective prey, means, and hunting ground. To what kind of hunters will the Stranger and Theaetetus finally belong: the lazy, slavish, and deceptive ones or the courageous, free, and true ones?

I. The dialectical chase

The Stranger (ξένος) accepts to proceed through questions (δι' ἐρωτήσεων, 217c4) in order to gratify (χαρίζεσθαι, 217e5) Socrates and everyone else and not to appear somewhat inhospitable and savage (ἄξενόν τι...καὶ ἄγριον,

4 *Ly.* 218b-c: Socrates hunting the *prōton philon*; *Grg.* 500d: Socrates hunting the Good contrary to the sophists hunting words (489b and 490a) and by words (*Euthd.* 295d cf. 290b-291b). See the "Diairesis of *θηρεύειν*" in Classen 1960, 65 and Schnapp 1997, 139.

5 *Smp.* 203d4-8. See Da Motta 2019 and Notomi 1999, 16-17 and 71.

6 *Sph.* 216a3-4; tr. Benardete 1984 *contra* Cordero 1993: ἔτερον.

7 Despite *Tht.* 197b-200d: hunting knowledges as birds cf. *Lg.* VII 823e6: slavish *erōs* for hunting birds.

8 See Rosen 1983, 84-109; Wolff in Aubenque 1991, 17-52; and Mouze 2020.

217e6-218a1)⁹. He then invites Theaetetus, under Socrates' recommendation, to begin distinguishing the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher, beginning with the first one, who on the contrary will reveal himself to be a most savage beast (ἀγριώτατον, 231a6).

Firstly, foreseeing that the genus of the sophist will be hard to hunt down (δυσθήρευτον, 218d3), the Stranger proposes to train on a simpler example. Just as the angler can be defined as a hunter of aquatic animals using bottom-up hooking aiming at the head and the mouth of the prey (219a4-221c4), so too the sophist will first appear as a hunter of wealthy and prominent young (221c5-223b8). But after four or five different appearances, our dialectical hunters will declare him to be a complex beast (ποικίλον... θηρίον) to be caught with both hands by tracking his trail (ἵχνος) on the other side (226a6-226b2). But the risk is then he will be confused with the philosopher, as the wolf with the dog, the most savage animal with the most tame... (226b2-231b9). So, exploring hunting is an opportunity for both a summary of the sophist's many appearances as well as a warning against his confusion with the philosopher (231c8-232a7).

Then, to explain how the sophist can appear a knower of many things, the paradigm shifts from the angler to the painter as an imitator of the things which are (233d3-235a9). Still, the hunters' order not to let the beast escape, to encompass him in a kind of net (ἐν ἀμφιβληστροῦ τι), and finally to declare the catch (ἄγρα, 235a10-c7) falls short in front of the sophist's relentless escape, first into a trackless species (εἰς ἄπορον εἶδος, 236c9-d4), then into a trackless region (εἰς ἄπορον τόπον, 239c4-7). So the hunters hold a council: are they to give up in front of the potentially infinite difficulties (241b4-c6)? They do not soften, even if the beast escapes for the *third* time into the darkness of non-being (254a4-7 referred to at 260c11-d3).

Finally, the paradigm seems to shift from the painter to the weaver, as they are eager to account for speech as a weaving together of the species (254b6-259e7). Getting closer and closer to their prey, the hunters find themselves fighting (διεμαχόμεθα) the sophist who could counterattack (διαμάχοιτο) by pretending that falsehood is impossible (260d5-e3). The Stranger orders therefore to track down (διερευνητέον) speech, opinion, and appearance, to prove falsehood possible and bind the sophist to it (ἐνδύσωμεν) or release him (260e3-261a3). But now Theaetetus' worry echoes the Stranger's prediction: the beast is so hard to hunt down

9 See Gordon 2012, 53-85: "Questioning" for the essential correlation between *erōs* and *erōtēsis*.

(δυσθήρευτον) that the chase might seem without limit (πέρας) (261a4-b4). Twice the Stranger needs to exhort the boy to remain courageous in front of the problems of falsehood and appearance (261b5-c4 and 264b9-c2) before inviting him, for the *third* time, to try again the dialectical method and exhibit (ἐπιδείξωμεν) the sophist's nature (264d10-265a2)¹⁰. And so the hunters seem ultimately to catch their prey, to bind it (συνδῆσομεν) and to weave it (σμπλέξαντες) in the final definition of the sophist as “an imitator of the wise” (268c5-268d5).

Throughout this omnipresent metaphor, the Stranger and Theaetetus are dialectically hunting the indefinite sophist¹¹. Indeed, the dialectical method of division and collection is presented as an infallible way to catch the genus of anything, at least for those dialecticians able to pursue all things in particular and in general (235b8-c6). But is really this method so infallible and has the sophist been totally caught? We can doubt it, especially when we recognize retrospectively the failures and mistakes in the *Sophist*, which the Stranger himself seems to acknowledge in the *Statesman* by warning us against haste and feeling of completeness¹², though only after having proved falsehood possible. Still, is not this dialectical incompleteness precisely the sign of the sophist's very elusive nature? Being described as: “a fugitive (ἀποδιδράσκων) into the darkness of ‘that which is not’, to which he attaches himself by a knack (τριβῆ), and on account of the darkness of the region, he's hard to get an understanding of”¹³. Maybe the sophist is not even an expert, but at least his deception has been exposed and his multiple heads successively cut off.

II. The sophistic chase

While the Stranger and Theaetetus hunt the sophist as a beast (θηρίον) throughout the whole dialogue, the sophist, on the other hand, appears first and foremost as a hunter, thought paradoxically not of wild beasts (θηρία) but of tame animals (ἡμερα ζῶα):

– Is there really a kind of hunting of the tame (τις θήρα τῶν ἡμέρων)?

10 See Gordon 2012, 86-124: “Courage”.

11 This main metaphor is closely related to fighting (260a-261a) and even to war (261b-c); the enemy being always the sophist to be chased, captured, and eventually killed.

12 Compare *Sph.* 268d5: Παντάπασι μὲν οὖν (Theaetetus) with *Plt.* 267c4: Παντάπασι μὲν οὖν (young Socrates).

13 *Sph.* 254a4-7; tr. Benardete.

– Yes, provided, that is, (a) human being is a tame animal (ἡμερον ζῷον). But set it down however you please. Either suppose that nothing is tame, or something else is tame, but the human being is savage (ἄγριον); or you mean, on the other hand, the human being is tame, but you believe there's no hunting of human beings. Whichever of these remarks you believe to be to your liking, make it this distinction for us.

– Well, stranger, just as I believe we are a tame animal (ἡμερον ζῷον), so I say there is a hunting of human beings (θήραν τε ἀνθρώπων). (*Sph.* 222b6-c2; tr. Benardete)

Theaetetus' wonder is not surprising, since the activity of "hunting" (θήρα) seems to have as its natural object the very "beast fit to be hunted" (θηρίον). What is more surprising, is the Stranger's narrow alternative presupposing that there *must* be a hunting of the tame *if* human being is a tame animal. Not only is the condition far from being certain – are we so sure that human being *is and always is* a tame animal? – but even if it were so, it does not necessarily imply a hunting of tame animals. So why does the Stranger force Theaetetus' hand here by a radical opposition between both beasts and men, savage and tame, which he will himself reject in the *Statesman*¹⁴? Because he knows that Theaetetus, who eventually became tamer (ἡμερώτερος) the previous day¹⁵, will never reduce men to savage beasts, and because he anticipates the first account of sophistry as "the hunting of the wealthy and prominent young"¹⁶. Actually, this seems to have been the most common appearance of and opinion about the sophists in Plato's time, witness Xenophon¹⁷ as well as the Pseudo-Platonic *Definitions*¹⁸. Indeed, Socrates himself is under Meletus' indictment who precisely pretends that he corrupts the young¹⁹, and thus confounds him with the sophist, who though being a man is also the most savage beast (ἀγριώτατον, 231a6). But this savage beast is said to hunt tame animals in private for money:

– And isn't it the case that of the art of private-hunting (ἰδιοθηρευτικῆς) there is the earning of a wage (μισθαρνητικόν) and there is the giving of gifts (δωροφορικόν).

– I don't understand.

14 *Plt.* 263c2-264b4 and 309e. See also *Lg.* VII 823b1-cl.

15 *Tht.* 210c3.

16 *Sph.* 223b5-6.

17 *Cyn.* 13. 9. 3-5.

18 *Def.* 415c9.

19 *Tht.* 210d2-3 and *Ap.* 24b-26b.

- You do not yet, it seems, pay attention to the hunting of lovers (τῇ τῶν ἐρώντων θήρᾳ).
- About what?
- That they offer the hunted gifts in addition.
- What you say is most true.
- Well, then, let this be a species of an erotic art (ἐρωτικῆς τέχνης).
- Certainly. (*Sph.* 222d7-e4; tr. Benardete)

Again, the division is imperfect if not fallacious, not only because there is a pecuniary erotic art, namely prostitution, but also because the sophist needs a great deal of seduction to persuade the young that he can educate them in exchange for money. Hence the sophist was described as a “prostitute of wisdom” by Socrates according to Xenophon²⁰. Even if the sophist is distinguished from those other beastly hunters, namely the flatterer, the courtesan, and the bad lover²¹, he nevertheless shares with them his savagery, yearning mostly after wealth and pleasure. He is compared to a wolf but also to a many-headed beast (ὁ πολυκέφαλος σοφιστής, 240c4), which are two famous Platonic metaphors for the *epithumetic* part of the soul, significantly imaged by Socrates as a complex and many-headed beast (θηρίον ποικίλον καὶ πολυκέφαλον)²². The sophist then, just as the *epithumētikon*, has many faces...

III. The Socratic chase

How are we then to distinguish the sophist from the philosopher, the wolf from the dog, the savage beast from the divine lover? It takes for sure a great deal of thinking and speaking, that is, to try to distinguish what is truly different and assimilate what is truly the same. This is precisely the activity assigned by Socrates – the very man who claims to know only the art of love (ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη)²³ – to the so-called “dialecticians”, those whom he pursues (διώκω) just as gods because he is “a lover of these divisions and collections” (ἐραστής...τῶν διαίρέσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν)²⁴.

20 *Mem.* 1. 6. 13 see Dorion in Brisson and Renaut 2017, 116-119.

21 *Phdr.* 240a9-c1 and 241c6-d1: the bad lover as a wolf.

22 *R.* IX 588c7-10 announced by 580d11: the epithumetic part is polymorphous (πολυειδίᾳ).

23 *Phdr.* 257a7-8.

24 *Phdr.* 266b3-c1.

Now according to Meletus, Socrates is not only guilty of “corrupting the young” but also of “not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new divinities” (δαιμόνια καινά)²⁵. This refers primarily, of course, to Socrates’ divine sign. But in the face of this judicial context, is it not mostly appropriate that the *Sophist* begins with a dialogue between Socrates and Theodorus about the very nature of the Stranger²⁶? Is he “very much a philosopher” (μάλα δὲ ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον), “a kind of god” (τινα θεόν), or rather “a divine man” (θεῖος ἀνὴρ)? Socrates warns Theodorus, and us, that the genus of the philosopher is not much easier to discern than that of the god, for he can manifest himself in all sorts of apparitions including statesmen, sophists, and complete madmen (μανικῶς)²⁷. This *third* appearance is nevertheless pre-eminent, as it is substituted by the philosopher itself, in Socrates’ initial question to the Stranger about the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher. But does the Stranger belong to this *third* type? He may himself hint at it, when he asks Theaetetus for a *third* favor: to not think that he is mad (μανικός)²⁸. Yet, what would be his madness? Since he is welcomed under the protection of the god of strangers, showing absolutely no ill will (οὐδεὶς φθόνος)²⁹, and reveals himself to be another great lover of divisions and collections, constantly exhorting Theaetetus to courage in the search for the truth (τάληθές ζητοῦμεν)³⁰, is he not inspired by this very divine erotic madness that possesses the chorus of the philosophers tracking (ἰχνεύοντες) Zeus³¹? Indeed, he acts as a divine lover towards Theaetetus, initiating him the best he can to philosophical dialectics, and thus elevating his soul from the sensible beauty (in which Theodorus seems to be stuck) to the intelligible beauty of Being itself (the dialogue is significantly punctuated at crucial moments by the adverb καλῶς, “beautifully”³²). The Stranger, tracking Zeus in company of Theaetetus, would thus be one of these “dialecticians” that Socrates is most eager to pursue, for the sake of knowledge of himself and true education of the young.

25 Ap. 24b9-c1.

26 See Gill 2021.

27 Sph. 216a-d2.

28 Sph. 242a-b.

29 Sph. 217a-b. See Brisson 2016: the absence of jealousy characterises the philosopher aspiring to the divine.

30 Sph. 246d9.

31 Phdr. 252e1-253a8.

32 See Sph. 216c2, 218c8, 219a3, 222c8, 231c7, 247e7, 251a4, 251e6, 254b6, 259a3, 261c5 and 265d5.

Human being is not already a perfectly tame animal, but he seems to be in-between (μεταξύ) the most savage beast (to which the sophist resembles) and the most divine being (to which the philosopher aspires)³³. That is why he needs to be educated and guided, in order to free himself from the monster in him and assimilate himself, as far as possible, to the god³⁴.

Epilogue: The reader's chase

The reader of so complex a dialogue as the *Sophist*, who is nevertheless eager to persevere and continue the hunting of political science in the *Statesman* under the guidance of the Stranger³⁵, is immediately confronted with Socrates' mysterious recognition (γνώρισις) of both Theaetetus and the Stranger³⁶. For what precisely is Socrates grateful and what knowledge has he exactly gained in listening to the Stranger's dialogue with Theaetetus? Plato has so neatly woven his trilogy, namely the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*, that everything seems to be done to engage the reader to ask himself the questions about the *Sophist* that Socrates would have certainly asked if it were not for Euclides' reductionist rewriting and Meletos' sophistic indictment. Thus, the reader is also on the hunt, trying the best he can to collect dramatic clues, solve unsolved perplexities, and explain philosophical digressions, in order to become himself a philosopher, according to Plato's own acknowledgment of his main purpose in writing³⁷. Just as the divine lover is looking for a beautiful beloved tracking the same god as him – namely Zeus, the Intellect – so too the divine writer is looking for a philosophical reader himself tracking the beautiful, the true, and the good – namely us, readers of Plato. And has not the Stranger appeared to us precisely as this mad divine lover, offering Theaetetus the dialectical method as a very “gift from god” (θεός-δῶρον)³⁸, which will lead him both

33 *Phdr.* 230a3-7.

34 *Tht.* 176b.

35 *Plt.* 264a5-6; 285d4-9; and 301e3-4.

36 *Plt.* 257a1-2.

37 *Phdr.* 276d1-d5: “for anyone following the same track (παντὶ τῷ ταὐτὸν ἕχοντι μετιόντι)”.

38 *Sph.* 222d7-e4: the erotic art linked to gift-giving (δωροφορικόν) cf. *Smp.* 218e-219a (epithumetic exchange); *Phdr.* 256b7-e2 (philotimic exchange); *Phdr.* 244a6-8 (philosophical madness as a divine gift); *Phlb.* 16c5-7 (dialectic as a divine gift).

to overcome the sophist in him and to become the true philosopher he is³⁹? The Stranger would then be a true philosopher and the best spokesperson of Plato⁴⁰.

39 *Tht.* 173e-174b (the philosopher's flight); *Sph.* 263a-b (Theaetetus' flight); and *Phdr.* 252b-c (Erōs-Pterōs).

40 See Delcomminette 2014 *contra* Rosen 1983. I thank Francesca Pentassuglio, Justin Vlasits, and Christoph Poetsch for their questions and remarks.

The Stranger of the *Sophist*: A Citizen of Elea “Different” from the Eleatic Philosophers

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In 1561, the protagonist of the *Sophist*, a citizen of Elea, became a member of the ‘Eleatic school’. This intrusion had an author: the German philologist J. Cornarius. Indeed, in 1561 J. Cornarius proposed his own version of some passages of Plato’s *Sophist*. In this version Theodorus presents the Eleatic Stranger as ‘a companion (*hetairoi*) of Parmenideans and Zenonians’ (216a). Since then, this *cliché* is accepted by all translations. However, when the possibility of justifying the existence of images and appearances is considered, the Stranger himself proposes ‘testing’ Parmenides’ thesis. His remarks are rather those of an adversary than of a friend or companion of Parmenides. In fact, in spite of Theodorus’ presentation, the Stranger, albeit citizen of Elea, does not seem to share the theses of the ‘Eleatics’. These anomalies invited us to question the character of ‘companion’ of the ‘Parmenideans’ credited to the Stranger. The questioning is possible if we exploit some valuable greek manuscripts of Plato’s *Sophist*, neglected by J. Burnet, like *Vindobonensis* 21 (Y). This manuscript, among others, has the lecture ‘*heteros*’, ‘different’, instead of ‘*hetairon*’, “companion”. This manuscript permits to maintain the formula ‘*tôn hetairôn*’, transmitted by *all* the manuscripts after the first ‘*hetairon*’, and removed in modern editions. The translation we propose is: the Eleatic Stranger is ‘different (*heteros*) from the companions (*tôn hetairôn*) of Parmenides and Zenon’. Cornarius, manuscript Y, *heteros*, Eleatic School, companion

If we had to specify which is the main novelty that Plato, in the *Sophist*, introduces in his own philosophy, there is no doubt what we would choose the notion of ‘difference’ (τὸ ἕτερον). Thanks to this notion Plato justifies in 257b the possibility of the existence of a certain non-being which is not the opposite (ἐναντίον), but only ‘the *other* (ἕτερον) of being’. This discovery mitigates the scope of the alleged ‘parricide’, since it does not refute the non-existence of an absolute non-being (to which, Plato says, we said ‘goodbye’ long ago, 258b), and justifies, at the same time, the possibility of the existence of a λόγος ψευδής (which expresses, in its turn, something ‘different’ from what it)¹.

* I am very grateful to Christopher Kurfess for his meticulous reading and comments on this work.

1 This discovery refutes the thesis of the main target of the dialogue, which is Antisthenes, not Parmenides, that ‘*all* λόγος is true (ἀληθύνει = veridise)’ (Proclus, *In Crat.* 37).

Plato, not only a great philosopher but also a very subtle writer, has taken care to give his novel discovery a fitting dramatic setting and he has decided to exhibit it in a dialogue *different* from the others. It's obvious that each of Plato's dialogues has its own specificity, but two main *differences* between the *Sophist* and his previous works make this dialogue a work apart: (a) its protagonist is 'other' than Socrates (we could say 'Socrates' other'), and (b) the method he uses is 'different' from the previous dialogues.

Our reading will be devoted almost exclusively to the exposition of point (a), concerning the personality of the protagonist of the dialogue, the Stranger from Elea. Concerning (b), about the method used, we should briefly note the following. Usually, Plato's philosophical mouthpiece for exposing his philosophy is Socrates, sometimes in a rather dogmatic way, who tests his interlocutors, who, in turn, are almost always convinced in advance or perhaps directly stubborn and foolish, like Thrasymachus. In some dialogues Plato arrives at solutions, while others remain *aporetic*. Everything is *different* in the *Sophist*. After a long introduction which prepares the final solution, a series of definitions obtained through the division of kinds into X and the *other* of X, the protagonist reviews, in two occasions, the history of previous philosophy, and presents his personal position about the achievements of past philosophers. Thanks to this method, his 'defining definition' of being, which he proposes on page 247d, can be considered valid not only for this passage, but also throughout the dialogue.

Let us now look at our central subject, case (a), that of the protagonist of the dialogue. He is presented by Socrates' interlocutor, Theodorus, as someone 'from' Elea, literally, 'τὸ γένος, ἐξ Ἐλέας' (216a3). The choice of Elea is obvious. Since the aim of the dialogue is the definition of the sophist, and, in the dialogue, the most precise and rigorous definition makes him someone who produces *appearances* of knowledge, we must first justify the existence of *appearances*. But since another great original thinker of Elea, Parmenides, had denied the existence of appearances, one must first put to the test the arguments posited by Parmenides. And nothing is more appropriate than to ask the point of view of an Eleatic who had listened to Parmenides himself in his youth. That's why Plato decides to give the floor to this privileged witness of Parmenides' words, another Eleatic like Parmenides.

Before continuing, let's make a parenthesis. I digress, but I would like to notice that it has never been seen that, unintentionally, almost by accident, the passage of the *Sophist* which presents Parmenides' point of view, is a very important document about Parmenides' philosophy. Why is that? Because the Stranger says that in order to justify the existence of φαίνεσθαι and δοκεῖν, that is, of *appearances*, it is necessary to *refute* Parmenides,

because appearances, which do not have the guarantee of being, belong to non-being, and Parmenides had said that non-being does not exist. For Parmenides, says Plato, who is the first doxographer of Parmenides, the appearances do not exist. The information is precious because 99% of the works devoted to Parmenides say that the so-called ‘second’ part of the *Poem* deals with appearances, (we speak in English of the Way of Seeming), which is totally false. Heidegger, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* says, along these lines, that, ‘in the appearance, it is the being that reveals itself. He makes Parmenides a phenomenologist *avant la lettre*. Δόξα, in Parmenides (and all the Presocratics) means ‘opinion’, ‘viewpoint’, never ‘appearance’. End of parenthesis.

Now, as we know, Elea, according to the *Sophist*, was the seat of a school of philosophy, the Eleatic school (in Greek, ἔθνος, literally ‘tribe’, but we can also say ‘group’, or ‘family’, according to Vladimiro Arangio-Ruiz and Livio Rossetti). It is the Stranger himself who mentions the existence of this group, but -and I am beginning to get closer to my main point- the Stranger does not say that *he* belongs to this school. Is it enough to be born in Elea to belong to the Eleatic philosophical school? Ameinias, the first ‘master’ of Parménides (D.L. IX.21) was born in Elea and was Pythagorean.

For our present concern, the question is important, because we are clarifying the philosophical position of the Stranger. If this philosophy is a ‘local’ philosophy, as is implied in from the majority of the translations, it concerns all the philosophers of the region. In fact, August Diès translates ‘chez nous’, Giuseppe Cambiano, ‘nostra stirpe’, Vladimiro Arangio-Ruiz ‘la nostra eleatica famiglia’, Léon Robin, ‘notre gens’, Francis M. Cornford, ‘in our part of the world’. But the text is problematic, because these translations rely, concerning the group, on the words παρ’ ἡμῖν, dative, with locative value. But in reality this text is found only in Theodoret and in an *emendatio* of the codex *Parisinus graecus* 1808, *emendatio* inherited by some descendants. On the other hand, the whole manuscript tradition, especially the best codices, B, T, W and Y, presents παρ’ ἡμῶν, genitive, with the meaning of ‘starting point’². It would be a school that issued ‘from home’, which is more logical, since it spread from Elea, πόλις of the only two true Eleatics of the group, Parmenides and Zeno, since Xenophanes is from Colophon and Melissos from Samos. Precisely the choice of παρ’ ἡμῶν helps to explain why someone who lived very far from Elea, like Melissos will become the Eleatic par excellence, because he is the only one who will write -we will see- the true core of Eleatism, ‘there is only one being’. We will return to this question.

2 Casadesús Bordoy 2013 is an exception, as he translates ‘procedente de nosotros’.

But, even if we adopt the original text, did the Stranger belong to a school that issued from his home? The only way to answer the question is to look at whether the philosophy that Plato attributes to the Stranger coincides with that of the Eleatic group. This is not the occasion to deal with the much discussed sentence according to which, even if this group comes from Elea, it had started (ἀρξάμενον) with Xenophanes, and even before (!). It is curious, however, to place a Colophonian as the initiator of a movement originating from Elea...But, what did the 'Eleatic' philosophers maintain? They argued in their stories (or, directly, in their myths: μύθοι) that 'what is called (καλουμένων) all things (τῶν πάντων) is one thing (ένος ὄντος)' (242d6). The usual translation of the sentence as 'they say that everything is one' is therefore not valid (by the way, the only philosopher who wrote 'πάντα - έν' is...Heraclitus). In the characterization of the Stranger unity would be more a matter of language, and it will become an ontological thesis when Plato later speaks of the 'monists,' as we shall see.

The very brief characterization of the Eleatic school we have just summarized is found in the very famous passage in which the Stranger considers the research of the previous philosophers, 242c-243a. A few pages later the Stranger begins a more precise study by reviewing those who have pronounced on the quantity, πόσα, of principles. We might say, as we have announced, that when he alludes to the 'monists' he is taking up the Eleatic thesis, but now from the ontological point of view. Indeed, the Stranger imagines that he questions the monists and asks them, 'You affirm, perhaps, that it (sc. τὸ εὖν) is only one (έν πού φατε μόνον εἶναι, 244b9)?' 'We affirm it,' they say. The statement is not hesitant or ambiguous. In direct speech, the text would be, 'We monists say: έν μόνον ἔστιν'. Now, it has never been noticed that these three words are a literal quotation from fr. B 8.1 of Melissos: 'μέγιστον μὲν οὖν σημεῖον ὁ λόγος, ὅτι έν μόνον ἔστιν' (Simplicius, *De Caelo* 558).

Even if he is never mentioned in the *Sophist*, Plato obviously thinks of Melissos when he invented from scratch an 'Eleatic school' because the only monist of the quartet which would compose this school, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Zeno and Melissos, is, precisely, Melissos. In Xenophanes unity was a characteristic of the divinity (fr. 23), that would have made of him a monotheist, not a monist; Parmenides, for his part, as L. Tarán has noticed, meant that 'Being is the only thing there is'³ (which does not mean that

3 L. Tarán 1965, 190.

it is One⁴); and Zeno, Parmenides' ‘defender’⁵ at the beginning of Plato's *Parmenides*, offered arguments for ‘eliminating’ (ἀνίρει) the one, according to Eudemos' account reproduced by Simplicius (*In Phys.*, 99 = 29A21 DK). Only Melissos is left. As J. Barnes says, ‘Melissos may go down in history books as the real inventor of monism’⁶.

Let us see now if the conceptions of the Stranger coincide with those which would make of him, not only an Eleatic, but also a representative of the school of Elea. After a long course which brought him to an encounter with the previous philosophers, the moment finally comes for the Stranger to express his own ideas. Aware of the solemnity of the moment, Plato doesn't hesitate to dramatize what the Stranger will say, and insists on using the first person, in order to underline the speaker's commitment. Here is what the Stranger says: ‘I affirm that what possesses a power, whatever it may be, either to act on any other similar thing, or to suffer -I summarize-, all this really exists. And therefore I posit as a definition that defines beings (τὰ ὄντα) that these are nothing but power (or ‘possibility’) (247e)’.

It would be illusory to try to find even a hint of monism in these words, which are a definition of τὰ ὄντα. Beings, τὰ ὄντα, are defined by the possession (...‘that which possesses...’) of something, but that something is not unity, but the possibility of acting or suffering. The title of our lecture, ‘The Stranger of the *Sophist*: a Citizen of Elea ‘Different’ from the Eleatic Philosophers’, seems to be confirmed. But let us see other examples.

We can suppose that, if the Stranger is a supporter of monism, he must respect the ideas of Parmenides and Zeno, as Plato interprets them. But in several passages of the dialogue the Stranger is very critical of Parmenides (to the point of fearing to be thought by a parricide, 241d3). At 241e says, for example, that even to a blind man (τυφλός) it would seem obvious that in some way being is not and that, under certain conditions, non-being is, which is the opposite of what Parmenides said (so a blind man would ‘see’ better than Parmenides!). And when examining the thesis of the monists, the Stranger remarks that those who hold that there is only one being, cannot even call this one thing ‘being,’ for the contrary would be . . . irrational (λόγον οὐκ ἂν ἔχον, 244d). But, if Parmenides was a monist — as Plato says — he should have done so. And finally, as a conclusion to his examination

4 K. Reinhardt had written that the predicate of unity was almost marginal (Nebensächlicher) in Parmenides (Reinhardt 1916, 108).

5 However, we should not forget that Plato makes Zeno say that ‘it was indeed out of a taste for controversy (φιλονικία) or something of the kind that I wrote this work when I was young’ (*Parm.* 128d).

6 J. Barnes 1979, 21.

of monists and pluralists, the Stranger draws this conclusion: ‘Thus, then, he who asserts that being is either a couple or only a unity, is led to thousands of other impasses (ἄπορίαι) that cannot be crossed’ (245e).

If we take all this into account, our lecture could end here, for we have shown that the Stranger, while being an inhabitant of Elea, is really ‘different’ from the Eleatic philosophers. But I must continue my talk because, when Theodorus presents the Stranger, he appears to say the opposite of what I am demonstrating. An Eleatic ‘different’ from the entourage of Parmenides and Zeno? Impossible. Theodorus says that this unknown person, on the contrary, is a ‘companion’ (ἑταῖρον) of the Parmenideans and Zenonians, and that, consequently, he shares their ideas. We are at an impasse, and we can ask ourselves the question: was Plato capable of using a companion of the Parmenideans to contradict Parmenides and even to try to kill him? Certainly not. As we know, the person who put the word ‘companion’ (ἑταῖρον) in Theodorus’s mouth (which would have made a ‘companion’ a real traitor, criticizing his masters) is a sixteenth-century German philologist, Janus Cornarius, or Kornar, from his real name Johan Haynpol, and the date of the crime, of the slander, is the year 1561. You probably know the story, but I must say two words to justify my position.

If Plato decided to choose as his spokesman a philosopher from Elea, it’s because he is supposed to be a good connoisseur of the local philosophy, who even had the privilege to listen personally to the lectures of the most important Eleatic, Parmenides. And, as a connoisseur of Parmenideanism, this anonymous person is aware of Parmenides’ findings, for example, the refutation of the existence of an absolute non-being, but also of the weak points of this position, for example, the difficulty of justifying the existence of a false speech

We do not hesitate to assert that, for Plato, the Stranger is *the other* (ἕτερος) of Parmenides. He belongs to the same philosophical current, therefore, he is not the opposite of Parmenides, but with respect to the non-being he supports a ‘different’ position, not contrary, which prevents him from consummating the parricide. It must be taken into account that the Stranger never speaks of the thesis of ‘his’ father Parmenides, but of ‘the’ father Parmenides (τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς Παρμενίδου λόγον, 241d5), for Parmenides is a kind of ‘father’ of the Eleatics’ homeland, author even of the πολιτεία of the city. The Stranger, then, is neither a companion nor a disciple of Parmenides. He is someone who has a relationship of *otherness* concerning Parmenides, because he is *different* from the Eleatic philosophers

What I have just said is not the result of an excess of imagination. It is *Plato himself who says it*, and the dialogue was interpreted in this way until

the tragic date we have mentioned, the year 1561, when the Stranger became, in spite of himself, a ‘companion’ of the Parmenideans. The author who established this bond of friendship is the philologist Janus Cornarius, as we have already said.

Let us look closely at the continuation of the events. There is not very precise information about the manuscript sources used in the first editions of the *Sophist*, that of Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1513, that of Johann Valder in Basel in 1534 and, finally, that of Henri Estienne in Geneva in 1578. But, in the passage that interests us, which concerns the presentation of the Stranger, there is no doubt that they used the same text that we find today in the *Vindobonensis* 21 (Y), or others of the same family. That text was as follows: ‘He comes from Elea (τὸ μὲν γένος ἐξ Ἐλέας), but he is different (ἕτερον δὲ) from the companions (ἑταίρων) of Parmenides and Zeno (τῶν ἀμφὶ Παρμενίδην καὶ Ζήνωνα); however, he is a true philosopher (μάλ᾽ αὖ δὲ ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον)’ (216a3);

It is also certain that Marsilio Ficino’s Latin translation relied on a similar text: ‘Eleatem quidem natione, longe vero alterum ac dissimilem a Parmenides et Zenone suis aequalibus’ it is the same in the case of the source used in 1552 in Louvain by Petreio Tiara: ‘itemque alterum quendam Parmenidis Zenonisque familia’, and, especially in Estienne’s version.

We found the same text in manuscripts not directly derived from *Vindobonensis* 21, for example, *Parisinus* 1814 and *Vaticanus* 1030, and A. Diès adds that ἕτερος was also found in an *emendatio* to the *Venetus Append Class.* 4.1, dated to the tenth century. We know that the *Vindobonensis* 21 (Y), is one of the four most important manuscripts on which the Oxford’s Burnet edition was developed (that however retains ἑταῖρον), but strangely it was not used by the new edition of D. B. Robinson, of 1995. A. Diès is a very enthusiastic defender of the *Vindobonensis* 21. He says: ‘Y often has the privilege of the correct reading, either with B or T, or with W or Stobée: sometimes it has it alone, and one does not see why we would be obliged, in such cases, to substitute, for the guarantee offered by Y, the precarious guarantee provided *ab aliis librariis*’ (1923, 298).

Given all these elements the adoption of ἕτερος instead of ἑταῖρον is necessary⁷. The discrepancies found in the manuscript tradition most likely obey the technique of self-dictation often used by copyists, as the two words,

7 The version we presented in our translation of the *Sophist* (1993) has recently been adopted by E. Mouze, who has also made the Stranger a philosopher ‘different’ from the Parmenideans (Mouze 2019, 59).

ἕτερον and ἑταῖρον, are pronounced the same way, even before the Byzantine period. There are other examples in the *Symposium* (221b7) and in the *Lysis* (206d4). And we understand why Theodorus must make it clear that, even though the Stranger is ‘different’ from the entourage (τῶν ἀμφί) of Parmenides and Zeno, he is, by birth, from Elea, but (δέ), (a remark that would be superfluous if he were really a ‘companion’ of the Parmenideans) —philosophically, he is other. . . . L. Gili proposes replacing δέ by γε⁸, but, in that case, the adversative character of the sentence would be weakened. Instead of trying to explain the anomaly that makes the Stranger (an Eleatic) someone ‘different’ (ἕτερον) from the Eleatic philosophers, Cornarius has chosen the lectio facilior, ἑταῖρον, and made the character a ‘companion’ of the Eleatics.

Apart from the coherence that the adoption of ἕτερος introduces into the dialogue, there are at least two additional reasons to support this reading:

(a) All manuscripts (out exception) that preserve the first lines of the *Sophist* present the following text, after the choice ‘ἕτερος/ἑταῖρος’: τῶν/τὸν ἀμφί Παρμενίδην καὶ Ζήνωνα ἑταίρων, ‘the entourage of the companions of Parmenides and Zeno’. If we keep ἑταῖρος (this is the case of all editions after 1561, notably the now orthodox one of Burnet-Robinson), the translation of the passage would be: ‘companion of the entourage of the companions of Parmenides and Zeno’. The redundancy is obvious, and for this reason all editions have deleted the second ἑταίρων, which has become ‘[ἑταίρων]’, when it is present in the entire manuscript translation. This anomaly disappears if we accept ἕτερον: ‘different from the entourage of the companions of Parmenides and Zeno’.

(b) Plato sometimes has the habit of advancing at the beginning of his dialogues the main subject of the work. Numbers, for example, will play a decisive role in the *Timaeus*, and the first words of the dialogue are: ‘One, two, three, but our fourth [...] where is it?’ (17a). The *Hippias Major*, whose subject is beauty, begins in this way: ‘Here is the beautiful (καλὸς) and learned Hippias’ (281a). This is, finally, the case of the *Sophist*, whose main discovery will be that of the ἕτερον, and the protagonist is presented as the ἕτερον of Parmenides, someone who, while being Eleatic, will be ‘different’ from Parmenides.

We are left with the justification of the date. The philologist Janus Cornarius had died in 1558, but his son published posthumously in 1561 his translation into Latin of Plato's dialogues, accompanied by *eclogae*, and, in the *eclogae secunda* he says, without going into the question, that, at

8 Gili 2017, 173.

the beginning of the *Sophist*, the reading ἕτερον ‘*mox supposita est*’, ‘has been placed later’ (he does not say how) instead of ἑταῖρον. He proposes to restore ἑταῖρον and he translates it as ‘sodalis.’ More than two centuries later, in 1771, Johann Friedrich Fischer, professor at Leipzig, published a second edition of Cornarius's *Eclogae*, in which he confirmed the choice of ἑταῖρον, and three years later Fischer added commentaries to Estienne's edition of 1578 (which had retained ἕτερον). In his comments Fischer again said he preferred the ‘*elegans Cornarii coniectura*’ (4), and proposed to eliminate the second ἑταίρων, which would have been added by the copyists. Since then, all editions of the *Sophist* have favored an *emendatio* that is only four centuries old and have dropped a version that had been respected from the writing of the dialogue until the sixteenth century, that is, for almost two thousand years, a version according to which the Stranger of Elea is a real philosopher, but *different* from the members of the Eleatic school.

Auf der Jagd nach einem Gestaltwandler: Zur Komposition des *Sophistes*

(Chasing a Shape-Shifter: On the Composition of the *Sophist*)

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By carefully analysing the opening of the *Sophist*, this paper argues against aporetic readings of the dialogue. First, I contend that the definition of the sophist as an ‘imitator of the wise person’ (*Sph.* 268c1) in the seventh division is meant to be conclusive and correct (at least within this dialogue), because the motifs of mimetic shapeshifting, hunt, and deceit are present from the very beginning, where Socrates introduces them by way of a reference to the *Odyssey*. A comparison with relevant passages from earlier dialogues (*Hippas Minor*, *Euthyphro*, *Euthydemus*, *Ion*) shows that Plato already ascribed the same language to sophistry. More particularly, two kinds of versatility are distinguished and evaluated differently: that of Proteus the shape-shifter, who is associated with sophistry, and that of Odysseus’ and Menelaus’ outward disguise. The fact that it is Socrates who brings up these key motifs also suggests, secondly, that the Eleatic Stranger is a trustworthy philosophical authority. In a third step, the first six divisions are shown not to be failures, but to provide a performative demonstration of the sophist’s shape-shifting nature: it is the sophist himself who, trying to escape his prosecutors, is imagined to ‘plunge’ (235c3) into the different shapes identified by the first six definitions. The paper concludes with the claim that the Eleatic Stranger might be practicing a knowledge-based (i.e. *ιστορική*, 267e2) imitation of the wise person when he leads Theaetetus through the changing shapes of the sophist, instead of immediately directing him to the goal of their enquiry. In the case of an individual so difficult to capture like the sophist, the hunter must be a little bit like their prey in order to be able to catch it: versatile and cunning like Odysseus and Menelaus.
mimesis, shape-shifting, proteus, hunt, versatility

1 Sokrates’ Anspielung auf Homer

Zu Beginn des *Sophistes* bringt Sokrates mittels eines Rückgriffs auf einen Homer-Vers die Vermutung vor, der ihm soeben vorgestellte Fremde aus Elea sei vielleicht ein verkleideter Gott, ein „elenktischer Gott“¹ (θεὸς ὧν τις ἐλεγκτικός, *Sph.* 216b6), der gekommen sei, sie alle, die sie noch so schlecht im Diskutieren seien, zu prüfen. Theodoros deutet diese Überhö-

1 Alle Übersetzungen sind meine eigenen; der griechische Text folgt der aktuellen OCT-Ausgabe.

hung des Gastes ironisch,² denn er antwortet, der Fremde habe es nicht auf Streitgespräche abgesehen und sei so zwar kein Gott, wohl aber göttlich, wie alle Philosophen. Überraschenderweise führt Sokrates darauf seinen Vergleich zu der Darstellung der Götter in derselben Homer-Stelle mit Bezug auf die *Philosophen* fort: Diese „erschieden“ den Menschen „in allerlei Gestalten“ (παντοίοι φανταζόμενας, c4), durchstreiften so die Städte und würden bisweilen als Sophisten, Politiker oder auch als Verrückte angesehen – eine Bestimmung, die viel eher einen Sophisten als einen Philosophen zu bezeichnen scheint. Wie ist diese Äußerung zu verstehen? Ist sie ein Zeugnis sokratischer Ironie und wird hier die philosophische Autorität des Eleatischen Fremden infrage gestellt? Ist er, ein Gefährte von Parmenides und Zenon, selbst ein verkleideter Sophist³ und ist somit, wie etwa von David Ambuel und Leslie Brown vertreten,⁴ die im Dialog erarbeitete Bestimmung seines Wesens unzulänglich, sodass der *Sophistes* als ein aporetischer Dialog zu betrachten ist?

Entgegen dieser Deutungsrichtung möchte ich durch eine genaue Analyse einiger oft überlesener Aspekte im Anfangsteil des Dialogs für folgende drei Thesen argumentieren:

- 1) Die Bestimmung des Sophisten als sich verstellender „Nachahmer des Weisen“ (μμητής τοῦ σοφου, 268c1) ist – zumindest innerhalb dieses Dialogs – abschließend und korrekt.
- 2) Auf dieser Basis ist der Eleatische Fremde als eine glaubwürdige philosophische Autorität anzusehen.
- 3) Die ersten sechs Dihairesen sind keine Fehlversuche, sondern geben in ihrer Gesamtheit eine Darstellung des Wesens des Sophisten.

Meine Untersuchung wird in drei Schritten vorgehen: Zunächst werde ich ausgehend von der erwähnten *Odysee*-Passage einige wichtige motivische Resonanzen zwischen dem *Sophistes* und einschlägigen früheren Dialogen Platons aufzeigen. Im zweiten Schritt werde ich erläutern, wie die implizite Gegenwart dieser Motive – allen voran der Gestaltwandlung und der Mimesis – im Dialog die Korrektheit der abschließenden Dihairese und damit auch die Autorität des Fremden nahelegt. Schließlich werde ich mittels eines genaueren Blicks auf die den Dialog beherrschende Jagdmetaphorik zu zeigen versuchen, inwiefern die ersten sechs Dihairesen eine Demonstration des sophistischen Wesens geben.

2 So auch Delcomminette 2014, 534.

3 Dies glaubt z. B. Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 27.

4 Siehe Ambuel 2007, xiv, 11 und Brown 2010 (mit weiterer Literatur: 153).

2 Motivische Resonanzen: Odysseus, Proteus und die Jagdmetaphorik

Ein Blick auf die von Sokrates anzitierte Stelle aus der *Odyssee* (17. 483–487) zeigt, dass es dort einer der Freier ist, der zu vorsichtigem Verhalten gegenüber einem Fremden mahnt, weil es sich um einen Gott handeln könne. Bekanntermaßen ist der anwesende Gast jedoch kein Gott, sondern Odysseus. Die Bezugnahme auf diese Stelle hat im übrigen platonischen Œuvre einige wichtige Resonanzen. Zunächst wird im *Hippias Minor* Odysseus als der „vielgewandteste“ (πολυτροπώτατον, *Hp. Mi.* 364c6–7, vgl. *H. Od.* 1. 1) Charakter Homers von dem Sophisten Hippias mit Falschheit und Täuschung assoziiert. Sokrates sucht den Heros gegen Hippias zu verteidigen, indem er die vorsätzliche Lüge mit Klugheit verknüpft und als Fähigkeit (δύναμις, 376a3) zur Falschheit und zur Wahrheit herausstellt. An einer Stelle des Dialogs wirft Sokrates seinem Gegner vor, er ahme Odysseus nach (μιμή), indem er ihn wissentlich täusche (370e10–11). Wie David LévyStone gezeigt hat, ist Odysseus nicht nur hier und anderswo in Platons Werk positiv konnotiert, sondern er verkörpert oft den Philosophen, ja sogar Sokrates selbst.⁵

Zweitens zitiert Sokrates dieselbe *Odyssee*-Stelle wortwörtlich in der *Politeia*, um das dort vorgestellte Bild der Götter als wandelbarer und trügerischer Wesen, als Zauberer, entschieden zurückzuweisen. Unter den genannten Göttern ist auch der göttliche Gestaltwandler *par excellence*, nämlich Proteus (*R.* 381d1–e1). Diese zweite Parallelstelle scheint zunächst die Zweifel an der philosophischen Autorität des Eleatischen Fremden zu untermauern, da er mit einer Gottesdarstellung in Verbindung gebracht wird, die anderswo vehement zurückgewiesen wird. Doch in der *Sophistes*-Stelle ist es gar nicht der Philosoph, der den Eindruck der Wandlung seiner Erscheinung hervorruft, sondern vielmehr „die Unwissenheit der anderen“ (τῆν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν, *Sph.* 216c5), mit denen er Umgang hat.⁶ Der Vergleich zwischen dem Philosophen und den Göttern zielt zudem nicht, wie etwa von Notomi angenommen,⁷ auf die Götter, sondern auf Odysseus: Dieser hat auch bei Homer keineswegs seine Gestalt gewandelt, sondern sich lediglich verkleidet.

Die dritte wichtige motivische Parallele kündigt sich in meiner Erwähnung von Proteus bereits an: An mehreren Stellen des *Sophistes*

⁵ Siehe LévyStone 2005, insb. 209–210.

⁶ Vgl. Delcomminette 2014, 535 und Benardete 1963, 176–177.

⁷ Vgl. Notomi 1999, 69–70.

wird die Suche nach der korrekten Bestimmung des Sophisten als eine Jagd bezeichnet: Sie „verfolgen“ (μεταδιώκειν, vgl. 224e7, 225e5) den Sophisten als ein „Wild“ (θήρα, 235a10), eine „schwer einzufangende Art“ (δυσθήρευτον ... γένος, 218d4, vgl. 261a6–7), ein „schillerndes Tier, das, wie man so sagt, nicht mit einer Hand einzufangen ist“ (ποικίλον ... τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον οὐ τῇ ἑτέρᾳ ληπτόν, 226a6–7). Francesc Casadesús Bordoy hat vorgeschlagen, dass es das ebenfalls in der *Odyssee* präsente Motiv von Menelaos' Jagd auf Proteus ist, das für diese ausgeprägte Jagdmotivik des Dialogs das unausgesprochene Vorbild darstellt.⁸ Er stützt diese These durch die Hinzuziehung von zwei Parallelstellen: Im *Euthydemos*, der deutliche inhaltliche Ähnlichkeiten zum *Sophistes* aufweist, bemerkt Sokrates über die anwesenden Fremden (Sophisten, die – ganz wie hier – vertreten, es gebe keine falsche Aussage), sie „ahmen Proteus nach, den ägyptischen Sophisten, und bezaubern uns“ (τὸν Πρωτέα μιμεῖσθον τὸν Αἰγύπτιον σοφιστήν⁹ γοητεύοντε ἡμᾶς, *Euthd.* 288b7–8). Er selbst wolle daher dessen Jäger, den Menelaos nachahmen.¹⁰ Darüber hinaus vergleicht Sokrates Ion im gleichnamigen Dialog mit Proteus, da „du jede Gestalt annimmst und dich hin und her wendest, bis du mir schließlich ganz entschlüpfst“ (παντοδαπὸς γίγνη στρεφόμενος ἄνω καὶ κάτω, ἕως τελευτῶν διαφυγὼν με, *Ion* 541e7–8). Statt ihm eine Probe seiner Homer-Kompetenz zu geben, täusche (ἐξαπατᾷς, 542a3) er Sokrates.

3 Der Sophist als Gestaltwandler und die Autorität des Fremden

Weder Proteus noch Odysseus werden in der *Sophistes*-Passage namentlich genannt, doch ihre implizite Präsenz scheint unbestreitbar: Wie wir gesehen haben, ist die Motivik der Jagd auf Proteus als auf einen Gestaltwandler, Zauberer und Täuscher schon früher bei Platon vorhanden und im *Euthydemos* findet sich auch bereits eine Verknüpfung von Proteus mit der Sophistik. Hinsichtlich der sich ebenfalls gut in das platonische Werk fügenden Einführung des Philosophen mit Odysseus wird im *Sophistes* ein Ausblick auf eine positiv konnotierte Form von intellektueller Wendigkeit und Täuschung gegeben, auf die ich noch zurückkommen werde. Proteus und Odysseus sind folglich mit zwei völlig unterschiedlich bewerteten Formen

8 Siehe Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 23–24 und *Od.* 4. 360–463. Vgl. zur Jagdmetaphorik auch Notomi 1999, 163–166.

9 Vgl. zu dieser abweichenden Version des Mythos, nach der Proteus ein ägyptischer König war, Hdt. 2. 112–120, E. *Hel.* 1–15 und *El.* 1279–1281.

10 Vgl. auch *Euthphr.* 15d2–4.

von Vielseitigkeit assoziiert. Indem Sokrates nun die Gestaltwandlung zunächst als eine Beschreibung des ‚wahren Philosophen‘ vorbringt, aber diese Wahrnehmung von Vielgestaltigkeit nicht dem Philosophen, sondern der Unwissenheit des Betrachters zuschreibt, erzielt er zweierlei: Erstens weist er in Bezug auf den Philosophen die Annahme einer tatsächlichen Gestaltwandlung zurück. Zweitens, weit wichtiger, legt er nahe, dass diese Bestimmung als *zutreffende* nur jemandem zukommen kann, der *kein* wahrer Philosoph ist, sondern diesem nacheifert. So gesehen wird der Sophist auf ganz implizite Weise bereits vom Dialoganfang an als ein Gestaltwandler präsentiert.

Hinsichtlich des Mimesis-Vokabulars ist auffallend, dass es in beiden zitierten Schlüsselstellen zu Odysseus und Proteus im *Hippias Minor* und im *Euthydemos* bereits auftaucht. Proteus wird später bei Lukian (*Salt.* 19) zum Paradigma für den mimetischen Tanz werden. Vorplatonische Zeugnisse gibt es für diese Assoziation von Proteus und Mimesis nicht, und auch der Gebrauch des Vokabulars im *Euthydemos* ist nicht hinreichend belastbar. Doch im *Sophistes* wird eine Verbindung zwischen dem sich proteusartig wandelnden Sophisten und der Mimesis über die Brücke des Adjektivs ποικίλος (schillernd) erzielt: Dieses wird zu Anfang des Dialogs zweimal in Bezug auf die Kunst des Sophisten gebraucht (*Sph.* 223c2, 226a6), bevor es Theaitetos im Superlativ auf die Mimesis bezieht (234b4). Zudem ist die Verbindung von Mimesis und Vielseitigkeit, Gestaltwandlung sowie Täuschung nicht nur bei Platon dort prominent, wo Mimesis pejorativ verwandt wird, sondern sie ist bereits in früheren Zeugnissen des Vokabulars belegt.¹¹ In ihrer Verknüpfung mit Gestaltwandlung und ποικιλία ist somit auch die Thematik der verstellenden Mimesis im *Sophistes* im Spiel, lange bevor sie zur Bestimmung des Sophisten herangezogen wird. Es ließe sich noch hinzufügen, dass auf der Grundlage der Engführung zwischen Odysseus und dem Philosophen der Sophist Hippias eigentlich bereits im *Hippias Minor* als ein Nachahmer des Weisen entlarvt wird, wenn Sokrates ihm vorwirft, er ahme Odysseus nach.

Wenn sich so die in der Schlussdihairesis erreichte Bestimmung des Sophisten als ein sich verstellender Nachahmer des Weisen bereits zu Beginn des Dialogs ankündigt, liegt die Vermutung nahe, dass diese Definition tatsächlich der Zielpunkt des Gesprächs ist (These 1). Hinsichtlich der philosophischen Autorität des Fremden (These 2) lässt sich ergänzen, dass seine Glaubwürdigkeit durch Sokrates in der Anfangspassage untermauert

11 Siehe z. B. *h. Ap.* 162–163, *Pi. P.* 12. 19–21, *E. Hel.* 33–34, 74, *Ar. Th.* 149–267; bei Platon *R.* 395a2, 596c2. Vgl. die Einleitung zu Pfefferkorn und Spinelli 2021, 9–16.

wird: Erstens bringt er selbst durch die Anspielung auf besagte *Odyssee*-Passage das Motiv der Gestaltwandlung ins Spiel, das für die Bestimmung des Sophisten durch den Fremden entscheidend sein wird. Zweitens befreit er im selben Atemzug den mit Odysseus assoziierten Fremden vom Vorwurf der sophistischen Gestaltwandlung, indem er diesen Eindruck der Kondition des Betrachters zuschreibt.

4 Die Funktion der ersten sechs Dihairesen

Inwiefern aber ist es möglich, die ersten sechs Dihairesen nicht als Fehlversuche anzusehen? Mehrfach ist in der Literatur darauf hingewiesen worden, dass die Definitionen des Sophisten als Jäger, Händler, Eristiker und Erzieher (sowie die Verwechslung mit dem Philosophen) gängigen Bestimmungen entsprechen.¹² In der Tat bezeichnet sie der Fremde aus Elea einmal als „Spuren“ (ἵχνη, 226b1) des sophistischen Wesens. In der *Politeia* gebraucht Sokrates diesen Ausdruck auf ganz ähnliche Weise: Hier bezeichnet er die herkömmlichen Bestimmungen der σωφροσύνη (Besonnenheit) – z. B. κόσμος (Ordnung) und ἐγκράτεια (Selbstbeherrschung) – als „Spuren“ (R. 430e9) ihrer wahren, philosophischen Bedeutung, nämlich Harmonie (σύμφωνια, ἁρμονία). Darüber hinaus werden die Ergebnisse der ersten sechs Dihairesen einige Male als Erscheinungen (φαντάσματα) des Sophisten charakterisiert.¹³ Wie diese Begrifflichkeit des ‚Erscheinens‘ genauer zu verstehen ist, offenbart die folgende Passage, in der zugleich die Jagdmetaphorik prominent hervortritt:

Fremder: Also los, jetzt ist es unsere Aufgabe, das Wild nicht mehr entkommen zu lassen [τὸν θῆρα μηκέτ’ ἀνεῖναι]! Denn wir haben es ganz erfolgreich umzingelt [αὐτὸν περιειλήφαμεν] mit dem, was unter den Werkzeugen für Reden bei solchen Bedingungen als ein Netz dienen kann [ἐν ἀμφιβληστροικῶ τινι], sodass er dem wenigstens nicht mehr entfliehen wird [ἐκφεύζεται].

Theaitetos: Welchem Netz?

Fremder: Dass er unmöglich *nicht* einer vom Geschlecht der Zauberkünstler [θαυματοποιῶν] ist.

Theaitetos: Auch mir scheint dies so zu sein bei ihm.

12 Siehe z. B. Crivelli 2012, 22 oder Notomi 1999, 78, 277–278; anders Brown 2010, 159.

13 Siehe φάντασμα in *Sph.* 223c2, vgl. 224d2, 231c1 sowie 265a8. Zur besonderen Verbindung von φαντάσματα und Falschheit vgl. Strobel 2021, insb. 266–268.

Fremder: Es scheint daher angebracht, aufs Schnellste die Kunst der Bilderproduktion¹⁴ zu teilen, und wenn uns der Sophist gleich erwartet [ὑπομείνη], nachdem wir in sie hineingestiegen sind [καταβάντας εἰς αὐτήν], ihn nach den Vorschriften des königlichen Gesetzes zu fangen, und diesem dann die Beute [τὴν ἄγρην] vorzuzeigen und zu übergeben;¹⁵ wenn er aber wieder irgendwo in Teile der mimetischen Kunst eintaucht [δύηται], ihm dann nachsetzend [συνακολουθεῖν] immer wieder den Teil, der ihn aufgenommen hat [τὴν ὑποδεχομένην αὐτὸν μοῖραν], abzuteilen, bis er gefangen ist [ληφθῇ]. In jedem Fall soll weder dieser noch auch irgendein anderes Geschlecht je damit prahlen, der Methode derer entkommen zu sein [ἐκφυγόν], die so auf jedes einzeln und alles insgesamt Jagd machen [μετιέναι] können. (*Sph.* 235a10–c6)

Diese Stelle ist kurz nach der richtungweisenden Entdeckung der mimetischen Kunst als der Gattung verortet, in die der Sophist einzuordnen ist. Das in der Passage erwähnte Netz entspricht also dieser „schillerndsten“ (ποικιλώτατον, 234b4) – d.h. großen, viele Einzelkünste unter sich vereinigenden – Gattung der Mimesis, welcher der Sophist nun zweifelsfrei angehört und der er deshalb nicht mehr entkommen kann. Im weiteren Verlauf der Jagd steigen Sokrates und Theaitetos selbst in den vom Netz umspannten Bereich ein (καταβάντας) – d.h. sie führen eine Dihairesis durch – und fangen den Sophisten, indem sie eine der Gattung der Bilderproduktion untergeordnete Art identifizieren, wo er sie erwartet (ὑπομείνη). Doch der Sophist erweist sich auf dieser Jagd selbst als höchst beweglich: Sein Verweilen in einer der Arten – und das ist entscheidend – ist so zu verstehen, dass er selbst in diese Bestimmung „eintaucht“ (δύηται), sodass seine Verfolger gezwungen sind, den Schlupfwinkel, der ihn aufgenommen hat (τὴν ὑποδεχομένην αὐτὸν μοῖραν), immer weiter zu teilen – d.h. ein immer kleineres Gebiet abzustecken –, bis er schließlich gefangen ist.

Die Metaphorik des Eintauchens ist deshalb so bedeutsam, weil sie die Erscheinungsweisen des Sophisten als etwas entlarvt, was nicht der Unfähigkeit der Jäger zuzuschreiben ist, sondern dem Handeln des Gejagten: Er wird vorgestellt als jemand, der während des Gesprächs *tatsächlich* seine

14 Der Begriff εἰδωλοποιική tritt hier zum ersten Mal auf und ist mit μιμητική (im weiteren Sinne) synonym, vgl. Crivelli 2012, 24 Anm. 42 mit weiteren Beispielen sowie Strobel 2021, 251. Siehe zu dieser Passage auch Palumbo 2021, 196, die sie mit Blick auf Platons eigene Kunst der Bilderproduktion diskutiert.

15 Dies ist eine Anspielung auf eine von Dareios befohlene Kriegstaktik der Perser („Kesseltreiben“), beschrieben bei Hdt. 6. 31 und von Platon erwähnt im *Menex.* 240a4–c2 sowie in *Lg.* 698c7–d5.

Gestalt wandelt und in die jeweilige Bestimmung eintritt oder -taucht – im Unterschied zum Philosophen. Wenn Theaitetos und der Eleatische Fremde ihm also in diese Bestimmungen hinein folgen, dann ist dies kein Fehler der Methode, sondern vielmehr eine Vorführung des Wesens des Sophisten (These 3). Erst als beide einen Schritt zurücktreten, um die *eine* Kunst zu finden, auf die die verschiedenen ‚Kenntnisse‘ des Sophisten hinauslaufen (232a5), gelingt es ihnen, den Übergang zu seiner Bestimmung als trügerischem Nachahmer und Gestaltwandler einzuleiten. Justin Vlasits¹⁶ hat dieses Verhältnis zwischen der Schlussdefinition und den sechs vorausgehenden treffend als das zwischen einer *essential* und mehreren *accidental definitions* beschrieben. Es bleibt zu präzisieren, dass die ersten sechs die letzte Bestimmung exemplifizieren, sie performativ vorführen – oder vielmehr: Der Sophist selbst tut es. Dies ist möglich, weil die *essential definition* selbst ποικίλος ist: Was essentiell ποικίλος ist, hat mehrere *accidental definitions*. Und das bedeutet vielleicht auch, dass im *Sophistes* keine festen Merkmale platonischer Dialektik beschrieben werden, sondern sie an einem Sonderfall erprobt wird, der die Philosophie selbst herausfordert: Das ‚Wesen‘ des Sophisten ist ebenso inhaltsleer wie der Gestaltwandler wesenhaft gestaltlos ist.¹⁷

5 Die Kunst des Fremden

Daran schließt sich eine weitere Frage an, mit deren Beantwortung ich zum Schluss komme: Können wir aus dieser performativen Funktion der ersten sechs Dihairesen schließen, dass der Fremde aus Elea den Zielpunkt der Untersuchung von Anfang an kennt? Wenn dies zutrifft, wäre sein Vorgehen als eine auf Kenntnis basierende (μετ’ ἐπιστήμης) und daher „wissenschaftliche Nachahmung“ (ιστορικὴν τινα μίμησιν, 267e2) des Weisen zu bezeichnen, da er Theaitetos nicht gleich zur Gattung der Mimesis führt, sondern zunächst mehrere Wege beschreitet, von denen er weiß, dass sie nicht zum Ziel führen. Diese Form der Nachahmung gehört zur Produktion von Scheinbildern durch den eigenen Körper und wird im Laufe der siebten Dihairese von der nur auf Meinung basierenden Nachahmung des Sophisten, die anschließend noch durch die Verstellung präzisiert wird, abgetrennt. Der Ausdruck ιστορικὴ μίμησις ist bei Platon singular.

16 Siehe Vlasits 2023, insb. 383–385.

17 Auch seine ‚Kunst‘ hat folglich einen fraglichen Status, dies bemerken Ambuel 2007, 63–64 und Brown 2010, 153, 168 zu Recht.

Mir scheint, es gibt gleich mehrere Gründe für die Annahme, dass der Fremde aus Elea wirklich so verfährt: Zunächst sieht er bereits zu Beginn des Gesprächs dessen Länge voraus (217d8–e5, 218d2–6). Darüber hinaus wäre gerade dieses kundig täuschende Vorgehen ein Beispiel der positiv konnotierten Fähigkeit, die Sokrates im *Hippias Minor* dem klugen und vielgewandten Odysseus zuschreibt, mit dem der Philosoph und der Fremde zu Beginn des *Sophistes* assoziiert werden. Drittens können wir uns darauf zurückbesinnen, wie es Menelaos gelingt, Proteus zu fangen: indem er sich als eine Robbe verkleidet, also selbst zur Taktik einer rein äußerlichen Gestaltwandlung greift, ganz wie Odysseus' Verkleidung als Bettler. In einem Wort: Im Fall des Proteus wie auch in dem des Sophisten muss der Jäger ein bisschen sein wie seine Beute, um sie fangen zu können.

Platone γενναῖος σοφιστής: per un'interpretazione metaletteraria della sezione sulla "nobile sofistica" (*Sph.* 226b-231c)

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This paper argues that the section on the "Noble Sophist" (*Sph.* 226b-231c) is not to be seen as a portrait of Socrates but rather as a description of the effects of the *Sokratikos logos* on the external addressee, and thus that the profile of the "Noble Sophist" corresponds to that of Plato, the author of the *Sokratikoi logoi*.
elenchos, Socrates, *Sokratikos logos*, protreptic

Sosterremo l'ipotesi secondo la quale nella sezione sulla "nobile sofistica" non è da scorgere un ritratto del Socrate elenctico nel suo agire con gli interlocutori, come di frequente è stato sostenuto, bensì una descrizione degli auspicati effetti che il *Sokratikos logos* ha sul lettore dei dialoghi: piuttosto che con Socrate il profilo del "nobile sofista" coincide quindi con il profilo di Platone autore di *Sokratikoi logoi* rivelando la funzione prevalentemente protrettica della scrittura dialogica.

La sezione sulla γενναῖα σοφιστική ha suscitato da sempre la perplessità degli esegeti, come mostra la frase con cui Cornford esprime il suo dubbio in merito: "the whole argument has admittedly 'come in by a side wind'".¹ Anche se l'assenza di punti di contatto sia con la quinta sia con la settima divisione potrebbe essere contestata, il dubbio di Cornford riceve conferma dallo stesso Platone che attribuisce allo Straniero di Elea una chiara espressione di disappunto per i risultati della διαίρεσις (231a). L'esito della sesta definizione è quindi inatteso perché il profilo positivo che emerge per il καθαρτής non si concilia con il carattere negativo che lo Straniero si attende per il σοφιστής. Una perplessità dalla quale di norma la critica sfugge attribuendo alla sezione lo scopo di offrire un ritratto di Socrate, nel dialogo che non a caso si apre con il passaggio di consegne tra Socrate e lo Straniero di Elea, quale ponte tra il metodo dell'*elenchos* e la μέθοδος che ruota attorno agli strumenti della συναγωγή e della διαίρεσις, sino alla μεγίστη ἐπιστήμη che lo Straniero attribuisce al φιλόσοφος nella digressione sul non essere (253c). Nell'ipotesi evolutiva, Platone offrirebbe uno sguardo

1 Cornford 1935, 181.

a ritroso sulla stagione conclusa del suo socratismo, ora abbandonato perché non offre più gli strumenti utili a sciogliere problemi ontologici quali pone, ad esempio, la nozione del non essere.² Uno sguardo certo benevolo, che si conclude con la lode sul carattere γενναῖος dell'*elenchos*, ma che presto viene distolto da Socrate per rivolgersi al nuovo metodo della digressione sul μή ὄν che permetterà di concludere la settima e definitiva διαίρεσις catturando finalmente il σοφιστής. E non mancano i punti di contatto fra il ritratto di Socrate che offrono i dialoghi aporetici e numerosi tratti caratteristici del nobile sofista, in particolare nella descrizione del processo elentico (230b4-5): coloro che lo praticano interrogano sugli argomenti in relazione ai quali qualcuno ritiene di dire qualcosa senza in realtà dire niente di valido, un quadro armonico con il racconto della ζήτησις alla quale Socrate si dedica dopo l'episodio dell'oracolo (*Ap.* 21b-22e). La nobile sofistica quale rappresentazione dell'*elenchos* socratico permette di sanare l'equivoco nel quale si può incorrere data l'apparente somiglianza tra la figura di Socrate e i sofisti, l'equivoco nel quale sarebbe caduto Aristofane nelle *Nuvole*.

A turbare tale quadro di particolare chiarezza concorrono però numerosi elementi della sesta definizione che invece sfuggono a questo schema, elementi che sembrano irriducibili al profilo di Socrate che emerge dai dialoghi. Non a caso, quando lo Straniero di Elea descrive da una parte l'intenzione che muove chi conduce l'*elenchos*, ossia educare (229a), dall'altra gli effetti che l'*elenchos* produce su chi lo subisce, ossia l'ira verso se stessi e la mansuetudine verso gli altri (230b-c), emergono profonde differenze sia con il Socrate che, ancora nell'*Apologia*, nega di essere un διδάσκαλος (19d-e), sia con l'effetto che l'*elenchos* di Socrate ha sugli interlocutori: come nota Vlastos, in netto contrasto con il Socrate di Senofonte che più di ogni altro contemporaneo riesce ad ottenere l'ὁμολογία dei suoi interlocutori (*Mem.* IV 6, 15) il Socrate di Platone vince nel dibattito ma non riesce mai a convincere né a trasformare i suoi interlocutori.³

I passi dei dialoghi ai quali la critica si è rivolta per sciogliere questi nodi non appaiono risolutivi. Dorion propone ad esempio il *Lachete* (189b) per l'*elenchos* inteso come *paideia*, e il *Carmide* (167a) per la moderazione quale effetto e causa dell'*elenchos*, ma in entrambi i casi si tratta di modelli ideali che non riflettono ciò che realmente accade tra Socrate e i personaggi:⁴ piuttosto che le reazioni all'*elenchos* che leggiamo nel *corpus* il *Sofista*

2 Centrone 2008.

3 Vlastos 1991, 292 n. 161.

4 Dorion 2012, 254.

descriverebbe invece gli effetti desiderati del metodo di Socrate, e non i suoi effetti reali.⁵ Dorion intende superare così la constatazione di Vlastos citata in precedenza secondo la quale Socrate nei dialoghi di Platone esce sempre vincitore dal processo elenctico perché confuta un interlocutore che però non appare mai persuaso. Ma distinguere la descrizione dell'*elenchos* nel *Sofista* dalla prassi di Socrate nei dialoghi aporetici lascia aperta la medesima domanda alla quale Dorion tenta di rispondere: perché Platone offrirebbe due versioni diverse, una nella prassi di Socrate, l'altra nella teoria dello Straniero, del processo elenctico? In effetti, nei dialoghi non avviene mai il mutamento che lo Straniero descrive quale effetto dell'*elenchos*: i personaggi come Trasimaco e Callicle conservano, se non inaspriscono, la loro ostilità, mentre chi è mansueto, come Eutifrone o Lachete, è tale sin dai momenti iniziali dell'incontro con Socrate, ben prima che il processo confutatorio sia avviato. Ogni plausibile soluzione al problema posto dalla sesta definizione non può ignorare lo iato che sia Vlastos sia Dorion riconoscono tra il *Sofista* e i dialoghi dove Socrate conduce l'*elenchos*. È necessario, quindi, prendere le mosse da un dato che appare incontrovertibile: lo Straniero non sta descrivendo gli effetti dell'*elenchos* che Platone rappresenta nei dialoghi. Chi e cosa descrive quindi lo Straniero?

Prima di tentare una risposta plausibile, è necessario per noi osservare nel dettaglio come la figura del maestro che purifica l'allievo tramite l'*elenchos* assuma tratti inconciliabili con la figura di Socrate in Platone. La sesta definizione giunge presto, una volta individuata la forma di purificazione rivolta all'ἄγνοια nella ψυχή, ad isolare il genere della διδασκαλική τέχνη (229a9-10), al cui interno poi sarà collocata la παιδευτική (229d1-3), al cui interno troverà infine posto l'*elenchos*, la *techne* attribuita al nobile sofista. Non sfugge alla critica come invece in Platone la maschera di Socrate sia mantenuta sempre distinta, in modo esplicito, dalla capacità di insegnare ai suoi interlocutori. Ciò emerge dalle affermazioni che, in modo programmatico per l'autore Platone e retrospettivo per il personaggio Socrate al termine della sua vita, sono formulate nell'*Apologia*. Socrate non ha mai tentato di educare gli ἄνθρωποι e, pur ammirando la conoscenza che permette ai sofisti come Eveno di ricevere il denaro di Callia per la *paideia* dei figli, afferma in modo reciso di non possederla (19d-e). E, in modo del tutto parallelo, Socrate ribadisce anche in relazione all'accusa presente di non essere mai stato maestro di nessuno (33a). Certo, la polemica dell'*Apologia* si riferisce alla concezione tradizionale di *paideia* quale trasmissione del sapere dal maestro all'allievo, quindi una nuova e diversa *paideia* socratica potrebbe

5 Dorion 2011, 204-205.

essere esclusa dal netto rifiuto da parte di Socrate lasciando così uno spazio per la funzione paideutica come descritta dallo Straniero. Ma una prova definitiva dell'estraneità di Socrate rispetto al profilo del nobile sofista è offerta dal ruolo che lo Straniero attribuisce ai μαθήματα. Nella descrizione del τρόπος con cui il καθαρτής elimina l'infondata opinione dei presunti σοφοί (230b4-d4), l'*elenchos* è descritto come un processo di preparazione in vista dell'insegnamento: affinché si possa trarre vantaggio dai μαθήματα impartiti, è necessario prima cancellare le δόξαι che sono d'ostacolo a quegli stessi μαθήματα, eliminando così il falso sapere. Emerge in modo evidente il carattere propedeutico dell'*elenchos* catartico: chi purifica, appare anche in grado di fornire i μαθήματα in un momento successivo. Al contrario, anche nel punto del *corpus* dove la maschera di Socrate giunge più vicino alla figura di maestro, la scena alla quale la critica guarda con maggiore frequenza per individuare una possibile *paideia* socratica, ossia l'immagine della maieutica nel *Teeteto*, Platone rappresenta Socrate in modo inequivocabile come del tutto estraneo ad ogni μάθημα possibile (150d): anche coloro che grazie alla prolungata συνουσία con Socrate, e al favore del dio, progrediscono in modo stupefacente, è chiaro che non apprendono nulla da Socrate, ma scoprono molte e belle cose in autonomia assoluta. Non solo, quindi, come nell'*Apologia*, Socrate nega di essere διδάσκαλος perché rifiuta la *paideia* tradizionale che prevede la trasmissione diretta del sapere dal maestro all'allievo, ma anche la supposta nuova *paideia* descritta con la metafora della maieutica non si concilia con il profilo del καθαρτής tratteggiato dallo Straniero.

E in relazione poi agli effetti dell'*elenchos*, abbiamo già osservato come l'azione di Socrate nei dialoghi susciti reazioni diverse rispetto a come lo Straniero di Elea descrive l'*elenchos* del καθαρτής. Certo, si potrebbe immaginare per Socrate un esito diverso in casi mai rappresentati nei dialoghi: l'effetto negativo potrebbe essere dovuto alla scelta degli interlocutori da parte di Platone, mentre in altri casi potremmo immaginare un esito simile a quello descritto dallo Straniero. Ad escludere questa possibilità però, e a conferma dell'impossibilità di equiparare il Socrate di Platone al καθαρτής, giungono due luoghi, dell'*Apologia* e della *Repubblica*, dove la reazione negativa all'*elenchos* è descritta in termini assoluti. Nella prima sezione dell'*Apologia*, Socrate racconta l'indagine che ha occupato la sua intera vita, l'indagine tramite la quale sottopone ad esame la risposta dell'oracolo (21b-24c): con uno sguardo retrospettivo, prima della morte, Socrate descrive in sintesi, potremmo dire, ogni *elenchos* compiuto nel corso della sua vita. E il tratto costante del bilancio di Socrate è la reazione d'odio: sin dal primo episodio di confutazione, che coinvolge uno dei πολιτικοί, Socrate suscita l'odio sia del suo interlocutore sia della maggior parte dei presenti

(21d). Anche il secondo tentativo di Socrate, con un altro ritenuto più sapiente del primo πολιτικός, lo rende oggetto dell'odio diffuso (21e) e anzi la πλάνη di Socrate assume ora il carattere eroico, tra Odisseo ed Eracle, di una sequenza di πόνοι proprio perché Socrate, nuovo eroe, è costretto a vincere il timore e il dolore che gli deriva dalla percezione di suscitare l'odio di tutti al fine di rispettare il dio che si era espresso tramite l'oracolo (21e-22a); al termine del racconto sugli incontri con i poeti e gli artigiani, Socrate tira le fila sulla sua ἐξέτασις notando come avesse suscitato numerose ἀπέχθειαι, molto pericolose, che sono poi la vera ragione che induce Meleto a muovere l'accusa presente, segnata, anch'essa, dall'odio: Socrate sa bene, οἶδα σχεδόν, di essere oggetto di odio da parte loro. L'effetto prodotto da Socrate è di segno opposto rispetto all'effetto prodotto dal καθαρτής descritto dallo Straniero: chi subisce l'*elenchos* si adira con se stesso ma diviene più mansueto con gli altri. Grazie alla *Repubblica*, alla scena della caverna, possiamo comprendere poi come nel mondo di Socrate la reazione ostile all'*elenchos* diviene un tratto distintivo della condizione umana in sé, ben oltre l'Atene del 399 e l'esperienza dello stesso Socrate. L'allegoria della caverna, introdotta come immagine della φύσις umana in relazione alla παιδεία (514a), prevede che nel momento del ritorno all'interno della caverna, il brusco passaggio dalla luce all'oscurità renda ridicolo il φιλόσοφος che non riesce più a disputare con chi è rimasto incatenato perché la sua vista ha bisogno di adattarsi al buio della caverna (516e-517a). La goffaggine del filosofo induce a ritenere persino dannosa l'ascesa fuori dalla caverna, al punto tale che chi tenta di sciogliere e condurre verso l'alto chi si trova in catene suscita la reazione più violenta possibile: "appena potessero afferrarlo e ucciderlo, non lo ucciderebbero?", chiede Socrate (517a). Sembra del tutto probabile che dietro l'immagine dello "sciogliere e trascinare verso l'alto" gli uomini della caverna sia da scorgere il processo elenctico come descritto dallo Straniero, in particolare per la sua funzione di preparazione alla vera ἐπιστήμη fuori dalla caverna. Appare quindi certo che, almeno nel mondo di Socrate, la reazione dei presunti σοφοί alla confutazione sia polarmente opposta rispetto a ciò che prospetta nel *Sofista* lo Straniero: non solo essi non divengono mansueti ma inaspriscono sino all'estrema violenza la loro reazione.

È quindi necessario, per superare tali contraddizioni, immaginare per l'*elenchos* catartico del *Sofista* un contesto nuovo, diverso dall'Atene di Socrate nella quale, come la vicenda del processo ha mostrato, il fallimento della persuasione sembra inevitabile. Certo, è possibile pensare all'Accademia, lo spazio nuovo che Platone immagina e realizza per superare le difficoltà incontrate da Socrate nel rapporto con la *polis*. E di conseguenza

è possibile identificare nel profilo del *καθαρτής*, quindi del nobile sofista, lo stesso Platone o comunque il modello del *philosophos* nella prima fase del suo approccio con i discepoli. Il fatto però che i destinatari dell'*elenchos*, nella sintesi offerta dallo Straniero, si ritengano già σοφοί depone invece a favore di una situazione analoga a quella di Socrate, in cui sono i cittadini a subire l'*elenchos* e non i giovani discepoli pronti a divenire φιλόσοφοι con il loro ingresso alla scuola di Platone. Certo, il modo in cui Platone si rivolge ad Atene, all'esterno dell'Accademia, la nuova strada che i Socratici come Platone intraprendono dopo la sentenza di morte del 399, è rappresentata dalla produzione dei *Sokratikoi logoi*. L'*elenchos* descritto dallo Straniero prevede un destinatario ideale, disposto ad intraprendere il processo di *paideia* nonostante il complesso di δόξαι che lo inducono a presumersi sapiente, il destinatario ideale che ogni produzione letteraria, come il dialogo, presuppone. Calare l'*elenchos* nella finzione letteraria del dialogo, sostituendo così Socrate personaggio con l'autore Platone e i personaggi interlocutori di Socrate che subiscono l'*elenchos* con i lettori, destinatari del dialogo, permette di superare le difficoltà insormontabili che Socrate, nel racconto di Platone, avrebbe incontrato ad Atene. E segnali in questa direzione sono offerti dal testo: nel momento in cui lo Straniero descrive l'ἀπαλλαγή, la liberazione dalle δόξαι che deriva dall'*elenchos*, aggiunge alla stabilità del beneficio per chi la subisce il piacere che prova chi ascolta (230b-c), invertendo così di segno la reazione ostile che il racconto di Socrate nell'*Apologia* attribuiva anche agli spettatori dei suoi ἔλεγχοι, agli ἀκούοντες (23c-d). Mentre nel racconto dell'*Apologia* è naturale immaginare un gruppo di spettatori in occasione dell'incontro nelle strade di Atene tra Socrate e uno dei falsi σοφοί, per il *καθαρτής* del *Sofista* sorprende la menzione di un "destinatario" esterno per l'*elenchos* paideutico, a meno che non si presupponga qui il lettore del dialogo. Allo stesso modo, in apertura della settima e definitiva διαίρεσις (264d-265a), lo Straniero afferma che il risultato dell'indagine, della quale è di nuovo descritto il metodo, sarà chiaro in primo luogo per lui e Teeteto, ma in seguito anche a coloro che per natura sono affini a tale metodo (265a). Nell'articolazione tra il momento presente della conversazione tra lo Straniero e Teeteto e il tempo futuro degli affini per natura (ἔπειτα) è plausibile scorgere il rapporto tra il tempo dei personaggi nel racconto e il tempo dei destinatari nella lettura. A prescindere dall'identificazione del γένος (dai soli discepoli dell'Accademia⁶ a Socrate⁷), anche in questo snodo decisivo del dialogo Platone sembra estendere quindi

6 Rosen 1983, 311.

7 Rowe 2015, 171 n. 112.

lo sguardo all'esterno della dimensione fittizia del dialogo per coinvolgere il lettore.

E i superlativi con cui sia Teodoro sia lo Straniero descrivono i risultati del processo catartico sembrano anticipare l'enfasi con cui l'Ateniese nel VII libro delle *Leggi* descrive la produzione dialogica quale migliore paradigma possibile per la ποίησις (817b): l'Ateniese, rivolgendosi ai poeti, afferma di essere ποιητής della tragedia καλλίστη ἄμα καὶ ἀρίστη, perché l'intera πολιτεία, e di conseguenza le *Leggi* di Platone, è rappresentazione del κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος βίος, con la medesima enfasi con cui Teeteto descrive la condizione alla quale la purificazione dell'*elenchos* conduce, la ἕξις βελτίστη e σωφρονεστάτη tra tutte, e lo Straniero suggella l'indagine sull'*elenchos* definendola μεγίστη καὶ κυριωτάτη, tra le καθάρσεις, quella che si addice a chi raggiunge la vera εὐδαιμονία (230d-e).

Emerge così l'intenzione protrettica di Platone, che non a caso presenta sin dalle prime battute del dialogo l'indagine dello Straniero come rivolta a definire il profilo del φιλόσοφος, una meta che non sarà raggiunta neanche dopo il *Politico*, come è noto, ma con ogni probabilità il paradigma del φιλόσοφος è realizzato almeno in alcuni dei suoi tratti dalla stessa maschera dello Straniero nel corso della ricerca. Tra questi, sorprende come Platone attribuisca allo Straniero di Elea, nel momento in cui sviluppa ciò che egli stesso definisce ἔλεγχος (242b), la medesima capacità paideutica che attribuisce al καθαρτής della sesta definizione: nella sezione dedicata a confutare i corporalisti lo Straniero muove dal presupposto teorico di rendere migliori costoro, βελτίους αὐτοὺς ποιεῖν (246d-e). Il nesso βελτίους ποιεῖν è un tratto distintivo del buon educatore che troviamo al centro del dibattito sulla *paideia* tra fine quinto e quarto secolo, tra le *Rane* di Aristofane (1008-1012) e l'*Antidosis* di Isocrate (226), ma che Platone, a differenza sia di Eschine sia di Senofonte, non attribuisce mai a Socrate. Non solo: l'*elenchos* che lo Straniero conduce sia con i corporalisti sia con gli amici delle idee ha, come per l'*elenchos* del καθαρτής della sesta definizione, anche uno spettatore esterno che ne beneficia: lo stesso Teeteto, per la cui χάρις, afferma lo Straniero, “tenteremo di confutare il *logos*, nel caso in cui lo confutiamo”. In conclusione, quindi, Platone assegna non a caso allo Straniero di Elea, che riproduce, come noto, alcuni tratti del φιλόσοφος ideale, la nuova forma di *elenchos* che prospetta nella sesta definizione, una forma che con ogni probabilità rivendica per se stesso e che immagina quale risultato auspicabile della lettura dei dialoghi.

Resta da chiedersi perché Platone avrebbe dedicato la sesta definizione a descrivere se stesso e la propria produzione, realizzando così una digressione rispetto all'obiettivo di catturare il sofista. È plausibile che la sezione sulla

nobile sofistica assolva, come altri passi del dialogo, allo scopo di offrire anche un ritratto del φιλόσοφος durante l'indagine sul sofista e sul politico, un ritratto che emerge per contrasto e che forse induce Platone a non completare, come noto, la trilogia con un *Filosofo*, dopo il *Politico*. Un profilo nel quale Platone proietta inevitabilmente se stesso perché condivide con i sofisti, molto più del suo Socrate, la medesima esigenza di attirare gli allievi, un'esigenza alla quale la produzione dialogica sembra assolvere quale suo scopo preminente.

How Socratic Is the “Noble Art of Sophistry”? Tracing the *Gennaia Sophistike* of the Sixth Diaeresis Back to Old Comedy

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Several scholars agree in identifying the “sophistry” outlined in the 6th diaeresis of Plato’s *Sophist* with the Socratic elenchus (see esp. Cornford 1935, 177-179). In fact, refuting someone “when (s)he thinks (s)he is saying something though (s)he is saying nothing” until (s)he feels ashamed for the opinions (s)he previously held (230c-d), is a kind of purification that strongly resembles Socrates’ elenctic activity. According to Plato and other first-generation Socratics, the shame triggered by Socrates plays a pivotal role in transforming the unfounded pretense of knowledge of Socrates’ interlocutors into an admission of ignorance. As Rosen has pointed out, the 6th diaeresis ends with a definition not of the sophist, but of “a hybrid of the sophist and the philosopher” (1983, 131). This is surprising, as one explicit aim Plato pursues very often (in the *Sophist* as well as in many other dialogues) is to distinguish between, in most cases even to counterpose, the sophist and the philosopher. This raises the question of what kind of sophistry Plato has in mind at 226B-231B. In this paper I claim that in the 6th diaeresis Plato points at a definition of the sophist that merges both the professional sophists and Socrates—a definition that can be traced back to Old Comedy. Here, the word *sophistes* encompasses “intellectuals” of various kinds (sophists, philosophers, *phusiologoi*, and even the initiates to mystery cults such as Orphism or the Eleusinian Mysteries) that were lampooned not only in Aristophanes’s *Clouds*, but also in other comedies by playwrights who were active in the decade before 423 BC (such as Eupolis, Ameipsias, and Plato Comicus). In this paper, I show how Plato’s account of sophistry at 226B-231B depends on a variety of comic motifs.

Socrates, Plato, Aristophanes, *sophistes*, *geloion*.

A puzzling feature of the sixth diaeresis of Plato’s *Sophist* is its conclusion. After having defined sophistry as a “purification” which is able to screen out the better from the worse, in a series of five diaereses, the Eleatic Stranger concludes that the sophist has the ability to “refute the empty belief in one’s own wisdom”, an ability which is “nothing other than a noble art of sophistry”.¹

Several scholars agree in identifying such “sophistry” as Socratic elenchus.² Indeed, refuting someone “when (s)he thinks (s)he is saying

1 Pl. *Sph.* 231b. All translations from *Sophist* are adapted from the translation by White 1996.

2 See esp. Cornford 1935, 177-179.

something though (s)he is saying nothing” until (s)he feels ashamed for the opinions (s)he previously held, as Plato says at the end of the passage, can be considered a kind of purification strongly reminiscent of Socrates’ elenctic activity. According to Plato, as well as other first-generation Socratics, it is precisely the shame triggered by Socrates’ elenctic activity which plays a pivotal role in quashing the unfounded pretense of knowledge held by Socrates’ interlocutors and brings about their admission of ignorance.³ As Stanley Rosen aptly pointed out, the sixth diaeresis ends with a definition not of the sophist but of “a hybrid of the sophist and the philosopher”.⁴ This is a surprising statement because in the *Sophist*, as well as in many other dialogues, Plato often pursues the explicit aim of distinguishing the sophist from the philosopher or, in many cases, even counterposing the former with the latter. This observation then raises the question: what kind of sophistry does Plato have in mind in this section of the *Sophist*?

My aim in this paper is to show that, in the sixth diaeresis, Plato hints at a definition of the sophist that is inclusive of both the professional sophists and Socrates, and thus criticizes the Socratic method and elenchus. Such a definition can be traced back to Old Comedy. Here, the word *sophistes* defines “intellectuals” of various kinds: not only the sophists but also the philosophers, *physiologoi*, the astronomers, and even the seers and initiates of mystery cults such as Orphism or the Eleusinian Mysteries. These intellectuals were lampooned not only in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*⁵ but also in other comedies by playwrights who were active in the decade before the rehearsal of *Clouds*. In fact, at least seven comedies rehearsed in the 430s and 420s deal with “education” (*paideia*) and those who teach and learn it, the “sophists” or “thinkers” (*sophistai* or *phrontistai*).⁶

As for the relationship between the sixth diaeresis of Plato’s *Sophist* and Aristophanes, it is stunning to note that Aristophanes’ Socrates seems to be aware of the diaeretic method. In *Clouds*, we see him ordering one of his pupils to “let your thinking become subtle and consider your affairs bit by bit, properly dividing them up and examining them”.⁷

3 See, for instance, the Alcibiades speech of Plato’s *Symposium* (esp. 216a-c and 217e-218a), Socrates’ dialogue with Euthydemus in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* 4.2 (esp. 4.2.39-40), and Aeschines’ *Alcibiades* (esp. SSR VI A 51-54).

4 See esp. Rosen 1983, 131. See also Gooch 1971, 124-133; Hermann 1988, 109-117; Dorion 2000. Trevaskis 1955, 36-49.

5 Ar. Nu. 331-334 and 357-362.

6 See Bromberg 2018, 31-62.

7 Ar. Nu. 739-741.

It seems likely that Plato derives the notion of *diairesis* from Aristophanes, and develops it in a philosophical perspective. This applies especially to the sixth *diairesis* of the *Sophist*, which clearly hints at a comic context. According to the Eleatic Stranger, “the method [of *diairesis*]... tries to understand how all kinds of expertise belong to the same kind or not. And so for that it values them all equally *without thinking that some of them are more ridiculous than others*, as far as their similarity is concerned. And it doesn’t consider a person haughtier because (s)he exemplifies hunting by military expertise rather than by killing vermin”.⁸ The example provided by Plato is clearly comic. In fact, Plato relates the method of *diairesis* to several items typical of comedy: the first is that things should be valued *per se*, without reference to their comic value (their *geloion*); the second is that *diairesis* should not consider whether a person is “haughty” (*semnos*), a quality distinctive of Socrates and other comic *sophistai*;⁹ the third and most important item is that, according to Plato, such haughtiness derives from a very peculiar expertise: that of “killing vermin” (*phtheirstike*). This expertise is precisely what the protagonist of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* – the old and dumb Strepsiades – lacks. For about ninety verses of *Clouds* (634-725), Strepsiades is plagued by bugs (and thus unable to properly follow Socrates’ teachings) because he is unable to get rid of them.¹⁰ Socrates and his pupils, on the contrary, are so used to dealing with insects, fleas in particular, that not only are they able to tame them, they can even craft waxen shoes for them and measure the distance of their jumps.¹¹

It should be noted that in the aforementioned passage from the *Sophist*, techniques for killing vermin (*phtheirstike*) are listed as a subcategory of hunting. This is also coherent with a passage from the *Parmenides*, a dialogue written in the same period as the *Sophist*, where a similar ability is attributed to the young Socrates. Here, the Eleatic philosopher Zeno reproaches a young Socrates for not being able to grasp the content of his book, yet he also remarks that Socrates is very good at “chasing down arguments as young female Spartan hunting hounds do”.¹² It seems clear that the analogy with the Laconian hounds conveys both negative and positive qualities of the young Socrates: on the one hand, he is not yet mature enough for philosophical reasoning; on the other, he knows how to track

8 Pl. *Sph.* 227a-b.

9 See, for example, Ar. *Nu.* 361-363.

10 See esp. *Nu.* 627-634 and 693-699.

11 See *Nu.* 144-152.

12 Pl. *Prm.* 128b-c.

arguments and correct his path when he misses the philosophical truth. Thus, it seems that the hunting metaphor the Eleatic Stranger puts forward in the *Sophist* is related to the image of the hunting Socrates mentioned by the Eleatic philosopher Zeno in the *Parmenides*. The comic context of the passage of the *Sophist* suggests that Plato's Socrates knows how to hunt because – as Aristophanes' *Clouds* also shows – he and his pupils know how to tame and kill vermin.

Several scholars have noted that the infestation of the *phrontisterion* in *Clouds* with bugs and fleas likely points to the poor personal hygiene of Socrates and his pupils, a feature that is clearly hinted at in *Birds*.¹³ The passage from the *Sophist* deals with issues related to personal hygiene in a similarly playful fashion: here the Eleatic Stranger tackles *katharsis*, that is, the purification of bodies: “fulling and all kinds of furbishing take care of the purification of nonliving bodies, but they have lots of specialized and ridiculous-seeming names”.¹⁴ Plato seems to imply that the purification of the body is ridiculous, since the body constitutes man's insignificant exterior. Therefore, *katharsis* should be applied not to the body but to the soul. But what is the link between such purification and the aforementioned example of hunting and killing vermin? Scholars have used these examples to show that all such skills, military expertise as much as killing vermin, belong to the same overall category of expertise, that is, hunting.¹⁵ I think that these examples should be understood in the light of the comic context of the passage. Once again, Aristophanes' *Clouds* proves to be a useful reference. In fact, considering the plot of *Clouds*, we are faced with a paradox. At the beginning of the play, we see that the Socratics do not care about their personal hygiene, and are, therefore, plagued by insects; yet, towards the end of the play, in the famous contest between the Stronger and the Weaker Argument, we see that the latter recommends warm baths, where youths should exercise their eristic abilities.¹⁶ As noted by several scholars, it is indeed difficult to match the filthy Socratics of the first part of *Clouds* with the bathing youths of this section of the play;¹⁷ what is obviously common to both, however, is rhetorical skill. Despite all differences between the two

13 Ar. Av. 1280-1283.

14 Pl. *Sph.* 227a.

15 In *Sph.*, Plato employs 78 terms designating a variety of human activities. For a complete survey of them, see Shukhoshvili 2009, 262-267, esp. 266-267. It is difficult to think that Plato is genuinely interested in these activities; such detailed account of them should be taken as highly ironical, and pointing at their devaluation.

16 Ar. *Nu.* 1052-1054.

17 See, e.g., Dover 1968, lxii.

lifestyles, the Socratics and the followers of the Weaker Argument are both *sophistai*, that is, “intellectuals” who master the art of speech and propound a new idea of *paideia*.

It seems that the sixth definition of the *Sophist* encompasses both kinds of *sophistai* displayed in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*. In fact, not only does the Eleatic Stranger deal with the technique of killing vermin (*phtheirstike*), but he also refers to the technique of bathing (*balaneutike*). The former reminds us of the insects that infest the *phrontisterion*, whereas the latter recalls the description of “warm baths” delivered by the Weaker Argument. Plato’s argument is clear. A proper *katharsis* must purify the soul, not the body. Therefore, all kinds of purification that aim to cleanse the body – such as those implied in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* – can only be conceived as insufficient, and, therefore, ridiculous.

The same comic context can be surmised for 228c-d. Here, the Eleatic Stranger deals with the notions of *symmetria* and *ametria*, and relates both to the problem of knowledge. Knowledge occurs in the soul. And it occurs in a very specific way: it is either present or absent. As the Eleatic stranger notes, the process leading to the acquisition of knowledge is similar to something that tries to strike a target: in the case that the target is hit, knowledge is acquired; but if it is missed, then no knowledge is gained. This entails that the soul *always strives for the truth*: it misses the truth not because it does not want to hit it, but because “it swerves aside from understanding and so is beside itself”. This implies that a lack of knowledge is simply the result of unwanted error. It never happens willingly, since *everyone always pursues knowledge*.

This intellectualistic pattern is common in Plato. Much earlier instances than those in the *Sophist* can be found, namely in *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, where similar claims are made.¹⁸ Scholars commonly agree in identifying intellectualism as a Socratic motif.¹⁹ This also applies to the sixth diaeresis of the *Sophist*. This passage has, however, a peculiar feature, one which is absent from the other passages of the Platonic corpus dealing with intellectualism. In the *Sophist*, symmetry corresponds to knowledge, whereas the lack of symmetry corresponds to the lack of knowledge; although this is rather strange, as the knowledge Plato has in mind here is knowledge of the immaterial soul, whereas symmetry and the lack of it are physical features that can only apply to bodily things. It is difficult to think that an ignorant

18 See *Prt.* 352b1-c7 and *Grg.* 509e5-7.

19 See e.g., Weiss 2018, 277-317.

soul is “out of proportion”, as the Eleatic Stranger claims at the end of the passage.

A way out of this difficulty is suggested by the same comic context we looked at previously. In the abovementioned verses of *Clouds* (144-152), we see that Aristophanes’ joke about the insects infesting the *phrontisterion* has a meaning that goes beyond a simple reference to the Socratics’ lack of hygiene. Socrates’ pupils are busy at performing a complicated task, that of measuring the distance of flea jumps. It is important to note that the verbs used by Aristophanes, *diametrein* and *anametrein*, hint at a kind of measurement that implies a *unit of measurement*. This explains why Socrates’ pupils craft a measuring device, namely waxen shoes, by dipping the feet of the fleas into melted wax. It is only thanks to these shoes that the measurement will eventually be carried out using flea feet as the unit of measure.

It seems obvious that Aristophanes is joking here about the Pythagorean notion of symmetry, which entails the idea of harmony derived from a specific number that serves as a unit of measure. Aristophanes is blatantly mocking this idea of symmetry, and, more importantly, he is indirectly attributing it to Socrates. Furthermore, it should be noted that the measurement of flea jumps is the first activity that Aristophanes reports about the Socratics. This fact, in itself, appears to suggest – at least in Aristophanes’ eyes – that techniques of measurement relying on a unity of measure were indeed characteristic of Socrates’ teachings.

A passage from Vitruvius’ *De Architectura* helps us get a broader picture: Vitruvius tells us that the Greeks, in order to achieve symmetry (*symmetrias... quaerentes*), “measured a man’s footprint and compared it with his height. When they discovered a man’s foot to be one-sixth of his height, they then applied this same ratio to the column, and whatever diameter they selected for the base of the column shaft, they carried its shaft, including the capital, to a height six times that amount. Thus, the Doric column came to exhibit the proportion, soundness, and attractiveness of the male body”. Then “they applied the same ratio based on footprints (*speciem isdem vestigiis*) to a woman’s slenderness, and began making the diameter of the columns measure one eighth their height, so that their appearance would be more lofty”.²⁰

Here, it seems clear that Vitruvius is dwelling on a notion of symmetry that reminds of Aristophanes’ derisive description of the measurement of flea jumps. *Symmetria* has to do with bodies and parts of them, both male and female. Given the comic context of Plato’s sixth definition, it is possible that

20 Vitr. 4.1.6-7. Trans. Rowland, adapted.

his reference to *symmetria* and *ametria* points towards the same idea. *Symmetria* and *ametria* are features of corporeal things. Their connection with the soul is impossible – and, therefore, ridiculous – as the soul cannot be measured. Aristophanes had already shown in *Clouds* that measurement is a typical feature of Socratic teaching. Plato very likely draws on this motif and merges it with the motif of the involuntariness of ignorance. The outcome is an ironical – and very likely a critical – account of intellectualism: as knowledge is in the soul, symmetry cannot be a valid criterion for deciding about its correctness.

Similarly, the absence of symmetry cannot be taken as a benchmark for ignorance. Hence the need to provide other definitions of ignorance: in the subsequent lines of the passage, the Eleatic Stranger points out that there are two kinds of deficiency in the soul: one is the lack of virtue that leads to cowardice, licentiousness and injustice, the other is the absolute lack of knowledge in all sorts of things (*polle kai pantodape agnoia*). Eventually, the Eleatic Stranger comes to investigate whether a diaeresis of *agnoia* itself is possible.²¹ It turns out that there is a sub-form of *agnoia* which is particularly vicious, as it is the cause of all the mistakes one makes whilst thinking. This sub-form is *amathia*, that is, the ignorance that goes with an unfounded pretense of knowledge. In *Laws*, Plato clarifies this idea.²² Here, we see that *amathia* has a specific drawback, namely it lets us “think we know everything when we are almost totally ignorant”. This error arises from the fact that due to an excessive love of themselves (*to sphodra philein hauton*) the *amatheis* always believe themselves to be wise – even when they are completely ignorant. For this very reason, they are unable to learn anything: therefore, they will discard every knowledge that is not their own. This leads the Eleatic Stranger to conclude that the *amatheis* should not be educated through *paideia*, but through elenchus: not by imparting knowledge to them, but by refuting their pretense of being wise.

The description of the *amatheis* provided here, and the necessity to deal with them by using elenchus, obviously brings Socrates to mind: in fact, we know from *Apology* that Socrates’ activity specifically consisted in dealing with fellow citizens who were famous for their wisdom, while he himself was conscious of his absolute lack of knowledge.²³ Socrates approaches

21 Pl. *Sph.* 229c-d.

22 Pl. *Lg.* 5.731e-732b. On the distinction between *agnoia* and *amathia*, see Cusinato 2023, 256–263.

23 See Pl. *Ap.* 20d-e and 21b-22a.

those who “appear wise” *but are not wise*.²⁴ It is important to note that the expression *dokein einai sophos* occurs thrice within just a few lines,²⁵ thereby highlighting the pretense of knowledge of Socrates’ interlocutors. Socrates’ elenchus exposes this pretense by showing them that *they think they are wise but are not*. The result is that most of Socrates’ interlocutors come to dislike or even to hate Socrates.

It is important to note the emotional setting of Socrates’ elenctic activity: by refuting the pretense of knowledge in his dialogue partners, Socrates makes them feel ashamed and angry at themselves. This can also be observed in *Sophist*, where Socrates’ interlocutors “lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves” and thus undergo epistemic transformation. Elenchus turns out to be a sort of *katharsis* since it uses emotions to “remove the opinions that interfere with learning”. Thus, elenchus leads to a purified soul. Its eventual result is that the interlocutors of Socrates believe “that they know only those things that they do know, and nothing more”.²⁶

Conclusion.

The sixth diaeresis imparts a highly accurate account of the Socratic method. The passages we have examined shed light on a variety of typical Socratic topics such as intellectualism, the distinction between *agnoia* and *amathia*, Socrates’ lack of wisdom and his interlocutors’ pretense of knowledge, and the purifying effect of elenchus. Nevertheless, Plato does not mention Socrates in the sixth diaeresis, nor does he use Socrates as a *dramatis persona*. On the contrary, through the words of the Eleatic Stranger he provides an account of sophistry which depends on a variety of comic motifs. We have seen that several of these motifs explicitly or implicitly recall Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, a comedy that lashed out violently at Socrates and his associates. In *Apology*, Plato recalls that this comedy was indirectly responsible for the hatred that led the Athenians to prosecute Socrates in 399. It is telling that in *Sophist* Plato uses motifs drawn from this very comedy: this sole fact suggests that the portrait of Socratic elenchus provided in the passage should not be considered as eulogistic, but, on the contrary, as an ironical and highly refined critique of the flaws of the Socratic method – the most evident of which being its relation to an impossible symmetry of the soul.

24 Pl. *Ap.* 21b.

25 Pl. *Ap.* b9, c6 and 21d8.

26 Pl. *Sph.* 230b-d.

This explains why Plato merges Socrates’ activity with that of the sophists: both are representatives of a *gennaia sophistike*, a “noble sophistry” that Plato heavily criticizes for its inconsistencies.

Platone confuta Parmenide, senza commettere parricidio.

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The purpose of this paper is to show that in the *Sophist*, although there is no parricide, Parmenides is nevertheless refuted, because he does not realise that one cannot speak of non-being, even to deny it, without somehow making it be.
Plato, Parmenides, parricide, being, not-being

Per molto tempo si è sostenuto che nel *Sofista* si consumi il parricidio di Parmenide da parte di Platone¹. Ma non sono mancati tentativi di mostrare che nel *Sofista* l'accordo tra Platone e Parmenide prevale sul dissenso², o addirittura che in questo dialogo non c'è nessuna confutazione di Parmenide da parte di Platone³. In questo intervento vorrei cercare di dimostrare che Parmenide è effettivamente confutato dallo Straniero di Elea, e che tuttavia non per questo si può parlare di un vero e proprio parricidio.

I.

Dopo aver introdotto le due specie di immagini, quella 'icastica' e quella 'fantastica', lo Straniero di Elea confessa di essere incapace di stabilire in quale delle due deve essere inserito il sofista, e ne deduce che il sofista è 'Un uomo sorprendente e difficilissimo da osservare, perché anche ora si è rifugiato molto bene e abilmente in una specie di indagine che non presenta vie d'uscita'. (236d, tr. Centrone). Espressioni come 'apparire', 'sembrare ma non essere', 'dire certe cose ma non vere' presuppongono infatti un grave problema:

Questo discorso (λόγος) ha osato supporre che ciò che è non è sia. Non c'è altro modo, infatti, in cui il falso verrebbe ad essere qualcosa che è. Il grande Parmenide, figliolo, quando noi eravamo ragazzi, testimoniò dal

1 V. una lista di nomi significativi in O'Brien 1995, 43 n. 1.

2 V. per es. Bossi 2013.

3 Questa è la tesi di Denis O'Brien 1995, 2000, 2013c.

principio alla fine in senso contrario (ἀπεμαρτύρατο), dicendo sempre, in prosa e in versi, così:

Mai ciò sarà domato, dice, che cose che non sono, siano
Ma tu nel tuo ricercare, da questa via distogli il pensiero.

Da parte sua (παρ' ἐκείνου), dunque, viene resa questa testimonianza (μαρτυρεῖται), e più di tutti potrebbe mostrarlo (δηλώσειε) il discorso stesso (ὁ λόγος αὐτός), se moderatamente torturato (βασανισθεῖς). (237a2-b2)

Che cosa significa ἀπεμαρτύρατο alla riga a6? Qui Platone utilizza un lessico fortemente connotato in senso metaforico, con riferimento all'ambito e alle procedure giudiziarie; lo si ricava non solo dal verbo ἀπεμαρτύρατο (e da μαρτυρεῖται che segue subito dopo), ma anche dal participio βασανισθεῖς, che indica l'atto del torturare, o quantomeno di esaminare in modo rigoroso. Ma qual è l'oggetto di questa testimonianza?

Grammaticalmente parlando è il pronome τοῦτο, che subito precede il verbo. Ma questo pronome, a sua volta, a che cosa si riferisce? Leggiamo che cosa scrive D. O'Brien: 'The demonstrative τοῦτο (object of the verb) is most simply taken as referred to the *logos* stated in the sentence preceding (237A3-4), and therefore to the *logos* which claims that "what is not is"'. (O'Brien 2000, 59). Stando così le cose, se come vuole il Liddel - Scott, il verbo composto ἀπο + μαρτύρομαι significasse 'maintain stoutly', 'With this translation, and with τοῦτο referring to the *logos* preceding, the words with which the Stranger introduce his quotation will have to mean that Parmenides "maintained stoutly" the thesis that "what is not, is"' (ibid).

Ma, prosegue O'Brien subito dopo, 'From a philosophical point of view, that is obviously not possible'. (ivi, 60). Per risolvere il problema O'Brien propone di intendere il verbo ἀπο + μαρτύρομαι nel senso di 'testimoniare contro', in analogia con il ruolo che la preposizione ἀπό assolve in greco in molti casi (O'Brien 2000, 62)⁴.

O'Brien è consapevole del fatto che il suo suggerimento è problematico, soprattutto perché nel gruppetto di occorrenze del verbo nella letteratura greca superstita il significato da lui prescelto non è mai attestato. Tuttavia egli ritiene che la sua soluzione sia comunque preferibile a tutte le possibili

4 V. anche O'Brien 2005, 115-116 e 2013, 118-120. Questa interpretazione è stata accolta dai due più recenti traduttori italiani, F. Fronterotta 2007, 307 e B. Centrone 2008, 97. Preferisce invece la traduzione tradizionale Bossi 2013, 160.

alternative. Ma a mio parere c'è una possibilità che O'Brien non ha preso in considerazione.

A parere di O'Brien l'unico modo per poter attribuire un significato positivo a ἀπεμαρτύρατο è ipotizzare che l'oggetto di τοῦτο non si riferisca al *logos* che precede, ossia a quello degli oppositori di Parmenide, 'but to Parmenides' denial of the *logos* in the quotation that will follow' (O'Brien 2000, 62). Quello che invece vorrei suggerire è che il verbo ἀπεμαρτύρατο può conservare un significato positivo anche se il suo oggetto è proprio il *logos* di coloro che ammettono che il non essere sia. L'assurdità filosofica rilevata da O'Brien si basa su un presupposto tacito, che in realtà è tutto da dimostrare. Questo presupposto è che la testimonianza di Parmenide riguardo il *logos* che dice che il non essere è debba necessariamente essere comprensiva dell'affermazione o della negazione, da parte di Parmenide, della verità di questa proposizione. E poiché affermazione non può essere, deve essere negazione: dunque ἀπεμαρτύρατο deve avere un significato negativo. Ma non c'è nessuna necessità che una testimonianza sia di questo tipo. Anzi, a ben guardare, ἀπομαρτυρέω non è certo il primo verbo che verrebbe in mente se chi scrive volesse riferirsi ad 'asserzioni' o 'affermazioni'. Sembra molto più logico che Platone lo abbia scelto proprio perché significa 'testimoniare'. E il compito del testimone è anzitutto quello di riferire dei fatti. In questo caso lo Straniero chiama qui in causa Parmenide come testimone del fatto che esiste un *logos* che osa 'supporre che ciò che è non sia'.

Questa valenza 'testimoniale' della citazione parmenidea è presente in modo palmare nel primo verso. Comunque si voglia tradurre il verbo δαμῆ, qui Parmenide sta dicendo che cosa si deve fare di fronte al pensiero, al discorso (oppure anche alla persuasione) secondo cui 'il non essere è'. Ma questo implica che questo pensiero, discorso o persuasione 'esistano'. Stabilire questo punto per Platone non è irrilevante. Il problema che lo Straniero sta discutendo è la difficoltà di comprendere nozioni come il falso o l'apparire. Però naturalmente non è detto che chi ammette l'esistenza di qualcosa di falso o di apparente pensi per questo di dover anche affermare che il non essere è. Dunque la testimonianza di Parmenide circa l'esistenza di questo *logos* diventa rilevante. Il modo continuo e pervasivo in cui Parmenide si occupa di questo problema ('testimoniò dal principio alla fine, dicendo sempre, in prosa e in versi') è addotto dallo Straniero precisamente con l'intenzione di mostrare, chiamando appunto a testimone Parmenide, che i sostenitori del non essere esistono realmente.

Certo, Parmenide cita la tesi di quanti affermano il non essere solo per confutarli. Ma le due cose restano comunque distinte. Che Parmenide abbia criticato il *logos* temerario dei sostenitori del non essere lo Straniero non ha

bisogno dirlo, perché la citazione parla da sola. Quello che dice, invece, è che questa è la posizione *di Parmenide*: ossia che la sua testimonianza si accompagna al suo punto di vista (παρ' ἐκείνου), il quale è, ovviamente negativo. Ora, dunque, non abbiamo più a che fare con la semplice testimonianza di Parmenide, ma anche a una precisa presa di posizione contraria alla tesi che è stata riferita.

2.

Lo Straniero, tuttavia, subito dopo aggiunge che ciò che più di tutto e in massimo grado potrebbe mostrare come stanno le cose (lasciamo per ora imprecisato il verbo δηλώσειε, che del resto è privo di oggetto) sarà l'analisi rigorosa (o tortura) del discorso stesso (ὁ λόγος αὐτός). Non è facile però capire quale sia il *logos* di cui lo Straniero sta parlando. Come è dimostrato da una accanita controversia che si è sviluppata su questo punto tra Denis O'Brien e Noburu Notomi⁵, si tratta di un problema decisivo per determinare il senso di questa parte del dialogo. Se il *logos* in questione è il *logos* di Parmenide (o almeno il *logos* inteso in modo generico, così da includere comunque quello del filosofo eleate, come ritiene Notomi⁶), diventa possibile collegare la 'tortura' di questo discorso (βασανισθεῖς) alla 'tortura' del discorso di Parmenide (βασανίζειν) annunciata dallo Straniero alcune pagine più avanti (241d6), e intendere l'intera argomentazione come la 'confutazione' di Parmenide, che non ammettendo in alcun modo il non essere renderebbe di fatto impossibile il *logos* in quanto tale (così Notomi⁷). Se invece, come vuole O'Brien, ὁ λόγος αὐτός è quello introdotto in 237a2, ossia il discorso che ammette che 'il non essere sia', è chiaro che la 'tortura' di questo discorso non può essere già sin da ora la tortura del discorso di Parmenide, con il risultato che almeno sino a 241d lo Straniero non intende affatto attaccare Parmenide, bensì appoggiare la sua posizione, confutando i suoi oppositori. Per O'Brien, inoltre, lo Straniero non confuta Parmenide nemmeno a partire da 241d. L'intenzione della tortura del discorso di Parmenide attuata dallo Straniero sarebbe infatti quella di confermare la tesi di Parmenide secondo cui il non essere non può essere né pensato né detto, distinguendo però tra un non essere assoluto ('was is not in any way at all'), per cui vale questa regola, e un non essere relativo ('was is not), per cui

5 O'Brien 2000 (che critica Notomi 1999), Notomi 2007, O'Brien 2013b.

6 Notomi 2007, in part. 174-175.

7 Ivi, in part. 169, 184-185

invece non vale. Semplificando all'osso, 'the Stranger finds a meaning for 'what is not', where Parmenides had found none' (O'Brien 2000, 98).

A me pare che la posizione di O'Brien, per quanto quella del suo avversario non sia priva di elementi interessanti, sia meglio compatibile con il testo. La vaghezza che caratterizza tanto ὁ λόγος αὐτός quanto δηλώσειε può essere almeno in parte limitata sia con riferimento a 237a2 (pare strano che ὁ λόγος αὐτός di 237b2 sia qualcosa di diverso da una ripresa di ὁ λόγος οὗτος di 237a2: 'questo discorso...questo stesso discorso...'), sia in base alla 'dimostrazione' che segue. Quello che infatti fa lo Straniero dopo l'annuncio della tortura è attaccare non il discorso di Parmenide, ma quello che ammette il non essere. Il punto di partenza dell'analisi è infatti quel discorso che ammette la possibilità di proferire il 'non essere assoluto' (237b-78). Solo più avanti nel testo lo Straniero mette in causa direttamente Parmenide, laddove dice: 'Meraviglioso ragazzo, non ti rendi conto che, proprio in base a ciò che è stato detto, 'ciò che non è' mette anche chi lo confuta in tale difficoltà, che quando uno tenta di far questo è costretto, su di esso, a contraddirsi?' (238d4-8) Qui l'allusione a Parmenide è evidente. Ma non è un caso che questo punto sia introdotto dallo Straniero come una nuova aporia, maggiore di quella precedente: una aporia che poco dopo renderà necessaria una seconda tortura, che non ha più per oggetto il discorso di chi ammette il non essere, ma quello di chi lo nega (Parmenide).

3.

Ma siamo davvero sicuri che le due fasi del ragionamento siano così nettamente distinguibili, così come gli oggetti a cui si riferiscono? Analizziamo l'immagine della tortura. Lo scopo per cui si sottopone qualcuno a tortura è evidentemente quello di costringerlo con la forza a dire quello che non vorrebbe dire. Questo elemento di costrizione è messo in chiaro laddove lo Straniero parla della tortura del discorso di Parmenide (241d5-7), come è segnalato dal verbo βιάζεσθαι; e la cosa vale anche per la tortura annunciata in 237b. Ora, quello che realmente accade nel ragionamento condotto dallo Straniero da 237b a 241d è che la stessa argomentazione inizialmente prodotta per mettere in difficoltà coloro che osano affermare che il non essere è si rivela, in modo solo apparentemente singolare, abbastanza potente da mettere in difficoltà anche la tesi opposta. Il discorso di chi afferma il non essere, una volta torturato dall'analisi, dimostrerà che questo non è possibile, perché affermare una cosa, sia pure il non essere, non si può fare senza farla in qualche modo essere. Ma questa stessa ragione rende impossibile anche

il discorso di chi nega il non essere, e in particolare quello di Parmenide. Infatti Parmenide, pur con l'intenzione di negarlo, parla comunque del non essere; e così facendo lo fa essere (lo afferma 'essente non essere'), contraddicendo così la sua intenzione.

In altri termini, la confutazione del discorso di chi afferma il non essere non si fonda sul fatto che lo si affermi come esistente, ma sul fatto che *se ne parli*, e in tal modo finisce per travolgere anche quelli, come Parmenide, che *parlano* del non essere per negarlo. Dunque in un certo senso è vero, come vuole Notomi, che il *logos* qui in questione ha un carattere generale, perché quella critica che in teoria dovrebbe riferirsi solo al *logos* di chi *afferma* il non essere, finisce per riferirsi a qualunque *logos* che in qualche modo *ne parli* (compreso quello dello Straniero, che lo vorrebbe *negare*): se è vero che la critica a Parmenide si annuncia in modo esplicito solo a partire da 241d, essa è tuttavia in qualche modo implicita sin dal punto in cui lo Straniero lo chiama in causa citando il fr. 2. Vediamo come.

La testimonianza di Parmenide da un lato afferma che esiste un *logos* secondo cui anche il non essere è, dall'altro nega che questo *logos* sia ammissibile. Ma è sufficiente questa negazione, fondata su una semplice contraddizione logica, a tranciare il dilemma? Quello che Platone vuole segnalare, dicendo che per fare questo la cosa migliore è analizzare il *logos* e attenersi ai risultati che ne conseguono, non è solo distinguere tra punto di vista di Parmenide e il (suo) *logos*; ma soprattutto mostrare che il punto di vista di Parmenide è controproducente, in quanto tira acqua al mulino dei suoi avversari. Spostando l'attenzione dal non essere semplice al non essere assoluto lo Straniero non sta qui mettendo in causa la differenza canonica tra non essere relativo e non essere assoluto (il diverso dall'essere). Quello che vuole dire è che qualunque tipo di non essere faccia la sua comparsa nel pensiero e nel linguaggio non può essere un non essere assoluto, ma deve necessariamente essere in qualche modo qualcosa che è: appunto perché, come ha insegnato lo stesso Parmenide (fr. 3; 8, 34) solo ciò che è può essere pensato e detto⁸. Il punto cruciale è che questo ragionamento si rovescia contro lo stesso Parmenide, dal momento che egli stesso parla del non essere (ed evidentemente si rivolge ad esso con il pensiero). E tuttavia, pur parlando del non essere ed esprimendolo nel linguaggio pretende che questo non essere rimanga non essere assoluto.

8 Questa convergenza è giustamente sottolineata da Bossi (2023, in part. 161-162)

4.

Quanto ora detto ci permette di prendere le distanze anche dall'interpretazione di O'Brien. Secondo questo studioso non è vero che lo Straniero critichi il discorso di Parmenide in quanto contraddittorio, dal momento che è contraddittorio anche il discorso dello Straniero, poiché ogni discorso che pretende di nominare il non essere lo è. (O'Brien 2000, in part. 125-126). Benché questo sia indubbiamente vero, tuttavia lo Straniero non si contraddice, perché è consapevole che il non essere di cui parla, in quanto ne parla, fa parte dell'essere; mentre Parmenide, per quanto sta in lui (si ricordi il $\pi\alpha\rho' \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\upsilon$ di *Sph.* 237b1) si arresta alla negazione, senza trarre le conseguenze implicite nell'atto stesso del negare: conseguenze che risultano evidenti quando il *logos* (che nega) viene messo alla prova. Dunque a mio parere si può dire senz'altro che in questa parte del dialogo lo Straniero di Elea allestisca una confutazione di Parmenide. Ma Parmenide non è confutato, come per lo più si ritiene, perché non avrebbe riconosciuto che il non essere in qualche modo può essere detto. Parmenide è confutato, viceversa, perché non si è attenuto in modo rigoroso ai suoi stessi principi, secondo cui tutto quello che è possibile dire e pensare, compreso il non essere medesimo, per ciò stesso anche è.

Questo spiega perché lo Straniero, nel momento in cui introduce la sua critica a Parmenide, non dichiara che sta per compiere un parricidio, ma piuttosto mette in guardia Teeteto dal credere che egli voglia diventare parricida (241d). Il parricidio sarebbe inevitabile se lo Straniero pretendesse che anche il non essere esiste, può essere pensato e detto; perché affermerebbe la possibilità di quello che Parmenide giudica impossibile. È naturalmente vero che lo Straniero sostiene, in vari punti del dialogo (a partire proprio da 241d), proprio questo, ossia che anche il non essere in qualche modo è. Ma questa formula non può avere il significato, antiparmenideo, di attribuire dignità di essere al nulla. Il non essere che in essa si nomina, infatti, non può essere il nulla; e non è nemmeno (o soltanto) il non essere inteso come diverso: è 'tutto ciò che noi pensiamo come non ente'. La frase significa che anche se lo pensiamo come non ente, il fatto stesso che lo pensiamo, anche a prescindere da qualunque altra caratteristica, ci costringe ad annoverarlo tra gli enti (in quanto è comunque un $\tau\acute{\iota}$ o un $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$), come il *logos* stesso di Parmenide dimostra.

Ecco dunque perché la confutazione di Parmenide convive con il fatto che non vi sia nessun parricidio. Il suo *logos* (non a caso l'oggetto di 241d5-7 è il *logos* di Parmenide, e non Parmenide stesso) rivela come essere quello

che Parmenide insistentemente si sforza di bollare come non essere: poiché secondo questo *logos* il pensiero è sempre e solo pensiero di qualcosa che è; e poiché lo stesso *logos* include il non essere tra gli oggetti pensabili (e dicibili), secondo questo stesso *logos* risulta necessario che ciò che esso nomina come non essere in realtà faccia parte dell'essere. Questo problema non va confuso con la difficoltà giustificare il divenire. A questo proposito non è escluso che l'appartenenza all'essere della *doxa* e dei suoi oggetti possa essere salvata, in Parmenide, in modo sostanzialmente analogo a quanto accade in Platone⁹. Ma il problema per risolvere il quale nel *Sofista* lo Straniero di Elea ritiene necessario confutare Parmenide non riguarda la fisica, bensì la fondazione della dialettica. Qui il *logos* di Parmenide non può essere salvato con nessun mezzo, perché non riconoscendo parte dell'essere ciò che si esprime nella negazione, nega la stessa possibilità di negare; dunque annulla la differenza tra vero e falso, e in generale dissolve interamente la δύναμις τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι (cfr. *R.* 511b3, *Prm.* 135c2): che per Platone è quanto dire la filosofia. Platone pretende di emendare questi difetti non uccidendo il padre Parmenide; ma al contrario attenendosi al suo *logos* in modo ben più coerente (almeno a suo parere) di quanto non sia riuscito a fare egli stesso.

9 V. Bossi 2013, in part. 161-162; e io stesso sostenuto una tesi analoga, con riferimento ai due ultimi versi del proemio, in Trabattoni 1998.

Parmenide padre superficiale e testardo. L'eredità eleatica nel *Sofista*.

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This paper aims to confirm the sometimes questioned thesis that in the *Sophist*, as well as in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, Parmenides is considered a supporter of a doctrine that identifies the all with a single and immobile entity. This highlights both the continuity that according to Plato exists between his own philosophy and Parmenides' doctrine, since both exclude absolute non-being from being, and the profound distance between them: from Plato's point of view, the exclusion of absolute non-being from being does not exclude the reality of non-being as difference, and therefore of multiplicity, relation, movement and false discourse. Having established this, I will focus on some *Sophist* passages where a mocking attitude towards Parmenides emerges, suggesting the need for a radical reinterpretation of the 'paternity' that the Stranger attributes to him: not the proud affirmation of a connection, as commonly supposed, but an ironic concession to a thinker who failed to see the limits of his assumptions and thus to grasp the dialectical multiplicity constituting reality.

being, non-being, one, many, parmenides' paternity

In questo contributo, intendo innanzitutto ri-argomentare la tesi secondo cui nel *Sofista*, come nel *Parmenide* e nel *Teeteto*, Parmenide viene considerato fautore di una dottrina che identifica il tutto con una singola entità assolutamente immobile, al fine di evidenziare sia la profonda distanza che Platone ritiene esserci tra la propria speculazione e la dottrina dell'Eleate, sia la continuità che viene riconosciuta nell'esclusione dall'essere del non essere assoluto. Fatto questo, esaminerò alcuni passaggi del *Sofista*, spesso trascurati dalla critica, nei quali emerge una certa attitudine derisoria nei confronti di Parmenide, la quale invita a rileggere radicalmente il senso e il valore della paternità riconosciutagli dallo Straniero.

Tanto nel *Parmenide*, quanto nel *Teeteto* e nel *Sofista*, a Parmenide viene attribuita una dottrina secondo la quale tutte le cose, τὰ πάντα ο τὸ πᾶν, in realtà sono una sola, ἓν. Nel *Parmenide*, tale tesi equivale a quella zenoniana, secondo cui qualunque forma di molteplicità comporta contraddizioni insanabili¹. Nel *Teeteto*, poi, a coloro che identificano l'essere

1 *Prm.* 127e6-128b6. Sulla possibilità di attribuire questa stessa tesi anche agli argomenti zenoniani citati nel *Fedro* cfr. Ferro 2022, 1-23.

con il movimento, locale, qualitativo e di composizione, si contrappongono Parmenide e tutti coloro, tra cui Melisso, per i quali il tutto è uno e assolutamente immobile, ἀκίνητον ο ἑστός². Nel *Sofista*, infine, Parmenide è tra coloro che hanno determinato l'essere secondo un criterio quantitativo³, ed è l'esponente di spicco della schiera eleatica, Ἑλεατικὸν ἔθνος⁴. Questi pensatori, in contrapposizione a coloro che hanno sostenuto l'esistenza di una molteplicità di enti, e a quelli secondo cui gli enti sono sia molti che uno, ritengono che tutte le cose siano in realtà una sola⁵. Come gran parte della critica ha notato, la ricostruzione platonica della dottrina eleatica fa riferimento soprattutto al pensiero di Melisso⁶. Nel *Sofista*, infatti, la tesi viene espressa due volte dalla formula ἐν μόνον εἶναι⁷, in esplicita ripresa di 30 B 8, 1, DK, dove troviamo ἐν μόνον ἔστιν, e in Melisso, più che negli altri appartenenti alla schiera, la singolarità dell'essere è centrale ed è esplicita l'assenza di parti⁸: non a caso, singolarità e semplicità sono le caratteristiche da cui lo Straniero intende affrancare l'essenza dell'essere confutando la tesi eleatica. In primo luogo, dunque, viene problematizzato il rapporto tra il nome e l'entità nominata: se gli Eleati utilizzano due termini, ὄν ed ἔν, ma ammettono che esiste una cosa soltanto, non sapranno render ragione dell'uso di due nomi per una singola cosa. Più in generale, l'essenza stessa del nome rende contraddittoria la loro tesi. Il nome, infatti, è qualcosa di altro dalla cosa nominata, e dunque, se tutto è uno, avremo o un nome che è nome di niente, o un nome che nomina sé stesso, generando comunque un'assurdità⁹. Successivamente, lo Straniero esamina il predicato di ὅλον e l'accostamento dell'essere a una sfera, effettivamente presenti nel testo di Parmenide¹⁰, per evidenziarne l'incompatibilità con l'assoluta singolarità e semplicità dell'essere come uno. Infatti, se da un lato la sfera può esprimere in modo figurato omogeneità e unicità¹¹, e l'ὅλον essere inteso nel senso

2 *Tht.* 152d7-e9, 180d7-e4, 183e3-4.

3 *Sph.* 242c4-6, 245d12-246a2; Centrone 2008, 139, n. 105.

4 *Sph.* 242d4-7.

5 *Sph.* 242c8-243a5, 244b6-10.

6 Cordero 1991, 115-118; Mansfeld 2016, 86.

7 *Sph.* 244b9-10, 245e2.

8 In Melisso ἐν ricorre nove volte per descrivere ciò che è, anche in forma sostantivata: 30 B 5, B 6, B 7, B 8, B 9 DK. L'assenza di parti, μόρια, viene specificata in 30 B 9 DK. Per riferimenti al dibattito in merito alle dottrine storicamente sostenute da questi pensatori cfr. Ferro 2022, 3, n. 12.

9 *Sph.* 244b6-d13; Bluck 1975, 72-73; Fronterotta 2007, 350, n. 171.

10 28 B 8, 38, 43-45 DK; *Sph.* 244d14-e5.

11 Diversamente dalle altre forme, infatti, la sfera presenta un unico angolo, un'unica faccia, e un'espansione perfettamente omogenea, tutti elementi che permettono di

generale di completezza di qualcosa che è tutto quello che deve essere e niente meno¹², in modo compatibile, sebbene non identico, con l'assoluta semplicità dell'uno in sé, dall'altro entrambi gli aspetti possono ben riferirsi a completezza e unità di un'entità composta di parti, qualcosa che è affetto dall'unità, ma di per sé incompatibile con ciò che è in tutto e per tutto uno. Proprio questo è il senso sfruttato dallo Straniero nella sua confutazione, grazie al quale può meglio evidenziare sia come, se l'essere si identifica con una singola cosa, l'ὅλον non potrà mai essere, perché comporterebbe complessità e duplicità, sia come l'uno in sé non potrà essere, in quanto mancherebbe dell'ὅλον, che lui ritiene caratteristica essenziale di qualunque cosa che pretenda di essere¹³. Dunque, se ciò che è è intrinsecamente uno, qualunque forma di alterità e molteplicità implicherebbe per l'essere di ricadere in ciò che non è in alcun modo, generando insanabili contraddizioni. Per questo motivo, da un punto di vista eleatico è impossibile alcuna commistione tra essere e non essere, come Platone trova sancito nel poema di Parmenide: οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆι εἶναι μὴ ἑόντα· ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ' ἅφ' ὁδοῦ διζήσιος εἶργε νόημα¹⁴. In nessun modo questo sarà mai domato, cioè il fatto che cose che non sono siano. Il significato di δαμάζω, infatti, se in senso generale indica sopraffazione, può declinarsi anche nel senso di assoggettamento¹⁵, o in quello di addomesticamento¹⁶. Metaforicamente, pertanto, la commistione di essere e non essere è qualcosa che è impossibile ricondurre a un ordine definito, e dalla quale bisogna tener lontano il pensiero. Dunque, nonostante vi siano elementi di interesse, ritengo da rifiutare la tesi di Palmer, secondo cui Platone attribuirebbe a Parmenide un monismo "generoso", in cui l'ἑόν, unico, perfettamente omogeneo, eterno e separato, farebbe da collante a un livello ontologico inferiore, dove si trovano entità in divenire che intrinsecamente sono e non sono. La critica platonica, pertanto, si concentrerebbe solo su quelli che oggi sono i primi due versi del frammento 7, presi isolatamente¹⁷. Per sostenere tale lettura,

leggere l'accostamento nei termini di perfetta unità, continuità, invarianza spaziale, compatibilmente con interpretazioni dell'ἑόν parmenideo nei termini di un monismo assoluto: cfr. Guthrie 1965, 43-49.

12 *Tht.* 205a1-6.

13 Cfr. *Sph.* 244d14-245e2, e Centrone 2008, 133-139 per una ricostruzione efficace. Sul ruolo della nozione di ὅλον nella concezione platonica dell'essere cfr. Centrone 2005, 103-114, che la esamina in relazione alla struttura logico-ontologica delle idee.

14 28 B 7, 1-2 DK; *Sph.* 237a8-9, 258d2-3.

15 Hom. *Il.* III, 301, XVIII, 432.

16 Hom. *Il.* XXIII, 655; *Od.* IV, 637.

17 Palmer 1999, 31-95, 146, 207-220.

Palmer fa riferimento alla descrizione della γένεσις contenuta nel V libro della *Repubblica*, dove alcune formulazioni relative alla commistione tra essere e non essere sembrano richiamare il poema di Parmenide. Tuttavia, pur ammettendo tali paralleli, non si può confondere l'eredità di Parmenide, linguistica e concettuale, con l'interpretazione della sua dottrina avanzata da Platone: a suo avviso, Parmenide identifica il tutto con una singola entità assolutamente immobile, e coerentemente fa ricadere qualunque alterità, molteplicità e movimento, in ciò che in nessun modo è, che come tale resta del tutto altro da ciò che è. A conferma di ciò, lo Straniero dice a Teeteto che, per superare l'*impasse* in cui sono finiti discutendo della possibilità di asserire il falso, dovranno interrogare a fondo il discorso del padre Parmenide, e costringerlo ad ammettere che esiste un modo in cui l'essere non è, e viceversa il non essere è¹⁸. Come noto, riconoscendo all'essere la capacità di predicarsi senza contraddizione di una molteplicità, si ammetterà la realtà del non essere come differenza tra cose che sono, τὸ θάτερον, distinguendolo dal non essere assoluto, τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, che in quanto tale resterà privo di qualunque identità ed esistenza¹⁹. Così facendo, se da un lato il discorso di Parmenide manterrà una qualche validità, consentendo allo Straniero di rigettare eventuali accuse di parricidio²⁰, dall'altro lui stesso costaterà come la discussione li abbia portati a disobbedire a Parmenide, andando ben oltre il suo monito²¹. Ma se la dottrina parmenidea è così lontana dalla speculazione platonica, il cui nucleo fondamentale consiste nello sforzo di giustificare l'armonia tra unità e molteplicità, quiete e movimento, e diversi livelli di realtà, qual è il senso e il reale valore della "paternità", che pure lo Straniero riconosce a Parmenide? A ben vedere numerosi elementi invitano a ravvisare profonda ironia in questo attestato di stima.

Innanzitutto, ironico risulta il modo in cui viene presentata la schiera eleatica, che si dice risalire a Senofane e a qualcuno ancora più antico di lui, non meglio specificato²². Infatti, diversamente da quanto spesso sostenuto, non ritengo opportuno pensare che lo Straniero conosca il capostipite dell'Eleatismo, ma sia per un qualche motivo reticente, o riporti convintamente voci sull'antichità della dottrina²³. Più probabilmente, invece, si tratta

18 *Sph.* 241d5-7.

19 *Sph.* 237b7-239c8, 258a7-259b8.

20 A ben vedere, infatti, in *Sph.* 241d1-4 lo Straniero raccomanda di *non* essere accusato di parricidio: così Palmer 1999, 145; Centrone 2008, XXVI-XXVII.

21 *Sph.* 258c7-11.

22 *Sph.* 242d4-7.

23 Per ipotesi relative all'identità di questi presunti predecessori cfr. Cordero 1991, 99-100.

di una struttura narrativa con cui Platone asseconda quello che poteva considerare un errato criterio di valutazione, proprio del senso comune, propenso a istituire un nesso tra il valore della dottrina e la sua antichità: per questo motivo, enfatizza l'antichità dei sostenitori di una certa dottrina o pratica intellettuale, al fine di costruire ironicamente un'aura di mistero e autorevolezza intorno a un sapere che in realtà risulta falso e dannoso. Nel *Protagora*, l'omonimo sofista rivendica l'antichità della propria tecnica, ritenendone esponenti anche autori come Omero ed Esiodo, i quali l'avrebbero mascherata con la poesia per paura delle ostilità che essa poteva suscitare²⁴. Nel *Teeteto*, anche della dottrina che identifica l'essere con il flusso, ed è fautrice di un relativismo gnoseologico assoluto, si dice che abbia origini perse nella notte dei tempi²⁵. Sempre nel *Teeteto*, infine, è evidente l'ironia di Platone verso quelle caratteristiche esteriori che possono essere erroneamente considerate un criterio adeguato per stabilire il valore di una dottrina. In *Th.* 171c10-d7, Socrate ricorda a Teodoro che Protagora è più anziano di loro, ed è pertanto probabile che sia più sapiente, nonostante le critiche che stanno rivolgendo alla sua dottrina. Tuttavia, non v'è dubbio che il timore reverenziale espresso da Socrate sia ironico, poiché egli ritiene certamente falsa la dottrina professata da Protagora: infatti, Socrate ribadisce un suo criterio metodologico fondamentale, in base al quale, nonostante tutto, procederanno senza affidarsi alla presunta autorità di qualcuno, dovuta magari alla maggiore anzianità o alla fama, ma attenendosi alle considerazioni che saranno capaci di sostenere. Anche nel *Sofista*, se da un lato lo Straniero teme che giudicare dottrine di uomini così antichi e famosi, come quelli che si sono occupati dell'essere, possa risultare difficile e oltraggioso, dall'altro ne evidenzierà senza remore i profondi limiti teorici, coerentemente con quanto suggerisce fin dalla loro presentazione l'avverbio εὐκόλως²⁶. Tanto il sostantivo εὐκολία, quanto l'aggettivo εὐκολος, esprimono un significato generale di facilità, agilità e linearità, declinabile sia in ambito pratico²⁷, sia in ambito concettuale, a proposito di un ragionamento privo di complicazioni²⁸. L'avverbio εὐκόλως resta coerente con questa semantica, ma ammette due interpretazioni opposte. In senso positivo può indicare serenità e disponibilità verso qualcosa²⁹; diversamente, tale facilità può connotarsi

24 *Prt.* 316d2-e5.

25 *Th.* 179e3-5.

26 *Sph.* 242c4-243a5.

27 *Lg.* 708b1, 942d4.

28 *R.* 453d4; *Prm.* 131e6.

29 *Phd.* 117c4.

negativamente, e trasformarsi in superficialità ed avventatezza³⁰. Nel *Sofista*, dunque, se da un lato i pensatori in esame hanno esposto le loro tesi in modo poco chiaro, questo non è certo l'unico elemento di superficialità, come lo Straniero ipotizza inizialmente con ironica cautela³¹. Essi, infatti, non hanno verificato l'effettiva solidità delle loro tesi: nel caso di pluralisti e monisti, il criterio quantitativo, su cui esse si fondano, a un esame attento si rivela inevitabilmente foriero di assurdità e contraddizioni³². Il padre Parmenide, pertanto, è un pensatore superficiale; ma c'è di più, perché alla carenza della sua proposta teorica si affiancano un'attitudine speculativa, e un approccio dialogico, decisamente antiplatonici. Il filosofo platonico, pur potendo raggiungere, già in vita, un sapere infallibile³³ e universale³⁴, è conscio dei limiti che il corpo determina nella conoscenza delle idee³⁵, e per questo esercita il dubbio e vive di ricerca continua, mosso dall'esigenza di rinnovare il proprio sapere³⁶: la sua condizione non è quella di σοφός, bensì di φιλόσοφος³⁷. Inoltre, egli sa che la vera conoscenza consiste in uno sforzo interiore di rammemorazione che ciascuno deve compiere da sé³⁸, e pertanto non ritiene di avere lui stesso qualcosa da trasmettere³⁹, ma concepisce il dialogo come una ricerca della verità comune, da perseguire insieme all'interlocutore⁴⁰, alle cui capacità e livello adegua le proprie riflessioni⁴¹. Ben diversa l'attitudine di Parmenide che emerge dal ritratto dello Straniero. Egli, infatti,

30 *Lg.* 752b5-c2.

31 *Sph.* 242c8-9, 243a2-b1.

32 *Sph.* 245d12-246a2.

33 Il filosofo "tocca" le idee (cfr. l'uso di ἄπτω ed ἐφάπτω in *Smp.* 211b7, 212a4-5; *R.* 484b3-5), e completando il recupero della conoscenza delle idee diviene un uomo perfetto, τέλειος (*Phdr.* 249c1-d3). La sua ἐπιστήμη, dunque, è ἀναμάρτητος (*R.* 477e6-478a1).

34 Il filosofo conosce le idee, che costituiscono l'essenza di tutto quanto si realizza nel regno del sensibile, ed è sempre capace di avere una visione generale delle cose (*R.* 534b3-6, 537b8-c8).

35 *Phd.* 64b7-68b7.

36 *Men.* 80c3-d4; *Smp.* 207c9-208b7.

37 *Smp.* 203b1-204c8; *Phdr.* 278d3-6; Centrone 2009, XLIV-LIV.

38 Sull'apprendimento come risveglio della conoscenza dell'intelligibile che si possiede, ma si è obliata con la caduta dell'anima nel corpo, cfr. *Men.* 81c5-86b4; *Phd.* 72e3-76a8; *Phdr.* 249b5-c6. Come si dice in *Men.* 85d1-8 e *Phd.* 73a7-b2, il vero filosofo dialoga non per trasmettere contenuti, ma per stimolare correttamente l'interlocutore a raggiungerli da sé, ἐξ αὐτοῦ.

39 *Ap.* 33a5-6; *Men.* 82e4-6, 85b8-d8; *Smp.* 175d3-e7.

40 *Cra.* 384c1-3; *Sph.* 218b7-8; *Phlb.* 14b5-7.

41 Sulla buona pedagogia, attuabile solo dal vero filosofo, cfr. *Phdr.* 249e4-250b1, e1-251a7, 271b1-272b4, 273d2-274a5, 276a5-7, e4-277c7; Centrone 1998, XIX-XXIX.

riferendosi alla propria gioventù, ricorda come Parmenide non perdesse occasione per dissuadere dal tentativo di istituire una qualsiasi commistione tra essere e non essere. Pertanto, lungi dall'accogliere alcun dubbio, e coinvolgere l'interlocutore in percorso comune di ricerca della verità, adeguando volta per volta il discorso, Parmenide si mostra intento a indottrinarlo, ossessionato da un presupposto teorico fallace, il quale costituisce un mantra da ribadire continuamente, sia in versi, μετὰ μέτρων, che nel parlato quotidiano, πεζῶν⁴². Il focus del *Sofista*, dunque, consiste proprio nello svolgere quella ricerca che Parmenide proibiva⁴³. In base a queste considerazioni, sembra opportuno non prendere seriamente la nozione di paternità, in riferimento alla ricerca filosofica. Come sappiamo, da un punto di vista platonico, elemento fondamentale del percorso conoscitivo è lo sforzo interiore che ciascuno deve produrre da sé, mirando alla verità comune: il giudizio su una qualsiasi tesi dovrà fondarsi sulla sua effettiva tenuta concettuale, e non sulla presunta autorità di colui o coloro che la sostengono⁴⁴. Pertanto, nessuna conoscenza raggiunta può essere realmente figlia di qualcun altro, e non a caso una delle immagini che descrivono Socrate, modello del vero filosofo, è quella della levatrice, volta ad aiutare l'interlocutore gravido a generare da sé conoscenza⁴⁵. Per tutti questi motivi, la paternità di Parmenide difficilmente può esprimere l'orgogliosa rivendicazione di un legame, come la critica ha per lo più sostenuto⁴⁶; piuttosto, tale riconoscimento risulta una bonaria e ironica concessione a un pensatore che, affezionato in modo ottuso a determinati assunti, non ne ha visto i limiti, precludendosi la comprensione della molteplicità dialettica che costituisce la realtà⁴⁷. Il non essere, infatti, non ha rapporto con l'essere, a qualunque livello di realtà, ma solo se inteso nel senso di ciò che non è in alcun modo, come lo Straniero e Teeteto ammettono dopo un esame accurato⁴⁸. Questa reciproca esclusione costituisce il requisito minimo perché una qualunque cosa si dia e se ne possa parlare, ma non preclude la realtà del non essere come diverso, e pertanto l'esisten-

42 *Sph.* 237a3-9.

43 *Sph.* 258c7-259b8.

44 *Phd.* 91b8-c5; *Smp.* 201c6-10; *Tht.* 171c10-d7.

45 *Tht.* 148e7-151d6.

46 Così ritengono anche interpreti secondo i quali Platone dichiara il parricidio: cfr. Fronterotta 2007, 14-15.

47 Non contraddicono questa ricostruzione le parole di Socrate, in *Sph.* 217c1-7, che ricorda i bellissimi discorsi, λόγους παγκάλους, ascoltati da Parmenide in gioventù, in riferimento all'incontro narrato nel *Parmenide*. Tale giudizio, infatti, può ben essere inteso ironicamente: sull'antiplatonicità degli argomenti parmenidei nel *Parmenide* cfr. Graeser 2003; Ferrari 2022, 63-89.

48 *Sph.* 237b7-239c8, 258a7-259b8.

za di differenza, molteplicità, relazione, movimento, e discorso falso. Reso innocuo, dunque, il monito di Parmenide può, e deve, essere accolto, senza essere “ucciso”, e proprio per questo motivo un corretto filosofare deve dirsi eleatico, ed è qualcuno che fin da giovanissimo ha accolto l’insegnamento di Parmenide a slegare la filosofia, e con essa la conoscenza della realtà, dalla prigionia in cui rimarrebbe rinchiusa qualora la tesi di Parmenide restasse inconfutata nella sua rigidità.

The Late-Learners of the School of Names: *Sophist*, 251a8-c6: ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος (the good man) and 白馬 (white horse)

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The focus of this contribution is on the ‘late-learners’ digression. In *Sph.* 251a8-c6, the Eleatic Stranger briefly discusses the view of some ‘young and old late-learners’ who hold that, from a logico-metaphysical point of view, unlike ‘a man is a man’ or ‘a good is good’, the statement ‘a man is good’ is neither a well-formed nor a grammatical sentence. Usually, modern commentators devote little energy to interpreting this passage since they are content to note that it suffices to discriminate *identity* and *predication* to avoid the sophism. The aim of this paper is to show that the position of the ‘late-learners’ is in fact more subtle than it seems, since it is widely open to many readings, and that the chosen reading of the digression has a direct impact on the general interpretation of the rest of the dialogue (communication of kinds, semantic distinction between names and verbs, etc.). To this end, the view of the ‘late-learners’ will be compared with a similar position discussed in a quite different philosophical ecosystem: the White-Horse Paradox forged by Gōngsūn Lóng, a dialectician of the ‘School of Names’. This paradox states that the sentence ‘a white horse is not a horse’ is true. Many readings of the White-Horse Paradox have been offered: some of these readings are the same as those suggested for the ‘late-learners’ view, but others are absent from the scholarly literature, although they provide interesting insights into the interpretation of *Sph.* 251a8-c6. sophism, dialectics, philosophy of language, late-learners, Gōngsūn Lóng

1. The ‘late-learners’ from *Sph.* 251a8-c6

In *Sph.* 251a8-c6, the Eleatic Stranger (ES) digresses on some ‘young and old late-learners’ who hold the puzzling view that, from a logico-metaphysical standpoint, ‘a man is good’ is neither a well-formed nor a grammatical sentence. For reasons of space, I shall not quote the text. I assume that any reader of this volume either is familiar with Plato’s *Sph.* or has a copy of the dialogue in hand or nearby.

The structure of the text is clear enough however, there are two steps:

251a8-b4: *a version of the aporia of the one and the many.*

Our everyday use of language implies the unity of the subject through the multiplicity of its predications or ‘appellations’, that is, the fact that

the same item can have a multiplicity of *names* (ὀνόματα), for instance Confucius can be named ‘human’ and ‘good’.

251b6-c6: *the feast for the ‘young and old late-learners’* (see also 252b8-10). The ‘late-learners’ claim that it is impossible for the one to be many, and for the many to be one. Accordingly, saying ‘a man <is> good (ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος)’ is to assert a wrong statement (from a logico-metaphysical point of view: this is an ungrammatical or a non-well-formed sentence). They believe that ‘the man <is> a man’ and ‘the good <is> good’ are the only well-formed sentences involving the names ‘man’ and ‘good’.

Who are the targeted ‘late-learners’? Scholars have suggested three hypotheses: either they are Antisthenes and his followers, or Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, or the ‘old’ late-learners are Euthydemus and Dionysodorus while the ‘young’ are some Megaric dialecticians (insofar as there is an argument very similar to *Sph.* 251a8-c6 attributed to the Megaric Stilpo in *Plut. Adv. Col.* 22.1119c-d, 23.1120a-b). I wish to remain neutral on such an issue, however it should be remarked that everything I am about to say is particularly appealing for the supporters of the Antisthenes’ hypothesis.

The implicit argument of the ‘late-learners’ is the following according to Crivelli (2012, 104):

If the same thing can be called by many names, then the many will be one and the one many.

Neither is the one many nor are the many one.

Therefore, the same thing cannot be called by many names.

Modern commentators usually devote little energy to interpreting this passage since they are content to note that it suffices to discriminate *identity* and *predication* to avoid the sophism. (Crivelli 2012, 103-109 and Brown 2019, 312-324 are notable exceptions: they discuss at length the view of the ‘late-learners’.) Nevertheless, there are three kinds of interpretations for the paradoxical view of the ‘late-learners’ (the reader can find the bibliography on this topic in Crivelli 2012):

- *Post-Fregean Interpretation*¹: the late-learners do not grasp the intuitive distinction between *predication* and *judgement of identity*.

For them, $A \in B$ iff $A = B$ (for instance a man *is* good iff man *is identical to* good). The rationale for such a view seems to be as follows: *man* and *good* are neither *co-extensional* (for $\{x: x \text{ is a man}\} \not\subseteq \{x: x \text{ is good}\}$) nor synonyms, i.e., *co-intensional* (*being a man* does not mean the same as *being good*); nor do they belong to the same *sort* (since ‘man’ is the *name* of a natural kind, ‘good’ that of an axiological quality, and what names a natural kind is not what names an axiological quality). Hence, someone who says ‘a man is good’ in reference to a subject (Confucius for instance) would make this *one* (subject) be *many*, namely, both a *man* and a *good*.

- *Bradleyan Interpretation*²: they do not grasp the distinction between *denoting* and *describing*, and they allow only one function for words, namely *naming* (they reject their *adjectival* and *verbal* functions).

According to this interpretation, their argument would be the following:

An object can only be referred by exactly *one* proper name.

The words ‘man’ and ‘good’ are different names.

No object can be named both by ‘good’ and ‘man’.

(if it were, *one* object would be *many*)

Unlike ‘a man is good’, both ‘a man is a man’ and ‘good is good’ are mere iterations of the same speech act of *naming* (when I say ‘ x is x ’, I refer to the object named by ‘ x ’ twice), and so are unpuzzling.

- *Essentialist Interpretation*: they do not grasp the distinction between *essential* predication and *nonessential* (or *ordinary*) predi-

1 I label this exegesis ‘Post-Fregean’ because Frege 1892a, 193–194 (followed by Russell 1903, §64; 1919: 172) forcefully distinguishes (unlike Leśniewski for instance) the ‘is’ of identity from the ‘is’ of predication: the first occurs in ‘Clark Kent is Superman’, the second in ‘Clark Kent is a man’.

2 I label this exegesis ‘Bradleyan’ for, in Bradley 1893, 19–24 (second chapter entitled ‘substantive and adjective’), Bradley asks how a quality can be both an adjective (‘the sugar is sweet’) and a name (‘sweetness is a property of the sugar’).

cation, and they allow only predication that fully expresses the essence of the thing.

For them, $A \varepsilon B$ iff B *fully expresses the essence of* A (for instance, a man is good iff goodness *fully expresses the essence of* this man). ‘A man is a man’ is an essential predication, while ‘a man is good’ is an ordinary predication. If ‘a man is good’ were an essential predication, then the object which is *one* would have *many* essences (humanity and goodness), and therefore the *one* would be *many*.

Of course, the preceding descriptions are crude and clumsy. There are many fine-grained subtleties within each of these three kinds of interpretation. For instance, among the Post-Fregean interpreters, Ackrill 1957 has claimed that Plato makes the distinction between identity and predication by discriminating two meanings for the copula ‘is’, whereas Brown 2019 believes that Plato distinguishes two kinds of *sentences*, namely, identity sentences and predications. But a rough and coarse overview is all I need here.

Choosing between these three readings involves selecting the relevant area of inquiry to which the late-learners’ discussion belongs: in the Post-Fregean Interpretation, the issue belongs only to logic; while in the Bradleyan Interpretation the issue belongs both to logic and philosophy of language; and in the Essentialist Interpretation, it belongs to logic and metaphysics. The choice is not trivial because it determines where in the text the ES answers the ‘late-learners’: either the answer would take place in the discussion of the ‘communication of kinds’ (Essentialist Interpretation) or at the very end of the dialogue in which Plato makes the distinction between nouns and verbs (Bradleyan Interpretation) or nowhere (Post-Fregean Interpretation). I will not offer any insight about what is the right reading of Plato’s text. Rather, I will propose a comparison with another puzzle to develop a bit the rationale in favour of the Bradleyan Interpretation (one reason to favour it is that Plato states many times that the target of the ‘late-learners’ is the fact that many *names* (ὀνόματα) are – wrongly from their point of view – attributed to the same thing, see *Sph.* 251a5-6, a8, b4).

2. The White-Horse Paradox: Gōngsūn Lóng and the Mohists

Curiously, a conundrum very close to that of the ‘late-learners’ was current in another philosophical ecosystem. Around 300BC, the dialectician of the ‘School of Names’ Gōngsūn Lóng has proposed a reasoning of that kind

against the non-identical predication (or ‘nomination’): the White-Horse Paradox³.

The White-Horse Paradox, unlike the ‘late-learners’ from *Sph.* 251a8-c6, was hotly debated in Chinese philosophical circles; for instance, it is mentioned in various Classics (*Liezi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Mengzi*), in the *Han Feizi* and in the *Mozi*, etc.

The chapter *Báimǎ Lùn* (白馬論) of the *Gōngsūn lóng zǐ* (公孫龍子)⁴ is a dialectical dialogue between a proponent of the truth and a supporter of the falsity of the following sentence:

白馬非馬 (*báimǎ fēi mǎ*)

“A white horse (白馬, *báimǎ*) is not (非, *fēi*) a horse (馬, *mǎ*)”

In Chinese, since there is no inflection, such a sentence can be read in many ways: ‘white horse is not horse’, ‘a white horse is not a horse’, ‘white horses are not horses’, ‘whitehorsesness is not horsesness’, ‘the kind *white-horse* is not the kind *horse*’, etc. I will ignore the subtleties involved by the fact that a preferred reading might be chosen and that some readings might be dismissed for contextual motives.

The dialogue gives five arguments for the truth of ‘a white horse is not a horse’, and five arguments in favour of its falsity.

The first argument for ‘a white horse is not a horse’ is true is as follows: ‘White’ is the *name* (名, *míng*) of a colour, ‘horse’ that of a shape, but naming a colour is not naming a shape, therefore white horse is not horse (since while ‘white horse’ names a coloured shape, ‘horse’ names only a shape).

The four other arguments are less exciting, they require that the sentence be understood only as ‘white horse is identical to horse’, and consist in showing that ‘white horse’ and ‘horse’ are neither co-extensional nor co-intensional. I shall ignore them.

The same kinds of interpretation have been suggested for the White-Horse Paradox as for the view of the ‘late-learners’, *minus* the Essentialist

3 The example taken by Gōngsūn Lóng reminds us of the example of horsesness favoured in some anti-Platonic anecdotes: the famous words of Antisthenes ‘Plato, I can see the horse, but not horsesness’ in *Simpl. in Cat.* 208.28-3, and a similar anecdote attributed to Stilpo in *DL* 2.119.

4 For an edition of this dialogue, see Suter, Indraccolo & Behr 2020.

Interpretation (because there is no known discussion of essences in Ancient Chinese Philosophy)⁵.

- *Post-Fregean Interpretation*: there is a confusion between *predication* (or *class membership*) and *judgement of identity*.

Gōngsūn Lóng refuses to discriminate the true statement ‘*white horse* is not identical to *horse*’ from the false statement ‘*horse* is not predicated of *white horse*’. In his first argument, he points out that *horse* and *white-horse* do not belong to the same *sort* of things (‘white (白)’ is the *name* of a colour, ‘horse (馬)’ that of a shape, and what names a colour is not what names a shape. ‘White-horse’ is neither the name of a colour, nor of a shape, but the name of a colour-and-shape). In his four other arguments, he indicates that *horse* and *white-horse* are neither *co-extensional* (since $\{x: x \text{ is a white horse}\} \subset \{x: x \text{ is a horse}\}$), nor synonyms, i.e., *co-intensional* (*being a horse* does not mean the same as *being a white horse*). His interlocutor who defends the commonsense view retorts that ‘*horse* is predicated of *white horse*’ is true: although *white horse* is not identical to *horse*, *white horse* is a member of the class *horse*.

- *Bradleyan Interpretation*: Chinese dialecticians do not grasp the distinction between *denoting* and *describing*, and they allow only one function for words, namely *naming* (they reject their *adjectival* function).

Gōngsūn Lóng, as other early Chinese dialecticians, believes that *one* name exactly corresponds to *one* thing⁶, and that the denotation of a name cannot vary depending on the linguistic context. His argument would be as follows:

An object can only be referred by exactly *one* proper name.

The words ‘white horse’ and ‘horse’ are different names.

No object can be named both by ‘white horse’ and ‘horse’.

(if it were, *one* object would be *many*)

‘a white horse is a white horse’ and ‘a horse is a horse’ are mere iterations of the same speech act of *naming* (when I say ‘*x* is *x*’, I pick out the object ‘*x*’ twice), and so they are unpuzzling.

5 For various readings of the White-Horse Paradox, see Hansen 1983, 140-171; Mou 2009, 22-26; Fung 2009, 172, 175-181; Van Norden 2011, 108-111, 113-114; Lucas 2012; Fraser 2020, 300-304 and Garfield & Priest 2021, 23-25.

6 On this point, see Hansen 1983, 72-81, 150-151

So far, the comparison between the White-Horse Paradox and the view held by the ‘late-learners’ is neither particularly instructive, nor particularly stimulating. The interest of Gōngsūn Lóng’s paradox lies in its reception in later Chinese philosophy: the Mohists, who represent the acme of ancient Chinese logical philosophy, seized the paradox to distinguish two types of ‘communication’ of names.

Indeed, the Mohists (*Xún Zǐ*, part. 3) take the White-Horse Paradox as an opportunity to wonder about the way in which the reference of generic compound names is fixed. They make the distinction between two kinds of compound names (see Hansen 1983, 148-155):

- some compound names denote the *intersection* of several classes.

For instance, ‘white horse (白馬, *báimǎ*)’ denotes the class corresponding to the *intersection* of the *horse* and *white* classes, i.e., $\{x: x \text{ is a white horse}\} = \{x: x \text{ is a horse}\} \cap \{x: x \text{ is white}\}$.

- some compound names denote the *union* of several classes.

For instance, ‘ox-and-horse (牛馬, *niúmǎ*)’ denotes the class corresponding to the *union* of the *ox* and *horse* classes, i.e., $\{x: x \text{ is an ox-and-horse}\} = \{x: x \text{ is an ox}\} \cup \{x: x \text{ is a horse}\}$.

In doing so, the Mohists support the view that the scope of the denotation of the name ‘horse’ varies when it appears in a compound expression: the name ‘horse (馬)’ used singly denotes all the members of the class of horses. When joined with the name ‘white (白)’, ‘horse’ denotes a subclass of horses; and when joined with the name ‘ox (牛)’, ‘horse’ denotes the class of horses.

But, such a heterogeneity in the way that compound names refer is a massive threat to a substantial thesis shared by almost all Chinese thinkers at that time, namely the principle: *one name, one thing*. Stated more fully, the thesis is that each thing has exactly *one* correct name, and each correct name has exactly *one* denotation. This would mean that all names select exactly the same denotation in all contexts, whether used singly or compounded into phrases.

The Mohists abandon or moderate the one-name-one-thing dogma, and consequently, the traditional and Confucian idea that the linguistic structure

does always *directly* reflect the structure of things in the world⁷. They allow that the denotation of a name can vary depending on the linguistic context. Unlike them, Gōngsūn Lóng takes a conservative stance and understands the one-name-one-thing dogma at face value: the objects denoted by the compound names are distinct from the objects denoted by either of their constituent names. So, ‘white horse’ is neither white nor horse, but, according to Gōngsūn Lóng’s first argument, a distinct *sort* of thing. As Lucas 2012 shows, the White-Horse Paradox involves a semantic taxonomy of predicates and classes according to the *sorts* to which they belong, *white horse* would be neither *horse* nor *white* because these names would all denotate classes belonging to *sorts* whose domains are disjoint: respectively: <colour + shape>, <shape> and <colour>).

Finally we can see the point of interest for comparison with the ‘late-learners’. The claim ‘one name, one thing’ is also shared by the ‘late-learners’ from *Sph.* 251a8-c6 according to the Bradleyan Interpretation. And so, it is possible to offer a *revised* Bradleyan Interpretation which can be labelled the ‘Gōngsūnian Interpretation’. While the Bradleyan Interpretation sees in the view of the ‘late-learners’ an issue about the distinction between *substantive* and *adjective*, the Gōngsūnian Interpretation is the reading according to which the issue lies rather in the distinction between *compound* name and *simple* name.

- *Gōngsūnian Interpretation*: the puzzle involved in the view of the ‘late-learners’ is reducible to the question: how *compound names* as ‘good-man’ (ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος) or ‘white-horse’ work without the one being many and the many being one?

The Gōngsūnian Interpretation involves a complication that is very interesting once we adopt a Platonistic viewpoint. Indeed, for Gōngsūn Lóng, the problem raised by compound names like ‘white horse’ and ‘good man’ is not only that of determining their proper extensions, but also that of combining different or not different *sorts* of items: ‘white horse’ implies the combination of a colour and a shape, ‘good man’ the combination of a natural kind and an axiological quality. Gōngsūn Lóng argues for the weird thesis that *white*, *horse* and *white horse* are three sorts that do not intersect with each other (in sortal logics, we say that the two sortals X and Y intersect iff X and Y are true of at least one object). As for the Mohists, they grant that

7 On the ‘rectification of names’, see Hansen 1983, 72-81, a view that obviously reminds us of some ideas from the *Cratylus*.

white horse is the sortal intersection of the sorts *white* and *horse* (see Lucas 2005 on Mohist ‘sortal’ logic).

Let us now put the discussion in the *Sophist*’s framework. The ES begins by presenting a digression about the ‘late-learners’ who support a paradoxical view close to Gōngsūn Lóng’s, but the ES immediately changes the subject to the issue of the ‘communication of kinds’ (*Sph.* 251d-259b). The connection between these two steps of the dialogue is better understood if the chosen reading of the ‘late-learners’ is Gōngsūnian rather than Bradleyan or Post-Fregean: since the ‘late-learners’ have some worries about whether the sorts intersect or not (they do not allow that ‘good man’ is a genuine *unity* resulting from the sortal intersection of *man* and *good*), it is appropriate to come straightaway to the topic whether there is some combination of kinds or not. In short, the Gōngsūnian Interpretation offers a way to grasp the connection between *Sph.* 251a8-c6 and what immediately follows.

True, in *Sph.* 251d-268c Plato nowhere examines the reference or denotation of forms resulting from the combination of other kinds, and so there is no ‘Mohistic’ text in the dialogue. In fact, the true answer to the ‘late-learners’ is not the idea that kinds can combine with each other (that would be question-begging), but rather appears in *Sph.* 261d1-262e1 in which Plato distinguishes between *noun* (ὄνομα) and *verb/predicate* (ῥῆμα, see Aristotle, *de Int.* 2-3). In doing so, he dissolves the simplistic semantics of the ‘late-learners’ (whether they are Bradleyan or Gōngsūnian): words can have different functions when they occur in different speech acts. If so, ‘good man’, far from being a compound name, is a syntactic complex construed as a pair <noun, predicate>.

3. Conclusion

Reading *Sph.* 251a8-c6 in the light of the *White Horse Dialogue* provides an exegesis of the *Sph.* sensitive to the fact that the rejection of non-identical predication (or nomination) constitutes a foil to which several types of answers can be provided: Plato and the Mediterranean tradition found in such a seemingly sophistic riddle an opportunity to distinguish identical or reflexive predication from non-identical and non-reflexive predication, while for the Mohists it was the opportunity to wonder about the way in which the reference of compound names is fixed. Furthermore, the Gōngsūnian reading of *Sph.* 251a8-c6 is attractive for better understanding the structure of *Sph.* 251d-268c given that such an interpretation connects the digression

about the late-learners with both the discussion of the communication of kinds and the logical-linguistic enquiry at the end of the dialogue.⁸

8 For another interesting comparison between Plato and Chinese philosophy: Wáng Bì from the ‘School of the Dark (玄學, *xuánxué*)’ offers exactly the same argument than Plato’s *Ti.* 49b-51b, 52d-53b, 57d-58c (in which Plato argues that the *χώρα* is unqualified or formless) for the thesis that the *dào* has no characteristics at all, see Garfield & Priest 2021, 18.

The Enigmatic *Locus Desperatus* at *Sophist* 244d11–12

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Sph. 244d11–12 is a *locus desperatus*. Editors have suspected these lines to be corrupted. Accordingly, they have proposed multiple emendations. In my view, however, the passage does not need emendation but only interpretation and Schleiermacher's construal. I argue that *Sph.* 244d11–12 shows that the one is not identical to a name. It shows this by analyzing what a name is and proving that the terms 'name' and 'one' are not intersubstitutable *salva veritate*. Plato, Sophist, monism, names.

1 Problems of *Sph.* 244d11–12

Sph. 244d11–12 is part of an argument against monism. It is unclear, however, what the argument is and what these two lines say. Cornford refuses to translate them, printing "Str." In a footnote, he points out that the omitted line is hopelessly corrupt.¹ However, the two manuscript variants of 244d11–12 are translatable and, at first blush, not terribly divergent. Moreover, lines 244d11–12 display the literary figure of parallelism and a pun on the previous τὸ ὄνομα ὀνόματος ὄνομα μόνον, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενὸς ὄν at 244d8. Compare BDW and T:

(BDW) καὶ τὸ ἓν γε ἑνὸς ἓν ὄν μόνον καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἓν ὄν.²

'and the one, in particular, being only one of one, it is also one of the name.'³

(T) καὶ τὸ ἓν γε ἑνὸς ὄν μόνον καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἓν ὄν.

1 Cornford 1935, 222 n.1. Duerlinger 2009, 107 nn 51 and 140 translates 'PHIL. And, indeed . . .', commenting 'The Greek of this sentence has no fixed sense. Most scholars seem to believe that it is corrupted. I follow Cornford here, assuming that the sentence is better left untranslated than given a highly speculative interpretation.'

2 B is Cod. Bodl. MS E. D. Clarke 39 (anno 895). D is Cod. Ven. gr. 185 (saec. XII). B and D belong to family β. T is Cod. Ven. app. cl. 4. I (saec. X) and belongs to a family of its own. W is Co. Vind. Suppl. Gr. 7 (saec. X) and belongs to family δ. Simplicius E and F attest ἑνὸς ἓν ὄν μόνον, like β and W. However, Simpl. D attests ἑνὸς ὄν μόνον, like T. All manuscripts of Simplicius attest τοῦ, like β and W. βTW and Simpl. DE attest αὐτὸ, but Simpl. F attests αὐτοῦ. See the (Duke et al. 1995).

3 αὐτὸ picks up on τὸ ἓν. 'μόνον' (only) admits two translations: 'exactly' and 'exclusively.'

‘and the one, at any rate, being only [one] of one, this itself (i.e. the one) is also one of (the) name.’

BDW explicitly express a nominal predicate ἓν, which T elides. This is a minor difference between BDW and T.⁴ However, the other difference is suspicious: τοῦτο ὀνόματος in T—unlike τοῦ ὀνόματος in BDW—breaks the parallelism with ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενὸς ὄν at 244d8–9. Nevertheless, we can read τοῦτο in T as expressing a subject that τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν in BDW assumes and translate both T and BDW-244d11–12 as: ‘the one is simply one of one, and the one is also one of the name.’

The editors have proposed an array of emendations that explain Cornford’s rejection of 244d11–12 as hopelessly corrupt. We can sort these emendations into three groups.⁵ Here is a representative sample from each one:

(AST) καὶ τὸ ἐν γε ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν μόνον καὶ οὐ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν.
‘and the one, in particular, is only one of the one and it is not one of the name.’

(STEINHARDT) καὶ τὸ ὄν γε, ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν ὄνομα, καὶ τούτου ὄντος ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ὄν ὄνομα.
‘and being, in particular, being one name of the one, is itself also a name of this name that is.’

(APELT) καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ὄνομα ὄν καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν ὄν.

4 Given τὸ ὄνομα ὀνόματος ὄνομα μόνον at 244d8, one can understand τὸ ἐν γε ἐνὸς ὄν μόνον as eliding the nominal predicate ἐν.

5 οὐ emendations

καὶ τὸ ἐν γε ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν μόνον καὶ οὐ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν (Astius 1820)
καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν μόνον καὶ οὐ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν (Stallbaum 1840)
καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν μόνον, καὶ τοῦτο, ὀνόματος δ’ οὐ τὸ ἐν ὄν (Badham 1865, xxxiv–xxxv)

ὄν emendations:

καὶ τὸ ὄν γε, ἐνὸς ἐν ὄν ὄνομα, καὶ τούτου ὄντος ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ὄν ὄνομα (Müller and Steinhardt 1852)

καὶ τὸ ὄν γε, ἐνὸς ὄνομα ὄν, καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα ὄν (Fr. W. Wagner 1857, 317–18; W. Wagner 1856)

καὶ τὸ ὄν γε ἐνὸς ὄνομα ὄν καὶ ταῦτα ὀνόματος ὄνομα ὄν (Deuschle 1857)

ὄνομα emendations:

καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ὄνομα ὄν καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν ὄν (Apelt 1897)

καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ἐν ὄνομα ὄν, καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος αὐτὸ τὸ ἐν ὄν (Hermannus 1865)

Other emendations:

καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς [ἐν] ὄν μόνον καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος † αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν (Campbell 1867)

καὶ τὸ ἐν γε, ἐνὸς ὄνομα ὄν μόνον, καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος, οὐ τὸ ἐν ὄν (Zeller 1889, II, 1:648, n.2)

Zeller’s emendation is a hybrid between ὄνομα and οὐ emendations.

‘and the one, in particular, being a name of the one, is also the one of the name.’

These emendations attest to at least three problems:

(Problem 1) (AST) introduces ‘οὐ’ because he takes 244d11–12 to express the opposite of what the argument intends to conclude. This emendation presupposes that either the conclusion or the construal of the argument is unclear.

(P2) (STEINHARDT) introduces τὸ ὅν because he thinks 244d11–12 harks back to τὸ ὅν (see 244b9–10, cf. 244b7, 12; 244c2, 8; 244d1, 3, 6, 8; 244c5, 8 ff.; 244a6). He takes the argument to be about τὸ ὅν and not about τὸ ἔν. He thinks 244d11–12 is the conclusion of a long argument that starts at 244b9, not of a short argument between 244c9 and 244d12. (APELT), in contrast, introduces ὄνομα because he believes the argument to be about a name. All this suggests that it is unclear what the argument is about and where it starts.

(P3) It is unclear whether the differences between BDW and T are consequential and which manuscripts render a better reading. An additional problem is an ambiguity that affects the MSS and all emendations:

(P4) It is unclear whether 244d11–12 mentions or uses the terms ‘one’ or ‘being.’ Compare Fowler’s and White’s translations of (APELT):

(Fowler, APELT) And the one will turn out to be the name of one and also the one of the name.

(White, APELT) And also *the one*, being the name of *the one*, will also be the one of the name.⁶

Fowler takes the first two instances of ‘one’ to be mentions of the term, whereas White—as his italics suggest—takes them to be uses.

6 Fowler 2006, Wiehl and Apelt 1985; Apelt 1897. A footnote in White’s translation in Cooper’s 1997 edition reads: ‘Plato is relying on the thought that if the terms “one” and “name” designate one thing (in the sense that he assumes is relevant), then they are interchangeable, even to the point of generating the strange phrase “the one of the name”’.

2 The context of *Sph.* 244d11–12

To understand the meaning of 244d11–12, we need to clarify the argumentative sequence between 244b9 and 244d12. At 244b9–c10, the Eleatic Visitor ('EV') begins as follows:

(Text1) ἔν πού φατε μόνον εἶναι; ... ὃν καλεῖτέ τι; ... πότερον ὅπερ ἓν, ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτῷ προσχρώμενοι δυοῖν ὀνόμασιν, ἢ πῶς;

I suppose you say that only one [thing] is? ... Do you call something 'being'? ... What? This very one [thing], and thus you apply two names to the same thing, or what?

(T2) τό τε δύο ὀνόματα ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι μηδέν θέμενον πλὴν ἓν καταγέλαστόν που.

It is ridiculous, I suppose, to accept two names and to postulate nothing except one [thing].

Here the EV is reacting to the monist view that 'the all is one (thing)' (244b6–7), 'only one thing is' (244b9–10), and 'the absolute and truly one is indivisible (245a8–9).' In (T1), the monists apply the terms 'one' and 'being' to the one and only thing they claim (there) is. In (T2), the EV detects a contradiction in claiming 'there is nothing except one [thing]' and simultaneously agreeing 'there are two names.' One can dispute what the contradiction is. Either (T2.1) the EV thinks the two names apply to two different things, one of which is one too many for a monist universe or (T2.2) he thinks two names, even if they apply to the same item, are too many things for a monist universe.

Interpretation (T2.2) may seem problematic because linguistic entities and ontological principles belong to different levels of discourse. But this is what the EV has in mind. He takes sentences to be among the things that are (260a5–6) and must, therefore, think that even a name is one thing too many for a monist universe:

(T3) καὶ τὸ παράπαν γε ἀποδέχεσθαι τοῦ λέγοντος ὡς ἔστιν ὄνομα τι, λόγον οὐκ ἂν ἔχον (244c11d1).

It makes no sense at all to agree with someone [i.e. a monist] who claims that a name is.

(T4) τιθεῖς τε τοῦνομα τοῦ πράγματος ἕτερον δύο λέγει πού τι. (244d3–4)

If one holds that the name is different from the thing, I suppose (που) one speaks of two.

(T4) analyzes what a name is. Naming something is essential to being a name. If something is a name, it necessarily names something. A name involves a *nominans* (i.e. a written or phonetic mark that names) and its *nominatum* (i.e. the object of named). *Nominans* and *nominatum* are interdependent. A *nominans* necessarily has a *nominatum* for a mark that does not name anything cannot be a *nominans*. Correspondingly, a *nominatum* necessarily has a *nominans* for an object unpaired to a *nominans* cannot be a *nominatum*.⁷ A name presupposes at least two distinct interdependent items, and these are too many items for monism.

(T1) and (T2) constitute an argument that trades on two names and the monist principle that there is only one thing. In contrast, (T3) focuses on just one name, while (T4) analyses what a name is. (T3) and (T4) do not make an argument, but—as καὶ μὴν in the following line suggests—they appear to present solid assumptions for an argument.

3 The name-one argument

(T5) (T5.1) καὶ μὴν ἂν ταυτόν γε αὐτῷ τιτῇ τοῦνομα, (T5.2) ἢ μηδενὸς ὄνομα ἀναγκασθήσεται λέγειν (244d6–7).

Further, he would then posit that the name is the same as the thing [αὐτῷ picks up τοῦ πράγματος], or he will be compelled to say that it is not a name of anything.

(T5.1') εἰ δέ τινος αὐτὸ φήσει, συμβήσεται τὸ ὄνομα ὀνόματος ὄνομα μόνον, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενὸς ὄν (244d8–9).

But if he says it is of something, it will follow that the name is only a name of a name and is not of any other thing.

(T5) Introduces two options monists have, to make their theory compatible with the existence of a name. These options present a dilemma: Either (T5.1) the name (i.e. *nominans*) names itself and the same item is simultaneously name and *nominatum* or (T5.2) the name has no *nominatum*. The second horn (T5.2) is immediately dismissed because, as (T4) implies, a name without a *nominatum* is a contradiction in terms.

The first horn (T5.1), in contrast, demands an explanation. (T5.1') introduces 'a name¹ that is a name of (i.e., that names) a name²'. But (T5.1) tells

7 At 244d1, 'ὄνομα' stands for *name* in a broad sense that includes the written or phonetic mark and its meaning. But at 244d3, 6, 7, 8, and 11, 'ὄνομα' and 'ὀνόματος' stand for the written or phonetic mark, meaning *nominans*.

us that the name¹ which names is the same as the name² which is named. This is a self-naming name.⁸ Since the job of a name is to distinguish a *nominatum*, a name identical to its *nominatum* can hardly do its job. Nonetheless, a name that is a *nominatum* of itself—unlike a *nominans* without *nominatum*—is not a contradiction in terms. Moreover, self-exemplifying words name themselves, e.g. ‘word’ refers to itself, and ὄρος—in Greek and carved in stone—is the very boundary and thus names itself.

The EV continues:

(T6) καὶ τὸ ἓν γε ἐνὸς ἐν ὃν μόνον (244dl1).

And the one, at any rate, is only one of one.

To obtain (T6), the EV has substituted all instances of ‘name’ in (T5.1)’ for ‘one’. The motivation for this substitution is the monists’ dictum that (T1) ‘the all is one’ and the claim under attack that (T5.1) ‘the one is a name of itself.’ The monists must take ‘one’ and ‘name’ to be coreferential. But if ‘one’ and ‘name’ are coreferential, they should be substitutable *salva veritate* in extensional contexts. Moreover, the sentences ‘the name is a name of itself’ and ‘the one is one of the one’ should say the same thing.

However, ‘the name is a name of itself’ and ‘the one is one of the one’ do not say the same thing, and ‘one’ and ‘name’ cannot, therefore, be coreferential. In ‘name¹ of...,’ we can fill in the empty placeholder with the term ‘name²,’ even if ‘name¹’ and ‘name²’ are identical, coreferential, and name one another. The empty place in ‘name¹ of...’ is a placeholder for a *nominatum*, and that *nominatum* can be the very name that names it. Although a *nominans* and its *nominatum* are usually different items, their identity does not imply a contradiction in terms.

8 It cannot be a *nominans* that names a different *nominans*, for these obviously are two different items as in (T4). τὸ ὄνομα ὀνόματος ὄνομα μόνον has at least three readings. (a) ‘The name is a name of a name,’ meaning: ‘name’ is the name of a name. I doubt this is the correct reading in this context. It commits the monists to the obvious existence of two different things, the *nominans* and the *nominatum*. (b) ‘The name is a name of name.’ This is an instantiation claim, stating that an individual name instantiates the kind name. This reading commits the monists to the obvious existence of two different things: an individual and a kind. Or (c) ‘the name is name of name’ intended as a definitional or essential claim, stating that to be a name is to name a name, i.e. itself. A name that is a name of itself is one single individual analyzable (i.e. divisible) *in abstracto* into a *nominans* and a *nominatum*. Such a name is inconsistent with monism because the one is indivisible (245a8–9). This is probably what the EV intends.

On the other hand, we cannot fill in the empty placeholder in ‘one¹ of...’ with a term coreferential with ‘one¹,’ let alone with ‘one¹’ itself. In Greek and in a context that has to do with counting, we would expect the empty space in ‘one¹ of...’ to be a placeholder for a partitive genitive. This is a placeholder for a whole or plurality of which the referent of ‘one¹’ is a part. Since part and whole are not identical,⁹ it would be nonsensical to fill in the empty place in ‘one¹ of...’ with a term that refers to the very same part that ‘one¹’ refers to. The monists cannot even accept ‘one of...’ to be a meaningful construction. They cannot admit that to be one is to be one among a plurality of items or parts. Indeed, the one of the monists cannot be one of anything. It follows that ‘name’ and ‘one’ cannot be coreferential.

In the case of a self-naming name, we can interchange the term ‘name’ (*nominans*) and whatever (*nominatum*) fills in the empty place in ‘name of...’ *salva veritate* and *salvo sensu*. This does not apply to ‘one of...’ in its ordinary meaning. Here, one is part of whatever fills in the empty place, and a part is not identifiable with its whole. A name and the one must be different. Here is the final blow:

(T7) καὶ [τὸ ἓν] τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὧν (244d11–12).

and [the one] is this one of the name.

Since the monists cannot consistently speak of ‘one of anything,’ they cannot speak of (T7) ‘one of a name.’ This last substitution adds insult to injury. It takes ‘one of...’ and ‘name of...’ to have the same meaning, to accept the same values in their placeholders, and to be equivalent. But ‘one of...’ and ‘name of...’ have different meanings, and the substitutions in (T7) and (T6) are unacceptable. The identity of one and name assumed by (T3) cannot be the case. The monists inconsistently suggested that the one was a name.

4 Lessons to learn

(AST) and (STEINHARDT) failed to appreciate that the argument at 244c11–13 not only focuses on a name but also exploits the notions of name and one (P2). (STEINHARDT) and (APELT) failed to understand that lines 244d11–12 trade on the meanings of the expression ‘one of...’ and ‘name of...’ (P3). More precisely, the argument trades on what one is and what a name is

9 I assume Plato has in mind ‘proper parts’, not an ‘improper part’ such that the whole is indivisible and a part of itself.

(P4). (AST) did not appreciate that the conclusion was explicit (P1, T4, and T5.2).

Unlike us, the EV is ready to mix different levels of discourse—linguistic expressions and ontological principles. He assumes the one and a name to be beings equally. Accordingly, if the one has a name, both the one and its name are beings, and there are two different items. This is incompatible with the monists' claim that there is only one thing. In a monist universe, the one cannot have a name, and the monists cannot consistently talk about the one.

This inconsistency is only part of the problem. The EV suggests (P1) that the natures of one and name are incompatible with monism. There cannot be one on its own, one always characterizes something else. Being one is to be one of something, one among several things. Moreover, a presumably single item, such as a self-referring name, is analyzable and involves a conceptual plurality. A self-referring name, precisely because it is a name, presupposes a naming relation between two relata, a *nominans* and a *nominatum*. Although it appears to be a single item, a self-referring name is a plurality consisting of two relata.

5 Editing *Sph.* 244d11–12

We can finally appreciate that the two transmitted variants of the text not only make sense but also show parallelism and progression through (T5.1'), (T6), and (T7). The claim in (T5.1') is odd, though not a contradiction in terms. The claim in (T6) is unacceptable for a monist. And the claim in (T7) adds insult to injury by building upon the confusion that led to (T6). Schleiermacher brings this progression to the fore by following BDW and reading αὖ τὸ instead of αὐτὸ. This reading renders the subject explicit (but the nominal predicate ἐν implicit) and reads (T7) as a climax.

(T7 SCHLEIERMACHER) καὶ [ἐν] τοῦ ὀνόματος αὖ τὸ ἐν ὄν.¹⁰

And the one is in turn [one] of the name.

This is not an emendation but a different word-division of a text Plato wrote in *scriptio continua*. He presumably wrote ...ONOMATOΣΑΥΤΟΕΝ... and

10 Schleiermacher 1824.

very possibly intended ΑΥΤΟ as αὐτὸ. Deussen gets the same effect by following T and adopting Schleiermacher's reading.

(T7 DEUSSEN) καὶ τοῦτο ὀνόματος αὐτὸ ἐν ὄν.¹¹

And the one is in turn this of a name.

(T7 SCHLEIERMACHER) takes its implicit nominal predicate from (T6). (T7 DEUSSEN), in contrast, expresses that nominal predicate with a τοῦτο that harks back to (T6). In favor of τοῦ, we may argue that it is an anaphoric definite article that particularizes ὀνόματος (Smyth and Messing 1984, 1119, 1120b–c). This particularization indicates that the name in (T7) is the name already mentioned in (T5.1). This indication is important because the argument operates with an iterative substitution of one for name in (T6) and name for one in (T7). τοῦ and αὐτὸ are compelling readings, and the new OCT text is right to accept them.¹²

11 Deussen 1869.

12 Judging by his notes, Schleiermacher's interpretation differs from mine. The editors of the new OCT text recognize that the argument trades on substitutions of terms leading to absurdity or senselessness.

IV. Dynamis and Being

The *Kinêsis* of Being in Plato's *Sophist* and the Motivation for Aristotle's Notion of *Energeia*

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Many scholars have proven as resistant as the 'Friends of the Forms' to the Visitor's protest in the *Sophist* that life and intelligence should not be excluded from what most fully or completely is. The reason is the assumption that life and intelligence are motions and that motion is incompatible with something being complete and therefore unchanging. Yet Plato's characterization of the soul as a 'self-moving motion' would suggest a different conception of motion while, on the other hand, his explicit analysis of motion restricts it to being either 'alteration' or movement from place to place. This problem of how to understand a motion that both defines life and can be attributed to what completely is, a problem seemingly left unsolved by Plato, is arguably the motivation for Aristotle's distinction between motion, as by definition incomplete, and 'activity' (*energeia*) as by definition 'complete' in possessing its own end. Attributing 'life' interpreted as 'activity' rather than motion to what 'completely is' avoids the difficulties raised by the *Sophist*, as is evident in Aristotle's account of the active but unmoved mover.

motion, life, activity, Aristotle

In a well-known, indeed notorious passage of the *Sophist*, the Visitor, faced with the insistence of the 'Friends of the Forms' that no kind of acting or being acted upon, in short, no *kinêsis*, can be attributed to 'what truly and fully is', exclaims:

What, by god? Will we be easily persuaded that motion (κίνησιν) and life and soul and intelligence do not truly belong to what completely is (τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι), that it itself neither lives nor thinks (μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν), but remains motionless (ἀκίνητον), austere (σεμνόν) and holy, possessing no intelligence? (νοῦς) (248e7-249a2).

This exclamation implies that thinking is a motion and that it must be attributed to, or included in, what truly or completely is. Yet the exact meaning of the passage has always been a subject of controversy. A common strategy, ironically, is to assume with the 'Friends of the Forms' that motion cannot possibly belong to 'what completely is' and to interpret the Visitor's exclamation in a way that avoids this conclusion. After critiquing interpretations of this kind, I will focus on what I consider the truly important and

difficult question raised by the passage: *what kind of a motion must thinking, and indeed life as such, be so as to belong to what completely is?*

One strategy for minimizing what the Visitor says is to interpret his words as suggesting only that *kinêsis* is to be included in being as a whole, *not* that it is to be attributed to what most fully is, i.e., the Forms. Such a reading, however, completely defuses the Visitor's critique of the 'Friends of the Forms' since the latter are happy to include *kinêsis* in *what becomes*,¹ insisting only on a sharp separation between becoming and true being (χωρίς; 248a7). If the Visitor is clearly challenging them here, the challenge must be to admit the power to act and be acted upon, and therefore *kinêsis*, into that which truly and fully is and not just into what is subject to becoming.²

Some scholars have sought to restrict *kinêsis* to the soul, taking the innovation of the *Sophist* to be that now the soul is included in 'true being' *along with the Forms* which themselves would remain motionless. J. B. Skemp has expressed this interpretation most succinctly: "'True Being" is more than the Forms' (1967, 21). Yet once *kinêsis* is identified with a movement of the soul, why it should be denied to the Forms themselves becomes less clear. De Vogel describes the movement of the Forms as a 'mouvement spirituel' (182). Indeed, a whole tradition of interpretation has interpreted the *Sophist* passage as attributing life itself, and therefore the movement that characterizes it, to the Forms. Michele Abbate thus suggests that being itself, as intrinsically dynamic and relational, is 'ensouled' (2016, 229). To attribute such spiritual *kinêsis* to the Forms themselves in their association with the soul, with sensible objects and with each other, is not necessarily to make them subject to becoming or change.³ As for why we *should* attribute such motion to the Forms, De Vogel already expressed the answer as clearly as could be wished: 'c'est de l'Intelligible que parlaient les Amis des Idées, c'est donc à ce même Intelligible que Platon dit qu'on ne saurait refuser la vie et le mouvement, l'âme et l'intellect' (182). Finally, we must note, against a current fad, that the *kinêsis* attributed to the Forms cannot be identified with a so-called 'Cambridge change' precisely because it is explicitly identified

1 As rightly argued by Mesch 2011, 105-6.

2 De Vogel already argued that the translation of παντελῶς ὄν as the totality of being presupposes an 'extensive' meaning of the adverb that it is not seen elsewhere to possess (1970, 182). See also Mesch 2011 for the view that *pantelôs on* is the Idea (114-5).

3 Diès likewise insists of the passivity of the Ideas in being known that 'cette passivité n'est pas mutabilité; ce mouvement n'est pas changement. Notre connaissance des Idées y découvre des caractères ou des lois: elle ne les y crée ni ne les y modifie' (1909, 57). See also Mesch 2011, 113.

instead with the *kinêsis* that constitutes the being of life and the soul.⁴ It is *real* motion, which is not to say it is *physical* motion.

But how exactly, then, are we to understand this *kinêsis* that belongs to the soul *and* to what completely is? Plato appears to be in genuine difficulty here and this because of an inability to get beyond an understanding of *kinêsis* as alteration or change. This is evident, first, in the opposition asserted in what follows between *kinêsis* and *stasis*, with the claim that *stasis* must be included in what truly is to prevent a kind of unlimited change that would undermine the possibility of knowledge (249b8-c9); note the association here of being moved with being *carried away* (φερόμενα καὶ κινούμενα). Secondly, this restrictive understanding of *kinêsis* as change is also evident in the claim that *kinêsis* and *stasis* are the only great kinds to exclude each other absolutely (250a8-9; 252d2-11). Specifically, what is ruled out here as being 'impossible with the greatest necessity' is that 'motion should come to stand' (κίνησιν τε ἴστασθαι) and that 'rest should be moved' (στάσιν κινεῖσθαι), *even though kinêsis as one of the greatest kinds would clearly need to be at rest, remaining always the same as itself, while stasis would need to be in motion in interacting with other kinds*. In short, while the critique of the 'Friends of Forms' for denying motion, life and intelligence to what completely is, as well as the definition of the soul's very essence as motion, requires an understanding of motion that would distinguish it from change in the sense of alteration, the discussion appears simply to fall back into this more limited understanding of motion.

The limitation is evident in both the *Theaetetus* (181d5-6) and the *Parmenides* (138b-c) where *kinêsis* is allowed only one of the two following meanings: alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) and change in place (φορά). It is hard to see how *kinêsis* in either sense not only could be attributed to what completely is, but could even characterize life, intelligence and the soul. In the *Phaedrus* (245e3-246a1) and the *Laws* (896a1-2), the very being of the soul is identified with a self-moving motion that explains and indeed guarantees the soul's eternality and incorporeality. But how could such motion be any kind of alteration or movement in place? The fundamental problem with attributing life to 'what completely is' is understanding what kind of *kinêsis* could be said to belong to *either*, where the answer clearly cannot be 'change' or 'movement in place'.

We have here, I suggest, the motivation for Aristotle's development of the notion of *energeia* as *distinct* from *kinêsis*: with this notion he can fulfill

4 See Mesch 2011, 117.

the Visitor's wish to attribute life, intelligence, and in general activity to 'what completely is' without attributing to it change.⁵ It also solves another fundamental aporia that the Visitor acknowledges as such. Simply wishing like children that being encompass both things in motion and things at rest (249d3-4) leaves the nature of being itself completely opaque as a mysterious 'third' that is neither in motion nor at rest (250c1-10). *Energeia* is Aristotle's positive characterization of this neither/nor. Being is activity, where 'activity' is to be understood neither as motion nor as the cessation of motion, but as something altogether different and more complete.

The key text here is *Metaphysics* Θ6 1048b18-35. I will not here provide the detailed analysis of this text I have provided elsewhere (Gonzalez 2019). I will only note three points concerning its relation to the *Sophist* passage. First, the examples this text gives of *energeia* as distinct from *kinêsis* are 'seeing' (ὁρᾶσις), 'intelligence', 'thinking' (both φρόνησις and νόησις) and, more generally, 'living' (ζῆν). With the exception of 'seeing' if understood literally, we have in these examples precisely what the friends of the Forms are said to deny to 'what completely is' in the Visitor's criticism. Secondly, while these are identified with *kinêsis* in the *Sophist* passage, they are explicitly opposed to *kinêsis* by Aristotle. Finally, and most importantly, what Aristotle claims to distinguish an *energeia* from a *kinêsis* is the fact that it is its own *telos* rather than moving towards a *telos*; this completeness at every moment is what enables one to assert simultaneously that 'I am living' and 'I have lived (in the sense of "completed living").' But then there can be no difficulty in attributing such complete activity to 'what completely is' (τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι). In contrast, it seems impossible to attribute to 'what completely is' a motion that is by definition 'incomplete' (ἀτελής). While there is no way of proving that Aristotle was responding directly to the *Sophist* passage, it seems highly unlikely that he was not.

Aristotle must furthermore have seen that Plato's notion of 'the motion capable of moving itself' (τὴν δυναμένην αὐτὴν αὐτὴν κινεῖν κίνησιν, 896a1-2), as which the soul is defined in the *Laws*, makes no sense on either of the senses of *kinêsis* recognized in the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*: i.e., it is senseless to speak of an *alteration capable of altering itself* or a *movement in place capable of moving itself in place*. Aristotle would also find it problematic to claim, as the proof for the soul's immortality in the *Phaedrus* does, that what moves itself will never desist from movement because to do so it would need to *abandon itself* (μόνον δὴ τὸ αὐτὸ κινουῖν, ἅτε οὐκ ἀπολείπον ἐαυτό,

5 Cf. Beere 2009, 14.

οὐποτε λήγει κινούμενον, 245c7-8): motion is by its very nature 'ecstatic' (*Physics* 222b6), so that what moves must be displaced from what it is; if the soul were essentially in motion, then, as Aristotle argues in *De Anima*, far from remaining with itself, it would inevitably *step outside of its being* (ἡ ψυχὴ ἐξίσταται ἄν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας, 406b15-16). Surprisingly, this argument by which Aristotle attempts to demonstrate against Plato the impossibility of the soul being in motion is one he could have found in Plato himself. In the *Parmenides*, Parmenides argues that if the One moves (κινεῖται), 'there is a great necessity that it *alter its character* [ἀλλοιοῦσθαι], since to the extent that something is moved, it to that extent is no longer disposed in the way it was, but is disposed differently' (162e4-163a2). And just a few lines earlier Parmenides claims that if the One alters from itself (ἀλλοιοῦται που τὸ ἐν ἑαυτοῦ, 162d6), their discourse would no longer be about the One. A similar conception of *kinêsis* is presupposed by Socrates' argument in the *Republic* that the gods cannot change. For something to step outside of its character (εἴπερ τι ἐξίσταίτο τῆς αὐτοῦ ιδέας, 380d8) is for it to be changed either by something else or by itself. But what is best, including the best soul, admits least of all of being 'altered and moved' (ἀλλοιοῦται τε καὶ κινεῖται, 380e3-4). Furthermore, what is best would never alter or change itself (αὐτὸς αὐτὸν μεταβάλλοι ἂν καὶ ἀλλοιοῖ; 381b8) as this would necessarily be a change for the worse.⁶ But then on Plato's own conception of motion, one that Aristotle appears simply to make his own, how can the soul be a self-moving motion without continually altering from itself and therefore never remaining what it is, i.e., a soul? How in never ceasing to move could it not leave itself? A possible solution to both this problem and to the general need to attribute life and intelligence to what completely is, is the notion of an activity that is its own end and as such *distinct from kinêsis*. This, of course, is Aristotle's solution, one demanded by the apparent absence of a solution in Plato.

Later Platonists claimed that Aristotle's critique of Plato's characterization of the soul as self-motion was only a dispute about names, with the term *energeia* being substituted for the term *kinêsis*. Thus Simplicius explains that 'the disagreement came about insofar as Plato acknowledges all change of whatever sort (πᾶσαν τὴν ὅπια νοῦν μεταβολήν), both active and passive (τὴν τε ἐνεργητικὴν καὶ τὴν παθητικὴν) to be motion (κίνησιν) . . . Aristotle by contrast, judging that only physical changes are to be called motions

6 Note also the claim later in Book 8 that, while it is difficult for a city so ideally constituted to be moved (κινηθῆναι), there will nevertheless be a dissolution of it as with all things generated (546a1-3). Being moved is implicitly identified here with being destroyed.

(κινήσεις), believes that the soul is active but is not moved (ἐνεργεῖν, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ κινεῖσθαι)' (*On Aristotle Physics* VIII, 5, 258b4-9 [Diels 1248, 22-31]). Simplicius can therefore go on to say that 'the disagreement between these philosophers is not about the thing itself, but about the name, as in many other matters' (ὥστε οὐ περὶ πράγμα νῦν, ἀλλὰ περὶ ὄνομα, Diels 1249, 12-13).⁷ Themistius in his *Paraphrase on the Soul* agrees that we should not argue about the name, though he adds that Aristotle's terminology is more accurate in reflecting the real and vast difference that exists between an imperfect and a perfect entelechy.⁸

This view is of course part of the Neoplatonic project to reconcile Plato with Aristotle. The reality seems rather different. While it is true that both the definition of the soul as self-motion and the attribution of motion to intelligible reality *demand* a new concept that would express a type of activity distinct from motion in the sense of change or alteration, no such concept is found in Plato. Plato continues to operate with an indiscriminate notion of *kinêsis* which leads to the incoherence of a 'motion of motion' and of Forms that are and are not capable of movement. To claim that Aristotle simply introduced a new name for a notion Plato already had is not to do justice to Aristotle's radical innovation: so radical that it was largely ignored by later Hellenistic and Neoplatonic philosophers who went back to making no fundamental distinction between activity and motion.⁹

In conclusion, it is not hard to see in Aristotle's unmoved mover, described as active in being alive and intelligent without being in motion, an answer to the Visitor's wish that would nevertheless have surprised the Visitor (and Plato!). If Aristotle appears to mimic the Visitor's words in insisting that life belongs to the first *ousia* that is god (ὥστε ζωὴ ὑπάρχει τῷ θεῷ, 107b26-30), it is with the important difference of insisting that the god is nevertheless *unmoved*.¹⁰ This is possible because of the distinction,

7 On this passage and on the attempts by both Simplicius and Hermeias to reconcile Plato and Aristotle on this point, see Long 2020.

8 See Gertz 2010, 82. Cherniss clearly takes the Neoplatonist perspective in seeing Plato as introducing a non-physical, psychical self-motion (1944, 437) into the real being of the Ideas and, in doing so, rejecting Aristotle's more narrow conception of motion as necessarily involving change in one of the categories (440-441).

9 For Plotinus' critique of the sharp distinction between ἐνέργεια and κίνησις, see Enn. VI 1 [42], 16. 4-19, and the excellent discussion in Chiaradonna 2008.

10 Aristotle did well to insist on this point since not only the Friends of the Forms, but contemporary scholars have a hard time accepting that life could belong to what is motionless, matterless, and perfect. For example, both Aubenque (2009, 90-91) and Laks (2000, 236), characterize the identification of god with life as 'metaphorical'.

not found in Plato, that enables Aristotle to say that the god can be *active* without being *in motion* (ἀκίνητον ὄν, ἐνεργείᾳ ὄν, 1072b7-8). Furthermore, we can see a retort against the Visitor in Aristotle's claim that there would be nothing 'austere' (σεμνόν) in the unmoved mover if it were *not* thinking and active (*Met.* Λ 9, 1074b17-18). For the Visitor, as we saw in his objection to the Friends of the Forms, what is most fully real is *either* austere because motionless *or* alive, intelligent and in motion: for Aristotle, thanks to the notion of *energeia*, it is austere because *both* motionless *and* intelligent/alive.¹¹ What indeed could be more awe-inspiring than what Aristotle calls in the *Nicomachean Ethics* the 'activity of motionlessness' (ἐνέργεια . . . ἀκινήσις, NE 7.15, 1154b26-8) and in the context of describing the most pleasurable activity of god? The Visitor's critique of the Friends of the Forms is thus likely to have inspired and provoked Aristotle in his attempt to restore to life its dignity and to perfect being its life.

11 See Brunschwig 2000, 279n23, and Hadot 1960, 114.

Power of Connection as the Mark of Beings

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This chapter argues that in the battle of gods and giants (*Soph*, 246a4-249d5) the Visitor proposes to both corporealists and formalists that the mark of being is the power of connection. It has two kinds: (i) the power to be added to or separated from something else causing difference according to its nature and (ii) the power to bear such a difference. In neither case does the power of connection entail motion, but it can cause stable states. One substantive outcome of this argument is that ontology must begin with an inclusive concept of being as existence. Another conclusion is that to exist is to have a nature that determines a peculiar set of rules regarding connection to other things. Statements express such connection by the copulative use of the verb “to be”, either saying that “X is Y” or that “X is not Y.” This point paves the way to argue that, as a mode of connection, non-being is also a mark of things that exist. Therefore, in the *Sophist*, the Visitor is doing more than displaying the distinction between the existential and copulative meanings of being; he is building an ontology in which to exist is to connect. The proposal of such an ontology begins with the battle of gods and giants.
Plato, *Sophist*, being, power, connection

After detailing the first batch of difficulties regarding beings—those about their number—the Visitor of Elea in Plato’s *Sophist* addresses the second set concerning what kind of things are beings (246a4-6; ποῖά ἐστιν, 242c6). The scope is to determine what is the mark they all have in common so that they are identified as such.¹ According to the Visitor, thinkers who have previously dealt with this problem fall into two groups that hold opposing theses. Their contentious confrontation is compared to a battle of gods and giants. In the right corner, the corporealists assume that beings are bodies (246b1-3) that we can touch with our hands (246a9, b1), so that tangibility is the mark of beings (247c5-7). In the left corner, the formalists think that only forms are real beings, essences (τὴν ἀληθινὴν οὐσίαν, 246b7-8), thence their mark is self-identity and stability (248a12). In addressing the contenders,

1 I do not think this is a definition of beings (as in Owen 1970, 230, n. 14; Miller 2004, 350-351; Fronterotta 2008, 189-190; Leigh 2010, 81-82; Gonzalez 2011, 66-68) for two reasons: (i) it has a disjunctive formula (either...or) and (ii) it does not determine a difference within a kind. This latter reason is welcome for avoiding the vexed question of the criterion for exclusion from being (see other arguments in Cornford 1935, 232; Brown 1986, 189; Vázquez 2018, 267).

the Visitor's approach consists of proving that both hold too narrow a conception, and he asks them to expand their horizons and agree on a more inclusive ontology. In this chapter, I aim to reconstruct the Visitor's two arguments in order to show that he is not simply refuting his interlocutors with *ad hoc* objections. He is rather introducing his own mark for beings, which later will take the lead of the dialogue, and inviting his counterparts to build a common ground. This mark is, I submit, the power of connection (δύναμις κοινωνίας), and it is a sufficient condition for something to exist (*qua* being).

Corporealists

We begin with the corporealists' thesis that tangibility is the mark of beings. Against their view, the Visitor points out evidence for the existence of ensouled bodies (246e5-7), souls (246e9), virtues of souls (247a2-3), and, finally, virtues such as wisdom (247a5-8). Because soul and wisdom are hardly tangible entities, the Visitor suggests that they would be better described as things that have the power to be added or separated from others (247a9-10). For instance, when virtue is added to or separated from the soul, it causes it to have the property of being virtuous (or not). If the corporealists accept this evidence, they must reject their previous thesis: some things that cannot be touched [by hands] exist (247b1-4). In these terms, a better mark of beings would be to have the power to be added or separated from others. This is how the Visitor formulates his proposal:

Λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιανοῦν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἴτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἴτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι· τίθεμαι γὰρ ὅρον ὀρίζειν [δεῖν], τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις

I say that whatever has any power whatsoever really is, whether to naturally make something different, or to bear [something different] including the most trivial caused by the weakest, even if only one or once and for all, for I stipulate the mark delimiting them must be that beings are nothing but power (247d8-e4).

To be is to have power either to naturally make or bear something different.² With this claim I take a stand against the mainstream interpretation that understands that the proposed mark of being is motion in the sense of acting and being acted upon.³ I do not claim that such a motion is excluded from it; instead I think the proposal has a broader target. Here are my reasons.

I construct the phrase ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτιοῦν so that ὅτιοῦν is the direct object of ποιεῖν, and ἕτερον an adverbial complement of ποιεῖν, which would mean “to make different.”⁴ This option explains why the term used is ἕτερον (the other of a pair) instead of ἄλλος (an unqualified other). Although “to make different” could be understood as causing change, this is not the best reading when it comes to linking the proposal to the previous argument against the corporealists. They were pressed to include the power to be added to or subtracted from things, following their premise regarding the tangibility of bodies. Such an addition/subtraction does not need to cause an alteration in a bearer, and nothing in the corporealists’ account suggests so. They seem instead to understand that additions and subtractions simply build a new set.⁵ For instance, if soul is corporeal, then a living being could be described as a soul connected to a body, instead of a body changed by the presence of a soul.

The same reason applies to the translation of δύναμις εἰς τὸ παθεῖν as “the power to bear [properties].” The fact that πάθος was used in the argument against the monists to designate properties (245b4-5), in particular essential properties, only strengthens the case.⁶ If the power of παθεῖν includes allow-

2 Crivelli 2012, 87-89 calls it a modal characterization of being, which disappears from the dialogue after the argument to the formalists. Although powers may entail modality when motion is implied, motion is not necessarily implied. In stable things, the power to produce difference amounts to explaining difference in something which, in its turn, is different because it has the power to bear this difference. This also departs from interpretations that claim that the text introduces a peculiar kind of motion (see Cherniss 1944, 439; Macé 2006, 143; Fronterotta 2008, 200; Gonzalez 2011, 80; Wiitala 2018, 186).

3 Cornford 1935, 238 drops the “either...or” and talks about “the power of acting and being acted upon, which belongs to ‘the just’ equally with ‘the hot’ and ‘the cold’” (on this point, see Künné 2004, 310-311).

4 Compare to ὅτιοῦν βέλτιον ποιοῦμεν in Pl. *Alc. I*, 128e2. I thank Mauro Regali for the objection that, according to the LSJ, the syntax of the two cases imposes different meanings. I could not see any reason why the order of the terms would determine such a variation in Classic Greek.

5 See Macé 2006, 137.

6 See Moravcsik 1962, 37; Owen 1966, 337; Bluck 1975, 97; Bondeson 1976, 5; Künné 2004, 87, who sustain this interpretation in a formal approach. For a defence of a metaphysical approach instead, see Brown 1986, 190-192; Leigh 2010, 73; Crivelli 2012, 87; and Halper, forthcoming.

ing for something to be added or subtracted from compositions and for this to happen once and for all, as in the case of essential properties, it should not entail change.⁷

A final relevant point is that difference makers and bearers are *naturally related* to whatever they are added to or subtracted from. These powers are natural rules for difference. If this is the right reading of the proposal, the mark of beings is to have the power to be added to or separated from others in the sense that beings either cause difference in something else or bear this difference due to what they are by nature. The Visitor does not aim to prove that bodies cannot be a prime component of the world; he wants to expand the corporalists' horizons so they can accept the existence of things that are not bodies: the soul and, as shall soon be clear, essences.

Formalists

An important feature of the formalists' view is that they are committed to the dual connection thesis: "in our case, the body⁸ *connects* to generation through perception, and the soul to real being through reasoning" (248a10-13).⁹ Given this premise, the Visitor aims to reduce the two instances to a single explanation "Regarding this 'connecting,' my excellent fellows, what would we say you mean by it in both cases?" (248b2-3). He does this by rephrasing the same proposal (248b3-4). Connection is thus "bearing a property or obtaining a state that emerged after a certain power from things becoming together with one another" (Πάθημα ἢ ποιήμα ἐκ δυνάμεώς τινος ἀπὸ τῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλα συνιόντων γιγνόμενον, 248b5-6).

I would like to point out a slight difference between the two versions of the proposal. The suggestion made to the formalists speaks of outcomes of power, very clearly marked by the suffix "-μα", in πάθημα and ποιήμα,

7 Those who thought that power entails change had their eyes on the following argument to the formalists, but see below.

8 Reading a dative of association, instead of instrumental or locative, matters to the argument, see below.

9 Cornford 1935, 242 and Wiitala 2018, 177 sustain that, in parallel to the corporalists, formalists deny the existence of generation and motion, but this contention does not require symmetry of ontologies. Quite the opposite, the Visitor's purpose is to include essence in the corporalists' account, and to make the formalists realize that being is existence. Therefore, I do not find Politis' (2016b, 157) claim that the outcome of the battle must be either a tiered or a tierless ontology compelling. In my view, the outcome is an inclusive concept of existence that allows for the distinctions such as the one between essences and things in generation.

as well as by the expression “after a certain power” (ἐκ δυνάμεως τινος), indicating causality. If δύναμις εἰς τὸ παθεῖν means the power to bear a property, a πάθημα ἐκ δυνάμεως must then stand for the actual bearing of a property. Ποῖημα, on its turn, must be understood as obtaining a state of affairs that marks the end of a process. In both cases, we are referring to states in which two items were brought together. But, as in the case of addition and subtraction, this does not necessarily mean that the items changed in the process. This is precisely the point the Visitor aims to make to the formalists.

Let me put the latter point more clearly. The formalists refuse the proposal by claiming that such a power occurs only in things in generation and not in essences (248c6-8).¹⁰ But, as we saw, the proposal does not entail change; moreover, it does not collapse the distinction between being and generation. Quite the opposite, it departs from the distinction of being and generation sustained by the formalists themselves and proceeds by building a common ground. In making such a proposal, the Visitor anticipates that the formalists suppose that power implies change. His goal is to show them that this is not the case; power entails connection, and this may refer to stable states.

As a consequence, the kernel of the argument to the formalists is not to refute them by claiming that, since connection implies change, forms must either cause change or be changed when they become objects of knowledge.¹¹ The Visitor is not committed to such a premise. Furthermore, this is not the most charitable reading of the formalists’ position. They suppose that reasoning and forms are always connected (248a11). The dual connection thesis suggests that the generation of a person causes this reasoning-forms connection to be placed in a soul and in a body, causing the need of this embodied soul to move in order to learn. There is no motion of reasoning towards forms because forms do not *become* known, they are known.¹² The motion of knowledge is the self-motion of the soul (or the intellect) of a living being towards understanding of this stable connection, perhaps in a process of reminiscence.¹³

10 I follow Cornford 1935, 240 n. 3 in reading τόδε γε at 248d10. On ascribing to the formalist the premise that power entails motion, see Vlastos 1973, 314 and Leigh 2010, 68.

11 For this interpretation, see Cornford 1935, 245; Keyt 1969, 6; Brown 1998, 201; Miller 2004, 355; Fronterotta 2008, 200; and Gonzalez 2011, 83.

12 See Keyt 1969, 8.

13 I therefore reject the idea that this is about a Cambridge change (as in Moravcsik 1962, 39-40; Owen 1966, 338-39; Keyt 1969, 13; Bluck 1975, 97; Künné 2004, 318), without

The proof to the formalists is that the motion of embodied souls towards knowledge exists, and that essences connect with generation by means of the soul's motion. The Visitor therefore builds on their assumption that the soul moves the body (246e5-7; cf. 249a9-b1) and also moves the intellect (249a4-7; cf. 248a11). From this, he shows that there is motion, life, soul, and wisdom (248e7-249a2), which connect generation to essences. Intelligence is motion in the embodied soul towards forms (249b2-3), a soul that also causes motion in the body. This brings us to the rejection of the initial claim that essences are indeed connected to things in generation (249b12-c2). The dual connection thesis is thereby reduced to one single concept of the power of connection.

In this reconstruction of the argument, it becomes clear that the Visitor does not aim to prove that Forms change, as this would actually go against his conclusion. If Forms would change, nothing would count as a stable item in the world¹⁴, and he would have no grounds to claim that reality is the sum of everything that is both stable and in motion (249d3-4).¹⁵ As with the corporealists, his goal is to expand the formalists' horizon and to make them accept that both motion and stability exist (250c3-4). If this is correct, a substantive outcome of the battle of giants and gods is that both parties should get rid of their narrow conception of being in order to build an ontology that begins with the most inclusive concept of being: existence. They were also advised to see existence as entailing the power of connection. This latter point still needs further clarifications, which I can only briefly indicate in an overview of the sequence of the dialogue.

Existence and connection

The first clarification comes in the argument to the late learners, who are described as “not allowing one to say that the person is good, but only that the good is good and that a person is a person” (251b9-c2). Their justification is that beings do not mix and have no power to take part in each other (251d6-7; μηδενὶ μηδὲν μηδεμίαν δύναμιν ἔχειν κοινωνίας εἰς μηδέν, 251e9). Because they conceive of reality as a series of discrete units, they

denying, as Leigh 2012, 248) does, that forms are the stable items in the world (see below).

14 See Bluck 1975, 100; Crivelli 2012, 93.

15 I take τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι μὴ παρεῖναι (248e8-249a1) to mean “not present in being altogether” (see Fronterotta 2008, 208; Wiitala 2018, 188), hence expressing the same idea as τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφότερα at 249d4.

see statements displaying connection as meaningless. There is much dispute concerning the argument directed toward the late learners, which I cannot address here, but an implicit (and, to my view, uncontroversial) premise in it is that the copulative use of the verb “to be” in a statement means connection.

This allows for the Visitor to further specify his position: in claiming that beings have the power to connect, he is not saying that everything is merged into a single, self-identical monistic unit (πάντα εἰς ταὐτὸν συναγάγων μεν ὡς δυνατὰ ἐπικοινωνεῖν ἀλλήλοις, 251d8-9). He seems to agree that beings are discrete units; nonetheless, he sustains that they are inserted in interrelations. Within these, things connect to one another in two modes: one *is* the other and one *is not* the other (τὰ μὲν, τὰ δὲ μή, 251e1).¹⁶ For every two things that exist, they connect through either being or non-being. As a result, “is not” stands for a kind of connection, as opposed to the absence of connection.

Another clarification is found in the simile of the letters. The Visitor claims that, like vowels, being and non-being connect everything (252e9-253a7; 259a3-7), functioning as bonds (οἷον δεσμὸς διὰ πάντων κεχώρηκεν, 253a4-5). Being is pervasive because, as a kind, it provides existence to everything.¹⁷ Non-being, in its turn, is pervasive because it provides specific difference, making everything discrete (256d12-e4). As a result, everything that exists has its peculiar rules of connection (ὅποια ὅποιοις δυνατὰ κοινωνεῖν, 253a8), its own nature.¹⁸ If the mark of being is the power of connection, the mark of non-being is the way each thing is differentiated from every other. Existence entails connection and difference.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to account for non-being as difference. This overview aims simply to suggest that the Visitor is doing more than displaying the distinction between the existential and predicative meanings

16 I read the negation as applying to ἀλλήλοις, and not to δυνατὰ ἐπικοινωνεῖν, for there is nothing that does not have power of connection.

17 Edward Halper, whose forthcoming work has coincidentally much in common with the ideas in this chapter, asked me why two kinds would need being as a third kind to hold them together. I thank him for pressing me regarding this point. As I understand it, the copulative “is” express the existence of something *qua* a specific standard of connections (having the power to connect to somethings and not to connect to others). Being, therefore, is not a kind that *holds* two kinds together, but is a kind that accounts for their existence as having this kind of connection.

18 For power as a nature, see Fronterotta 2008, 190; Gonzalez 2011, 67; and Vázquez 2018, 266.

of being.¹⁹ He is explaining that existence entails a position within a state of affairs that marks beings according to their connection to others and their peculiar difference, and this argument begins in the battle of gods and giants.

19 Cornford 1935, 296; Ackrill 1957, 2.

Being and Power in Plato's *Sophist*

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At *Sophist* 247D8-E4, the Eleatic Stranger offers as a “defining characteristic” (ὅρος) of what is “really being” (ὄντως εἶναι) “power” (δύναμις), that is, the ability to affect or be affected by anything in any way, to any degree, and at any time, even once. This defining characteristic is later applied to the argument between the materialists and the idealists, but it is not subjected to further analysis. This definition takes on particular significance in the light of *Republic* VI 509B8-9, for there the Idea of the Good is “beyond *ousia*,” surpassing it both “in seniority” (πρεσβεία) and “in power” (δυνάμει). In this paper, I explore some of the connections between the two passages.

Sophist, *Republic*, being, power, *ousia*, Parmenides, Idea of the Good

1.

In the Eleatic Visitor's examination of various views on the nature of being, he turns to the gods and the giants, idealists or so-called friends of the forms and materialists.¹ The Visitor focuses on moderate realists who are prepared to allow that, although souls can be explained in a materialist way, properties possessed by souls cannot.² If, for example, justice or wisdom or other virtues and vices are real, then being cannot be limited to bodies. Thus, the materialist cannot claim that being or reality consists only in those things that are bodies. In the face of their presumed puzzlement regarding just what it is that bodies and psychical properties have in common that makes them both real, the Visitor offers an eirenic criterion:

I say that anything has real being that has the power to do something to something else or to have something done to it by something else in the smallest degree by the most trivial thing, even if only once. I hypothesize as a criterion for beings nothing other than power.³

1 *Sph.* 246A4ff.

2 *Sph.* 247B1-4.

3 *Sph.* 247D8-E4: Λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιαν οὖν [τινα] κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἶτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτι οὖν πεφυκὸς εἶτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπασι, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι· τίθεμαι γὰρ ὅρον [ὀρίζειν] τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις. I have favored Burnet's text over that of the OUP revision of 1995.

The criterion of power (δύναμις) for being seems to come out of nowhere. For this reason, some scholars have suggested that the criterion is purely of dialectical significance. That is, the criterion of power is enough to defeat the strict materialist, but it is not a criterion to which Plato is himself committed.⁴

The criterion of power does not in fact come out of nowhere. In *Republic*, the Idea of the Good is said to “be beyond (ἐπέκεινα) οὐσία, exceeding it in seniority (πρεσβεία) and in power (δυνάμει).”⁵ The discordance between this attribution of power to the Good and the criterion of power used to identify anything real at all needs to be addressed. For in the latter case, we rightly assume, I think, that something’s power is indexed to its οὐσία. Thus, a particular sensible has the power to affect one or more of our senses because it is the kind of thing it is, that is, because of its οὐσία. Or, a body (σῶμα) has the power of resistance because of its nature or οὐσία as a body. But the *Republic* passage ties the summit of power to that which is explicitly said to be “beyond οὐσία.” If power is a criterion of being (τὸ ὄν) and not of οὐσία, then at least the appearance of discordance seems to recede since the Good unquestionably is or has being, even though it is “beyond οὐσία.”⁶ Yet a deeper discordance remains.

To put it simply, how can that which is beyond οὐσία have any power at all, much less be the *ne plus ultra* of power? The question is urgent for any discussion of the Idea of the Good. But this paper is not focused on that. Rather, it is focused on what the *Sophist* passage and the following arguments tell us about being. Return for a moment to the examples of power cited above, the sensible object and the body. It would seem that the attribution of power to each of these depends *entirely* on identifying the specific power that each possesses. After all, a smell does not have the power to affect our ears because of the limitation imposed on the power

4 Cornford 1935, 239, says that at 249Dff, the question regarding the nature of being is said not yet to be resolved. Therefore, δύναμις cannot be Plato’s definitive answer to this question now.

5 R. VI 509B7-9. See Diès 1909, ch. 2, esp. 21-29, who points out that there are a number of passages in the dialogues in which δύναμις and ποιεῖν and παθεῖν figure in definitions of things. See, e.g., *Phdr.* 270C-D; *La.* 192B; *Protag.* 349B; *Phd.* 97C; *Crat.* 393D; *Tht.* 156A, 158E, 174B. But as Diès recognizes, all of these passages adduce various sorts of acting and being acted upon as indicative of a thing’s φύσις, that is, the kind of thing it is. The *Sophist* passage, however, is seeking a property or definition of being in general.

6 That the Good is not beyond reality in the sense of being nothing at all is evident from the fact that it is “the happiest of that which is” (εὐδαιμονέστατον τοῦ ὄντος) (526E4-5), that it is “more beautiful” (κάλλιον) than knowledge and truth (509A6), and that it is “the brightest of that which is” (τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον) (518C9).

that it does have. As the dialogue will go on to argue, to be this or that implies being different from other things. In other words, it seems difficult to separate power from essence. Considering the issue from another angle, if we endowed the Good with, say, the passive power to be known, this would depend entirely on it being knowable. But that would require that the Good have an οὐσία.

What, then, do that which is beyond οὐσία and that which has or is an οὐσία have in common such that we can say of both that the criterion of their being is power? Whence the commensurability of the two? Putting the question in yet another way: how does that which is beyond οὐσία “exceed” in its power anything with an οὐσία? Surely, it is not by “aggregating” all the specific powers of beings or by possessing all of them each to the highest degree. We cannot reduce that which is “beyond οὐσία” to that which is “all the οὐσίαι there are.” This is both textually false and philosophically absurd. We may begin to answer these questions by supposing that the superiority of the power of the Good in relation to the power of every other being is analogous to the paradigmatic status of the Forms in relation to their participants. Thus, the Form of Circularity does not “exceed” the circularity of participants; rather, it just is what circularity is and its participants are images of that. Along these lines, we might suppose that the paradigmatic power of the Good stands to the power of everything with an οὐσία just as the paradigmatic status of Forms stands to its participants. Taking this just one step further, we may say that “the perfect being” (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν) of Forms stands to the being of its images, as the “super perfect being of the Good” stands to the perfect being of the Forms. Let us call this “super perfect being” “infinite being” to indicate that it is not subject to the limitations imposed by having or being οὐσία. On this line of reasoning, the being of everything other than the Good is limited by its own nature. The unlimitedness of the Good is the paradigm of being.

2.

The relevance of the above to the *Sophist's* exploration of the nature of being should by now be clear. To begin, the specter of Parmenides hangs over this dialogue. Parmenides is said to hold that “the all is one.”⁷ This leads the Visitor to gloss “all is one” as the claim that being is one and to point out that

7 *Sph.* 244B6: ἐν τὸ πᾶν.

“one being” is a misnomer, so to speak. For if being is one, then its oneness is distinct from being in which case either its oneness has no being (which is contradictory) or else its oneness and being itself are two and being is no longer one and “being” no longer refers to “the all.” The internal complexity of Parmenides’ principle—being and oneness—is a useful introduction to Plato’s own exploration of being among “the greatest kinds.” I would suggest that the Visitor’s refusal to elide being and oneness but to insist that these introduce plurality into what is is only properly understood against the background of the superordinate Good. It is not the case that the postulation of the Good falls prey to the same argument that the Visitor uses against Parmenides. It is not the case that, if the Good is the paradigm of being, then “the Good is one” means that the paradigm is two, including goodness and oneness. As explained in the dialogue *Parmenides*, a paradigm of being will just be the One, whereas “one being” is irretrievably plural. That is because it is not possible for one to be without partaking of οὐσία.⁸ Complexity is thus written into the very fabric of being. Being must be one, but it also must be many.

It is worth reflecting for a moment on the radical conclusion that Plato reaches by taking up and challenging Parmenidean metaphysics. Unlike Aristotle, the primary referent of “being” cannot be identical with οὐσία; rather, it must be “beyond οὐσία.” Aristotle agrees with Plato that the primary referent of being must be absolutely simple, but he rejects the necessary condition for absolute simplicity, which is the elision of being and oneness or, stated in terms of *Parmenides*, the absence of participation in οὐσία in the primary referent. Aristotle identifies the primary referent of “being” with the intellection that constitutes the unmoved mover. But just as being cannot be one without distinguishing being and oneness (and hence denying perfect simplicity in the one being), so intellection cannot exist without intentional objects or even just a single object, in which case the primary referent of “being” is not absolutely simple and so not actually primary.

8 *Prm.* 142B5-6. We recall that Parmenides is ringing the dialectical changes on his own hypothesis regarding the One. See 137B2-4. I take it that his own hypothesis is being glossed at *Sph.* 244B6 as “the all is one.” If that is the case, then the οὐσία in which the one has to partake in order to be would be oneness. But it would equally be the case that it would have to partake of the οὐσία of being.

3.

I am going to suggest now that in *Sophist* the ensuing discussion of dialectic culminating in the introduction of the greatest kinds has as necessary background the primacy of the Good or the One as the primary referent of "being" in which case we will discover the *inevitable* complexity of τὸ παντελῶς ὄν. That among the five greatest kinds there is a γένος of Being—something that leads many scholars just to throw up their hands in despair—follows from the necessary complexity of τὸ παντελῶς ὄν. There must be a γένος of being, but this γένος cannot be the primary referent of "being." We have already seen why this is so: the γένος of being is an οὐσία, whereas the primary referent must be "beyond οὐσία."

The really real, τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, cannot, then, be one. But it also cannot be many (and *not* one). It cannot be one, because as we have seen, what is ἀπλῶς one cannot be one *and* also be or exist. It cannot be many and not one because, however many are the many and whatever they are, what makes them count as a many is that they all have being, excluding thereby everything that does not have being.⁹ Naturally, we might suppose that the many are one in exactly the way that any group of things that are ὅμοια are many and one. That is, they are numerically many, but one because they participate in a self-identical "one" "over and above."¹⁰ But the self-identical one, say, the Form of Largeness, is in the crucial respect not like the putative one that is Being. For whereas the Form of Largeness is the paradigm of largeness, the putative Form of Being is not the paradigm of Being. We have seen that the true paradigm of being is "beyond οὐσία." It is not the case, of course, that the putative Form is not one. That is exactly what the γένος of Being is; it is one γένος among the five. But this γένος also exists and so it is not merely one; rather, it is also a many. It is essentially and irreducibly many. So, it is not one in the way that the Form of Largeness is one. Being one self-identical Form is sufficient for the explanatory role it has, which is to explain how many things that are the same (ὅμοιον) can yet be different.

That τὸ παντελῶς ὄν is a one-many, but not in the way that things that are ὅμοιον are one-many only makes sense, I suggest, if we refuse to take the intelligible world as the ultimate *explanans* for the being of the sensible world. The paradigm of the being of everything that has οὐσία must be "beyond οὐσία." Then, of course, it follows that this paradigm is unequivocally one.

9 See *Sph.* 250C1-2.

10 See *Prm.* 132A1-3.

But that still leaves us with the very difficult problem of how τὸ παντελῶς ὄν can be one-many.

In order to answer this question, we need to recur to a passage that concludes the battle of the gods and giants. There the Visitor says in response to the friends of the Forms who insist that τὸ παντελῶς ὄν is completely immobile,

What, by Zeus, are we really going to be so easily persuaded that motion, life, soul, and thought have no place in that which is completely real; that it has neither life nor thinking, but stands immovable, holy and solemn, devoid of intellect?¹¹

This is one of the most contentious passages in this dialogue full of contentious passages. Against the friends of the Forms, the Visitor urges that thinking, and all that implies—motion, life, and soul—cannot be absent from τὸ παντελῶς ὄν. The Visitor is responding to those who do not deny that thinking is real; they deny that it is really real. They suppose that the really real must be frozen in holy, solemn immobility. The Visitor is not making the utterly banal point that we should not exclude motion, life, and soul from the real. No one holds *that*. But we might well ask how thinking and all that that implies can be integrated into the really real. I want to suggest now not just that it must be integrated into the really real, but that the really real, τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, could only be a one-many if thinking is an essential part of the really real.

4.

Here is the basic idea. Plato was perhaps the first to realize that thinking is essentially a unificatory process. By this I mean that to think, basically to engage in διάνοια, is to aim to see the unity within a phenomenal complexity. To take a simple example, to see that the Morning Star and the Evening Star (a “many”) are in fact one, namely, the planet Venus, is to achieve cognitive unification. Without cognizing the unity “behind” the many, there would just be the planet Venus. Without the ability to “see,” that is, to mentally see, that what appears to us as many is in fact one, there would remain the phenomenal many without unity. More generally, in any truth-functional

11 *Sph.* 248E7-249A2: Τί δὲ πρὸς Διός; ὥς ἀληθῶς κίνησιν καὶ ζωὴν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν ἣ ῥαδίως πεισθισόμεθα τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι μὴ παρεῖναι, μηδὲ ζῆν αὐτὸ μηδὲ φρονεῖν, ἀλλὰ σεμνὸν καὶ ἅγιον, νοῦν οὐκ ἔχον, ἀκίνητον ἐστὸς εἶναι;

λόγος, we express our judgment that a “many,” the subject and the predicate are, nevertheless, one or *relatively* identical. But of course their identity is not perfect identity, something that resides only in that which is unequivocally one, namely, the first principle of all. In fact, the very idea of a predicative judgment depends on thinking of the many as one. Without the thinking, the “is” of predication is gratuitous. We might as well say that “Theaetetus” and “sitting” are two phenomena whose connection is entirely adventitious or arbitrary. Without thinking, we might as well say that for any “A” and for any “B,” there is no more reason to say that “A is B” than to say that “A is not B,” for example, that Venus is and is not the Morning Star or the Evening Star. Predication, for Plato, is not made according to some arbitrary criterion, say, physical proximity, but according to a criterion that thinking alone has access to, namely, being. In the above examples, we must add that the being attained in predicative judgments generally is the diminished being of sensibles. The one-many of the subject-predicate judgment is of course real. Its being is an image of the really real being where we find a really real one-many.

Returning to τὸ παντελῶς ὄν and the explanation of why it must be a one-many, we can, I think, see this most easily in the following manner. If each Form is a one or μόνας, then the predicative judgment we make, for example, in mathematics, will not be able to provide the requisite unity. So, a λόγος that expresses the relation between a circle and a straight line or between odd and even numbers or, in fact, any terms on both sides of an equation would *not* be rooted in reality. If, in other words, “five is odd” is true, then the mere fact that there is a Form of Fiveness and a Form of Oddness would not in itself explain why this is true any more than would the fact that the Morning Star is the Evening Star be explained by the existence of the planet Venus. But what “unifies” the Form of Fiveness and the Form of Oddness?” By now it should be evident that the only thing that can do this is in the requisite manner is an intellect eternally thinking all that is thinkable in its internal complexity. To leave intellect out of picture or to say that it is extraneous to the correct account of intelligible reality is to leave unexplained, and I would say, inexplicable the necessity of the truth that “five is odd.” I emphasize that we can no more efface the oneness of each Form as “part” of a many than we can make the manyness merely a “sum.” So, an intellect—revealed by Plato in *Timaeus* as the Demiurge—eternally contemplates the array of intelligibles in all their internal complexity. We might gloss the really real being of the intelligible world as the internal relatedness of all οὐσίαι. I suppose that is the clearest way of expressing the otherwise dark saying that being is one-many.

I have been arguing that in order to understand why δύναμις is a ὄρος of being, we have to recur to *Republic* in order to make use of Plato's claim that the paradigm of being and the paradigm of δύναμις must be "beyond οὐσία." Once we do that, we can see why τὸ παντελῶς ὄν is not simply one. We can see why the battle of gods and giants is in itself inconclusive owing to its assumption that "being" will be the one thing that all beings have in common. This is of course true in a sense, but as soon as we see that if this is so, we shall be unable to explain why there is a γένος of Being that itself is a being no more and no less than any other γένος. To state the *Aufhebung* of Parmenides, it is indeed the case that being is one, but only if we recognize that being is "beyond οὐσία." From this it follows that the being of everything else is internally complex but that this complexity is only possible with the introduction of an intellect into τὸ παντελῶς ὄν.¹²

I would like to close by reiterating my claim that *Sophist* is rendered philosophically incoherent if we refuse to situate it within the systematic framework explicitly introduced in the *Republic*. Without the first principle of all, and without its having or being δύναμις paradigmatically, we do not have the basis for the claims that Plato makes about the intelligible world in *Sophist*. The many puzzles thrown up by *Sophist* provide as good an example as any I know of the necessity for a systematic and comprehensive approach to Plato.

12 See Abbate 2016, 227-242, esp. 228-230.

Modes of Power and Different Beings in *Sophist* 246a-249d

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This paper re-examines Plato's *dynamis* proposal in *Sophist* 246a-249d and argues that power is an intrinsic relational property with distinct modes for bodies, forms, and souls—namely, interactional, constitutional, and directional powers. This conclusion challenges the restriction of power to specific beings and shows the need to differentiate between power bearers. The interpretation rejects the notion of power as a definition or type of being, proposing instead that it serves as a criterion for comparing different beings. Plato's exploration of power does not establish a 'power ontology' but facilitates 'ontological comparison' by highlighting interrelationships among beings with varying modes of power.

power, beings, modes of power, ontological comparison

In his exploration of non-being and falsehood, the Eleatic Stranger digresses to address a puzzle about being. The puzzle is *what sort of* beings there are, and he identifies two opposing views—corporealism and idealism. In examining and reforming corporealism, the Stranger introduces the *dynamis* proposal (DP): to be is to be capable of acting on or being affected by something else. This paper explores the controversy surrounding DP's interpretation. There are two prevailing interpretations: a *generally all-inclusive* reading¹ where power characterizes all kinds of beings, and a *restricted* reading² that limits power to either bodies or forms.

This paper argues that Plato views power as an intrinsically relational property. On one hand, power describes the all-inclusive action-passion relation between different beings including bodies, forms, and souls. On the other hand, each being's power has distinct modes. Inasmuch as power pertains to relations between beings, it is itself neither the essence nor a type of being. It follows that the Stranger is not committed to the notion that

1 For the generally all-inclusive interpretation of DP, see, e.g., Moravcsik 1962, Owen 1971, Brown 1998.

2 For the interpretation of DP restricted to bodies, see, e.g., von Staden 1998, McCabe 2000, Politis 2006b; for the interpretation of DP focused on the forms, see, e.g., Leigh 2010, Marmodoro 2021. ?If it is extended to the forms, isn't it all inclusive? Say why not. (Reply: It is more accurate to replace 'extended to' with 'focused on'. They use DP to understand the communion of forms but say nothing about the power of bodies and souls.)

being is defined by having power or that being is power. Additionally, my argument clarifies the specific modes of power in different beings (bodies, forms, and souls). Notably, my interpretation underscores the centrality of the soul in the Stranger's argument.

The procedure involves revisiting relevant passages in the debate. Section 1 argues that power, as formulated in DP, is a *relational property* with nine possible cases. Sections 2, 3, and 4 delve into the modes of power in bodies, forms, and souls, arguing that they have interactional, constitutional, and directional powers respectively. Section 5 concludes with remarks and clarifications on the proposed interpretation.

1. Dynamis Proposal and the Modes of Power

The Stranger offers two versions of the formulation of DP:

(α) I say that a thing really is if it has any acquired power by nature, either (εἶτ) to act on something else (ἐτερον) or (εἶτ) to be affected, even by the most trivial thing and in the smallest way and even if it only happens once. (β) For I set down as a mark (ὄρον) to mark off beings that they are nothing other than power. (*Sph.* 247d9-e5)

There are two points to clarify in the formulation of DP, pertaining to the terms 'ἐτερον' and 'εἶτ' ... εἶτ'....'

The term 'ἐτερον' (something else) implies that the power is a relational property which involves two correlates, an 'agent' and a 'patient.' The Stranger suggests that an entity *a* has power only if it is related to an entity other than itself, say entity *b*, emphasizing that power must involve relationships between different beings. The fact that power essentially refers to something else makes it impossible to be a definition of being.³ The reason is that the Stranger proposes the principle at 255c12-d7 that things are said to be something either in their own right (αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά) or with relation to something else (πρὸς ἕτερον). He uses this principle to distinguish between Being and the Different: Being is said both by themselves and in relation to something else, while the Different is said only in relation to something else. Since power, like the Different, is said in relation to something else, power is distinguished from being and cannot be the definition of being. It also justifies the interpretation of ὄρον in version (β) of DP as 'mark' rather than 'definition.'

3 See, e.g., Marmodoro 2021 endorses the view that being is power.

The formulation ‘either to act on or to be affected by something else’ is a disjunction. In ordinary language, the connective ‘either...or...’ (εἴτ’... εἴτ’....) can have two senses: *inclusive*, where the statement is true if at least one of the options is true, and *exclusive*, where only one can be true, not both. Given that when the Stranger examines the idealists, he asks whether coming to know and being known are an action, an affection, or both (ποίημα ἢ πάθος ἢ ἀμφοτέρων, 248d4–5), it becomes evident that the connective εἴτ’... εἴτ’.... in DP is an *inclusive* disjunction. Consequently, there are three modes in which an entity can satisfy DP:

DP-mode I: both to act on and to be affected by something else.

DP-mode II: only to be affected by something else.

DP-mode III: only to act on something else.

Our next step is to systematically assess each entity involved in Gigan-tomachia to determine whether they all adhere to DP and to identify the specific mode in which they satisfy DP.

2. Bodies and Interactional Power

Since the Stranger offers DP as an improvement over materialism, and he imagines that the materialist accepts this proposal, it is clear that the body satisfies DP, but in what mode?

Some commentators wrongly limit DP to depicting the body, arguing that subsequent developments in the dialogue dismiss its application to forms and souls.⁴ This error stems from assimilating the Stranger’s general portrayal of power in DP with its application to bodies. However, a crucial distinction exists: the general portrayal uses ‘either-or,’ while the application uses ‘both-and.’ Thus at 248c5, when referencing DP, the Stranger uses the connective ‘or’ whereas immediately after, 248c7 uses ‘and’ to describe the corporealists’ view of ‘becoming’. As it says: “We took it as a sufficient mark of *beings* that power is present in a thing to do something *or* (ἢ...ἢ...) have something done to it... In reply, they say that becoming has the power to do something *and* (καὶ) have something done to it...” (Sph. 248c4–7).

This difference indicates that the body satisfies DP in terms of a special mode of power rather than in terms of power in general, namely DP-mode

4 See, e.g., von Staden 1998, 270–1 argues that in the Sophist, Plato hints that *dynamis* is more suitable for describing material things rather than forms, and in the Theaetetus, Plato associates *dynamis* with the bodies rather than the souls.

I: the body has the power both to act upon and to be affected, which I call *interactional* power. For example, when someone uses their hand to push something else, say entity *a*, *a* will push the hand as resistance or push entity *b*. In this regard, the hand and the entity *a* are in an interactional chain, they both act on and are affected.

This power mode aligns with original corporealism, particularly explaining its key feature. In *Sph.* 246a7-b1, the Stranger summarizes the corporealists' central claim by saying that only entities experiencing impingement and touch, that is, bodies, are beings. The Greek terms used are προσβολή (attack) and ἐπαφή (touch) illustrating the body's active and passive involvement in its power. This is parallel to Plato's use of τὸ προσβάλλον and τὸ προσβαλλόμενον to explain how a particular color comes into being in *Theaetetus* 154a1-2.

The Stranger criticizes corporealists for limiting their understanding of power to interactions among bodies alone. The Stranger may accept interactional power for describing body but acknowledges its limitations when exploring the powers of form and soul.

3. Forms and Constitutional Power

Commentators differ on whether the Friends of the forms ultimately accept DP, and, if so, in what sense. In the Stranger's examination of the Friends in *Gigantomachia*, he focuses on the relationship between form and soul in knowledge. The puzzles are whether DP can be applied to characterize the soul's knowing of form and, if so, what DP-mode applies to forms in this process.

Let's first present the basic claims of the Friends, followed by discussion of the three-phase examination of these claims by the Stranger. Friends' basic claims (F) include:

(F1) Perhaps by distinguishing between becoming and being you say they are separate.

(F2) And you declare that by the body and through perception, we commune (κοινωνεῖν) with becoming, but through reasoning and by soul we commune with real being,

(F3) which (being) is the same always in the same way, but becoming is different at different times. (*Sph.* 248a7-13)

(F1) and (F3) are metaphysical claims, while (F2) is epistemological. (F3) delineates distinct features of real being linked to rest and becoming linked to

change. (F1) posits the separation of these 'beings' into distinct worlds, and (F2) asserts that humans use body through perception and soul through reasoning to commune with these two different entities. The Stranger questions the Friends' epistemological claim, and then challenges their metaphysical claims, compelling the Friends to partially revise their claims.

In the first examination phase (248b11-c9), the Stranger questions whether 'commune' in (F2) aligns with 'the power to be affected *or* to do' (248c5) in DP. The Friends respond that 'becoming has the power to be affected *and* to act,' but 'this power does not fit with being' (248c7-9). While they aim to reject applying DP to what they term real being, the use of 'and' signals a rejection of applying body's power mode (DP-mode I) to real being specifically. Their stance leaves room for consideration of other modes of power.

In the second examination phase (248c10-e5), the Stranger assesses whether using power to explain coming to know and being known in (F2) aligns with the Friends' other claims (F1) and (F3):

- (EF1) Real being is the same always in the same way. (from F3)
- (EF2) The soul comes to know and *being* is known. (from F2)
- (EF3) To come to know is to do something. (introduction of DP)
- (EF4) If to come to know is to do something, then to be known is to be affected.
- (EF5) To be known is to be affected. (EF3, EF4, *MP*)
- (EF6) To be affected is to be changed.
- (EF7) To be known is to be changed. (EF5, EF6, *HS*)
- (EF8) *being* is changed. (EF2, EF7, *HS*)

The introduction of DP to explain (F2) leads to a result (EF8) that contradicts the Friends' claim F3. There are two possible interpretations: either the Friends accept the result (EF8) and revise their original claim regarding the nature of real being (form), which leads to the view that forms undergo mere Cambridge change, or they find the result (EF8) unacceptable, prompting a search for the problematic premise. (EF6) and (EF3) are suspect. Given that (EF4) is a naïve characterization of the *converse* in the relation, commentators do not consider it problematic.

Due to space constraints, a detailed discussion of these views is not possible. In short, the 'mere Cambridge changes' perspective lacks support in other dialogues and may not align with the dialogue's overarching project. Additionally, there is no strong textual basis for refuting the idea that being affected implies being changed. Therefore, the interpretation that (EF3) is

problematic seems more plausible, since it is the introduction of DP to explain (F2) that leads to (EF3).

Some commentators may think that the interpretation that (EF3) is problematic implies that the argument rejects the use of DP to understand the soul's knowing of forms at all. However, this inference does not hold. Rather, it only challenges a specific mode of power, namely, that forms are affected in the process of being known (DP-mode II), while leaving open the possibility that forms act on in this process (DP-mode III).

The third examination phase (248e6-249d4) could be reconstructed as follows:

(EF9) It (i.e., τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι) has *nous*. (From F2)

(EF10) If it has *nous*, then it has life.

(EF11) It has life. (EF9, EF10, *HS*)

(EF12) If it has *nous* and life, then it has them in a soul.

(EF13) It has a soul. (EF11, EF12, *HS*)

(EF14) If it has a *nous*, life, and soul, then it's not at rest and not completely changeless.

(EF15) It changes. (EF9, EF11, EF13, *HS*)

This argument starts from an examination of the Friends' claim (F2) and infers a result (EF15) that contradicts claim (F3). But unlike the second phase, the Stranger and Friends seem to find this result difficult to refute. This argument, thus, would force Friends to revise their claims. The suggestion given in the dialogue is to revise (F3), which concludes in the assertion that 'being and totality of things (τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν) are both the unchanging and that which changes'. (249d3-4)

It is widely recognized that the introduction of soul (and *nous*, life) leads to the revision of Friends' claims. Commentators vary in their interpretations of the entities recognized as real being by the Stranger and Friends, depending on their understanding of the relationship between the soul and τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι and τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν. One interpretation posits that the Friends recognize that Forms have *nous* and life.⁵ Another interpretation suggests that the soul here is an embodied soul, necessitating the inclusion of the body in τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι.⁶ A third interpretation introduces the soul as a distinct kind of being outside of the forms and bodies.⁷

5 It goes back to the Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus, *Enneads* iii 8.9. Also see, e.g., Gerson 2006.

6 See, e.g., Owen 1971.

7 See, e.g., Cornford 1935.

Limited by space, I cannot examine these views in detail. I support the third interpretation. The main reason is that the context in which the Stranger introduces (EF9) is a discussion of whether the soul's coming to know forms is an instance of DP. Commentators take for granted that souls, or entities with souls, change, but this requires explanation. This explanation depends on what the stranger sees as a sufficient condition for change. While the Stranger does not provide a sufficient condition for change in this argument, he mentions a presupposition in (EF6) of the previous argument: 'to be affected is to be changed'. Thus, asserting that the soul or something with a soul is changed implies that it is being affected. Since the soul is being affected, it follows that the forms are acting on it. Therefore, in the process of forms being known by the soul, contrary to the apparent grammatical form, it is forms acting on the soul, and forms satisfy DP in terms of DP-mode III: having the power only to act on while remaining immune from being affected, which I call *constitutional power*.

Let's review the examination of the Friends. Instead of seeing the argument in the third phase as overturning that in the first two phases, the arguments in the three phases complement each other. The first phase rejects DP-mode I, the second phase rejects DP-mode II, while the third phase affirms the use of DP-mode III to characterize forms' power in relation to the soul.

4. Active Soul and Directional Power

In examining the soul's power, the last section highlighted its *passive* role in knowing forms. However, we hesitate to characterize it solely as passive. This section aims to demonstrate that the soul, in some sense, plays an active role in its relationship with forms. The Stranger's inquiry into the soul's relationship with forms extends beyond the *Gigantomachia* passage to include dialectics and production, where the active role is termed dialectical power and productive power.

In *Sophist* 253c-e, Plato describes a form of dialectical knowledge wherein a dialectician possesses the power 'to know how to discriminate by kinds, how things can associate and how they can not' (253e1-2). This dialectical power is contrasted with the incapacity of most human souls to see what is divine. Plato uses the term dialectical power (ἡ τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμις) to denote dialectics in both *Republic* (511b4) and *Philebus* (57e6-7). Plato's characterization of dialectical power varies across dialogues. In *Sophist*, it involves the power to determine which forms commune. When the soul

comes to know forms, it does not act on them; instead, it collects and separates the relationships between forms. Conversely, the outcome of this knowledge is that forms are structurally present in the soul, acting on it and causing a transformative turnabout (περιαγωγῆς, *R.* 518d4).

Furthermore, the soul's power extends to production. Plato defines production as a type of power in *Sophist*, where it is described as 'the power to cause (αἰτία, or ἄγῃ in *Sph.* 219b4-5) things to come into being that previously were not' (*Sph.* 265b9-10). The term ἄγειν (to bring or to direct) is used by the Stranger to specify the soul's ποιεῖν as bringing something into being or causing a change.

The soul's power is capable of acting on itself as well as on external entities. When it acts upon itself, it causes the soul to turn around, whereas when it acts upon external entities, it produces change on them. The soul's power, in turn, is grounded on the its being affected by forms. The soul changes (turns around) itself by directing its different parts toward different objects, and it changes something else by directing them toward specific goals. Therefore, I refer to this power mode of the soul as *directional* power.

We can summarize the different modes of power in three different beings as follows:

Form's *Constitutional* Power: Form has the power to act on something else while remaining immune from being affected by it.

Body's *Interactional* Power: Body has the power both to act on something else and to be affected by something else.

Soul's *Directional* Power: Soul has the power to direct itself by being affected by something else and direct something else by acting on itself.

These three modes of power in the three different beings align with the three distinct 'motions': form is unmoved, the body engages in interactional motion, and the soul is self-moved. Indeed, the specified modes of power in different beings illuminate the specific content of these three modes of motion and underscore the differences between them.

5. Conclusion

In summary, my interpretation of Platonic *dynamis* highlights power as an intrinsic relational property, and different beings possess different modes of power. According to Plato, power is not a definition of being or a fundamental type of being but rather serves as a criterion for comparing different beings. Therefore, Plato's exploration of power does not establish

a 'power ontology' but facilitates the discussion of 'ontological comparison.' The various modes of power across different beings forms a chain of power, enabling the examination of interrelationships between them. In this chain, the soul serves as an intermediary, being directed by forms to subsequently direct the realm of becoming or bodies. The soul's mediating role is effective when it actively exercises its power with its dialectical power and production.

Koinōnía, Dynamis y Justicia

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Neither the *koinōnía tōn eidōn* nor the conception of being as a ‘*dynamis tou paschein kai poiein*’ (*Sph.* 248c8) upon which it is based is a real innovation because we find a *koinonía* of forms in the *Republic* (476a, 500c). However, the connection between these ideas and the notion of justice has not been explored. 1) Organized by the form of the Good, the *koinonía* of the *Republic* is an intrinsically just *kosmos* which functions as the paradigm of personal and political justice (472c, 462c, 443c). 2) The form of the Good is conceived as the highest *dynamis* (*R.* 509b8) of a hierarchical order in which every being has a *dynamis/physis* to fulfill its *ergon* (*R.* 346a1-3, 351a1-352d2, 352d9-354a9, 359b9-13) and to achieve its *aretē*. These ideas mentioned in the *Republic* are developed further in the *Parmenides* by replacing the model of immanence with the model of justice: every Form “does its own” (*Prm.* 150a7-b1). Conceiving the Form as an agent, I suggest, leads Parmenides to propose a more fundamental form of *koinōnía* (*Prm.* 158d3-8), which allows him 1) to save the unity of the Form and 2) to link the causal function of the Good—its *dynamis*—with the notion of unity. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to show that justice, *dynamis*, and *koinōnía* are mutually implied in the *Republic*, *Parmenides*, and *Sophist*.

koinonía, dynamis, physis, justice, unity.

I

Aunque la κοινωνία τῶν εἰδῶν y la concepción del ser como “cierta potencia de actuar o padecer” que le sirve de fundamento (*Sph.* 247e-248c; 254c5) no son una innovación, sino una cuestión de énfasis en los diálogos platónicos,¹ su relación con la noción de justicia ha sido poco atendida.² Es, empero, manifiesta en *R.* 500c3-5, donde se dice que las Formas οὐτ’ ἀδικοῦντα οὐτ’ ἀδικούμενα ὑπ’ ἀλλήλων y se conservan en un orden κατὰ λόγον.³ Simultáneamente se afirma aquí la eterna autoidentidad de las Formas y la necesaria interacción que implica su integración en un orden intrínsecamente justo y racional que, como tal, necesariamente es conforme al fundamento, la Forma del Bien.⁴ Por ello, este orden constituye el “paradigma

1 Cf. Adam 1902, I, 363-364; Mesquita 2018; Ferrari 2000; Gonzalez 2011, 92-93.

2 Una excepción es Schwabe 2001, 119-120. Cf. Gutiérrez 2022.

3 Cf. Grg. 507e.

4 La expresión κατὰ λόγον abole el λόγου δεῖται de *R.* 449c7-8. Cf. Gutiérrez 2002, 48.

divino” que imita el filósofo que actúa como demiurgo de las virtudes en la vida pública y privada (R. 500d4-9). Por ende, en la medida en que son justos, los ámbitos eidético, psíquico y político constituyen, cada uno, una multiplicidad integrada y gobernada por un principio rector; respectivamente, la Forma del Bien, el alma racional y el filósofo gobernante. Sin embargo, mientras que lo inteligible se comporta siempre de este modo, el filósofo tiene que instaurar ese orden en el alma y en la polis. Así pues, el pasaje de R. 500c3-5 confirma la comunidad eidética mencionada en R. 476a4-7: *Καὶ περὶ δὴ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰδῶν περὶ ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, αὐτὸ μὲν ἐν ἑκαστον εἶναι, τῇ δὲ τῶν πράξεων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ ἀλλήλων κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἑκαστον.*

Como puede verse, ambos pasajes muestran que, en tanto que paradigma del orden político y psíquico justo (R. 443c; 462c; 472c), la *koinōnía* eidética es esencial para la *República*, pues sin ella no son concebibles ni la justicia personal ni la política.⁵

Más aún, el carácter intrínsecamente justo del *kósmos noetós* no sólo presupone la *dynamis* de interacción de las Formas (*Sph.* 254c5), sino que esta, antes que como mera potencialidad, debe entenderse como el ejercicio efectivo y permanente de su poder. Como tal, el ser de las Formas no es estático ni inmóvil (*Sph.* 249a1), sino el de un poder esencialmente dinámico y relacional. Siendo así, es factible identificar el *pantelōs ón* de *Sph.* 248e⁶ con el *kósmos* del paradigma divino de R. 500c4-5. De este modo, ambos diálogos comparten la misma concepción dinámica del ser:⁷ así como la justicia implica necesariamente la interrelación armónica entre las partes implicadas y gobernadas por un solo principio, así también la naturaleza de las Formas comporta una comunicación entre ellas (*Sph.* 257a8-9) regida por la Forma del Bien.

II

Ahora bien, R. 476a4-7 distingue entre la unidad de la Forma y sus formas sensibles e inteligibles de manifestación.⁸ Pero la *koinōnía* eidética instaura

5 Ignoran esta conexión Cordero 2014b; Marmodoro 2021, 7; Rickless 2007; Von Kutschera 1995, 132, n. 10.

6 La diferencia de interpretaciones —intensional o extensional— del *pantelōs ón* no afecta a nuestra propuesta.

7 Cf. Gonzalez 2011, 71-74.

8 Cf. Ferrari 2000, 374-376.

una dialéctica entre la unidad del ser de cada Forma y la multiplicidad de sus apariencias inteligibles. Una dialéctica semejante significa:

1) que mientras cada Forma permanece en la unidad de su ser, sus múltiples apariencias inteligibles manifiestan lo que ella es *virtualmente*: el *phainesthai* es inherente al ser de las Formas y a su *dynamis*;

2) que, como modos de aparecer de Formas superiores y, en última instancia, de la Forma del Bien, las Formas son, por tanto, *agathoeidē* (R. 509a3); es decir, cada Forma representa al Bien para aquello que participa en ella. La Forma del Bien es la perfección y el poder supremo (509b8) que, como tal, instauro un orden jerárquico (485b5-7) en el que cada ser, ya sea sensible o inteligible, dispone de una *dynamis* propia que le permite alcanzar su *areté*, esto es, la unidad de su naturaleza y su función (R. 346a1-3, 351a1-352d2, 352d9-354a9, 359b9-13);

3) que, al recibir múltiples determinaciones por su comunidad con otras Formas, cada Forma constituye una unidad indivisible de múltiples elementos y, por ende, tiene una estructura semejante a la de la justicia como *παντάπασιν ἕνα ἐκ πολλῶν* (R. 443e1-2). Además, en virtud de que cada Forma “hace lo suyo”, la Forma de la justicia se ve reflejada en la totalidad del orden inteligible justo;

4) que, por último, la unidad de la Forma tiene como presupuesto a la Forma de la Unidad que, por tanto, coincide con la Forma del Bien (Arist. *Metaph.* N 4, 1091b14-15).⁹ Ahora bien, puesto que la Forma del Bien es concebida como causa del ser y la esencia de las Formas (509b6-7) – de su subsistencia y su ser determinado– y que R. 476a, además de la *koinōnía* eidética, también se refiere a la *koinōnía* con los cuerpos y las acciones, puede entenderse, por consiguiente, que “lo uno” tiene la misma función causal que las Formas respecto de “lo demás” (Arist. *Metaph.* I 6, 988a10-11).

III

En *Parménides* II encontramos elementos que desarrollan esta interpretación. Explícitamente se recurre a la noción de justicia en conexión con la *koinōnía* y se presenta un nuevo tipo de *koinōnía* más fundamental que permite vincular la función causal del Bien respecto de las Formas con la noción de unidad.

9 Cf. Ferrari 2000, 389; Horn 2005, 311-312.

Así pues, Parménides toma como punto de partida de la *gymnasía* (137c4-5) el aspecto más seguro¹⁰ de la concepción de las Formas del joven Sócrates, a saber, la unidad del ser de cada Forma, que coincide con la hipótesis atribuida a Parménides.¹¹ Tanto el joven Sócrates como el Parménides de la deducción I (D I), conciben a la unidad y la multiplicidad como mutuamente excluyentes.¹² Allí se extraen las consecuencias contradictorias que se siguen si se toma en cuenta la posición de Gorgias.¹³ Pues si la Forma es y es concebida como una unidad absoluta, se sigue que: 1) la Forma excluye toda multiplicidad, 2) no es un todo ni tiene partes, 3) es ilimitada (*ἄπειρον*, cf. Meliso DK30 B2), carece de figura y, por ende, no podría estar en ningún lugar (*Prm.* 137c-138a); en definitiva, una Forma así concebida no es uno ni es.¹⁴ Por ende, una unidad semejante no admite ningún tipo de discurso ni de conocimiento (*Prm.* 142a3-4). Así concebida, la Forma no puede servir de orientación al pensamiento ni de fundamento del discurso. Esto equivale a la completa destrucción de todos los *logoi* (*Sph.* 259e4-5) que, como tal, imposibilita cualquier comunicación. Lo que está en juego aquí es la relación entre el ser, el pensamiento y el lenguaje.

Además, la D II examina las consecuencias que se siguen para “lo uno” si lo uno en sí participa del ser. En tal caso, surge la pregunta: ¿cómo puede lo uno conservar su unidad? Ciertamente, *tò hèn ón* puede ser cualquier entidad sensible o inteligible. Por eso, no sólo se le asigna *epistémē* y *dóxa* a lo uno que es, sino también sensación (*Prm.* 155d6).

Ahora bien, *Prm.* 143a6-8 introduce una operación del pensamiento (*διανοία*) que separa sendas Formas —lo uno en sí y el ser— en lo uno que es. De este modo, el pensamiento tendría adonde dirigirse, hacia las Formas (*Prm.* 135d8-e4), pero Parménides añade que no es por ser uno que lo uno es diferente del ser, ni por el hecho de ser ‘ser’ que el ser es otro que lo uno, sino que difieren entre sí a causa de lo diferente y de lo otro (*Prm.* 143b3-6; cf. 139c). Como señala el Extranjero de Elea, cada Forma es diferente de las demás, pero οὐ διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν, sino por su participación en la Forma de lo diferente (*Sph.* 255e5-6). En consecuencia, tanto el ser de las Formas

10 Cf. Phd. 100d8-e2; 101d1-2. R. V toma la noción de justicia de R. II-IV como la hipótesis más sólida (453b4-5; 462a2-b3). Cf. Gutiérrez 2015.

11 Cf. *Prm.* 128a8-b1 y d1. Cf. O’Brien 2007.

12 Cf. *Prm.* 129b7-8; 137c4-5, 137b1-4.

13 Cf. Bremond 2019.

14 Cf. Ps.-Arist. MXG 979b25: μηδ αμοῦ δὲ ὄν οὐδὲν ἄν εἴη; cf. Sext. Emp. Adv. Math. VII. 70. Cf. Bremond 2019. Para Zenón, cf. Arist. Metaph. III 4, 1001b. Como veremos, el modelo de la inmanencia remite a esta idea. Cf. *Prm.* 138a-b; 145e1; 151a4-5; 159c.

como el pensamiento requieren no sólo de la unidad de cada Forma, sino también de la *koinōnía* eidética.

Mientras que el pensamiento requiere de la distinción y la comunicación entre las Formas, en la sección 149d8-150d4 persiste el modelo fiscalista de la inmanencia según el cual las Formas ingresan (ἐγγίγνεται) y están presentes (ἐνείη) en su portador —ya sea sensible o inteligible— como un todo o una parte. Este modelo presupone la existencia y la modalidad absoluta del ser inteligible que su portador compartiría por posesión (ἔχειν) o por adición (προσεῖναι). La inmanencia implicaría, entonces, que la Forma se extiende por todo su portador, o bien lo contiene, de tal suerte que la Forma resultaría siendo, además de su *ousía*, igual o mayor que su portador.¹⁵ Por ende, ninguna Forma puede “estar en” ninguno de los *ónta*. Siendo así, o bien no son en absoluto (posición de Gorgias), o bien son, pero están absolutamente separadas (posición del joven Sócrates). No es, pues, casual que, en medio de este argumento, Parménides recurra a la noción de justicia, ya que el problema de fondo sería el de una *polypragmosynē*. Por ello, Parménides pregunta: “¿Es, acaso, posible que la pequeñez sea igual a algo o más grande que algo y que *haga lo* de la grandeza y la igualdad, pero no *haga lo suyo* (καὶ πράττειν [...] μὴ τὰ ἑαυτῆς)?” (*Prm.* 150a7-b1). Si la respuesta fuera positiva, cada Forma cumpliría con las funciones de otras Formas. Pero, al contrario, cada Forma “hace lo suyo” —πράττειν τὰ ἑαυτῆς— según su naturaleza o *ousía*, y, de este modo, actúa como un agente justo.

Mientras que, según la más grande aporía, las Formas no ejercen su poder sobre lo sensible ni este sobre ellas (*Prm.* 134d), el modelo de la justicia introduce un modelo ontológico alternativo al de la inmanencia. Sin embargo, este modelo ontológico no es aplicado sino hasta la D III, donde se examinan las afecciones de los otros si lo uno es (*Prm.* 157b6). Evidentemente el *páschein* de los otros es la contraparte del *prátein* de las Formas.¹⁶

IV

El modelo de la justicia desarrolla una dialéctica entre el ser y las apariencias que coincide con la concepción de la *koinōnía* como una “afección o una acción que, gracias a una cierta *dynamis*, se origina del encuentro mutuo” (*Sph.*

15 Parménides toma como ejemplos la pequeñez (150a-b) y la grandeza (150c).

16 Cf. Gutiérrez 2022.

248b5-6) de los términos implicados. En ese sentido, en la D III se habla de una génesis de “algo diferente” mediante una comunión (κοινωνησάντων) de lo uno y “los otros que lo uno” (*Prm.* 158d2-4). Puesto que, según la D IV, “se ha dicho todo cuando se ha mencionado a lo uno y los otros” (πάντα γὰρ εἴρηται, ὅταν ῥηθῇ τό τε ἓν καὶ τᾶλλα), de manera que “no hay junto a ellos algo diferente, algo otro que lo uno y los otros” (*Prm.* 159b7-c1; cf. 151a2-4), el producto de esa “génesis” debe ser la Forma (μιᾶς τινὸς ἰδέας) concebida como un “todo, que ha surgido como un uno completo y perfecto a partir de las partes” (ὅλον ἐξ ἀπάντων ἓν τέλειον γεγονός) (*Prm.* 157e1). El carácter completo y perfecto de este todo permite entenderlo como presupuesto de las partes y, por eso mismo, como Forma.¹⁷ Pues, además, a la Forma se le atribuye la función de proveer el límite y la determinación a los otros (ὁ δὲ πέρας παρέσχε πρὸς ἄλληλα), convirtiéndolos en partes y todos (*Prm.* 158c7-d5), ya sean sensibles o inteligibles (Arist. *Metaph.* A 6, 987b17-22; 988a7-14).

Así pues, la Forma no sólo tiene la misma estructura que la justicia, sino que actúa como ella relacionando e integrando las partes en un todo mayor que la suma de las partes. A diferencia del modelo de la inmanencia, el de la *oikeioprágia* rescata la unidad de la Forma de su desintegración en la multiplicidad en la que, por tanto, sólo aparece un efecto de su acción. Asimismo, a pesar de que la *gymnasía* sólo recorre uno de los tantos caminos que hay que recorrer para dar con la verdad (*Prm.* 136e1-3), nos encontramos ante una brevísima pero fundamental alusión a los principios.

Sin embargo, la separación radical de lo uno y los otros en D IV (*Prm.* 159b6-7) es precedida en D III por una distinción de ambos términos mediante una operación del pensamiento (διανοίᾳ) que separa (ἀφελεῖν [...] ἀφαιρεθέν, *Prm.* 158c2-3) lo que no está realmente separado (*Prm.* 158b4). De ahí el uso del verbo *metalambánein* para hacer referencia a un momento lógicamente anterior a la *methéxis* de los *ónta* en lo uno (*Prm.* 158b8-9) con el propósito de examinar “en sí y por sí aquello que podamos ver de la naturaleza diferente de la Forma” (*Prm.* 158c5-6) o de los otros como “multiplicidades en las que lo uno no está” (*Prm.* 158c1). Nótese, empero, que claramente se da a entender que el pensamiento no puede aprehender esta *physis* en sí misma, sino sólo cuanto de ella podemos “ver”, esto es, algo —“aquello más pequeño que nos sea posible sustraer”— ilimitado en multiplicidad (ἄπειρον πλήθει) (*Prm.* 158c6-7; cf. Anaxágoras DK59 B1). Es, pues, a partir de sus efectos que el pensamiento concluye que esa naturaleza es mera indeterminación (158d6).

17 Cf. Harte 2002, 131-134; Migliori 1990, 309.

En consecuencia, la génesis de las Formas no debe entenderse literalmente, sino como un análisis de su constitución en virtud de una *koinōnía* más fundamental en la que ese “uno” y esos “otros” producen por su propia *dynamis* una acción o padecen una afección (*Sph.* 248b5-6) y, de ese modo, cumplen respectivamente su función según su naturaleza.¹⁸ Así pues, la posición de *péras* en la *apeiría* (*Prm.* 158d3-6) tiene como resultado una multiplicidad ilimitada. Sin la actividad del uno como principio, los otros se desintegrarían completamente y, en última instancia, no serían nada (*Prm.* 158b4), razón por la cual estos principios están siempre interactuando.¹⁹ Como tal, lo uno no sólo sería causa de la unidad y determinación de las Formas, sino, por eso mismo, como la Forma del Bien, de su ser y su esencia (*R.* 509b6-7). En este sentido, es idéntico con el Bien (*Arist. Metaph.* A 6, 987b21-988a17; N 4, 1091b13-15). No obstante, también es causa de *epistēmē* y *alētheía* (508e2-3), de modo que, en contraste con la indeterminación de la naturaleza de los otros, lo uno es *idéa tou agathou y mégiston máthēma*, es decir, en tanto Forma suprema es principio de determinación e inteligibilidad de todas las Formas y, además, es en sí mismo accesible al pensamiento (*R.* 516b4-7).²⁰

El Uno/Bien es, pues, *por sí mismo*, sin tener que participar en o excluir nada, ya que, a diferencia del resto de Formas, en su caso no se puede decir que “es mucho lo que es, pero infinito en cantidad lo que no es” (*Sph.* 256e). Más bien es *virtualmente* todo. Por el contrario, lo uno absolutamente separado *hebt sich selbst auf* y, por tanto, ni es ni es uno, del mismo modo que los otros o la multiplicidad absolutamente carente de unidad no son nada (*D VIII*). Así pues, el Uno pone el límite y la determinación en lo ilimitado e indeterminado, sin identificarse con, ni desintegrarse en los otros. Su *dynamis* le permite manifestarse y actuar permanentemente sobre estos sin perder su unidad. De esa manera prevalece el modelo de la justicia sobre el de la inmanencia.

En definitiva, el encuentro de los filósofos de Clazómenas y de Elea en Atenas tiene como resultado “algo diferente” a las posiciones que ellos representan. Y, como espero haber demostrado, *koinōnía*, *dynamis* y justicia se implican mutuamente en la *República*, el *Parménides* y el *Sofista*.

18 Véase la distinción de Filolao entre los factores limitantes y los ilimitados. Cf. Graeser 2003, 62 y Hölsle 2019, 344.

19 Por ende, la multiplicidad indeterminada es, en cierta medida, unidad. Cf. Halfwassen 2001, 73.

20 Cf. Szlezák 2003, 97-99. Por el contrario, en la línea de la interpretación neoplatónica, Halfwassen 1992, 220-226, sostiene que el Bien no es inteligible.

To Act and to Suffer: Allusions to Plato's Dialectical Metaphysics in the *Sophist*¹

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This paper considers the proposal made by the Stranger of Elea to materialists and idealists: reality is qualified as the power to act and to suffer. Whatever acts must act on what suffers its action, but agent and patient are in such a dynamic relationship that they can 'swap roles' with each other. The consequent complexity emerges in the entirety of the *Sophist* and has its most evident expression in the *diairesis* that manifests the complex nature of Ideas. This *diairesis* proceeds from a one and generates its multiple branches by a process that, as it were, brings the Ideas into being from what is not due to the intervention of a demiurge. If being qualifies as a power to act and to suffer that leads to a systemic vision of the complexity of reality and the intervention of a demiurge, the result is a reduction of importance of ontology, the science of 'being', which has interested readers of the *Sophist* for centuries. For Plato 'being' in all its variants is not the definitive word that connotes reality, as the subsequent ontological tradition (of Aristotelian origin) believes. In conclusion, the ontological treatment should not be overvalued: Plato here presents the dialectical and dynamic vision of his philosophy.

Act, suffer, ontology, dialectic

In Plato's second description, in the *Sophist*, of previous philosophy as a *γυγαντομαχία* between materialists² and idealists,³ the materialists, even if made better people, are kept in check. The strange thing, however, is that at

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- 1 Sadly, Maurizio Migliori passed away after submitting his paper. The editors have taken the liberty of making some stylistic changes in his English.
 - 2 A basic methodological principle should always apply. If Plato wanted to attack not a philosophical position but a school or a philosopher, he would have introduced distinctive elements that would have allowed the reader of the time to understand who it was. Since adequate textual indications are lacking, it is not possible to suggest references to specific philosophers (even if the Atomists are the only true materialists of antiquity). Since Theaetetus claims to have encountered many of them (246B4-5), it is better to think that in this case Plato refers to a theoretical position in a generic sense.
 - 3 Again, the same variety of positions that are constantly hypothesized (Megarians, Pythagoreans, Academics, Plato himself in an earlier phase) show that the problem is unsolvable. The only textual datum is that they are Eleatizing, so much so that the Stranger from Elea claims to know them well. This does not seem suffice to determine a school because, to a certain extent, the Eleatic position has conditioned the debate of a generation of thinkers.

this point the Stranger almost seems to take pity on them and to desire to help them by offering them what appears like an escape route:

Stranger: Maybe they find themselves in difficulty (ἀποροῖεν). In case they find themselves undergoing (πεπόνθασι) some such situation, then see whether they would be willing to accept our proposal and to agree (ὁμολογεῖν) that to be (τὸ ὄν) is something like the following. . . . I say that anything (ὅποιανούν) has some power (δύναμιν) either to act (ποιεῖν) by nature (πεφυκὸς) on another thing, or to suffer (παθεῖν) even a slightest thing by an entirely insignificant entity (σικμρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου) even if it is just for a single time, all this really is (πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι). In fact, I propose a definition (ὅρον): entities are nothing other than power (τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις).

Theaetetus: But, since they have nothing better to say at the moment, they accept it.

Stranger: Fine. Perhaps, in fact, something different might appear both to us and to them later. For now, therefore, this remains agreed between us and them (*Sph.* 247D4-248A2).

Therefore, on the one hand we have an important fact on the theoretical level: a *definition* of being, emphatically underlined (τίθεμαι γὰρ ὅρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα), that applies to all of reality. On the other hand, this seems to be accepted only temporarily, so much that the Stranger even puts forward the hypothesis that one might change his mind.

In fact, we are faced with a first proof of how Plato uses the dramaturgic context to make the reader *think*. Accordingly, the subsequent discussion with the Friends of Ideas confirms and, at the same time, strengthens what we just read. They are presented in a better way: they defend themselves with great attention (μάλα εὐλαβῶς, 246B6-7), and they are more meek (ἡμερώτεροι, 246C10). Yet, they divide the sphere of becoming from that of being: with the body, by sensation, we commune (δι' αἰσθήσεως κοινωνεῖν) with becoming, while with the soul, by reasoning (διὰ λογισμοῦ δὲ ψυχῇ), we commune with the Ideas, the being that really is.

Stranger: But, good friends, what can we say that this 'communing' (κοινωνεῖν) is for you in relation to both cases? Isn't that what we said a little while ago? . . . A suffering or an acting on, by a certain power (πάθημα ἢ ποίημα ἐκ δυνάμεως τινος), starting from things that meet with one another (ἀπὸ τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα συνιόντων). Perhaps, Theaetetus, you do not understand their answer to these questions, while I probably do, given my custom with them. . . . They do not grant us what a little while

ago we said about being (οὐσίᾳς) to the earth-born. . . . We have given, if I am not mistaken, as *an adequate definition* of entities (ἱκανὸν ἔθεμεν ὅρον που τῶν ὄντων), that the power (δύναμις) to suffer or to act (πάσχειν ἢ δρᾶν) is present, even with respect to the smallest reality. . . . To this they reply that to becoming (γενέσει) belongs the power to suffer and to act (τοῦ πάσχειν καὶ ποιεῖν δυνάμεως), while the power (δύναμιν) of neither is suitable for being (*Sph.* 248A10-C9).

We are therefore in the presence of a definition given here without any real reason (for the materialists it was a help; here it is an imposition), and, as in the previous case, it is emphasized that it also applies to what may seem irrelevant (σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, 247E2; σμικρότατον, 248C5); finally, it is defined as *adequate* (ἱκανὸν).

Plato almost seems to know the debate that has divided interpreters of this ὅρον. Of course, if we stopped at the first formulation it would be possible to accept the proposal of those (Cornford 1935, 238-39; Bluck 1975, 93) who believe that in Plato this term does not have the technical value it acquires with Aristotle and indicates only the specific mark of entities. However, the construction of the text and the fact that this description is repeatedly taken up, even in the stronger formulation in the second treatment, leads one to accept the opinion of those who believe that we are talking about *definition* in a strict sense here (Owen 1971, 109 n. 12, De Rijk 1986, 101 n. 12).

To confirm the importance of this *definition*, Plato proposes a sequence of arguments against the 'Friends of Ideas', which involve some fundamental notions of reality (248C-249B):

1. if the soul knows and being is known, this implies doing and suffering (ποίημα ἢ πάθος . . . τὸ μὲν πάθημα, τὸ δὲ θάτερον, 248D5-6; ποιεῖν τι... συμβαίνειν πάσχειν, E1-2) and therefore movement;
2. it is necessary to admit life, soul and intelligence, which are connected to each other: this makes it impossible to think of reality as animated and yet immobile (248E-249E);
3. the final consequence is that we must oppose the extreme positions, the one that affirms that everything is immobile as well as the one that claims that everything is in motion, but we must admit both terms: both being (τὸ ὄν) and the whole (τὸ πᾶν) are both immobile and in motion (249D3-4).⁴

4 Two asides, before proceeding with the analysis: 1. It is relevant that these Friends of Ideas are almost worse than the materialists both because there is absolutely no chance of convincing them and because they support a doctrine of the Ideas that Plato radically condemns, so much so that it is perhaps better to consider their sobriquet, 'friends of

Plato essentially presents us, on the basis of the pair to act – to suffer, with an extremely dynamic view of reality, which

1. cannot be organized in a fixed framework, given that movement can never be excluded, just as it must not always be required;

2. given the complexity of reality, unilateral positions cannot be accepted;

3. reality, being, is characterized by the power that both the acting and the suffering have, a pair that has an even more complex interconnection. In fact, in the *Theaetetus* Plato clarifies that the two terms of the pair should not be taken in a unilateral and rigid way because, under certain conditions, they are able to ‘exchange roles’:

In fact, a thing is not an ‘agent’ (ποιεῖν) before encountering something that suffers (τῷ πάσχοντι), nor is it a ‘patient’ (πάσχον) before encountering something that acts (τῷ ποιοῦντι); something that, when encountering something else, is an agent (ποιεῖν), while encountering still another appears to be a patient (πάσχον) (*Tht.* 157A4-7).

Plato further emphasizes the importance of these two processes also for the human being: the philosopher, who neglects things that are too close, ‘instead, . . . seeks and commits himself to the study of what the human being is and what is convenient for such human nature to act or to suffer (ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν) in a different way from other beings’ (*Tht.* 174B3-6).

Plato reaffirms the mutual relationality of the acting and the suffering with the explanation of sensation: this occurs as an encounter between two movements that start from the subject and the object (see also *Ti.* 45B-46C6, 67C4-68D7) and that give rise to an intermediate reality between what acts and what suffers (μετὰξὺ τοῦ ποιοῦντός τε καὶ πάσχοντος, 182A5-6); from this then two movements start which return respectively to the subject and the object. Subject and object therefore *act* inasmuch as they move but *suffer* the action of the median reality, as Plato reiterates several times. In fact, the subject that *suffers* becomes sentient (πάσχον αἰσθητικόν, 182A6-7), while *the object that acts* (ποιεῖν, 182A7) becomes, for example, hot and white. At the same time, however, the sensory organ, precisely because it perceives, is active and acts, ‘sees’ (ὁρᾷ, 156E3).

Ideas’ as well as the laudatory expressions that accompany them as ironic. 2. I have translated ποιεῖν with ‘to act’, because it is the term that ‘works best’ paired with ‘to suffer’. But its meaning is strongly ‘productive’: this verb indicates the realization of something, of some effect. Plato knows that he is moving on ambiguous terrain and in fact, at times, he also uses δρᾶν. Consequently, depending on the context, it is better to translate either with ‘to act’ or with ‘to produce’.

This game of changing roles is so relevant that Plato uses it, without stressing it, throughout the course of the discussion: at the beginning (154B1-4) it is said that we carefully look at (παραμετρούμεθα) or touch (ἐφαπτόμεθα) the object which is therefore looked at and touched (παραμετρούμενον ἢ ἐφαπτόμενον). However, also the object acts, as is clear from a series of textual remarks: for example, when it is defined as 'that which generated the colour together with <the subject>' (156E4) or when Socrates affirms the active role of 'everything that acts by its nature' (ἕκαστον δὴ τῶν πεφυκότων τι ποιεῖν, 159C4). In parallel, the subject suffers, as is recognized when speaking of 'what acts on me' (τὸ ποιοῦν ἐμὲ, 160A1; τὸ ἐμὲ ποιοῦν, 160C4). The text emphasizes that both act, for example, when it states that both the agent and the patient have generated (ἐγέννησε γὰρ... τό τε ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον, 159C14-D1) sweetness and a sensation of sweetness; at the same time first it is said that the sensation originates from the relationship with *the patient subject* (πάσχοντος, 159D2), and then it is made clear that 'I perceive' (ἐγὼ καὶ αἰσθάνομαι, 160C5).

Therefore, the fundamental question is that of the relationship, which can also be seen from different points of view. However, the basic data remain: the seeing person is such because there is something seen; and vice versa, the subject exists because he has the ability to see, that is he emits and is able to receive, just as the object offers itself to sight, emits and is able to receive. But some subjects may not have this ability (if they are blind), some objects may not have a capacity to be seen (if they are invisible). However, the relationship remains stable in the sense that there is always an active and always a passive because there is no action without passion and vice versa. The realities at stake are always two: 'In fact, a reality in its entirety cannot simultaneously have the dual function of suffering and doing (ἅμα πείσεται καὶ ποιήσει). Otherwise, the One would no longer be one but two' (*Prm.* 138B3-5). Also, this affirmation is put forward by Plato on various occasions (see e. g. *R.* 436B8, 437A1-2).

If we now read the *Sophist* in the light of what we have said, some important points emerge. In the first place, if reality depends on a double movement, an acting and a suffering that can also turn into their opposites, the basic question becomes that of complexity, that is, of the interplay of multiple and diverse relationships that can be established between all the instances of the real (cf. *Prm.* 135E-136C). Consequently, simple outlines must be rejected *as such*: it is necessary to accept both the multiple aspects that reality has and the different points of view and/or the different theoretical models that a thinker can adopt. On the other hand, if this were not the case, how could the Stranger propose very complicated outlines of the

relationship between Ideas such as those we find in the *Sophist*, 253B8-253C3 and 253D5-E2?

Actually, the whole *Sophist* tends to highlight this relational complexity. I only recall a few points that highlight it:

1. the proposed dialectical research model, all based on relationships, which completes what has already been said in *Parmenides* and which will be made even more complex in *Politicus*⁵ and *Philebus*;

2. the double analysis of previous philosophers, which are considered both as monists and pluralists and as materialists and idealists; this shows that it is always possible to apply different paradigms to interpret our realities, which are always multiform;

3. the very complicated structure of dialogue that proposes and intertwines at least six conceptually very different themes;

3.1. the definition of the sophist;

3.2. the development of an ontological discussion;

3.3. the solution of the problem historically set up by the Eleatic school with the denial of non-being;

3.4. the introduction to the dialectic of ideas;

3.5. methodological reflections;

3.6. the definition of real entities as the power to act and suffer;

5 The dialectical dialogues in sequence show that the diaretic procedure is presupposed: in fact, we proceed towards the *Philosopher* (unwritten) distinguishing him first from the sophist, a figure at the same time similar and yet radically different, then from the politician, who is extremely close, not to say connected, to the philosopher. This also justifies the absence of a real hiatus between *Sophist* and *Politicus*. This need to distinguish is characteristic of the *Philosopher*, which however remains unwritten. The important thing here is to find a sign that seems to anticipate the decision not to write it. In fact, at the beginning the problem of the figure of the philosopher is posed (216C-E), then the question arises of distinguishing three obviously connected figures, sophist, politician and philosopher (217A4), and the Stranger faces the difficult operation of 'clearly determining for each (καθ' ἑκαστον) what it is' (217B2-3). Then, however, in 253E, after having characterized dialectic, he affirms that 'in a context of this type we will find it now and later, if we would look for it (ἐὰν ζητῶμεν)' (253E8). The use of the subjunctive signifies a reference to a possible eventuality and, thus, leads us to think that nothing forces the Stranger to define the philosopher. Although this is apparently incongruous with respect to the commitment made, it is really a small sign that we can expect the unwritten dialogue. That is to say, it would be possible to write it. In fact, at the beginning of the *Politicus*, it is recalled that the project is threefold (τριπλάσιον, 257A4) and discussed whether to treat the philosopher or the politician first (257B-C). The puzzle about the appropriate sequence shows that the problem must be elsewhere, namely, in the limits that Plato imposes on himself in writing about things of great importance.

4. the same initial presentation of the figure of the philosopher (216 C-D) that

4.1. in some cases is endowed with value,

4.2. while in other cases appears worthless,

4.3. and in still others looks to describe a madman;

4.4. and needs to be distinguished from politicians and sophists, with which some confuse him;

5. the same five *diaireseis* of the sophist:

5.1. the first three are connected but very different from each other;

5.2. the next, which features a purifying sophist (226B-231B), is completely out of the box, so much so that

5.2.1. it is impossible to say, *on a textual basis*, whether such purification is an acquisitive or a productive *technē*,

5.2.2. in fact, it is not mentioned in the final list which speaks of hunting, fighting, mercantile techniques as acquisitive arts (265A7-8);

5.3. the last *diairesis* is not theoretically harmonizable with the other three (which are acquisitive arts, while the last is productive).

In summary, the game of (potentially) infinite relationships that characterizes complexity is made apparent in the *Sophist*. But the most important moment to highlight the complexity of reality is the denial that all the Ideas either mix with each other or that none mixes with any other. Instead, it is necessary to investigate each combination individually and the instrument of this investigation is dialectic.

To verify whether and how the Ideas are connected to each other, Plato examines only 'some (ἄττα) of those considered greater' (254C3-4), that is, same and different, rest and change, being. We will return to this strange list, made up of two pairs and being taken alone, but for now it suffices to say that we do not need Plato to tell us they are not all the most important, since two absolutely central pairs are missing, namely, one-many and whole-part.

The one-many pair is missing because it would create an almost unsolvable theoretical problem with respect to the central theme of the *Sophist*, given that, only here, we have an identity:

We say that the *identity* (ταὐτόν) between one and the many, manifested by reasoning (ὑπὸ λόγων γιγνόμενα), occurs every time in each statement, always, in the past as well as now. This will never end and it does not begin now; but, in my opinion, there in us is some immortal and stable feature (ἀθάνατόν τι καὶ ἀγήρων πάθος ἐν ἡμῖν) of the same reasonings (*Phlb.* 15D4-8).

As for the whole-parts pair, it is missing because in this case, unlike the other pairs, the relationship is vertical: the whole contains the parts and the relationship cannot be further articulated or overturned, whatever the importance of the part.

This absence of the two pairs is actually mere appearance, because the *diairetic* procedure is justified only on the basis of that complexity of reality, made up of one and many, of the whole and of parts. The procedure finds its maximum expression in the fact that Ideas are composed of Ideas, as Plato explicitly says many times. To give just a few examples among the many possible: in the *Phaedrus*, the first moment of the dialectical procedure consists in bringing the scattered things back into a single Idea, the second in 'being able to divide in reverse *by Ideas* (κατ' εἶδη) according to the articulations they have by nature and trying not to splinter any part' (265E1-2; see also 277B5-8). Similarly, in the *Politicus*: 'we must not separate a small part (μόριον) from the large and numerous ones *nor act independently of the Ideas* (εἰδους), but the part (μέρος) *must be at the same time an Idea* (εἶδος)' (262A8-B2; cf. also 285A3-B6); then, after a long discussion (262E3-263B10) the Stranger states: 'when there is an Idea (εἶδος), it is *necessary* (ἀναγκαῖον) *that it is also a part* (μέρος) of this thing of which precisely we say Idea (εἶδος), while there is no need that a part (μέρος) is an Idea (εἶδος). In this way, rather than the other way around, you have to say, Socrates, that I always (ἀεὶ) mean to speak'.

This is even better clarified in *Philebus* 16C-E where Plato proposes a second model of *diairesis*, divided into five passages:

I. we have to assume a single Idea for each individual reality (ἀεὶ μίαν ιδέαν περὶ παντὸς ἐκάστωτε θεμένου, 16D1-2);

II. afterwards, it is necessary to examine whether it contains two or three others or a greater number;

III. we have to proceed in the same way for each of these;

IV. in the end it is necessarily discovered not only that the reality in question is *one, many and infinite* (ἓν καὶ πολλὰ καὶ ἄπειρά, 16D6), but how many there are;

V. in the same way we have to proceed with the Idea of the unlimited (τὴν δὲ τοῦ ἀπείρου ιδέαν, 16D7).

This complexity, manifested in *diairesis* and at the same time concealed by the technical formalization of the model, which almost seems to be an elementary game, explains the fundamental features that Plato exhibits right from the choice of the fisherman. *Diairesis* has no heuristic value because one must already know what one is trying to define. However, it is useful in that it can reveal unsuspected difficulties, due sometimes to the limits of

language; it can also allow us to discover otherwise hidden links, such as that between the sophist and the fisherman, and it can allow us to formulate relevant concepts such as the nature of productive art.

The explanation of this latter art starts by an initial step that is logically connected to the agent-patient pair: 'Speaking of everything that was not previously and that then someone leads to being (εἰς οὐσίαν ἄγῃ), we say that whoever brings it to being produces (τὸν μὲν ἄγοντα ποιεῖν) in some way, while what is brought to being is produced (ποιεῖσθαι)' (219B4-6). This passage is so important that towards the dialogue's end it is explicitly recalled as clarifying the 'power' of a productive art: 'we said, *if we remember what was stated at the beginning*, that productive art (ποιητικήν) includes every power (πᾶσαν ... δύναμιν) which is the cause of the subsequent generation of things that were not there before' (265B8-10).

The reference to power leads to a parallel between the human and the divine demiurges (θεοῦ δημιουργοῦντος, 265C4): the Stranger opposes a spontaneous causality devoid of thought (τινος αἰτίας αὐτομάτης καὶ ἄνεν διανοίας, C8-9) to 'a divine reason and science, which derive from a divinity' (ἢ μετὰ λόγου τε καὶ ἐπιστήμης θείας ἀπὸ θεοῦ γιγνομένης, C9-10). Thus Theaetetus, with many doubts, accepts the opinion that reality is produced κατὰ γε θεὸν (D3). This allows for a quick conclusion:

I will assume that the realities that are called natural are produced by a divine art (θεῖα τέχνη), while what is made by men starting from these (τὰ δ' ἐκ τούτων ἀνθρώπων συνιστάμενα) is the effect of a human art and that, according to this reasoning, there are two kinds in productive art (ποιητικῆς γένῃ), the one human, the other divine (θεῖον) (265E3-6).

Thus, it is possible to conclude that natural realities 'are all (πάντα) the result of the generation made by a divinity (θεοῦ), who produced each of them (ἕκαστα)' (266B3-4). Of course, this discourse should be further developed by examining the human demiurge and the divine one in the other dialogues (especially in the pair *Timaeus-Philebus*), but we must return to the theme of being with a basic question. To face it, I recall the points made in the discussion so far: 1) reality is characterized as the power to act and suffer; 2) things with these powers have such a dynamic relationship that they can even 'swap roles' with each other; 3) the consequent complexity emerges in the entirety of the *Sophist* and has 4) its most evident expression in the *diairesis* that manifests the complex nature of Ideas. 5) This *diairesis* proceeds from a one and 6) generates its multiple branches 7) by a process that, as it were, brings the Ideas into being from what is not 8) due to the intervention of a demiurge.

If being qualifies as a power to act and to suffer and if this insight leads to a systematic vision of the complexity of reality and to the intervention of a demiurge, what remains of that ontology that has interested readers of the *Sophist* for centuries? This result reduces the importance of 'being' in Platonic philosophy: for Plato 'being' in all its variants is not the definitive word that connotes reality, as the subsequent ontological tradition (of Aristotelian origin) believes. Plato's philosophy is a dialectic, not an ontology, so the ontological readings of his thought must be considered an evident case of what Gadamer calls *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of the effects).

We must consider the problem more deeply. Surely, the question of being cannot be undervalued because, on the negative side, Parmenides seems to have led philosophical investigation to a standstill due to the impossibility of saying 'it is not'. It is no coincidence that the Stranger speaks of an extraordinarily difficult question. In fact, an object that appears but seems without being as well as a statement that is not true pose many difficulties. Theaetetus finds it extremely difficult to grasp in what way one could say or think that the false really exists without falling into the contradiction (236D9-237A1).

So, the problem to be faced concerns the impossibility of pronouncing 'not being' in some way. This situation places the sophist in a position of such strength (240B) that he might undermine Eleatic thought itself; for this latter finds itself blocked in its attempt to deny non-being, which it has claimed to be unspeakable: 'So what can you say about me? In fact, *for some time* and still now I may be defeated in the refutation of non-being' (239B1-3). The first proposition of Gorgias' *Peri tou me ontos*, the one that the Anonymous of *De Melisso, Xenophane et Gorgia* attributes as proper and exclusive to the sophist, states that, if non-being is not, it *is* no less than being: as not being is not being, so being *is* being. Consequently, the fact that things are is no more significant than the fact that they are not.

To get out of this problem the Stranger affirms that it is necessary to proceed with much patience (241C) and, above all, not to consider him a parricide:

But this above all I beg you (μᾶλλον παραίτοιμαι). . . . Do not believe (μὴ ὑπολάβῃς) that I have become a kind of parricide. . . . To defend ourselves <from the sophists>, we will necessarily have to test the speech of our father Parmenides and to force not-being in a certain way to be, and being in turn in a certain way not to be (241D1-7).

Confirming the complexity of the task, Plato explicitly says that he will offer an *inadequate* performance: he will deal with the relationship between these

supreme genera only 'to grasp being (τό τε ὄν) and not-being (μὴ ὄν), if not with absolute clarity, in order at least not to remain without any reasoning about them (λόγου γε ἐνδεεῖς μηδὲν) to the extent that is allowed by the procedure of the present inquiry' (254C5-8).

However, from this *limited* treatment some extremely relevant conclusions emerge, conclusions that confirm that Plato's dialectical philosophy is not and cannot be an ontology: being has no primacy over other supreme genera:

It must be said, therefore, that even 'being in itself' is different from other <genera> (τὸ ὄν αὐτὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἕτερον). . . . Even being (τὸ ὄν), then, for us (ἡμῖν) is not for as many times as there are other <genera>. In fact, not being each of those, it is in itself one (ἐκεῖνα γὰρ οὐκ ὄν ἐν μὲν αὐτὸ ἐστίν), but it is not even the others which are numerically infinite (ἀπέραντα δὲ τὸν ἀριθμὸν). (257A1-6).

The same thing is said even more explicitly in further conclusions, which I present in segments:

<1> So, do not tell us that, by showing not-being as contrary to being (τοῦναντίον τοῦ ὄντος), we have dared to affirm that it is. In fact, for some time now we have said goodbye to the opposite (περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς) of being, whether it is or is not, whether we can or cannot talk about it.

Therefore, in the first place, absolute not-being remains excluded and denied (with an evident allusion to Gorgias: 'that it is or not, that one can or cannot talk about it').

<2> Instead, as for the not-being that we have now said to be (ὃ δὲ νῦν εἰρήκαμεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ὄν), someone must either try to convince us that we are not speaking well by refuting us or, if he is not capable of it, he too must say like us that the genera mix with each other and that both being and different cross all genera and each other (τό τε ὄν καὶ θάτερον διὰ πάντων καὶ δι' ἀλλήλων διεληλυθότε) and that different, through participating in being, is; however, because it is not that which it participates in, but is different, and being different from being, it is quite evidently necessary (σαφέστατα ἐξ ἀνάγκης) that it be not-being (259A2-B1).

Therefore, not-being as different, not-being relative to the negation of some specific reality, must be affirmed. Consequently, both being and different (the relative not-being) are pervasive. In short, not-being remains a very important issue here also because it constitutes the link between the ontological problem and that of the figure of the 'sophist'.

Plato declares that he has not given space to the absolute not-being, but only to the relative one.

<3> And since being, in turn, participates in the different, it will be different from other genera; but since it is different from each of these (ἕτερον δ' ἐκείνων πάντων), it is neither each of them nor all the others taken together but only itself (πλὴν αὐτό). Consequently, being indisputably (ἀναμφισβητήτως) is not for innumerable reasons and in innumerable cases. The same also applies to the other genera which, taken one by one as well as all together, are in many respects and, on the other hand, in many respects are not (πολλαχῇ μὲν ἔστι, πολλαχῇ δ' οὐκ ἔστιν) (259A1-259B6).

Therefore, being is determined in turn by the different and, consequently, it is not the other genera, neither considered individually nor taken all together. Being, like all other genera, is and is not.

If, though, being were the theoretical category that adequately defined all of reality, how could it be articulated on the same level as the other supreme genera as happens in the *Sophist*, and how could Plato say: 'This, then, is the discourse that summarizes my reasoning, as far as I think. There were three distinct realities (τρία τριχῇ) even before the sky was generated (πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι), Being, Space and Generation (ὄν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν)' (*Ti.* 52D2-4). So, before the generative process began there were three preconditions, and being is only one of them. Moreover, since the text underlines the 'three', we must assume that the structure of the numbers precedes this list of preconditions.

All this leads us to a conclusion: since each term corresponds to an opposite, Plato is proposing (without explicitly saying so; i.e., he leaves it to the reader to work it out) two pairs of genera: absolute being - absolute not-being (obviously omitted from the discussion); relative being - relative not-being (the latter marked by the different).

In conclusion, I have tried, in a completely inadequate way,⁶ to argue that Plato here presents a dialectical and dynamic vision of his philosophy and that the ontological treatment should not be overvalued because in this discussion the main theme is that of the need to place relative not-being (and therefore also relative being) in the picture.⁷

⁶ For further details cf. Migliori 2007.

⁷ All this brings us to another conclusion: since each term corresponds to an opposite, we see that the five genera are actually eight when counting the pairs (1) "absolute being - absolute non-being" (removed from further consideration); (2) relative

My proposal immediately raises a basic objection: Does Migliori really believe he can affirm this dialectical vision of Platonic metaphysics on the basis of two little phrases about acting and suffering? Is it not right to think, on the other hand, that 'for such an important definition one would expect much more emphasis'? (Centrone 2008, 147 n. 107). To answer this type of objection, for reasons of space I give up on analyzing what Plato says in the *Phaedrus* on philosophical writing as a game (παιδιά), yet so serious that one can dedicate one's entire life to it (276C-E; 277E; cf. also 278C-D), but I recall two passages:

The first reference is to the *Philebus*, in which Plato presents reality as a mixed result of the *action* of *Peras* upon the *Apeiron*. Here, there would be a lot to say, especially by intertwining it with the two treatises of the *Timaeus*, the one focused on the actions of the Demiurge (29E-47E) and the one that adds (παράθεσθαι) the action of Necessity with material causes, but there is not space to do this.⁸

The second is to recall the many passages in which Plato, without attracting attention and without any emphasis, mentions the pair to act - to suffer. Of these, I mention only three. In the well-known passage *Phaedo*, 97B-99C he speaks of Anaxagoras ordering all things through Intelligence. Socrates repeatedly emphasizes that the problem concerns the identification of the causes: 'I thought that if someone wanted to find the cause (αἰτίαν) for which each thing is generated or perishes or *is* (γίγνεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται ἢ ἔστι), he should find, for each thing, what is the best way to be or to suffer or

being - relative non-being (as marked by the different); (3) motion - rest; (4) same - different. This may seem very strange since Plato only ever talks about five genera. The fact is, however, that Plato plays a game with the meta-ideas by insisting obsessively and uselessly on the number of these meta-ideas. Let us limit ourselves to mentioning the lines in which the numerical reference (i.e., two, three, four and five) is explicit: we have in a few lines, from 254D7 to E5, seven numbers plus another eight up to 256D1. There are 15 numbers, some of which are truly impressive for their obvious uselessness: for example, 1) it is stated that since two new genera have been added to the previous three, the discussion concerns five genera (254E5); 2) the Stranger asks first if same is a fourth form in addition to the three previous ones and then if we have to consider the different as the fifth (255C); 3) it is stated that movement is different from the other three and not from the fourth 'after we have agreed that there are five genera, concerning which and among which (περὶ ὧν καὶ ἐν οἷς), we set out to investigate' (256D1-2). The diversity of relationships must rightly be emphasized, but this insistence on the numerical data requires an explanation. A possible explanation (mine) is that Plato invites us to reflect on the numerical data in order to make Theaetetus say that it is impossible for their number to be less than five (256D3-4), a statement that can be read as either completely meaningless or really 'allusive'.

8 Cf. Migliori 2013, 472-82.

to produce anything (ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν)' (97C6-D1). Here the text passes easily from the classical ontological determinations (to be, to be born and to perish) to this 'strange' association between being and acting and suffering; the latter two are proposed as the ontological cause of anything, that is, of any reality, as if it were an obvious and banal fact. Soon after this, the relevance of this pair is proposed again when Socrates states that it would have been enough for him to understand 'how for each one (ἕκαστον) it is better to both produce and suffer what he suffers (καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν ἅ πάσχει)' (98A5-6).

So, too, the *Phaedrus*, 269D-270D, underlines the power of acting and suffering as a determining element for grasping the nature of both simple and compound realities.

First, we need to see if the object, of which we would like to become experts ourselves and capable of making others expert, is simple or composite. Secondly, if it is simple, it is necessary to examine *its power* (τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ), *what does it act upon by nature?* (πρὸς τί πέφυκεν εἰς τὸ δρᾶν), *by what does it have power to be acted upon?* (εἰς τὸ παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ). If, on the other hand, it contains multiple Ideas (πλείω εἶδη), after having enumerated them, one must see for each one, as if it were one (ὅπερ ἐφ' ἑνός), *by virtue of what it itself acts by nature? or by virtue of what it suffers and from what?* (τῷ τί ποιεῖν αὐτὸ πέφυκεν ἢ τῷ τί παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ) (*Phaedrus*, 270D1-7).

Finally, acting and suffering appear decisive elements in the *Laws* against those who support the disengagement of the divinity:

Let us try to persuade this young man with the reasoning that the one who takes care of the whole (τοῦ παντός) has prepared everything for the salvation and the realization of the whole (τὴν σωτηρίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν τοῦ ὅλου), in which also each part (τὸ μέρος), as far as it can (εἰς δύναμιν), suffers and acts (πάσχει καὶ ποιεῖ) what is proper to it. Each of these parts is under the control of rulers who always preside over the smallest action or passion (ἐπὶ τὸ μικρότατον αἰεὶ πάθης καὶ πράξεως) and realize the ultimate goal in the smallest details (Lg. 903B4-9).⁹

9 Did Plato really entangle things so much? To this question I answer yes, on a textual basis. Plato has a precise conception of writing: the important things 'then he will not write them seriously (σπουδῇ) in black water, sowing them through a pen with speeches (μετὰ λόγων) which cannot discursively defend themselves (αὐτοῖς λόγῳ βοηθεῖν) and which cannot adequately teach the true (ικανῶς τάληθῃ διδάξαι). . . . But he, as far as he is concerned, will sow them in the gardens of scriptures and write them, *if he writes*,

(γράφει, ὅταν [δὲ] γράφῃ) as a game (παιδιᾶς)' (*Phdr.* 276C7-D2). In fact, the written game becomes the characteristic of the philosopher, which is the one 'who believes that in a written speech (γεγραμμένῳ λόγῳ) on any subject there is necessarily a lot of play (παιδιάν πολλήν) and that a work in verse or prose worthy of much seriousness has never been written (μεγάλης ἄξιον σπουδῆς)' (*Phdr.* 277E5-8). The statement is then reiterated and connected to the definition of philosopher: 'if one has composed these works knowing the truth (τὸ ἀληθές) and being able to help them (βοηθεῖν) when he is tested on the things he has written, and if speaking (λέγων) he is able to demonstrate the weakness of the writings (τὰ γεγραμμένα φαῦλα), he must not be called with some name taken from them, but from what he is devoted to Calling him wise (σοφόν), Phaedrus, seems excessive and suitable only for a divinity, but a lover of wisdom (philosopher, φιλόσοφον) or something similar would be more suitable for him and more moderate' (278C4-D6). Of course, these are not futile games, indeed they are very beautiful (276E); Plato not only does not despise them, but he goes so far as to say that they are so important and demanding that one can dedicate his life to them (276D), *as he did*. In this way he was able to remain faithful to the teaching of Socrates: philosophy is not taught, but practiced and the true teacher is the one who provides the student, in this case the reader, not so much with the solutions, but rather with indications, tools, suggestions, provocations that lead him to reflect, to identify problems and to grasp the signals for possible solutions, in a word: to do philosophy.

Like a Child Begging for Both (Pl. *Sph.* 248-249)

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Pl. *Sph.* 248-249 is a passage whose understanding impacts that of key issues in Plato's late metaphysics such as whether Forms change, whether anything remains stable, what makes something knowable, and what distinguishes Forms from particulars. The passage splits into three parts. 248a3-b1 presents the three theses accepted by the Formalists. 248e7-249b7 argues against them. 249c10-d4 draws a conclusion open to two readings. In §1 of this work, I distinguish such two readings. In §2, I sketch seven arguments in favour of the second reading. In §3, I focus on one such arguments and discuss it more in detail. The outcome, §4, is hence a battery of arguments available to support the claim that everything is both changing and unchanging, under different respects. Plato, metaphysics, forms, change, unchangeability.

1. The two readings

A central section of Plato's *Sophist* is devoted to the rejection of the position of the Friends of the Forms, a.k.a. the Formalists. The Visitor and Theaetetus attribute three theses to these thinkers, namely: (Th1) Becoming is separated from being. (Th2) Through reasoning by the soul we are in contact with being and through sensation by the body we are in contact with becoming. (Th3) Being is always by itself in the same condition and becoming is from time to time different.¹

The rejection of the Formalists' position has notably to do with the acceptance of change in the realm of being, but debate among scholars abounds on what this precisely means. Two understandings have been put forward, corresponding to two different readings of the last sentence of the following passage, which concludes the rejection of the Formalists.

1 The three theses are exposed at Pl. *Sph.* 248a3-b1. Here is my translation: 'VIS. Do you [friends of the forms] speak of becoming by distinguishing it as separated from being in some way? Otherwise, how? THT. Yes. VIS. And you say that through perception by the body we are in contact with becoming, while through reasoning by the soul with real being, which you say is always by itself in the same condition, whereas becoming is from time to time different. THT. That's what we say.'

ΞΕ. Τῷ δὲ φιλοσόφῳ καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα [ἐπιστήμην ἢ φρόνησιν ἢ νοῦν] τιμῶντι πᾶσα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἀνάγκη διὰ ταῦτα μήτε τῶν ἐν ἢ καὶ τὰ πολλὰ εἶδη λεγόντων τὸ πᾶν ἐστηκὸς ἀποδέχεσθαι, τῶν τε αὖ πανταχῇ τὸ ὄν κινούντων μηδὲ τὸ παράπαν ἀκούειν, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν τῶν παιδῶν εὐχὴν, ὅσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεκινημένα, τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφοτέρα λέγειν.²

VI. And by these reasonings it is necessary for the philosopher, who values all these things [ἐπιστήμην ἢ φρόνησιν ἢ νοῦν] the most, as it seems, neither to accept the static totality (τὸ πᾶν ἐστηκὸς) of those who assert the one or even the many forms, nor to listen at all to those who make what is (τὸ ὄν) change in every way, but, as in the prayer of the children, ὅσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεκινημένα, τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφοτέρα λέγειν. (Pl. *Sph.* 249c10-d4)

First reading. Something is completely unchanging and something else is completely changing. In other words, of all entities, some are completely unchanging and some are completely changing. According to such a reading, the last phrase could be translated as follows: “To assert that what is and the totality are both together, all changing things and all changeless things”.³

Second reading. Everything is both changing and unchanging, under different respects. In other words, each entity is both unchanging, under a certain respect, and changing, under a different respect. According to such a reading, the last phrase could be translated as follows: “To assert what is and the totality both together as unchanging and changing”.⁴

Though both readings are *prima facie* plausible, they contradict each other. Indeed, if everything is both changing and unchanging (as per the second readings), then nothing can be completely changing and nothing can be completely unchanging (against the first reading).⁵ I shall now (§2) sketch seven arguments available to the supporters of the second reading. A full presentation of the arguments requires the analysis of many passages of the *Sophist*, a task which is beyond the scope of the present work. I hence present more fully (§3) only the fifth argument, since the passage on which it is based has acquired significant relevance in recent scholarship.

2 I choose to translate τὸ ὄν as ‘what is’ and τὸ πᾶν as ‘the totality’ to remain as neutral as possible on issues regarding what a totality is, so to avoid shifting the focus of the paper.

3 Most scholars support this reading. Cf. Brisson 2008; Crivelli 2012; Sabrier 2016.

4 A conspicuous minority of scholars is sympathetic to the second reading. Cf. Irani 2022 and Gill 2012.

5 The conclusion is equivalent to ‘It is not the case that something is completely changing and it is not the case that something is completely unchanging’, which contradicts the first reading.

2. Arguments available to support the second reading

First argument. In *Tht.* 154-183, Socrates develops and then rejects a metaphysical framework based on the principle that everything changes completely. If there are independent reasons to state that in rejecting such a metaphysical framework Socrates endorses the view that everything is indeed changing, though nothing completely, then the second reading matches better with this parallel passage.⁶

Second argument. The second reading matches better with the discussion of the greatest kinds that begins at *Sph.* 250. Different interpretations of it have been proposed, but one broadly shared view is that the greatest kinds are all pervasive.⁷ If this is so, the first reading is ruled out, as it prevents the two greatest kinds Change and Stability from being all pervasive. In fact, if there is something which is completely unchanging,⁸ as the first reading claims, such an entity would fall under Stability, but not under Change. But on the assumption that the greatest kinds are all pervasive, then the second reading should be endorsed.

Third argument. The second reading matches better with *Sph.* 248b2-c10, which argues that when any two entities are in certain circumstances, some relation occurs between them. The passage also claims that when a particular soul and being (οὐσίαν) are in certain circumstances, the relation of κοινωνεῖν occurs. It is not entirely clear what κοινωνεῖν means in this passage and what it entails, but according to a plausible interpretation of it, anytime a κοινωνεῖν occurs, both the entities involved in the relation change. If this is true, being is not changeless. But if being is not changeless, then nothing is changeless, for being is what is contrasted with becoming. Therefore, nothing is changeless, against the first reading.

Fourth argument. The second reading matches better with the argument at *Sph.* 248c11-e6, which shows that the Formalists commit themselves to an inconsistent triad: what is known is unchanging, what is known is affected, what is affected is changed. From a logical point of view, this conclusion

6 I present elsewhere the advantages of this interpretation. For different ones cf. Buckles 2016; Van Eck 2009. There are textual hints that the two passages of *Tht.* and *Sph.* need to be read together. At *Tht.* 180b-d, Socrates states that the position starting from the claim that everything is completely stable needs to be discussed. At *Tht.* 183d-184a, he defers it to the *Sph.*, or so the supporters of the second reading claim.

7 Cf. Irani 2022 and Sabrier 2016 for and against this view.

8 The supporters of the first reading usually state that all and only Forms are as such, cf. Crivelli 2012.

leaves open both readings, but a plausible interpretation of the passage is that it pushes the Formalists to reject that there is something which is completely unchanging, and so that even the objects of knowledge change.⁹

Fifth argument. The second reading matches better with the argument at *Sph.* 248e7-249b8, which shows that being is not unchanging, and that what changes and Change should be accepted as beings. By itself, this conclusion leaves open both readings, and yet if the passage shows that what fully is changes, then everything changes, for ‘what fully is’ is unsurprisingly contra-posed to becoming.

Sixth argument. The second reading matches better with the argument at *Sph.* 249b8-c9, which, assuming the presence of understanding, shows that it is not the case that everything changes under all respects.¹⁰ By itself, the conclusion of the argument leaves open both readings, but on a natural reading, the premises of the argument also imply that if something changes under all respects, then there is no understanding of it. Since the Visitor himself argues that the philosopher values knowledge, reasoning and understanding the most (καὶ ταῦτα μάλιστα τιμῶντι *Sph.* 249c10), it is unjustified to attribute to him a claim allowing for the existence of entities that are by construction impossible to understand. Therefore, no entity changes under all respects, against the first reading.

Seventh argument. Only the second reading allows for a real attack against the Formalists, one that forces them to a serious modification of their metaphysics. The first reading, on the other hand, allows the Formalists to block the Visitors’ attack by a slight terminological change, namely the use of ‘Forms’ for what they previously called ‘Being’, and of ‘Being’ for the conjunction of ‘Forms’ and ‘Becoming’.

3. Focus on the fifth argument

Each of the arguments presented in §2 stands on a particular interpretation of thorny passages from *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. I shall now remove the

9 Cf. again Gill 2012 and Irani 2022.

10 The argument is as follows. (1) If everything changes under all respects, then nothing is by itself in the same condition. (2) If nothing is by itself in the same condition, there is no understanding. (3) There is understanding. (C) It is not the case that everything changes under all respects. To be precise, in the text one reads that everything is φερόμενα καὶ κινούμενα. From *Tht.* 181-183 this means that everything is completely changing. Moreover, that everything is completely changing is equivalent to the absence of stasis, explicitly stated in the text.

hypothetical flavour from one such arguments by providing justification for the interpretation used. For its relevance in the current debates on the matter, I focus on the fifth argument, previously presented as resting on the assumption that *Sph.* 248e7-249b8 states that what fully is changes. This section hence aims at justifying such an assumption.

At *Sph.* 248e7-249b8, the Visitor sets an argument to reject the Formalists' position by listing the following premises:

What fully is (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν) has faculty of understanding (νοῦς).

If it has faculty of understanding, it has life.

If it has life, it has it in a soul.

If it has a soul, it changes.

Together, the four premises imply that what fully is changes.¹¹

Based on this reconstruction, the passage indeed claims that what fully is changes and hence the fifth argument goes through. However, there is an ongoing debate among scholars on whether 'what fully is' is a good translation of τὸ παντελῶς ὄν and whether 'faculty of understanding' is a good translation of νοῦς. Though these translations are very natural for the Greek text, they seem to impose on the Visitor the striking view according to which Forms have souls. As a consequence, scholars divide into two streams. On one side, those who bite the bullet and weakened the meaning of having

11 Instead of agreeing on such a simple conclusion, the Visitor and Theaetetus draw two, slightly more complicated, conclusions (*Sph.* 249b2-3). One conclusion is: 'If what is were unchanging, there would be no faculty of understanding, for anyone of anything under any respect'. If one is ready to assume that the 'what is' of this conclusion refers to the previous 'what fully is', the conclusion follows by contraposition. For suppose that what fully is is unchanging. If it is unchanging, namely it is not changing, it has no soul. If it has no soul, it has no life. If it has no life, it has no faculty of understanding. Hence, it has no faculty of understanding. And if even what fully is has no faculty of understanding, then nothing has it (if one rejects that 'what is' in this conclusion refers to the previous 'what fully is' by claiming that 'what is' means 'anything that is', the conclusion will still hold, for understanding implies change). The other conclusion is: 'What changes and Change should be accepted as things that are'. Such a conclusion splits into two parts: (i) What changes should be accepted as something that is. (ii) Change should be accepted as something that is. (i) causes no troubles, since even what fully is changes, and it indeed is. On the other hand, there is no explicit indication on why Change should be accepted as something that is, but given that it is the Formalists' position which is under discussion, it is reasonable to assume that what changes changes because of its participation in Change, and that it is not possible for what participates in F to exist without the existence of F. Therefore, if what changes is, then Change is as well.

a soul.¹² On the other, those who have stretched the meaning of νοῦς or of τὸ παντελῶς ὄν.

Dealing with Plato's conception of the soul would lead me too far from the present aim, and I hence limit myself to a short comment to justify my translation of νοῦς and τὸ παντελῶς ὄν. As to νοῦς, the proposed alternatives are: 'having a guiding rational principle' and 'participate in a certain kind of rationality/order'. However, two reasons tell in favour of my translation. First, if νοῦς takes any such weaker senses, premise (2) would lack justification, since neither the guidance of a rational principle nor the participation in a certain order seem to imply the possession of life. For example, an apple falling from an apple-tree is guided by a rational principle and participates in a certain order, that of Newton's law, but it arguably has no life. Contrarily, my understanding of νοῦς makes sense of (2), since it is acceptable that if something has the faculty of understanding then it has life. Second, at *Sph.* 249c7, the Visitor lists νοῦς together with other two faculties of the philosopher, namely ἐπιστήμη (knowledge), and φρόνησις (faculty of reasoning), and so it is natural to read νοῦς as a third faculty, that of understanding.

As to τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, the alternative defended in the literature is that the adverb παντελῶς refers to a certain totality comprising both what is and what becomes.¹³ However, at least two reasons tell in favour my understanding of παντελῶς. First, there is textual evidence that τὸ παντελῶς ὄν means 'what fully is', for it is contrasted with τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, which clearly means 'what in no way is'.¹⁴ Second, the supporters of the alternative view are forced to a very unnatural understanding of how the non-sentential adverb 'completely' works. Non-sentential adverbs, just like adjectives,¹⁵ qualify the term they refer to by modifying its intension or extension.¹⁶ When they modify the intension of the term they qualify, the resulting phrase refers to a concept different from the one expressed by the term without qualification, though related to the previous one. For example, the predicate 'being *almost*

12 Cf. De Vogel 1953 and Irani 2022. The view in Fronterotta 2008, 33 is interesting, though he does not justify why 'having a soul' should be understood by analogy and 'non implica la presenza dell'anima'.

13 Such scholars can be made coincide with the supporters of the first reading, for their usual move is to state that, in everything there is, something changes and something else does not. Cf. Sabrier 2016.

14 I owe this point to Fronterotta 2008, 29. Cf. *Sph.* 237b.

15 It is often possible to substitute adverbs for the corresponding adjectives, but not always: someone who teaches well is not necessarily a good teacher.

16 It is possible that they modify neither, as in 'really true' and 'true'.

friends' has a different intension from 'being friends', though both have to do with friendship. When non-sentential adverbs modify the extension of the term they qualify, they usually shrink it. An example with adjectives is that the extension of 'the full glasses' shrinks that of 'the glasses'. Sometimes, non-sentential adverbs expand the extension of the term they qualify. An example is the suffix '-ish', since the extension of 'the greenish apples' expands that of 'the green apples'. The supporters of the alternative view are forced to claim that παντελῶς, namely 'completely', expands the extension of the term it qualifies (in our case τὸ ὄν). However, this is simply not how the non-sentential adverb παντελῶς and its English counterpart 'completely' work.

As a final remark, let me note that both the scholars who bite the bullet and those who stretch the meaning of the Greek text understand 'what fully is' as a synonym of 'Forms'. And yet, there are reasons to avoid this move. First, Forms are never mentioned in the argument and arguably play no role here. Indeed, in the whole passage *Sph.* 248-249, the Greek word for 'Forms' appears just twice: right at the beginning, at 248a4, in giving the name to the group of philosophers that the discussion wants to reject, and at the very end, at 249d1, to say that those who posit (the unchanging) Forms have been rejected. Second, by breaking the synonymity, it is possible both to read the Greek text naturally and not to concur with the claim that Forms have souls. Third, it helps acknowledging that the argument at *Sph.* 248e7-249b8 undermines the Formalists' ground to posit Forms. Recall that the Formalists assumed (Th1) that being is separated from becoming. Positing Forms is a consequence of such a separation. And yet, if such a separation is rejected, their ground for positing Forms is undermined and their view rejected. Of course, Forms can still exist, but their existence would need to be posited on other grounds, and Forms would be different from how they were previously thought to be. For example, if being and becoming are not separated, since everything is shown to change (become) under certain respect, then Forms (as well as anything else) would change under some respect.

4. Conclusion

I presented seven arguments available for the supporters of a reading of *Sph.* 249d3-4 according to which everything is both changing and unchanging, under different respects. (1) It gives a nice parallel with a passage in the *Theaetetus*. (2) If kinds are all pervasive, then it should be preferred. (3) If whatever is involved in a κοινωνεῖν gets changed, then it should be preferred.

(4) If whatever is involved in a process of knowledge gets changed, then it should be preferred. (5) If what fully is changes, then it should be preferred. (6) If there is nothing which cannot be understood, then it should be preferred. (7) If the attack against the Formalists is meant to be a serious one, then it should be preferred.

Knower and Known: The Making of a *Sophistes*

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The Eleatic Stranger's question about the aetiological relationship between knower and known – does only one affect the other, or both, or neither? – is not clearly answered in the *Sophist*. One can arrive at a Platonic answer by attending to basic aspects of Plato's own thought that are not included in the Stranger's characterization of the "Friends of the Forms", above all the fundamental role of the Good as source of the intelligibility, being, and nature of the Forms. This basis underlies two related facts: first, Forms affect knowers as objects of desire (*eros*) for truth; second, participation in Forms is a value-bestowing Formal cause (NB: not an Aristotelian formal cause) of worldly participants being what they are, namely, things instantiating, enacting, or personifying a type of *dyunamis* essential to the good ordering of the realm of becoming. This twofold answer to the Stranger's question has in turn implications for how we assess the alleged status of sophistry as a *technē*.
metaphysics, participation, causality, *technē*.

Introduction

I begin by bringing the Good of the *Republic* into discussion of the *Sophist* and highlighting some of the Eleatic Stranger's remarks reflecting a more full-blooded, Good-based version of Platonism than that which he attributes to the Friends of the Forms. Drawing on the role of the Good as the source of the being, essence and intelligibility of Forms in general, I will describe briefly how the participation of worldly things in Forms works and how Forms are an *aitia* of worldly participants being what they are. On that basis I propose answers to two related questions: What aetiological relationship obtains between knower and known? Is sophistry a *technē*, as assumed throughout the *Sophist*'s multiple processes of Division? The answer to the first question suggests an answer to the second.

The Friends of the Forms and Plato's Own Platonism

Whether or not power (*dyunamis*) to affect or be affected is a mark (*horos*) of being, as suggested by the Eleatic Stranger at *Sophist* 248C, the suggestion raises the question of whether Forms as objects of knowledge affect the

knower, or are affected by the knower, or neither, or both (248D). I agree with those who think that knowers do not affect Forms, at least insofar as the Forms' own intelligible natures are concerned, and also with those who believe that Forms do somehow affect knowers. I suggest two ways the latter is so, one obvious and non-controversial, the other quite innocent-looking but highly controversial. To appreciate either of these, however, it is necessary to restore some basic aspects of Plato's own thought.

First, Forms affect potential knowers as objects of desire or aspiration. The role of *eros* in motivating and sustaining the search for expertise or knowledge is well-attested in the *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and elsewhere. This would be an important part of any answer to the Stranger's question. Although the matter is more complicated than first appears, we focus here on a second part of the answer.

A second way that Forms affect knowers depends again on a fundamental aspect of Plato's Platonism that the Stranger does not mention, the fact that the Good is the source of the intelligibility, being, and nature of the Forms (*to gignosesthai...kai to einai te kai ten ousian*, R. 509B). Among other things, this means that the Good determines which groupings of things correspond to Forms (Ox, Guardian, Number, Triangle, Greater, Different, Shuttle, et al.) and which do not (cosmetician, marketplace haggler, confectioner). This foundational role of the Good also explains why all Forms are separate from worldly participants—i.e., not just not spatially where they are (nor in any place else at all, *Timaeus* 52A-B), but entirely independent of them (e.g., *Symposium* 211A-B): intelligible, non-spatial Forms depend for their being on the eternal Good alone.

To elaborate a bit, the intelligible realm encompasses all the types or kinds—animal, vegetable, mineral, political, psychological, mathematical, relational, or artefactual—whose coordinated instantiation is essential to the optimal ordering of the realm of becoming, along with the natural subtypes thereof. By contrast, there are no Forms for things not directly or indirectly essential to that ordering. Note that by this criterion there are Forms even for such “lowly” or “undignified” types of things as hair, dirt, or clay (*πηλός*), for which the young, not-yet-philosophically mature, Socrates of the *Parmenides* denies separate Forms (such things “are just what we see”, 130C-D). To his credit, however, he then wonders aloud whether there might not be such Forms after all. Plato indicates elsewhere the nature and positive value of these “lowly” sorts of thing (hair, *Timaeus* 64c; clay, *Theaetetus* 147a).

Implications for the Sophist

The Eleatic Stranger sometimes appears quite unconcerned with any limitations, good-based or otherwise, on the population of Forms. But he himself expressly, if discreetly, adopts a more familiar Platonic view both in the *Sophist* itself and in its sequel, the *Statesman*. In the latter he emphasizes that division according to kinds must distinguish *gene* or *eide* from mere parts (*mere*, see esp. 262A, 263A). Socrates had put the point more colorfully in the *Phaedrus*: the dialectician's divisions of reality must not “hack off parts like a careless butcher” but rather “carve at the natural joints” (265E). And in the *Sophist* itself the Stranger suggests a robust Platonic outlook when he refers to the divine creator (*demiourgos*) of natural kinds such as plants, animals, and inanimate bodies formed in the earth, whether fusible or non-fusible (265C), and again when he maintains that “we ourselves, the other creatures, and the constituents of things—fire, water, and their kin—are produced by god” (266B). These passages not only harmonize well with the *Phaedrus*, but bring the *Sophist* squarely in line with the *Timaeus*, where the Demiurge creates animals of all the kinds found in his eternal *paradeigma*, along with fusible and non-fusible so-called “elements”. At the same time, the Stranger is clear that such types as “marketplace haggler” and “number other than 10,000” do not enjoy the status of natural groupings. As he would put it in the *Statesman*, they are mere parts (*mere*), not genuine *genē* or *eidē*.

Pluralities or types of things that do not as such correspond to Forms do of course exist and bear common labels, and are in some cases highly valued by humans —e.g., the *Gorgias*'s cosmetician, whose alleged art and its products only appear to be valuable. Human beings have the general capacity, sketched in largely mathematical form in the *Timaeus*' account of the soul, to formulate all sorts of concepts and to devise all sorts of gadgets, good, bad and ugly.

If many of these sorts of thing do not as such correspond to Forms, it remains true also that all worldly things, including cosmetic powders and pink flamingo lawn ornaments, do nonetheless participate in *some* Forms, if only under such descriptions as *water*, *earth*, *three*, or *different*. In short, the basic metaphysical framework set forth in the *Republic*—a select, exclusionary population of separate, eternal, Good-dependent Forms that *are* the intelligible natures possessed, embodied, or enacted by non-Form particulars—is still very much with us in the *Sophist*, even if it is invoked only in passing by the Stranger, and is largely set aside for his purposes.

How Participation in Forms Makes Participants What They Are

On this basis one can also see what participation of worldly things in Forms amounts to. In short, all natural kinds of living things and their vital parts (ox, heart, lung, vine, root, leaf), along with any sort of expertise or mastery (*technē*, *epistēmē*) needed for the survival and flourishing of living things, are not “just what we see”, but sorts of things possessing some specific *objective value*, sorts of things well-suited to fulfill some role necessary for the optimal ordering of becoming. The key point is that possession of one or another objective, eternally determined sort of value is part of what it is to be a participant in a natural kind or a genuine *technē*. There is no across-the-board fact/value distinction in Plato, because genuine values are facts; indeed, they are essential facts about participants in Forms. Thus, supposing that Ox is one of the animal types found in the Demiurge’s *paradeigma*, being a flesh-and-blood ox is not a value-neutral matter of having a size, shape and musculature sufficient for drawing a plow, nor is it a matter of that plus the fact that the ox is well-suited for doing things humans need done in order to survive. Beyond that, it is an animal capable of performing a type of function that is, eternally and objectively speaking, essential to an optimal sublunar realm.¹

If there is an objectively determined optimal design for a cosmos, city, or soul, independent both of human opinion and of whatever may currently happen to be the case among sensibles, then it follows that Forms, as the intelligible kinds directly or indirectly essentially involved in that design, are *aitiai* of participants being what they are. They constitute a value-laden Formal cause, or a value-bestowing *aitia*. If one is tempted to speak of Forms as “formal causes” as counterparts to one of Aristotle’s celebrated four causes, scare quotes are necessary because separate Forms are not and cannot be Aristotelian formal causes, since the latter are of necessity immanent in things—like the sphericity in a particular bronze sphere. If this bronze sphere’s sphericity were not present in it, the bronze would not be spherical. To separate that sphericity in thought is one thing, but to separate it metaphysically and still claim that it is what “makes” the bronze sphere spherical would be, in Aristotle’s view, patent nonsense. And if one were to

1 Note that participation is not, as is commonly thought, a matter of approximately duplicating a non-spatial Form (a clear impossibility), or of being exactly like the Form in one respect but not others, nor is it something to be asserted but whose explanation remains a mystery. Also, for those worried — needlessly if understandably — about how the metaphor of “imaging” supports the picture of participation given here, see the extensive discussion in Patterson 1985 or the very short treatment in Patterson 2022.

take Plato's *eidē* to be just Aristotelian universals (inherent common natures shared by any and all groups of similar items) Aristotle would be quite right about that. But rather than trying to read Aristotle back into Plato, one would do better to see Aristotle's immanent formal causes as an attempt to preserve one sort of aetiological function Plato claimed for his Forms while avoiding what he, Aristotle, honestly but mistakenly took to be the disastrous consequences of Plato's making his Forms separate substances (*ousiai*).

To address a further matter that may be troubling some readers, it is trivially true that a sensible could not embody some genuine or objective value if there were not such a value to be embodied, and another truism that possessing a given value is what makes a particular thing valuable. Socrates says in the *Phaedo* that participation in Forms is a "simple but safe" *aitia* of sensibles being what they are (101B). But has safety been bought at the cost of triviality? Certainly not. The Platonic position is coherent and "safe" only given the non-trivial and much-contested assumption of the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *et al.*, that there is an eternal, objective, rational basis of value articulable in the structure of a good soul, city, or cosmos—a basis that would abide eternally and immutably even if nothing in the world embodied it or even conceived of it. This contention Plato had to fight for tooth and nail against the relativists (e.g., Protagoras as represented in the *Theaetetus*), the self-styled "naturalists" of the *Philebus* who neglect the most important facts about what they consider "nature" (59A), the allegedly wise scientific types of *Laws* X (888E), the atomists (whom Plato never deigns to mention by name), and other assorted "wise guys". Establishing that basic truth and working out in some degree of detail how it applies to the good design of cosmos, city, or soul, is a fundamental challenge for the full-blooded Platonist.

Return to Knower and Known

One can now readily see how the general notion of a Platonic Formal cause applies to our initial question about knower and known. In a nutshell, the weaver, doctor, housebuilder, statesman, guardian/auxiliary *et al.*, possess types of power or capacity whose proper exercise is essential for bringing rational order into the realm of becoming. I believe it is fair to say that genuine *technē*, divine or human, is the medium by which rational order enters into the created world. Possession of some specific sort of *genuinely valuable* expertise is what *makes* someone a doctor, statesman, or weaver: the positive value of the expertise is part of its very being. In this respect, the

types of genuine *technē* are just special cases of Platonic Formal causality as described above with regard to natural kinds.

Admittedly, without platonic Forms people could still heal disease, prune grape vines, or weave cloaks, still be labeled ‘doctor’, ‘vintner’ or ‘weaver’, still embody immanent universals, and still be thought valuable by humans. But none of that would yet imply that it is objectively and eternally a good thing that humans exist at all, or that they should enjoy what we call “health”, or that there should be houses or clothing or agriculture in the sublunar realm. Perhaps humans are simply creatures that have emerged, along with our cosmos as a whole, through the chance collocation of atoms in the void, or the blind interactions of primal elements such as fire and air. Perhaps all artefacts and all types of human *technē* are just things these chance creatures have devised for their own survival or pleasure, so that ultimately there is no objective basis for considering the abilities of doctors more valuable than those of hairdressers or pastry cooks, or philosophy any better than sophistry (if one could even distinguish between them), much less for considering Socrates truly the best, wisest and most just person of his time (*Phaedo* 118A). These things would not be possessors of a value determined objectively and eternally by the nature of goodness, as opposed to characteristics or skills that are useful to and valued by certain creatures (human beings) that have emerged from primeval disorder through processes unguided by eternal principles of rationality or goodness.

Why Sophistry Is Not a Technē

Each of the *Sophist*’s series of divisions starts from the general assumption that sophistry is some sort of *technē*. But if sophistry is in Plato’s view a genuine *technē*, the discussion above implies that there should be a Form of Sophistry and that sophistry is essential to the right ordering of the realm of becoming. If one (rightly) rejects that conclusion, then sophistry is not a genuine Platonic *technē*, despite what the divisions of the *Sophist* assume. In everyday usage the term ‘sophist’/‘sophistes’ would by definition be someone who is master of some skill or craft (*technē*), or wise in some way.² Thus the pastry chef, hairdresser, and the popular sophist, along with the doctor, architect, and Philosopher-King, would each be a *technites* and a

2 For a deep dive into these waters, see Parry 2020 on the concepts of *technē* and *epistēmē* in a range of ancient philosophical authors, and Parry 1996 on Platonic Justice as a *technē*.

sophistes. Plato is of course willing in appropriate contexts to have a literary protagonist use ‘*technē*’ and ‘*sophistes*’ in such a broad sense. But as argued above, he himself holds to a normative, hence exclusionary conception of *technē*. This is abundantly clear in the *Gorgias*. Socrates and Gorgias, like Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger, define sophistry through a series of divisions, assuming from the start that it is a *technē*. But in the immediately following exchange with Polus, Socrates flatly and provocatively denies that either sophistry or rhetoric is a *technē*, in part because these do not by nature aim at any genuine good. In the *Phaedrus* Socrates implicitly reaffirms that position: without knowledge of truth, one has not a *technē*, but a routine devoid of art (ἄτεχνος τριβή, 260E). But he then takes a more conciliatory approach, granting that rhetoricians do have skills, including mastery of certain forms of argument and means of manipulating emotions. They even teach, lecture on, and write treatises about these skills. But he goes on to say that these skills are only the preliminaries (τὰ πρὸ 269A) of an art of “speaking well”, listing several necessary features that popular rhetoric lacks, and concluding with the normative requirement that a speaker effect persuasion in a manner “pleasing to the Gods”.

So it is difficult to believe that Plato has by the time of the *Sophist* abandoned the distinction between a broad, popular use of *technē* and a distinctively Platonic normative conception—especially since he there introduces, among a series of profit-seeking versions of sophistry, one definition that stands out for its obvious and distinctively Platonic brand of normativity, the “Sophist of noble lineage”, who winnows out falsehoods in a manner highly reminiscent of Socrates.³ Moreover, the conscientious (or even merely conscious) reader of Plato will notice the “red flag” planted at the very moment the general assumption of sophistry as a *technē* is introduced and endorsed. When the Stranger asks whether the *sophistes* possesses a *technē*, Theaetetus gives the ingenuously question-begging reply, “Of course he does: he’s a *sophistes* after all!” It is on this unshakable foundation that the divisions proceed.

The technitai Must Do Their Part

It is a further question as to how someone *comes to be* and *continues to be* a participant in a genuine *technē* and more specifically in a Form of Wisdom.

3 ³ For an original, philosophically probing investigation of the role of the Good in Platonic dialectic and the development of the philosopher-ruler, see Broadie 2022.

Let it suffice to say here that in Plato's view this involves an appropriate inborn character or aptitude which must then undergo lengthy and arduous development through practice, reflection, and "real world" experience, all under expert guidance and supervision. With appropriate variations these are in general the means by which any genuine *technē* is acquired. If someone has become a good builder of houses, maker of shoes, warrior, ruler, etc., and if in addition the mastery thus acquired through blood, sweat and tears is of a type that has a place in the eternal, objectively determined good ordering of some aspect of our world of becoming, then that person is a participant in the corresponding intelligible Form. There is nothing particularly mysterious about this, and nothing more is needed. That is, however, a great deal to ask, especially in the supremely important case of becoming a philosophical ruler.

Conclusion

As good Platonists seeking *sophia*, then, let this be our mnemonic and our mantra: aspiration, perspiration, personification of the eternal Form.

V. Being and Non-Being

What completely is, what in no way is, and what is and is not in Plato's *Sophist* and *Republic*

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Plato's treatment of what in no way is at *Sophist* 236d-239c has important connections with the arguments directed toward the lovers of sights and sounds in *Republic* V. Understanding these connections is crucial to understanding the *Sophist's* articulation of the agenda for its main discussion that follows at 239c-242c, where Plato effectively indicates the need to reconsider the Parmenidean legacy of those arguments. Plato, *Sophist*, *Republic*, ontology, non-being

Because the *Sophist* is one of Plato's most intertextual dialogues, understanding the development of its themes often requires recognizing how Plato is re-engaging with issues he has previously explored. For example, the treatment of what in no way is (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν) at *Sophist* 236d-239c has connections with its treatment in the arguments directed toward the lovers of sights and sounds toward the end of *Republic* V. Recognizing these connections is important for understanding the *Sophist's* articulation of the agenda for its main discussion that then follows at 239c-242c.¹

The arguments at *Republic* V 476e-480a present a set of paired epistemological and ontological hierarchies, wherein knowledge has as its object what is (τὸ ὄν) or what completely or simply is (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν or τὸ εἰλικρινῶς ὄν), ignorance has as its object what is not (τὸ μὴ ὄν) or what in no way is (τὸ μηδαμῆ ὄν), and the intermediate epistemic condition *doxa* has as its object what both is and is not (ἅμα ὄν τε καὶ μὴ ὄν). The arguments manifest Parmenidean influence in their overall structure and in the set of distinctions they draw. Parmenides himself had identified what is and cannot not be as the object of understanding that does not wander; he had identified what is not and must not be as completely unknowable; and he had also identified what is and is not the same and not the same as the object of mortals' wandering understanding. Elsewhere, I have discussed at length how Plato would have found inspiration in Parmenides for the hierarchies

1 Useful treatments of *Sph.* 236d-242c include Owen 1970, 241-4; de Rijk 1986, 84-92; Kolb 1997, 79-85; Notomi 1999, 173-201; and Crivelli 2012, chap. 2.

he articulates in these arguments (Palmer 1999, chaps. 3-4, and 2009, chaps. 2-4).

The discussion of what in no way is in the *Sophist*, which echoes and expands upon its treatment in *Republic* V, proceeds in three stages. First, the Eleatic Visitor asks Theaetetus to consider to what the words τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, or simply τὸ μὴ ὄν, could refer.² The Visitor concludes, with an air of paradox, that whoever tries to give utterance to τὸ μὴ ὄν should not even be regarded as speaking. These words cannot refer to any of the things that are, he says, since each of these *is* something (τι) (*Sph.* 237b7-e7). The line of thought here expands on that Glaucon had articulated in *Republic* V in response to certain of Socrates' questions. When Socrates had asked whether one who knows knows something or nothing (τι ἢ οὐδέν), Glaucon had said one who knows knows something (τι) (*R.* V 476e7-9). When Socrates had then asked whether such a something is or is not (476e10), he had said it is, 'for how could one know what is not?' (*R.* V 477a1).³ In the first stage of the *Sophist's* treatment of what in no way is, the Visitor makes a very similar point when he says it should be obvious that τὸ μὴ ὄν cannot be applied or refer to any of the things that are and, if not to what is, then neither can it refer to something (*Sph.* 237c7-11).

The second stage of the *Sophist's* discussion pursues the thought that while another of the things that are might belong to what is, none of them can ever belong to what is not (*Sph.* 238a1-c11). Here 'what is not' continues to be used equivalently to 'what is not in any way',⁴ and 'belonging to' is a way of indicating predicational attribution. The thought here thus amounts to saying that what is not in any way can have no predicates, for predicating anything at all of it would involve attributing to it one of the things that are

2 The Visitor introduces the discussion by asking whether we dare utter the words τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν (*Sph.* 237b7-10). He then asks what we should think if someone asked to what one ought to apply the designation τὸ μὴ ὄν (*Sph.* 237b10-c2). This shift without comment from τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν to τὸ μὴ ὄν indicates that these phrases are being treated as equivalent; the considerations the Visitor proceeds to develop in fact require, to make proper sense, that τὸ μὴ ὄν be understood as a shorthand equivalent for τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν. Although the subsequent discussion will emphasize that τὸ μὴ ὄν should not automatically be understood as equivalent to τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, in problematizing the nature of appearance and falsehood the Visitor relies throughout on the equivalence (however much Theaetetus tries to resist it).

3 Πῶς γὰρ ἂν μὴ ὄν γέ τι γνωσθεῖν; Glaucon's response here echoes Parmenides B2.7 DK: οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἔόν, as recognized, e.g., by Owen 1970, 226; Kahn 1988, 255; Palmer 1999, 32-3; Bossi 2013, 158-60.

4 This point is essential to understanding the line of thought developed here and through the second and third stages of the discussion. Cf. de Rijk 1986, 84 n. 3.

and thus some measure of being. That is, what is not in any way is not *F* for any and all values of *F*. The Visitor proceeds to infer on this basis that what is not (in any way) cannot have any number, since number is one of the things that are, and that, as such, it cannot be either one or plural and should neither be spoken or thought of as such. He concludes this stage of the discussion by declaring that what is not itself in itself (τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό) is 'unthinkable, unspeakable, unutterable, and indescribable' (*Sph.* 238c8-10). In the third stage of the discussion, the Visitor notes how he has himself lapsed into self-contradiction by illicitly, albeit unavoidably, referring to it as singular in speaking of it as τὸ μὴ ὄν and how he has attributed some measure of being to it in saying that it *is* unutterable, unspeakable, and indescribable (*Sph.* 238d1-239c3). These latter stages of the *Sophist's* discussion of what is not in any way can be seen as exploring at greater length the point already articulated in the first of the *Republic* V arguments that what is in no way is altogether inapprehensible (*R.* V 477a3-4).

These three stages of the *Sophist's* discussion of what in no way is follow upon the Visitor's characterization of appearing and seeming but not being and of saying things that are not true as all intensely problematic, after their quarry the Sophist himself has been identified as a practitioner of the art of appearance-making (*Sph.* 236b-d). The discussion of what in no way is aims to make it clear that the not-being involved in seeming and appearing but not being and in false speaking *cannot* be the not being of what in no way is. When the Visitor says that talk of these things hazards the supposition that 'what is not is' (*Sph.* 237a3-4), the supposition cannot be that what in no way is somehow is. Thus, the conclusions established in the treatment of what in no way is at *Sophist* 237b7-e7 remain unchallenged throughout the remainder of the dialogue. Although the *Sophist's* treatment of what in no way is echoes that in *Republic* V, the *Sophist's* focus has shifted from its inapprehensibility (an epistemic concern) to its unutterability (a logical-metaphysical concern). This shift is due not only to the *Sophist's* concern with the problem of falsehood but also to the fact that Plato is in this dialogue endeavoring to provide an analysis of the possibility of false speech and thought and of appearance. The programmatic discussion that follows at *Sophist* 239c-242c thus begins to focus on how not being is actually involved in the sophistic art of appearance-making.⁵ Plato is here in effect returning to what completely or simply is and to what both is and is not in a

5 Robinson 2001, 438-45, usefully discusses this portion of the dialogue in service of his defense of the text οὐκ ὄντως ὄν at *Sph.* 240b7 and οὐκ ὄν ἄρα ὄντως at 240b12, printed in his 1995 OCT edition of the dialogue and accepted here (as already in Burnet's 1900

manner that reconsiders their relation and problematizes the *Republic's* strict division between the two.

As the *Sophist's* discussion of what in no way is reprises and expands upon its treatment in *Republic V*, Theaetetus's efforts to articulate what an εἶδωλον is operate against the background of the *Republic's* development of the distinction between what completely or simply is and what both is and is not. Theaetetus's initial proposal, that by εἶδωλα we mean images in water and mirrors, ones that are drawn or stamped, and others like that (*Sph.* 239d6-8), recalls the lowest division of the *Republic's* Divided Line, which had contained εἰκόνες comprising shadows, appearances in water and other reflective surfaces, and the like (*R. VI* 509e9-510a3).⁶ When the Visitor tells Theaetetus that the Sophist will want a general and properly conceptual account of what an εἶδωλον is, rather than just examples, Theaetetus bravely suggests that an εἶδωλον is 'some other such thing made to resemble the genuine thing' (*Sph.* 240a7-8). In considering this account, the Visitor gets Theaetetus to agree that, as such, an εἶδωλον is not another true or genuine thing, where by 'true' or 'genuine' he means ὄντως ὄν – 'really being' or, perhaps, 'actually being' (*Sph.* 240a9-b4). Likewise, the Visitor gets Theaetetus to agree that if an image is not genuine, it is the opposite of genuine, and that, insofar as what is like something else is itself not genuine, it is not ὄντως ὄν or 'really being' (*Sph.* 240b5-8). This exchange echoes Socrates' description in *Republic X* of how the bedmaker does not produce the Bed itself but only a particular bed: 'if he does not produce what [the bed] is, he would not then produce what is, but something such as what is but that is not' (*R. X* 597a4-5). This passage, of course, comes in the context of a discussion of how 'a remarkable sophist' can produce appearances of all things, though not things that really are (*R. X* 596c-597a; cf. *Sph.* 234b-c).

Although Plato in the *Republic* will eventually identify Forms, as here in Book X, as the things that genuinely are and sensible particulars as things that both are and are not, the arguments at the end of *Republic V* operate at a level of generality that does not yet make these identifications. The discussion at this point in the *Sophist* is similarly abstract. At the same time as it reprises the distinction between what completely is, what in no way is, and what is and is not, this stretch of the *Sophist* is going beyond the *Republic* by explicitly problematizing the distinction. As the Visitor presses

OCT), against the readings οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν and οὐκ ὄν ἄρα οὐκ ὄντως transmitted in W (for defenses of which see, e.g., Kohnke 1957, Frede 1962, Cordero 2007).

6 The Divided Line of *Republic VI* further divides the categories of what completely or simply is and what both is and is not initially distinguished in *Republic V*.

him for clarification, Theaetetus bravely suggests that although what is like a genuine thing, which really or actually is, is not itself ὄντως ὄν or ‘really being’, it still *is somehow* (ἔστι γε μὴν πως, *Sph.* 240b10), just not genuinely, and that it really *is* a likeness. The Visitor, adopting the standpoint of the Sophist, makes this characterization of something that is not what really or genuinely is but nevertheless *is somehow* appear intensely problematic; and it starts to seem that way to Theaetetus himself, even though he can see that what is required is some manner of interweaving what is not and what is. The attempt to specify what an εἶδωλον is here concludes with the Visitor remarking that the Sophist has effectively forced them to agree, despite their reservations, that what is not is somehow (*Sph.* 240c5).

This point is already implicit in *Republic V*’s characterization of the object of *doxa* as what both is and is not. In the earlier dialogue, however, it was apparently not regarded as problematic to posit that there are things that both are and are not, or at least not problematic in the way it is thought to be here in the *Sophist*. The *Republic V* arguments were designed to persuade the lovers of sights and sounds (and the sophists associated with them) that, in focusing their attention solely on beautiful things without recognizing the nature of the Beautiful itself, they fall short of knowledge and instead operate solely at the level of *doxa* (*R.* V 476b-d). What was at issue was whether there is any such entity as the Beautiful itself, not whether there are particular beautiful things, which are understood to be beautiful in some contexts or relations but not in others. The principal problem with the first argument Socrates had constructed for the sight-lovers was that although the sight-lover might well agree with its first premise that one who knows knows something that is rather than something that is not, he can hardly be expected to concede the subsequent premise that what completely is (τὸ παντελῶς ὄν) is completely knowable (*R.* V 477a3). For that there is anything that could properly be designated as τὸ παντελῶς ὄν is just what the sight-lover does not recognize, and there is nothing in this argument that could be reasonably seen as helping him do so. Here in the *Sophist*, by contrast, even as it recurs to the same ontological hierarchy of what really or genuinely is, what is in no way, and what is and is not, it is the last of these that is now found most problematic. The Sophist’s refuge from the Philosopher’s effort to define him as a trafficker in appearances rather than reality is in effect a suggestion that those appearances are as true, real, or genuine as anything else.

In the parallel discussion articulating the apparently problematic character of false belief and speech, Theaetetus suggests false belief involves supposing things that are not are *in a way* (*Sph.* 240e3-4). This suggestion

is hardly surprising since it obviously parallels his previous suggestion that things that are not true or genuine still *are* in some way. It is more surprising and interesting to find the Visitor himself proceeding to introduce yet another viable possibility, namely, that one could also believe falsely by supposing that ‘things that completely are in no way are’ (*Sph.* 240e5-6). This possibility is striking in the way it combines the extremes of the ontological hierarchy in *Republic V*. But why should false belief involve a supposition that things that completely are in no way are? The Visitor might have simply added to Theaetetus’s suggestion the complementary possibility that false belief involves supposing that things that are are not. And what are ‘things that completely are’ supposed to be? Some sense can perhaps be made of the Visitor’s striking suggestion by understanding it as representing the stance of those who, like the lovers of sights and sounds, resolutely refuse to recognize the existence of anything beyond the ordinary objects of experience that could be designated as what completely or simply is.

The Visitor sums up this stage of the initial discussion by saying false speaking will need to be understood along the lines just suggested for false belief, namely, ‘as stating that things which are *are not* and that things that are not *are*’ (*Sph.* 240e10-241a1). It seems clear enough that ‘stating...that things that are not are’ corresponds to Theaetetus’s suggestion that false belief involves supposing that things that are not *are in a way*. It is not so clear, however, that ‘stating...that things which are *are not*’ simply corresponds to the Visitor’s suggestion that false belief may also arise when one supposes things that completely are in no way are since the phrase in fact appears to be characterizing a more general possibility. In any case, the Sophist is represented as rejecting the possibility of either option – apparently, as the somewhat vague representation of his reasons for doing so at 241a-b indicates, because he equates not being with not being in any way or at all. Until not being is clearly distinguished from not being in any way, such refuge may continue to appear available to him.

At the beginning of his preliminary discussion of the problems of appearance and falsehood, the Visitor had quoted Parmenides’ declaration: ‘...for this may never be made manageable, that things that are not *are*. | But you from this way of inquiry restrain your understanding’ (*Parm.* B7.1-2 D-K). At the end of this discussion the Visitor says that he and Theaetetus will have to defend themselves against the Sophist’s objections by subjecting Parmenides’ words to closer examination and by forcefully insisting that ‘what is not *is* in some respect and, then again, that what is somehow *is not*’ (*Sph.* 241d5-7). The intervening discussion has made it clear that the not being involved

in these still rudimentary analyses cannot be that of not being in any way. For the possibility that what is not in any way could *be* in any respect has been decisively ruled out. Parmenides himself, at the end of B2 D-K, had identified what is not and must not be as completely unknowable, and the discussion of what is not in any way here in the *Sophist* can be seen as developing that thought as well as Plato's own earlier use of it in the first of the arguments at the end of *Republic* V. Whatever thought Parmenides is warned against in B7.1-2, that thought is not that things that are not in any way are. Elsewhere, I have suggested that what Parmenides is being warned against is supposing that things that are not *are* in the way required to serve as objects of genuine understanding (Palmer 2009, 122-5). This thought involves insisting on a separation between the immutable object of true understanding and the mutable objects of the wandering understanding mortals typically achieve. If the Eleatic Visitor is suggesting that he may have to contradict Parmenides, it would appear to be on this firm separation, for in the course of demonstrating how there is a way of not being distinct from not being in any way, he will make it possible to understand, not only how things that are (though not genuinely or truly) are not, but also how what completely or really is in certain respects is not. And this, of course, amounts to a reconsideration by Plato of an important feature of the *Republic's* ontological division.⁷

⁷ This paper has benefitted from comments and questions by conference participants both during and after the session at which it was presented. In particular, I am grateful to Tom Tuoza, Noburu Notomi, Verity Harte, and Jan Szaif for their useful remarks.

Malum esse duplex, et le non ens ipsum: la distinzione tra τὸ μὴ ὄν e τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν del *Sofista* di Platone nella soluzione procliana al problema del male

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This paper aims to show the centrality of the reception of the notion of relative non-being that can be derived from Plato's *Sophist* for Proclus' definition of the ontological status of evil and its definition through the notion of *παρυστάσις*, "form of collateral subsistence". In the *Sophist*, Plato seems to individuate two notions of non-being: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, "absolute non-being", which corresponds to nothingness, and τὸ μὴ ὄν, 'relative non-being', which is instead counted among the many entities: it participates in being precisely in its constitution as 'other' and 'different' from a specific being. In doing so, Plato grants a specific form of existence to non-being as 'the different', one of the five supreme genres. This Platonic teaching translates, in Proclus' *De Malorum Subsistentia*, into the position of a *double track* of evil and non-being, which consists in affirming that just as two types of non-being can be identified, so two types of evil can be hypothesized, that is, an absolute evil, corresponding to the *Sophist*'s τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, and a relative evil, corresponding to τὸ μὴ ὄν. It will then be possible to show how the assumption of the distinction of the *Sophist* allows Proclus, on the one hand, to resolve the aporias left open by the Plotinian treatment of evil (which would assume, as demonstrated by O'Brien, precisely the distinction between τὸ μὴ ὄν and τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν) and, on the other, to redefine the ontological status of evil and give, thus, a justification of its presence. It will then be clear that this conception derives from a correct position of the problem of negation, which Proclus finds precisely in the platonic *Sophist*.

Plato, *Sophist*, non-being, Proclus, evil

Straniero. — Non credere che io divenga quasi un parricida.

Teeteto. — E perché mai?

Straniero. — Perché, per difenderci, sarà necessario che noi sottoponiamo a esame il discorso del nostro padre Parmenide, e dovremo sostenere con forza che ciò che non è, in certo senso è esso pure, e che ciò che è, a sua volta in certo senso non è.¹

È con queste celebri parole dello Straniero di Elea che lo stesso Platone, nel dialogo *Sofista* (241d3-7), si definisce come una sorta di parricida nei confronti di Parmenide: si tratta, notoriamente, del difficile problema inerente

1 Trad. A. Zadro, in Giannantoni 1974, 401.

alla nozione di non-essere, che Parmenide aveva bandito completamente dall'esistenza, e alla quale invece Platone concede una specifica forma di esistenza in qualità di 'diverso', arrivando a farne uno dei cinque generi sommi. Si tratta, in particolare, della distinzione ricavabile dal dialogo platonico tra due differenti forme di non-essere: da un lato, quello che Platone chiama τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν (*Sph.* 237b7-8), traducibile come 'ciò che non esiste assolutamente in nessun modo', il non-essere nella sua purezza, inteso come assoluto. Dall'altro lato, quello che Platone definisce τὸ μὴ ὄν (*Sph.* 257-259), una forma di non-essere che potremmo definire 'relativo' in quanto non si pone come opposizione o contrarietà a *tutto* l'essere o all'essere in quanto tale, bensì come contrario – 'altro' – rispetto ad uno specifico essere, venendo così a delinearsi come differenza e alterità, ossia come *il diverso*. È proprio in virtù di questa contrarietà solo relativa che il non-essere inteso come τὸ μὴ ὄν ha per Platone una certa forma di esistenza e può dunque essere annoverato tra gli enti, poiché partecipa all'essere proprio nel suo costituirsi come *altro* e *diverso*, e proprio in virtù di tale relazione fa parte dell'essere stesso.

Particolarmente interessante è rilevare la centralità che la ricezione di tale concezione platonica assunse nella trattazione procliana del problema del male e nella definizione del male come παρὸν πτόστασις, la quale trova proprio nella corretta posizione della nozione di non-essere in relazione al male il suo fondamento.

Proclo dedica un'opera specifica alla discussione sulla natura del male, il *De Malorum Subsistentia*,² nella quale il tema viene affrontato alla luce dei concetti di *essenza*, *sussistenza*, *sostanza* ed *essenza*, ossia da un punto di vista prettamente ontologico.³ La definizione della specifica forma di esistenza del male non può allora che costituire per Proclo il punto di partenza ed insieme il fondamento dell'intera discussione sul male, poiché da essa dipende l'affermazione dell'unicità e della bontà del Principio Primo, nonché l'eliminazione di qualsiasi deriva dualistica e della 'ipostatizzazione' del male. L'argomentazione procliana a tal riguardo è significativa: chiedendosi quale sia lo statuto ontologico del male, Proclo passa in rassegna le

2 Il *De Malorum Subsistentia* (d'ora in avanti: *DMS*) fa parte dei *Tria Opuscula* procliani, nei quali il filosofo affronta le questioni inerenti alla Provvidenza, alla Libertà umana ed al Male. Possediamo queste opere unicamente nella traduzione latina di Guglielmo di Moerbeke (1280). Si segnala la retroversione in greco di Strobel 2014.

3 Soprattutto alla luce del sistema emanazionistico neoplatonico che non solo pone un unico Principio Primo, causa prima e fine ultimo di tutte le cose (l'Uno), ma per il quale tale principio è identificato con lo stesso Bene assoluto, in quanto tale causa solo di beni.

tesi contrapposte di coloro, da un lato, che ritengono che il male non esista e, dall'altro, di coloro che ritengono invece che il male esista. Ritenendo necessario che, come in un procedimento giudiziario – per usare l'immagine impiegata da Proclo stesso⁴ – si debba prendere una posizione e dare un giudizio, la risposta del Diadoco non appoggia pienamente nessuna delle due posizioni, e ciò, significativamente, proprio sulla base della nozione di non-essere che emerge dalle parole dello Straniero di Elea (Procl. DMS I, 8, 5-37):

Se vuoi, sia dunque questo il nostro giudizio: il male è duplice (*malum esse duplex*), (...) da un lato quello che è solo male, puro e non commisto con il bene, dall'altro quello che non è puro e che è unito con la natura del bene. (...) Ciò che partecipa in modo discontinuo al primo bene può essere legato al non-bene, poiché l'essere delle ipostasi superiori è in modo perfetto e puro ma gli enti ultimi invece possono unirsi in qualche modo al non-essere. Infatti alcune realtà sono mentre altre non sono, a volte esistono ma infinite altre volte non sono, un ente è ciò che è ma non è tutte le altre cose; si può dire che in questo essere unito al non-essere l'esistenza sia superiore al non-essere. Il non-essere stesso (*et le non ens ipsum*) [è duplice], da un lato quello che non è in senso assoluto, diverso e al di là dell'ultima natura che è secondo l'accidente, non potendo esistere né per se stesso né secondo accidente: infatti quello che è non-essere in senso assoluto non può a volte essere e a volte non essere; altro è invece il non essere che si dà unitamente a ciò che è, che sia lecito chiamarlo privazione di essere o alterità. E infatti l'uno è assolutamente non-essere, invece l'altro, come dice lo Straniero di Elea (*ut ait Eleates xenus*), è ad un livello superiore e il suo grado d'esistenza non è inferiore a quello di ciò che è. D'altra parte in quegli enti che sono in modo discontinuo il non-essere è più debole dell'essere, ma in certo modo preservato dall'essere stesso.⁵

È qui esplicitato quello che può essere definito come 'il doppio binario del male e del non-essere', che consiste nell'affermare, come si evince dal passo, che così come si possono individuare due tipi di non-essere, allo stesso modo si possono ipotizzare due tipi di male, ad essi corrispondenti. Prima di passare alla loro analisi e per comprendere ulteriormente le implicazioni

4 Procl. DMS I, 8, 5-8.

5 Trad. Paparella 2014, 491-493, modificata. Per altre traduzioni del DMS, si rimanda alla bibliografia.

che tale distinzione comporta per la teodicea procliana, occorre sottolineare come uno degli aspetti più interessanti di questo passo consiste non solo nell'evidente ed esplicito riferimento di Proclo alla nozione di non-essere presente nel *Sofista* di Platone, ma soprattutto nel fatto che, secondo l'interpretazione di O'Brien,⁶ vi si celerebbe un'implicita contrapposizione a Plotino ed alla sua celebre identificazione male-materia;⁷ contrapposizione che si giocherebbe proprio sul terreno del *Sofista* e sulla necessità di porre in modo corretto la corrispondenza tra male e non-essere.

Plotino aveva definito il male come 'una forma di non-essere', specificando che questo non fosse da intendersi come il non-essere in senso assoluto (τὸ παντελῶς μὴ ὄν), ma soltanto come il *diverso* dall'essere (ἕτερον μόνον τοῦ ὄντος) (*Enn.* I 8, 3, 2-7); si tratta, anche in questo caso, di un riferimento alla celebre nozione di non-essere presentata dallo Straniero di Elea. Conseguenza di tale definizione, nella prospettiva plotiniana, è l'identificazione del male con la materia, ultimo gradino della gerarchia che discende dall'Uno e proprio per questo concepita non solo come negazione e στέρησις di essere, ma proprio per questo definita da Plotino come καθ'αὐτὸ κακόν (*Enn.* I 8, 3, 40), 'il male proprio in quanto male', dunque male primario/male in sé/male assoluto. Alla luce di ciò, convinzione di O'Brien è che la necessità di porre due tipi di male corrispondenti a due tipi di non-essere scaturisse per Proclo da quella che dovette apparirgli come un'inaccettabile contraddizione implicita nella concezione plotiniana del male, derivante, in tale prospettiva, da un uso errato da parte di Plotino della distinzione tra τὸ μὴ ὄν e τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν del *Sofista*: sebbene Plotino identifichi il male con il non-essere *relativo*, gli fa tuttavia corrispondere una nozione di male inteso come *assoluto*. In altre parole, secondo la prospettiva procliana l'errore di Plotino sarebbe quello di aver fatto corrispondere al non-essere relativo non un male altrettanto relativo, bensì un male in sé, assoluto, il quale invece, a rigor di logica, dovrebbe corrispondere proprio a quel non-essere assoluto che lo stesso Plotino, in accordo con Platone, aveva escluso. La correzione di tale contraddittorietà si rivelerebbe allora fondamentale per Proclo, e non solo per smascherare le aporie insite nella soluzione plotiniana e, di conseguenza, per rifiutare l'identificazione male-materia, ma soprattutto per definire lo statuto ontologico del male e, di qui, la sua natura.

⁶ O'Brien 2017.

⁷ Su tale tema, cf. ad esempio O'Meara 2005.

Si comprende allora come la ricezione della nozione di non-essere del *Sofista* abbia delle conseguenze fondamentali per la soluzione procliana al problema del male (Procl. DMS I, 9):

Allora se qualcuno ci chiedesse se il non-essere è oppure non è, diremo che il non-essere assoluto che non partecipa in alcun modo dell'essere, non è in senso assoluto; il non-essere relativo invece può essere considerato uno degli enti. Allo stesso modo, il male – poiché anche questo è duplice: uno che è solamente male, ed uno che non è privo di mescolanza con il bene –: il primo lo collocheremo al di là del non-essere assoluto, nella stessa misura in cui il Bene è al di là dell'essere, mentre l'altro lo collocheremo tra gli esseri; né infatti può restare privo di essere a causa della mediazione del bene, né può ancora restare privo di bene a causa dell'essere: è infatti allo stesso tempo essere e buono. E invece quello che è totalmente male ed è una caduta e come una deviazione dal primo dei beni, a buon diritto è anche privato dell'essere: quale cosa infatti avrà un accesso negli enti, non potendo partecipare al bene? Invece, quello che non è male totale ma è sub-contrario ad un certo bene e non a tutto il bene, è al contrario ordinato e reso buono dalla preminenza dei beni totali; ed è un male per quelli ai quali si oppone, ma d'altra parte da quelli dipende come qualcosa di buono: non è lecito infatti che si opponga a quei beni, ma che li segua tutti secondo giustizia, altrimenti non esisterebbe assolutamente.⁸

Si trova in questo passo la definizione più completa del doppio binario del male e del non-essere, che come accennato in precedenza consiste nell'ipotizzare due tipi di male, un male assoluto ed uno relativo, dichiaratamente corrispondenti ai due tipi di non-essere delineati nel *Sofista* di Platone. Ne deriva che il male assoluto, corrispondente al non essere assoluto (τὸ μὴδαμῶς ὄν), non può assolutamente esistere: secondo l'argomentazione procliana, così come il Bene si pone oltre l'essere, il male assoluto (o in sé), se esistesse, in quanto diametralmente opposto al Bene, dovrebbe porsi al di là del non-essere; esso è dunque ancor meno esistente del non-essere stesso. Diverso è il caso del male relativo, che, significativamente, corrisponde al τὸ μὴ ὄν del *Sofista*: esso si pone piuttosto come alterità e come privazione *parziale* del bene, e proprio per tale motivo può avere una qualche forma di sussistenza, in quanto subordinato e dipendente dal bene. Il primo punto fondamentale della teodicea procliana è allora questo: la negazione di sussistenza ontologica *autonoma* del male, stante la quale non può esistere un

⁸ Trad. Paparella 2014, 493-495, modificata.

male assoluto che si dia come totale deficienza e privazione del bene, perché ciò che non ha in sé nemmeno una traccia di bene non può partecipare in alcun modo dell'essere, e viceversa. Analogamente al non-essere relativo al quale corrisponde, che si pone come *altro* e *diverso* rispetto all'essere o ad un essere specifico e proprio in virtù di tale relazione partecipa necessariamente dell'essere stesso, il male può allora sussistere solo se inteso a sua volta come *relativo*, ossia come privazione solo parziale di un bene particolare e che, proprio in quanto tale, è comunque legato e commisto al bene e in virtù di tale relazione può *in qualche modo* sussistere.

Se allora risulta evidente come siano proprio la ripresa della nozione di non-essere presente nel *Sofista* di Platone e la sua corretta messa in relazione con il tema del male a costituire per il Diadoco il presupposto imprescindibile per la definizione dello statuto ontologico del male, è fondamentale sottolineare a questo punto del discorso come è proprio su queste basi che si fonda la definizione procliana del male come *παρρηγόστασις*, che scaturisce dunque come naturale conseguenza dall'identificazione del male con il non-essere relativo e dalle implicazioni che tale identificazione comporta. Poiché infatti è stata negata al male la sussistenza ontologica autonoma, ne consegue nella prospettiva procliana che il male non è in grado di opporsi attivamente ad alcunché, perché nella sua condizione ontologica non possiede né la potenza né la capacità di agire. Afferma infatti Proclo in diversi punti del *De Malorum Subsistentia*⁹ che la potenza del male non deriva da se stessa, bensì dalla presenza del suo contrario, e che dunque il male né agisce né è in grado di agire, ma sia l'agire sia la capacità di agire gli derivano dal suo contrario. La relazione tra il bene e il male, in particolare, è resa possibile secondo Proclo proprio dall'eccellenza della potenza del bene, che è tale da attribuire concretezza anche alla sua stessa privazione.¹⁰ Ciò che ne consegue nel discorso procliano è allora che il male non può che subentrare negli enti in modo del tutto accidentale e solo collateralmente al bene, dal momento che il male non ha una causa specifica e primaria: a differenza delle molte cose buone, la cui bontà può essere ricondotta al Bene supremo, i mali costituiscono al contrario una moltitudine indeterminabile ed indefinibile, e non possono dunque essere attribuiti ad un principio ed una causa unici ma piuttosto ad infinite cause, intese come debolezza, discordanza, impotenza.¹¹ Ne deriva, come una naturale e necessaria con-

9 Cf., ad esempio, Procl. *DMS* I, 7; III, 43; IV, 54.

10 Ibid., I, 7, 45-54.

11 Cf. Ibid., III, 47, 3-10; 48, 21-26.

sequenza, la celebre definizione di Proclo del male come *παρυπόστασις*, “forma di sussistenza collaterale”.¹² La centralità di tale nozione consiste nel fatto che essa esprime abilmente non solo la non autonomia dell’esistenza del male, ma anche il subentrare del male negli enti in modo del tutto accidentale, derivante in prima istanza proprio dal fatto che il male non ha per Proclo una sussistenza ontologica *autonoma*, ma solo relativa, come la forma di non-essere con cui è identificato. Nella prospettiva procliana ciò significa che il male deve essere annoverato fra le realtà che vengono a sussistere in modo accidentale, in virtù di un altro fattore e non a partire dal proprio principio:¹³ sono allora la molteplicità e la differenziazione a determinare l’insorgere del male in un soggetto, di modo che il male non può che essere considerato come un elemento avventizio ed accidentale che compare là dove esiste la molteplicità. È proprio in tal senso che, proprio perché è stato identificato con il non-essere relativo, entro la prospettiva procliana il male non deve tanto essere definito come negazione o privazione di *essere* – come invece in Plotino e nella tradizione neoplatonica in generale: non possedendo un’esistenza autonoma, il male non può opporsi all’essere, e deve dunque piuttosto essere inteso come negazione di *unità*. È in tal senso che il male in quanto *παρυπόστασις*, si configura come una forma di sussistenza collaterale che subentra in corrispondenza dell’impoverimento della *δύναμις* emanata dall’Uno, impoverimento che, come tale, può sussistere unicamente in dipendenza della sostanza alla quale inerisce, traendo da essa, come suo sub-contrario, il proprio essere. Un aspetto fondamentale sembra emergere dalle considerazioni finora esposte, e che costituisce in qualche modo la peculiarità della soluzione procliana al problema del male: il male (e dunque il negativo) può e deve essere considerato come un elemento essenziale del passaggio dall’Unità originaria e trascendente alla totalità unitaria, articolata ed ordinata del cosmo. Ciò significa che il male relativo che è la *παρυπόστασις* può darsi quale non-essere relativo proprio in virtù della struttura scalare del Tutto, ossia della gradazione gerarchicamente ordinata dell’emanazione del reale a partire dall’Uno, in virtù della quale l’estroflessione della *δύναμις* dell’Uno determina un progressivo indebolirsi della *δύναμις* stessa, e dunque un conseguente indebolimento del legame tra l’Uno, quale causa prima, e la totalità degli effetti da esso derivati. Si può considerare come, in tal senso, il negativo si origina proprio a causa del prevalere del principio dell’alterità su quello dell’identità, della molteplic-

12 Secondo la traduzione di Abbate 1998. Per una ricostruzione della storia del termine, cf. Lloyd 1987.

13 Procl. *DMS* IV, 50, 12-15.

ità sull'unità, il che tuttavia, occorre ribadirlo, è un elemento necessario e strettamente conseguente della scalarità del Tutto e della generazione della totalità dell'Essere che deriva dall'Uno.

Risulta allora evidente come nella prospettiva procliana, sulla scorta del *Sofista* di Platone, il non-essere relativo venga a configurarsi come la stessa possibilità metafisica della realtà distinta dall'Uno: è in tal senso che il non-essere relativo può essere definito come la radice ontologico-metafisica della molteplicità, ossia come la condizione del darsi di una pluralità di enti differenti. Ne deriva nel discorso procliano che il non-essere relativo, proprio in quanto fulcro della differenziazione dell'essere e nodo della possibilità metafisica dell'esistenza del molteplice, è anche radice della condizione ontologica del male. È allora evidente come tale concezione derivi da una corretta posizione del problema della negazione, che Proclo ha ritrovato nella nozione di non-essere presentata nel *Sofista* platonico.

Does Plato Revise His Ontology in *Sophist* 256a? Notes on the “being” of the Ideas

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In the *Republic*, Socrates affirms that the Good causes the “being” of the other Ideas (R. 509b7-8). It is to some extent noteworthy, however, that the Visitor, in the *Sophist*, establishes that the “being” of each Idea is caused by participation in Being (256a1-2). Apparently, the same predicate of the Ideas is explained in two works by different causes. To assess that scenario, this paper faces three questions: i) Does “being” have the same meaning in both dialogues? ii) Is it possible to establish a rule for the causation of the predicates within the so-called Theory of the Ideas? iii) Is Plato changing or revising his ontology in *Sophist* 256a?

Plato, *Sophist*, ideas, being, *Republic*.

**To my daughter Helena Braga, the beautiful princess from “the blood and race whereof I’m proud to be”*

Introduction: my aims

According to Paul Shorey (1895) and Mario Vegetti (2003), the climax of the *Republic* is the affirmation by Platonic Socrates that the Idea of Good causes the “being” of the other Ideas (R. 509b7-8). It is to some extent noteworthy, however, that the character Visitor of Elea, in the *Sophist*, establishes that the “being” of each Idea is caused by participation in the Idea¹ of Being (254d10; 256a1-2; 256d8-9; 256e3-4; 259a6-7). Apparently, the same predicate of the Ideas is explained in two dialogues by different causes. To assess that scenario, this paper faces three questions:

- (a) Does the predicate caused by the Good in the *Republic* have the same meaning of that caused by Being in the *Sophist*?
- (b) Is it possible to establish a rule for the causation of the predicates?
- (c) Is Plato changing or correcting his ontology in *Sophist* 256a?

1 *Idéa, eîdos* and *génos* can be used interchangeably: *Sph.* 254a-d, *Plt.* 262b-263a, *Prm.* 129c. Cf. Cornford 1935, 276 and Ackrill 1997, 107.

1. The “being” of the Ideas in the Republic

Although the *Sophist* is the work in which the interrelation between the Forms is explored the most, it is not the first dialogue to assert that kind of relation. Some other works have evidences thereof (*Phdr.* 265e1-2, *Cra.* 438e5-10, *Phd.* 102a10-105b4), and we are expressly told, in the *Republic*, that there is *koinonía tôn eidôn allélon* (476a5-8). This dialogue even presents one example of that interrelationship. In the first part of the Simile of the Sun (508e1-509a9), we are told that, as the Sun is the cause, for the visible things, of their power of being an object of vision, similarly, *the Good is the cause, for the Ideas, of their power of being object of cognition, i.e., the power of being cognizable*. The Good causes, to the other Ideas, the “cognition” and “knowledge” (*gnósis, epistémē*), “the truth and the being” (*alétheia te kai ón*).

The ‘cognizability’ or *power of being knowable* of the Ideas had previously been described as having, at least, two aspects:

- the *power of being “something”, i.e., existing (because whoever knows, doesn’t know “nothing” (oudén), but “something” (ti), something “that is” (ón): R. 476e7-477a1; see also 507b4-7);*
- the *power of existing in a very specific way, to wit, a “changeless”, “intelligible” and “eternal” way (R. 477a2-478d9; 479a1-2; e6-8; 507b8-9).*

Thus, *if the Good causes the Ideas’ power of being knowable, presumably it is what causes their two aforementioned aspects*. Thereby, I propose that “truth and being”, say, the “reality”² of the Ideas, must be understood as *existence and specific way of being, i.e. essence*.

Likewise, it seems to be confirmed by the Simile’s second part, in which it is said that, as the Sun is the cause for the visible things of their generation, growth and nutrition, similarly, *the Good is the cause for the Ideas of their “eînai” and “ousía” (509b1-7)*. For the *horómena*, the generation is the existence’s beginning, and the growth and nutrition are related to their way of being, in the time. *Mutatis mutandis*, as the Ideas are not-generated, their *eînai* and *ousía* must mean, on the one hand, the very fact of being or existing, and, on the other hand, their specific mode of being, as eternal and changeless “essences”.

Then, the Simile’s second part confirms the first part’s message: *the Good is the cause of the “being” and “reality” of the other Ideas, i.e. their existence*

2 Cf. Dixsaut 2000, -137ff; Ferrari 2003, 304.

and *essence*. Some sense of “existence” is hence one of the meanings of what is caused by the Good in the *Republic*, as acknowledged by many scholars.³

2. Which sense of “existence”? Brief remarks on the verb “to be” in Plato

For several occurrences of the verb *eimí* in the *corpus platonicum*, its meaning was really very disputed. Nevertheless, I would like to stress that the quarrel regarding if there would be in Plato a distinction between the verb’s senses or uses is irrelevant for my argument.

Firstly, because, as noted by C. Kahn (1966), there is an *elementary, pre-modern, sense of existence*, noticeable even in Homer (*Il.* 6. 152; *Il.* 722-723), which is *presupposed* also in predicative and veridical constructions, as well in the complete and incomplete uses of the verb “to be”. L. Brown’s (1986, 1994) thesis takes, in turn, that tack, arguing that the uses and senses of the verb are indissociable, due to an “intimate” or “natural continuity” between all them. Moreover, as noted by these scholars, Plato has often denoted that elementary sense of *existence* through constructions such as “to be something” (*ti eînai*), “to be something or nothing” (*ti eînai e oudén*).

It is important to stress that *I am not arguing* that this kind of construction points *only* to the existential nuance, as Brown has well showed. My point is that *this nuance has to be recognized as present*. Accordingly, the dispute among the scholars about the differentiation of uses of the verb “to be” and if there is an univocity of its senses in Plato, it is not important to my point. It is enough for my purposes to acknowledge that *that basic sense of existence* is running throughout the passages to which I call attention. That sense, according to Brown (1994), Kahn (1981) and Aubenque (1991), is present in the notion of “to be something (*ti*) rather than nothing (*oudén*)”.⁴

3. The “being” of the Ideas in the Sophist

In the *Sophist’s* section on the “Greatest Kinds”, I understand that that elementary sense of existence is present too, due to the presence of the verb “to be” as well of the notion of “to be something”. Many times we are told

3 Shorey 1895, Adam 1963, Krämer 1969, Annas 1981. *Pace* Ross 1951, Santas 1980.

4 Plato has in view, with that notion, an idea of real, not merely mental, existence (see *Phd.* 65d; *R.* 480a; *Sph.* 247a).

that the *mégista géne* “are”. In some occurrences of the verb *eimí*,⁵ we have textual evidence to affirm that, if not the only sense, *the existential sense at least must be present*, to make sense of the passages.⁶ In my opinion, that point was definitively proved by Brown against G. E. L. Owen and M. Frede. Consider the following lines:

- i) “do you say that both of them [sc. Change and Rest] and each *are* in the same way?” (250a11);
- ii) “the Being surely mixes with both [sc. Change and Rest], for both presumably *are*” (254d10);
- iii) “Change *is*, because it shares in Being” (256a1).

Brown⁷ firstly shows that these passages must be read as a sequence which conveys *the same message*, but with an increasing technicality in terms of Platonic terminology: “X is”... “X is due to the mix with Being”... “X is due to the participation in Being”. Secondly, she shows that in all these passages the verb “to be” was put by Plato in a distinct way from the statements in which it marked the non-identity or the predication. Therefore, it must have a complete use, an existential sense. Besides the fact that we do not have textual evidence to deny it, this claim is supported by the previous discussions of the theories of being (242c-251a). I would like to add to her argument another piece of evidence, namely, the Visitor’s conclusion from ii): as Being, Change and Rest *are*, i.e. *exist*, “*they come to be three*” (*tría dè gígnetai taúta*, 254d12). If the intended sense of the verb in 254d10 were only predicative or veridical, how could he conclude that they are three things?

Thirdly, Brown shows that the point above on 256a1 is valid for the other two key passages containing the formula “*ésti dià tò metéchein tou óntos*”, 256d9-e3 and 259a6-7. By reading these three passages in the inverse order, Owen’s (1971, 253-255) only argument to deny the existential sense, or complete use, is the fact that in 256d9-e3 and 259a6-7 the verb admits a completion. So, according to him, it would have to be assumed as an elliptical, incomplete use, and we could apply that reading to 256a1. Conversely, Brown shows that Owen’s position is implausible in the three passages alluded to, and that it is better to accept that the complete uses are *not incompatible* with the addition of a completion to the verb, due to a “natural

5 E.g. *Sph.* 250a11; b3-10; 252a2; 254d10; 256a1-2.

6 Cf. Cornford 1935; Ackrill 1957; Vlastos 1981b; Heinaman 1983a; Cordero 1993; Crivelli 2012. Pace Frede 1967; Owen 1971; Kostman 1989.

7 Brown 1986, 65-68. See also Crivelli 2012, 150.

continuity” between its uses in Plato’s eyes.⁸ Besides reading the passages in their natural order, Brown’s reading has the advantage of making sense of them in their specific occurrences and in the whole of the dialogue⁹.

Furthermore, in the *Sophist*, the existential sense is also connected with the notion of “to be something”, in a parallel way to R. 476e7-477a1. Then, we are told that Change and Rest “are”, i.e. each one is “something” (*ti*), exists,¹⁰ and, “with respect to them”, Being is a “third thing” (*trítōn ti parà taúta*, *Sph.* 250b7). Therefore, Change and Rest have a power of connection (*dýnamis koinonías*) by which they share in reality, exist (*methéxeton ousías*, 251e9-10; 250b10-11; 252a2-3).

Notwithstanding the fact that the predicate “being” of the Ideas has in two dialogues the same meaning – at least with respect to a basic sense of existence –, we can see nonetheless a divergence about *what causes*¹¹ it: in the *Republic*, it is explained by the Good; in the *Sophist*, by Being.¹²

Thus, is Plato revising a central aspect of his metaphysics? However interesting this question can be, we must first answer another one: *how does the causation of the predicates by the Platonic Forms work?*

8 The same argument is, in my view, correctly used by Brown 1986, 66 n. 29 to show that Frede’s (1967) position, according to which *Sph.* 256a1 is contained in 255e11, is also not the best reading.

9 And, as we saw with pleasure in our 2022 Symposium, L. Brown still holds her 1986 position.

10 Cf. Kahn 1966; Aubenque 1991. In Dixsaut’s (2022, 563) view, “l’être ne peut avoir que son sens “existentiel”: en participer c’est avoir la puissance d’exister”.

11 The terminology for the causality of the Good on the other Ideas (“*F is available or belongs to X (pareînai; proseînai) due to (hypó + genitive) the Idea of F*”, R. 509b5-8) is compatible with the typically undefined formulas of formal causality (“*X is F due to (dióti; diá + accusative; causal dative) the Idea of F*”, *Phd.* 100d7; R. 505a3-4; etc.). Sometimes this relation is expressly called “participation” (*Phd.* 100c5; R. 476c7-d3). And this exact phrasal structure is what we find in the *Sophist*: *X ésti dià tò metéchein toú óntos* (255b3; 256a1-2; 256d8-9; e3-7; 259a6-b1). See Vlastos 1981c, Guthrie 1975, 349-350, Frede & Brunschwig 1989, Sedley 1998.

12 Ackrill 1957, 1 claims that “*diá*” in *Sph.* 256a1 does not mark that (ii) “*metéchein toú óntos*” is the cause of (i) “*kínesis éstin*”, because (ii) is not prior to (i). However, the inter-eidetic relation in view is a formal causality (see the previous note), with respect to which any temporal precedence could not have any sense (*Met.* 1070a21-24; *APo.* 95a19-24). So, I disagree with him because his only argument simply ignores the possibility of a timeless relation. The Idea of Being causes the existence of the other Ideas, but not in the same way as a father causes his son’s. In my view, the *diá* precisely indicates the explanation why “*kínesis is*” (256a1), as the Aristotelian “why” of something (*tò dià tí*) is its *aitía* (*Ph.* 194b16-23; *Simp. in Ph.*, 316, 29-33). For *diá + accusative case*, see the LSJ s.v.

4. A rule for the causation of predicates

At *Phd.* 100b5-c8, we are told that *something has the property F only due to participating in the Idea of F (or F-ness)*. Nevertheless, F-ness, as all Forms, has many properties. Which ones are relevant? Maybe this causality rule could be more detailed if we had, in Scolnicov's (2003, 64) words, a "distinction, within the Form, of the properties that are shared in from those that are not". Well, we have it elsewhere.

At *Top.* 137b3-13, Aristotle establishes *a distinction among the kinds of properties that Forms possess*. It would unfortunately require a more in-depth discussion to expose that distinction and to explain why it is hardly acceptable.¹³ Nonetheless, the notion that grounds that distinction, namely, the *relativization of the possession of properties*, can prove to be useful. Although Plato himself has done that in other contexts (*R.* 454a-455d; *Phd.* 102b-d; *Men.* 71d-72d), Aristotle's novelty was to use the relativization to think the eidetic field. So I suggest the following distinction, inspired by that *Topics*' passage as well as by some great studies on it:¹⁴

- i) "Ideal Properties", which belong to all Forms *qua* Forms, differentiating them from the sensible beings;
- ii) "Defining Properties", which *define the specific Form that each Form is*; the Form has this kind of property in the *Pauline Predication mode*;¹⁵
- iii) "Existential Properties", which all Forms and sensible beings have in common.¹⁶

Now this distinction can usefully restrict the *scope of participation*: *the only predicates of the Form that are shared by its instances are the "defining properties"*. Thus, by sharing in the Idea of Beautiful, the painting is *beautiful* but not *imperishable* (*Phd.* 100b5-c8; *Prm.* 130e4-131a3). And by sharing in the Idea of Bed that object is a *bed* but not *immaterial* (*R.* 596a1ff.). It is important to mark that this rule also regulates the relations between Ideas: by participating in the Idea of the Same, each Idea is the same (as itself) (*Sph.* 256a7-8).

Any different result for the causation of predicates that was not the possession of the "defining properties" of the Form shared in by the sharing thing would be an *absurdity*. In the examples above, if some of the "ideal

13 See Cherniss 1944, 1-5; Vlastos 1981a, 334.

14 Owen 1986; Keyt 1969; Vlastos 1981a. For the new distinction, see Braga da Silva, 2017 & 2022.

15 Vlastos 1981b.

16 E.g. existence, identity and alterity.

properties” were shared in, e.g. imperishability and immateriality, our world would be composed of paintings and beds which would be sensible and, at the same time, imperishable and immaterial. Moreover, that absurdity is expressly prohibited in the *Sophist*: each Idea is different from the others not due to its own nature, nor by participating in whatever Idea, but only due to participating in the Idea of the Other (255e3-7). Then, a *causal exclusivity* is presupposed: *only the Idea which has the predicate as its “defining property” can cause it in other Ideas.*

Whether this causation dynamics makes sense, the predicate “being”, in its elementary sense of “existing”,¹⁷ only could be caused exactly as it is described in the *Sophist*: *by participation in the Idea which is its intelligible correspondent, the Idea of Being* (256a1). According to the same dynamics, the Idea of Good could never cause the existing itself, but only the predicate “to be good”.¹⁸ As a corollary, the affirmation in the *Republic* of the causation of existence by the Good constitutes a *total violation of this rule.*

Final Considerations

In conclusion, some remarks about my initial aims can be made. (a) A common sense of existence is signified as one of the meanings of the predicate which is caused in the *Republic* by the Good and in the *Sophist* by the Being. (b) We can derive a rule within the Platonic metaphysics, according to which there is a *causal exclusivity* regarding the explanation of the predicates: *only the Idea which has the predicate as its “defining property” can cause it in the other things.* (c) So, concerning the “being” of the Ideas, Socrates cannot be right; only the Visitor’s claim is concordant with that rule.

Does this mean that Plato is correcting that point in the *Sophist*? The honest answer seems to be recognizing that the explanation of the divergence is not readily available in these dialogues to the reader. It seems rather to have to be sought in other aspects of Platonic *opera*, as the dialogical, maybe even the extradiological aims of the author. However, any attempt to furnish a proper explanation of the divergence requires a more in-depth discussion than what is possible to develop in a short article like this. In spite of that,

17 Even if one can argue, on the basis of Frege’s (1884, § 53) and Russell’s (1903) works, that *existence is not a predicate* of things, we have many Platonic passages in which, as we saw, *existing* is a *predicate* expressly caused by an Idea, exactly as all other predicates. Plato is not Frege. See Dixsaut, 2022, 620.

18 Further, “to exist” and “to be good” cannot be equivalent, because *bad things exist* and *the Good is not their cause*: R. 379b1-c7.

without any pretensions of solving the issue but by way of a conclusion, I would like to present *two suggestions*.

From a *dialogical perspective*, it is a fact that *Republic's* Socrates is present in the *Sophist*, so he listens the Visitor's point regarding the "being" of the Ideas. But what is really noteworthy is his *silence* on this point. Why does he not erupt in protest? I would like to suggest that *he does not disagree with the guest's position*. It is possible to reach this conclusion if one has in view two pieces of evidence:

- a) the Athenian admitted, one day ago (*Tht.* 169a6-c3), that he has a personality trait which he calls his "sickness": a "terrible love" for "fighting in the *lógoi*", which does not allow him to continue the discussion without debating any issue with which he disagrees;
- b) after listening to the Visitor, Socrates says thanks to Theodorus for having introduced the Eleatic to him (*Plt.* 257a), and that points to the fact that he really appreciated the exposition.

Finally, from an *extradiological perspective*, regarding the very dissonance between both positions, I would like to suggest something close to Proclus' interpretation on other "gaps" in the dialogues (*in Prm.*, IV): more than a "revision" or "correction", Plato could be providing, *to his reader*, an *invitation*, to "fill", by himself, that silence on Socrates' part, and to engage and strive for identifying the divergences and difficult "fits" between the several positions presented in the dialogues.¹⁹

Then, this would be an invitation, *to us*, to identify the subtle aporias which, *even if not put in the texts* – being *kept in silence* (like Socrates) – could insist on resonating *within us*. Surely this invitation would urge the reader to move himself towards not only the questions, but also the answers, the openings of the roads, the solutions – solutions that are not readily given: *euporíai*.²⁰

19 In Blondell's (2002, 39) view, Plato's goal was also "to draw in the reader as a participant in the discussion". Cf. Nails 1995, 218-219.

20 I wish to thank to Debra Balido and Jeremy Henry for the English revision. I also wish to thank to my colleagues of the Centre Léon Robin and the UFRJ Pragma, especially to Anca Vasiliu and Carolina Araújo, for enriching discussions on these subjects. A special thanks is due to Néstor Cordero too, for our enthusiastic conversations on the *Sophist*, our "Bermuda Triangle".

The Referents of ‘Being’ in Plato’s *Sophist*

Roberto Granieri

I argue that part of Plato’s strategy to neutralize the paradox of falsehood is to pin down various referents of the name ‘being’, τὸ ὄν. I focus on four and track their role in the dialogue’s argument. They are: (1) any primary being; (2) the Kind Being; (3) any participant in the Kind Being; (4) a set of participants in the Kind Being. Being, reference, paradox, falsehood, Kind

1. Introduction¹

In *Sophistical Refutations* 1 Aristotle claims that one of the most prolific and widespread causes of paralogisms turns upon the nature of names. Human language is inevitably ambiguous because names are finite, and the objects they are devised to signify infinite. Inability or inexperience in disambiguating names leads for Aristotle to committing or failing to recognize paralogisms.²

Plato’s conception of homonymy is different from Aristotle’s.³ Plato does not dwell on theorizing on ambiguity. And his account of language, whereby names are designed to univocally signify an essence or nature,⁴ is *prima facie* hard to reconcile with the idea that a single name may correspond to two different λόγοι τῆς οὐσίας.⁵

1 Unless otherwise indicated, Greek texts are cited in the most recent OCT editions, and translations modify Rowe 2015. This paper is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 885273). Thanks to Lesley Brown, Paolo Crivelli, and David Sedley for feedback.

2 Cf. Arist. *SE* 1.165a3-17 (also 165b31-166a6), with Fait 2007, 102-104.

3 Cf. e.g. Pl. *Ph.* 78e2; *Prm.* 133d3; *Ti.* 52a5, where ὁμώνυμος practically means ἐπώνυμος (cp. e.g. *Phd.* 92d9, 102b2, c10, 103b7-8; *Prm.* 130e6); also Arist. *Metaph.* A 6.987b10 Primavesi: συνωνύμων, with Alex. Aphr. in *Metaph.* 51.2-25, 77.10-3 Hayduck; Syrian. in *Metaph.* 108.27-9, 112.2-6, 114.35-115.3 Kroll. See also Anton 1968. Plato also uses ὁμώνυμος simply for two things sharing a name, cf. e.g. *Prt.* 311b5-6; *Phdr.* 266a1; *R.* 330b3; *Tht.* 147d1; *Sph.* 218b3; *Plt.* 258a1.

4 Cf. esp. *Cra.* 393d4-5, 428e1-2, 436e3; with Sedley 2006, 216-221 and Crivelli 2019², 485-492.

5 Cf. e.g. Arist. *Cat.* 1.1a1-3 (but τῆς οὐσίας at 1a2 is controversial since antiquity and excised by Bodéüs); *Top.* A 15.107a20. On Plato’s limited contribution to the study of

Yet, Plato is of course aware that words are *de facto* used to signify different things⁶ and that this linguistic phenomenon can be sophistically exploited. At *Sph.* 218b8-c5 the Eleatic Stranger (ES) stresses that he and Theaetetus need to investigate the *logos* of what a sophist is, because so far they only have the name σοφιστής in common (περί τοῦνομα μόνον ἔχομεν κοινῇ), and perhaps they have privately used it to name different things (τὸ δὲ ἔργον ἐφ' ᾧ καλοῦμεν ἑκάτερος τάχ' ἂν ἰδίᾳ παρ' ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ἔχομεν), whereas it is always about the thing itself (περί τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτό), through *logoi*, that two should agree upon, rather than merely about the name without a *logos*.⁷ At *Euthd.* 277d1-278d1 Socrates warns Clinias that he ought to learn 'the correctness of names' (277e4: ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος) if he wants to resist the playful assaults of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, who deceive him by exploiting 'the difference of names' (278b6-7: τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων διαφορὰν;⁸ see also 295d1-2). Thus, Plato was also credited in antiquity, by Eudemus of Rhodes, with resolving many sophistical problems by introducing τὸ δισσόν, i.e. the double meaning of words.⁹ Moreover, although the distinction of the senses of a term is not part and parcel of Plato's philosophical method, as it is of Aristotle's, the dialogues often stage works of linguistic clarification, aimed at identifying the primary referents of names, as opposed to secondary or just wrong ones.

My thesis here is that *part of* Plato's strategy to neutralize that particular paralogism that is the paradox of falsehood is to pin down various referents of the name 'being', τὸ ὄν.¹⁰ I want to chart some of these referents and track their role in the dialogue's argument. My project is thus different from the investigation of Plato's supposed distinction of various senses or uses of the verb εἶναι, which has been a prevalent worry of most studies on Plato's conception of being (and not-being) in the *Sophist*. The two projects may

ambiguity see Robinson 1942a; Blackson 1991; Stewart and Sprague 1977, 35-44; and Sedley 2006, 223-226.

6 'Ambiguity was a general feature of Greek literature and not the special invention of philosophers' Stewart and Sprague 1977, 61.

7 Cf. Pl. *Cra.* 439b6-8 (countering 435e-436a), and Simp. in *Cat.* 24.10-25.9 Kalbfleisch.

8 This is the closest Plato gets to a name for ambiguity. The term ἀμφιβολία and cognates (on which cf. e.g. Arist. *SE* 4.166a6-21; *Top.* Z 6.145b24-5; *Po.* 24.1461a25-6; S.E. *PH* 2.256-9 Mutschmann-Mau; D.L. 7.62 Dorandi) never occur in Plato, with the interesting exception of *Cra.* 437a7 (ἀμφίβολον).

9 Cf. Simp. in *Ph.* 98.1-2 Diels (echoed by in *Cat.* 22.9-13 Kalbfleisch), with Shorey 1930.

10 Arguably, Plato often uses τὸ ὄν and ἡ οὐσία indifferently (cf. e.g. Pl. *R.* 486a9 and 508d4, with 521d5 and 523a3; or *Sph.* 250c2 and 256a1, with 250b9, and 252a2). But this should be demonstrated rather than assumed, so here I only focus on τὸ ὄν.

partly overlap but are not the same. And I suspect Plato worried more about the former issue.

I argue that τὸ ὄν refers in the *Sophist* at least to four different things:

- 1 Any primary being;
- 2 The Kind Being;
- 3 Any participant in the Kind Being;
- 4 A set of participants in the Kind Being.

There may be further referents. But I think these are worth zooming in on.

2. The question

It first ought to be shown that Plato thinks that answering the question of the reference of τὸ ὄν matters for his project in the *Sophist*. Let us note, to begin with, that the problem of the reference of names is prominent from the very start of the dialogue, with the question of whether the three names (ὀνόματα), σοφιστής, πολιτικός and φιλόσοφος refer to three distinct kinds, or two, or one (217a4-9). Then, especially starting from the exposition of the puzzles about not-being (236d5-242b5), the emphasis on language correctness becomes increasingly conspicuous. In this stretch of text the occurrences of ὀρθός and cognates with verbs and names of saying are plentiful (e.g. 237c11; 238b4, c5, c8; 239a8, b9). More interestingly, Plato coins here the term ὀρθολογία (239b4), a *hapax* of his corpus and attested again no earlier than half a millennium later (Hdn. Gr. iii 2.513.6 Lentz).¹¹ Plato introduces it in relation to τὸ μὴ ὄν. But remember how the ES sets out to proceed: since not-being is intractable, one should start off with being, 'the most important and chief thing' (243d1); but no later than 243c2-5 the possibility arises that being is as obscure as not-being, a worry confirmed twice later (244a7-8; 245e8-246a2). An ὀρθολογία περὶ τοῦ ὄντος seems then equally, and indeed preliminarily, required.

Further, the whole enquiry into being pursued by the ES and Theaetetus is driven by questions on the exact reference of τὸ ὄν, which those thinkers who have so far made pronouncements about how many beings there are and what they are like (242c5-6: τὰ ὄντα διορίσασθαι πόσα τε καὶ ποιὰ) have uncritically failed to clarify, thereby making their views underdetermined and ultimately incomprehensible (242c4-243b10). Thus, the two interlocutors agree at 243d3-6 that they 'need first to talk about being (τὸ ὄν), and

11 There is another Platonic *hapax* at 236e5, ἐναντιολογία (see below).

track down exactly what those who use the expression think they're indicating (δηλοῦν) by it'. Then at 244a5-6 the ES asks those who have spoken about being what they intend to signify when they utter the word 'ὄν' (τί ποτε βούλεσθε σημαίνειν ὅποταν 'ὄν' φθέγγησθε). Yet again, at 244b6-7 he proposes to inquire from the monists 'what exactly they say being is' (τί ποτε λέγουσι τὸ ὄν). Once light has been shed on the referent(s) of ὄν, one can do the same with τὸ μὴ ὄν and hopefully solve the paradox.

Answering the question of the referent(s) of τὸ ὄν is therefore key to Plato's project in the *Sophist*. Let us now inspect how Plato answers that question.

3. Four Referents of τὸ ὄν

As anticipated, I argue that at least four referents of τὸ ὄν emerge from the *Sophist*'s inquiry into being:

1) First in the order of exposition is the one implicit in the πόσα τε καὶ ποιά inquiry (242c5-6), pursued by the other thinkers who have spoken about being. Arguably, by claiming that τὰ ὄντα are, say, two, e.g. the hot and the cold, those thinkers did not contend that any other object except hot and cold is a blank nothing, i.e. that the furniture of the world counts only two items. Instead, they probably meant that hot and cold (or similar pairs) are basic constituents of all things,¹² perhaps on the assumption that, unlike everything else, they alone are immune from generation and corruption (things may be more complicated, but not necessarily different, with the monists). The notion of a *being* assumed by these thinkers compares therefore to that of a *principle*, like e.g. in Aristotle's *Ph.* A 2 or *Metaph.* Z 1 (see Mansfeld 1986, 5-11).

Likely, this is also the meaning relevant to the notorious τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι at 248e8-249a1. I will not open the can of worms of the interpretation of this phrase. But if we take it to refer to *perfect* being, then τὸ ὄν may stand not only for any primary being, but also for the *domain* of those beings. And this chimes with Plato's familiar use of τὸ ὄν (or οὐσία) to signify the whole intelligible realm, in contrast with γένεσις.

Now, cross-examining the thinkers who have spoken about being, the ES pushes them to clarify their notion of being: when they say that certain

12 Either as basic material stuffs (e.g., Frede 1996, 186-187) or as fundamental properties (e.g., Cornford 1935, 218; Rosen 1983, 207; and Crivelli 2012, 74-75). Perhaps these thinkers were insensitive to this distinction.

(primary or fundamental) beings *are*, they attribute *being* to them; but what exactly does this *being* in turn refer to? The question rests on the implicit assumption that 'being' must refer to some real thing, something that counts itself as a being (see e.g. Rosen 1983, 208; and Crivelli 2012, 76), an assumption in turn based on a robust realist theory of meaning. Thus, throughout the assessment of the rival views on being, a conception of being as a distinct entity finds its way through the dialogue.

2) This leads us to the second referent of τὸ ὄν, the Kind Being,¹³ one of the 'greatest' or 'most important' Kinds. This Kind is introduced with the assessment of the so-called 'children's prayer' (at 249d3-4), and has a pivotal role thenceforth. It should be conceived of, I submit, neither as a mere generalization over whatever is,¹⁴ nor as a most comprehensive genus of all genera, located atop of a universal Porphyrian tree.¹⁵ It is instead, like any other Form, the entity metaphysically responsible for its participants' possession of the property its name names, i.e. being (*simpliciter*). A distinctive feature of this Kind is that it is all-pervasive (256d12-e3, 259a5-6), i.e. cannot fail to be participated in. Further, it is well-known that Forms play for Plato a special role in setting the norm for the correct use of language.¹⁶ Notably, they are the primary bearers of names and their participants inherit their name from them.¹⁷ This suggests that the Kind Being has a referential primacy in the *Sophist's* 'orthological' inquiry into being; and that any participant in the Kind Being is also thereby derivatively called ὄν.

3) This brings me to the third referent of τὸ ὄν. Just as Plato calls καλόν both the Form of Beauty and what partakes in it, so too he calls ὄν not only the Kind Being, but also any of its participants. Thus, Motion is a being, because it partakes in (the Kind) Being (256d8-9: κίνησις...ἐστι ὄν ἐπειπερ τοῦ ὄντος μετέχει); and so are all other Kinds (e2-4: σύμπαντα [γένη]...ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος, εἶναι τε καὶ ὄντα).

4) But Plato can also refer to a given *set* of participants in the Kind Being, with the collective singular τὸ ὄν (see O'Brien 2005, 146-147). We come here to the fourth referent. The notorious phrase πολὺν τὸ ὄν at 256e6 should, I think, be interpreted in this way. In saying that 'in relation to each of the Forms being is *manifold*' (e6: περὶ ἑκάστον ἄρα τῶν εἰδῶν πολὺν μὲν ἐστι τὸ ὄν), the ES means that the beings signified by the predicates that hold true

13 Cf. e.g. Pl. *Sph.* 250c2, 254d4; 259a4-5, b1-2.

14 Pace e.g. Bostock 1984, 101.

15 Pace e.g. Stenzel 1931, 94-97; Diès 1925, 286; Frede 1996, 197-198.

16 Cf. e.g. Pl. *Cra.* 435e6-440e1, with Cambiano 1991, 181-185 and Barney 2001, 138-155.

17 Cf. e.g. Pl. *Phd.* 102b1-3; *R.* 596a7-9; *Prm.* 130e5-131a2.

of a given Form are manifold, i.e. that each Form partakes in several other Forms.¹⁸ Notice in this regard the backreference at 263b11-2 to the point made at 256e6-7, now restated in a slightly different phraseology: ‘for we said, I think, that there are many things that are about each thing, and many that are not’ (πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ἔφαμεν ὄντα περὶ ἕκαστον εἶναι πού, πολλὰ δὲ οὐκ ὄντα). The πολὺ ὄν at 256e6-7 is now πολλὰ ὄντα, which confirms the collective meaning of τὸ ὄν in the former passage.

4. Contribution to the Solution to the Paradox

How does this work of semantic clarification about τὸ ὄν contribute to the solution of the paradox of falsehood? A few words on the paradox itself first. In outline, it contends that (i) false speech says that the things that are, are not and that the things that are not, are;¹⁹ thus (ii) false speech implies a reference to not-being; but (iii) Parmenides established that the not-being is neither thinkable nor sayable; (iv) therefore false speech is impossible. The critical notion is obviously that of not-being (τὸ μὴ ὄν): false speech entails it; Parmenides banishes it. I will not, of course, reconstruct Plato’s entire solution to the paradox. I want to focus on the role that the distinction of referents of τὸ ὄν plays in this solution. Here is my proposal:

After setting aside the notion of being implicit in previous accounts of being (referent 1) as unhelpful in solving the paradox, Plato suggests that in the notions of τὸ μὴ ὄν involved respectively in the Parmenidean ban and in falsehood, not only is the negative particle μὴ to be understood differently (as indicating contrariety in the former and mere difference in the latter), but also, I submit, the name ὄν, i.e. as respectively referring to the Kind Being (referent 2) and a set of beings (referent 4), viz. those signified by the predicates true of something; and since referent 3 (any participant in the Kind Being) is foundational for referent 4, the importance of the whole fourfold distinction becomes apparent.

18 See O’Brien 2005, 147-148. The conclusion at 256e6-7 need not be inferred from 256e3-4 alone. It is instead more naturally read as resulting from the entire argument initiated at 255e8 (*pace* e.g. Owen 1971, 255-259; cf. Heinaman 1983a, 6-10).

19 My formulation reflects what Crivelli calls ‘bipolar’ description of falsehoods, which replaces the initial ‘unipolar’ description (cf. Pl. *Sph.* 240d9-10; also, 237a3-4, 260c3-4 and d2-3), with a view to Plato’s solution to the paradox (cf. Crivelli 2012, 60-63). My account concerns Plato’s solution and does not cover the referent of being in a ‘unipolar’ description, which seems to be *what is the case*.

Let me explain. When at 258e6-259a1 the ES denies having in any way rehabilitated a contrary of being (τοῦναντίον τοῦ ὄντος), by adding that he and Theaetetus have long since said farewell to that contrary (ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν; see O'Brien 2011), he must have in mind the impossible Parmenidean not-being, the μηδαμῶς ὄν (237b7-8) which, in the context of the falsehood paradox, entailed an ἐναντιολογία (236e5; another Platonic *hapax*²⁰). But at this stage of his analysis this is reconceived of, I submit, as the contrary of the *Kind Being*. For (a) when earlier at 257b3-4 the ES concludes that τὸ μὴ ὄν is not something contrary, but only different from ὄν (οὐκ ἐναντίον τι λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος ἀλλ' ἕτερον μόνον), he should have in mind what was said about Motion at 256d5-9, that since it is different from ὄν, it is an οὐκ ὄν; and also what was said about Difference at 256d12-e4, that by rendering each a different thing from being (ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ ὄντος ἕκαστον), it makes it a not-being (οὐκ ὄν ποιεῖ). In both cases ὄν stands for the *Kind Being*. For the ES is quick to point out that Motion and all other Kinds, while being not-beings, nevertheless *are* because they also *partake in* τὸ ὄν (d8-9: καὶ ὄν, ἐπεὶ περ τοῦ ὄντος μετέχει; e3-4: καὶ πάλιν, ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος, εἶναι τε καὶ ὄντα). (b) Second, this *Kind* is universally participated in; but since contrariety implies absence of participation,²¹ there can be no contrary of Being. Hence, τὸ μὴ ὄν involved in the Parmenidean ban, as reformulated in the *Sophist's* analysis, is the (impossible) contrary of the *Kind Being*.

But this is not the referent of ὄν denied by the μὴ ὄν involved in the ES' account of falsehood. At 263b7-12, he concludes that false speech says things that are not, as if they are (τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει); and yet what it says are things that are, just different things that are from those that are about Theaetetus (ὄντων δέ γε ὄντα ἕτερα περὶ σοῦ). Here we find the back-reference to 256e6-7: 'for we said, I think, that there are many things that are about each and every thing, and many that are not'. Just as the manifold being (πολὺ ὄν) at 256e6 is here rephrased as 'many things that are' (πολλὰ ὄντα), so too the not-being unlimited in multiplicity (ἄπειρον πλήθει τὸ μὴ ὄν) at 256e7 is here rephrased as 'many [things] that are not' (πολλὰ οὐκ ὄντα). I should leave aside the issue of the substitution of 'unlimited in multiplicity' for 'many'.²² The point is that the μὴ ὄν involved in falsehood is not the negation of the *Kind Being* (neither as a contrary of it, nor as differ-

20 Cf. 268b4: ἐναντιολογεῖν, itself a Platonic *hapax* (cf. Arist. GC A 7.323b17 Rashed). My hunch is that the two *hapax*, ὀρθολογία (239b4) and ἐναντιολογία (236e5), are related.

21 See Pl. *Phd.* 102d6-7 (also 104b6-c1); *Sph.* 252d2-10; with O'Brien 2005, 129-133.

22 See O'Brien 1995, 79-81. For a different reading see Crivelli 2019², 459-500 n. 47.

ent from it), but of a given set of beings, i.e. those signified by predicates that hold true of a subject – our referent 4. Thus, the $\mu\eta\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ involved in falsehood is the set of beings that are *different from* (and therefore *are not*) all those signified by the predicates that hold true of a subject.

This is how the work of referential clarification about $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$ contributes to solving the paradox. The solution requires, among other things, elucidating the meaning(s) of $\tau\omicron\ \mu\eta\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$; but to do so, we need to distinguish both different meanings of the negative particle $\mu\eta$, but also, I have argued, different referents of the name $\tau\omicron\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$.

Finding Certainty in the Being of Non-Being: A Final Rejoinder to Protagoras

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In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates demonstrates the existence of false judgments in a dilemma that leads up to the (in)famous *peritrope* argument (cf. *Tht.* 170c). Put simply, the dilemma is based on the proposition ‘there are false judgments.’ If judged true, then false judgments exist; if judged false, then false judgments still exist since the proposition itself is deemed false. This paper aims to show in two parts that the same logic is used to demonstrate the Being of Non-Being in the *Sophist*. In this dialogue, the visitor confronts the sophist’s claim that “*that which is not* never in any way has a share in being.” (*Sph.* 260d). By construing Non-Being in accordance with Parmenides’ illegitimate concept of Nothingness, as contrary to *what is*, the sophist argues that any association in thought or speech with Non-Being is impossible and, by extension, that false judgements cannot exist. Should the visitor and Theaetetus prove unable to challenge this claim, the sophist will have escaped into the dark region of deceit and illusion. Although they do fail to refute unintelligible Nothingness, I argue that their failure is in fact progress, as it prepares the ground for a different account of Non-Being. I will show that the transition from a failed *elenchus* to the victorious assertion that Non-Being has a share in Being is facilitated by the logic used against Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. False judgements, *peritrope*, Non-Being, Protagoras, Parmenides

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks an imaginary Protagoras what they are to do with his thesis ‘Man is the measure of all things’. Things are not for every man what they seem to him to be, that is, men do not always judge what is true. Sometimes they judge truly and sometimes falsely, which undermines the idea of human beings as standards for truth. Socrates demonstrates the existence of false judgments in a dilemma that leads up to the (in)famous *peritrope* argument. Put simply, it is based on the proposition ‘there are false judgments.’ If this proposition is judged true, then there are false judgments; if it is judged false, then there are false judgments nonetheless, since the proposition itself was judged false (cf. *Tht.* 170c).¹ This paper aims to show in two parts that the same logic is used to demonstrate the Being of Non-Being in the *Sophist*.

In this dialogue, the Eleatic visitor confronts the sophist’s claim that “*that which is not* never in any way has a share in being.” (*Sph.* 260d). By constru-

1 All citations from the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* are from Plato: *Complete Works* (1997).

ing Non-Being in accordance with Parmenides' illegitimate concept of Nothingness, as contrary to *what is*, the sophist argues that any association in thought or speech with Non-Being is impossible and, by extension, that false judgements do not exist. If the visitor and Theaetetus fail to refute this claim, the sophist will have successfully escaped into the dark region of deception and false appearance. And they do fail at refuting unintelligible Nothingness. However, as I argue in the first part of this paper, their initial failure provides a platform for formulating an alternative account of Non-Being, ultimately leading to the downfall of the sophist. How they move cleverly from failing to refute Non-Being as Nothingness to victoriously asserting that Non-Being has a share in Being by relying on the same logic that was used against Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* will be shown in the second part.

Partners in Confusion

In their attempt at hemming in the sophist, the visitor suggests that they dissect the art of copy-making. Is the sophist a likeness- or an appearance-maker? Bewildered, he fears the sophist has “escaped neatly into an impossibly confusing type [ἄπορον εἶδος] to search through.” (*Sph.* 236d). Theaetetus agrees, but has he truly understood the conundrum they are facing, “this seeming but not being, and this saying things but not true things (....)” (*Sph.* 236e)? The questions that are emerging from their discussion are exceedingly difficult to answer: How is it possible for things to *appear* in a way that they *are not*? How can one talk about things that are false if things that are false *are not*? To successfully capture an illusionist, Theaetetus must not be bedazzled by the argument and simply share in the visitor's state of confusion over the type of copy-maker the sophist is. He must realize that an account of confusion itself is necessary. For confusion, falsity, and deceptive sophistry would not be possible unless *that which is not* somehow *is*. The sophist would slip out of their hands were they not able to refute the claim that Non-Being is contrary to Being and radical Nothingness. And, so, they must enter the treacherous path of inquiry that Parmenides had warned against and examine the notion that Non-Being is.

Their engagement with Non-Being as Nothingness at 237b–239b can be divided into three parts. First, the visitor shows that if Non-Being does not have a share in Being, then it cannot be expressed in language, since one can only speak of things that are. To speak about Non-Being would be to speak and say nothing. With this, Theaetetus thinks that their *logos* has reached “the height of confusion”, but the visitor contends that the “greatest

and most fundamental confusion” remains (*Sph.* 237e-238a). In the second part, the visitor proceeds to demonstrate that the root of the problem is the unintelligibility of Non-Being. If none of *those that are*, i.e., Forms, and especially Unity and Plurality, can belong to *that which is not*, then Non-Being cannot be grasped in thought. For it is only by applying Unity or Plurality to some particular ‘thing’ that it becomes an intelligible ‘something.’ But it turns out that there is an even greater *aporia* concerning Non-Being than its unintelligibility. In the third part, the visitor explains that Non-Being confuses even those who attempt to show how confusing it is, forcing them “to say mutually contradictory things about it.” (*Sph.* 238d). This is because the very act of demonstrating that Non-Being cannot be conceived as a ‘thing’ treats it as a ‘thing’. The demonstration itself violates the unintelligibility of Non-Being. The visitor now admits that “the refutation [ἐλεγχον] of *that which is not* has been defeating me for a long time.” (*Sph.* 239b).

This defeat, however, is not the letdown it first appears to be. Pausing to reflect on it, we realize that it would not be possible for the visitor to be defeated by their *elenchus* unless Non-Being has a share in Being. By failing to adequately approach Non-Being in words and thought, the visitor demonstrates performatively that it is possible to be wrong and speak falsely about something. Their failed *elenchus* is evidence that Non-Being has a share in Being. Thus, I argue that in declaring himself defeated by their argument, the visitor nevertheless emerges victorious from it. Careful readers of the *Theaetetus* will recognize the logic of this maneuver. Let us remind ourselves of the dilemma confronting Protagoras there: Socrates claims that if most people judge falsely that there are false judgments, then there are false judgements, since they judged *falsely* that there are such judgements. In the *Sophist*, we see this logic reproduced. If the visitor’s engagement with Non-Being as Nothingness is contradictory and false, then Non-Being must somehow *be* since it confused him, and he spoke falsely about it. The visitor cannot be confused and speak falsely about Non-Being, unless Non-Being somehow is.

Having caught on to this underlying logic, we find it expressed in yet another remark by the visitor in the same passage: “So was I deceived just now when I said that I would formulate the biggest confusion [μεγίστην ἀπορίαν] about it, when we have this other one to state which is even bigger?” (*Sph.* 238d). In the second part of my division above, the visitor claims that the greatest confusion about Non-Being is its unintelligibility. Then, in the third, he confronts the fact that Non-Being *qua* Nothingness is irrefutable as such. Perplexed, the visitor wonders if he was wrong earlier when he deemed the unintelligibility of Non-Being the greatest *aporia*. Although the question is

merely rhetorical, let us spell out the alternative ways that he and Theaetetus could answer it. They could either say, yes, he was deceived earlier, but if he was, and said things that were false, then Non-Being must have a share in Being. Alternatively, they could say, no, he was not deceived earlier—the unintelligibility of Non-Being is the most confusing thing about it. But, alas, for there to be confusion about anything, Non-Being must have a share in Being. No matter how they respond, it must be admitted that Non-Being is.

The visitor's question is reminiscent of Socrates' rhetorical question to an imaginary Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*: "What then, Protagoras, are we to make of your argument [τῷ λόγῳ]?" (*Tht.* 170c). The *homo mensura* doctrine becomes problematic given that most people believe in the existence of both wisdom and ignorance amongst them (*cf. Tht.* 170b). If people are the measure of all things, and they judge that there are false judgements, then there are false judgements, according to Protagoras' own doctrine. On the other hand, if they are judging falsely that there are false judgments, then there are false judgements, nonetheless. As Socrates concludes there, "Whichever we say, it comes to the same thing, namely, that men do not always judge what is true; that human judgements are both true and false." (*Tht.* 170c). The visitor could have made a similar remark concerning the greatest confusion surrounding Non-Being: Whichever we say it comes to the same thing, namely, that Non-Being is.

From Retreat to Counterattack: A Clever Move

Having accepted defeat—and, at the same time, not accepted it—in their battle with Nothingness, the visitor asks Theaetetus: "What then? Are we going to withdraw and give up?" (*Sph.* 241c).² Should they make themselves as absent as Non-Being itself in their attempt at confronting it? The other option is to take on Father Parmenides' saying and insist "with brute force both that *that which is not* somehow is, and then again that *that which is* somehow is not." (*Sph.* 241d). They must modify Parmenides' ontological framework to extricate themselves from the grip that the sophist still has on the argument. But the visitor expresses concern, admitting to Theaetetus that, "I'm afraid I'll seem insane to you if I'm always shifting my position back and forth, given what I've said." (*Sph.* 242a-b). Only moments ago, he showed that it is impossible to refute Nothingness. Now he is willing

2 Minor modification of Nicholas P. White's translation in *Plato: Complete Works* (1997).

to assert once again that Non-Being is—is the visitor a sophist himself, changing his position for the sake of winning the argument?

Not exactly. He is not reversing his position on the illegitimate ‘concept’ of Non-Being. It remains unapproachable in thought and speech and irrefutable as such. What he will boldly attempt, pending Theaetetus’ support, is a negotiation of this framework to accommodate for an account of Non-Being that is *other than* Parmenides’, but not contrary to it.³ Theaetetus’ response is reassuring: “I certainly shall not think you are going wrong if you proceed to your refutation and proof.” (*Sph.* 242b).⁴ Indeed, if the visitor were going wrong by continuing his argument, then he would still be right, given that it would not be possible to go wrong on the sophist’s understanding of Non-Being.

The project that lies ahead is to conceptualize Non-Being so that it allows for the existence of falsehood. This is a clever move on behalf of the visitor (or Plato), I argue, as it shifts the burden of proof from the visitor and Theaetetus to the sophist. Instead of having to disprove the sophist’s understanding of Non-Being as contrary to Being, which remains an impossible task, *the sophist* will have to disprove an account of Non-Being that grants the existence of falsity—and how could the sophist coherently hold that an intelligible account of Non-Being is false within an ontological framework that denies the existence of false speech and thought? She cannot claim that such an account is false without affirming what is being denied—the Being of Non-Being. The radical position of the sophist is untenable precisely because it eliminates the condition for refutation. If false judgements do not exist, then the sophist cannot be wrong, but neither can she dispute the opinions of others. Clearly, the sophist is in deeper trouble than the visitor lets on at this point in the dialogue.

Although the apparent challenge in the dialogue is to explain how it is possible for *that which is not* to have a share in *that which is* and vice versa, it is more challenging, indeed impossible, to explain how an existing account of Non-Being is not, based on an understanding of Non-Being as Nothingness. Once an account of Non-Being that allows for the existence of falsehood is formulated, it becomes indisputable that Non-Being somehow is. It is therefore not a problem for the visitor and Theaetetus that they cannot refute the sophist’s understanding of Non-Being *qua* Nothingness.

3 I agree with Francesco Ferro’s reading of Plato’s relation to Parmenides’ philosophy in ‘Parmenides: a superficial and stubborn father: The Eleatic Legacy in the *Sophist*’ presented at the Symposium Platonicum XIII, 2022. See also O’Brien, 2013c.

4 Minor modification of Nicholas P. White’s translation in *Plato: Complete Works* (1997).

They do not need to. They can simply let it go, or more deviously declare themselves defeated by their own *elenchus*. All they need to do to capture the sophist is to come up with a *different* account of Non-Being. We see this insight reflected in the following comment by the visitor: “Even if our grasp of *that which is* and *that which is not* isn’t completely clear, our aim will be to avoid being totally without an account of them—so far as that’s allowed by our present line of inquiry—and see whether we can get away with saying that *that which is not* really is *that which is not*.” (*Sph.* 254c-d). It is not necessary to formulate a correct account of Non-Being. *Any* intelligible account of Non-Being that grants the existence of falsehood will guarantee the Being of Non-Being.

The account they develop is premised on the fact that Forms are not self-contained and discrete entities. For *that which is not* to have a share in *that which is*, and vice versa, the Forms must be allowed to blend. Some Forms will associate with other Forms to a small extent and others to a large degree, says the visitor (*cf.* *Sph.* 254b). For example, the Different has great blending powers, since each Form is different from all the others. The Different also associates with Being, since the Different *is* without being Being itself. In the same way all Forms *are* by participating in Being, and they *are not* since they are not Being itself but different from it. By participating in the Different, every Form, including Being, *is not* in the sense that it is one Form and not all the others. “So even *that which is* is not, in as many applications as there are of the others,” says the visitor, “since, not being them, it is one thing, namely itself, and on the other hand it is not those others, which are an indefinite number.” (*Sph.* 257a).

This conclusion follows from their hypothesis that the Forms blend. If the Forms do not blend, then they could not formulate an account of Non-Being as Difference. So, why would a sophist not try to unravel their account by countering that the Forms do not associate with one another? The visitor seems open to such a challenge: “And if somebody doesn’t admit that [it is in the nature of Forms to blend], then he needs to win us over from our earlier line of argument for it, to win us over from its consequences.” (*Sph.* 257a). But this is not a viable option for the sophist, given the logic expounded in this paper. If an opponent demonstrates that their theory of the blending of Forms is false, then Non-Being must have a share in Being, or else their theory could not be proven false. From this perspective, the invitation to refute their account is yet another point in support of it. Anyone is welcome to show that they are wrong because doing so will only prove that it is possible to be wrong, which implies that they are right—Non-Being must have a share in Being and, hence, the Forms do blend.

The strength of their position is not made explicit in the dialogue, but there are signs that the visitor is aware of it. The first sign is the mentioned invitation to disprove their theory of the blending of Forms. If this were a real threat to their position, it is unlikely that the visitor would have left it unaddressed, as he does in the dialogue. Rather than confronting a possible weakness in their account, he goes on to bracingly affirm their position: “Nobody can say that this *that which is not*, which we’ve made to appear and now dare say is, is the contrary of *that which is*.” (Sph. 258e). Non-Being is not contrary to *what is* and radical Nothingness, but the nature of the Different “chopped up among all beings in relation to each other” so that Non-Being is “each part of the nature of the Different that’s set over against *that which is*.” (Sph. 258e). The confidence with which this conclusion is delivered, without addressing potential challenges to their theory of the blending of Forms, is another indication that the visitor is fully aware of their advantage in the argument.

Although their account of Non-Being could be improved through dialectical discussion, nobody can deny that *that which is not* in some way is, while submitting instead that Non-Being is absolutely Nothing, since such a counterargument would only affirm the Being of Non-Being. In what might be a final rejoinder to the great sophist, Protagoras, the visitor urges: “With regard to *that which is not*, which we’ve said is, let someone refute us and persuade us that we’ve made a mistake—or else, so long as he can’t do that, he should say just what we say. He has to say that the Forms blend with each other, that *that which is* and *the different* pervade all of them and each other, that *the different* shares in *that which is* and so, because of that sharing, is.” (Sph. 258e–259a).

The visitor seems to say (with unmistakable triumph in his voice), ‘Now that we have made the Form of *that which is not* appear, Protagoras, or any other sophist, go ahead and refute us! Prove us wrong if you can.’ To borrow the turn of phrase once more from the *Theaetetus*: ‘Whichever you say, it comes to the same thing, namely, that Non-Being is.’ The dilemma facing the sophist is this: If she agrees with their account of the blending of Forms, then Non-Being is. If she disagrees with it, contending it is false, then Non-Being is nonetheless, or else their account could not be false. It turns out that to capture a sophist all they need is a different account of Non-Being than Nothingness, since any such account cannot be denied without affirming the Being of Non-Being.

Σκοπός and the Unity of the *Sophist*

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Although like Noburu Notomi I defend the thematic unity of the *Sophist*, I locate the unifying subject or “target,” *skopos*, not in “the sophist” but in “Being and Not-Being on every level.” Against Notomi’s case that the *skopos* is the sophist: most of the dialogue concerns questions about Being; to define an unknown via bifurcation is a flawed method; the final definition does not fit known sophists; schools were Plato’s rivals by the time of writing. My proposed unifying target comes close to Marsilio Ficino’s “Being and Not-Being.” Although Being is not discussed in every part of the dialogue, sections can have subsidiary *skopoi*, which all serve the whole. My interpretation helps illuminate connections between the search for the sophist in the “frame” part of the dialogue and discussions about Being in the dialogue’s core.

Being, Not-Being, *skopos*, unity, Neoplatonic hermeneutics

Although Noburu Notomi wrote *The Unity of Plato’s ‘Sophist’* over twenty years ago, his observation still remains largely true, that “[t]he variety of the philosophical issues it raises ... makes us fail to see the dialogue *as a whole*.” In the spirit of the Neoplatonic assumption that a Platonic dialogue aims at a unitary “target” or subject, σκοπός, I seek to carry forward Notomi’s project, though in a different direction. He proposed “the sophist” as unifying subject of the dialogue.¹ I propose “Being and Not-Being on every level” (cf. παντοδαπού, Hermias, in *Phdr.* 1. 15.17): images, our embodied world, soul, the forms, and the One. When the Visitor talks about accounts of the thing and not only of the name (218c2–4, 221b1–2, 263), or about the divine production of “things that are” (265b–e), I take his interest to lie in what we may call ontological thickness and semantic realism (cf. 257c), not only in how to use the verb “to be.”

The structure of the *Sophist*, however, calls its thematic unity into question. A logico-metaphysical core (*Sph.* 236–264) is enclosed by a frame that defines the sophist via bifurcative division. One may think the connection between frame and core merely formal. On the other hand, if we suppose that the *Sophist* is not unified thematically, what are we saying about

1 Others who recently have proposed “the sophist” include Gill 2012, 3–4 and Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 17.

it as a work? Let us hypothesize that a dialogue is unified thematically and see how far we get.

Sometimes Neoplatonists applied the term *skopos* to what they thought Plato sought to accomplish (e.g. Procl. *in Alc.* 14.3-4; *Op.* 1). More often they spoke of *skopos* as the unitary, governing subject, which each segment of a dialogue was to illuminate (e.g. Procl. *in Ti.* 1. 19.27-28; cf. Baltzly, 2017). Is it legitimate to seek a dialogue's *skopos* understood in this second sense? One may say *no*:

First, as Heath (1989, 163-66) argued, a work's unity need not be thematic but can rest on plot, structure, or imagery. For example, we fail to pay proper attention to the work's thematic plurality (173) if we try to make both the speeches about love in the *Phaedrus* and that dialogue's later discourse on rhetoric serve a single *skopos*.

Second, the hermeneutic circle threatens to make a *skopos* otiose. We cannot identify a *skopos* except from all the parts of the dialogue, but by the time we have analyzed those, the *skopos* is the product of our analysis, not a guide to analysis.

Third, the *skopos* hermeneutic is bound up with Neoplatonic ontological assumptions. Although Middle Platonist interpreters argued for what they thought a dialogue was "about," περί (Plutarch, Anon. *in Tht.*), Iamblichus and successors called the interpreter to consider a dialogue a microcosm of reality and the author an imitator of the demiurge. These assumptions bespeak an obsession with hierarchy mediated by allegory. For example, Proclus took the characters in the *Parmenides* to "imitate" levels of being (*in Prm.* 1. 628.22-25, 699.23-26, 5. 1021-1022, 1027.13-21, 1031.12). But if we eschew allegorizing, then we should not seek a *skopos*.

Fourth, the *skopos* theory admits no disconfirming evidence. With enough ingenuity, we can claim that *any* work has thematic unity. Thus, the theory lacks heuristic value.

Against these objections, first, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* says that a *logos* should be an organic whole of parts connected by necessity, like a living body (263d-264e, 268d). Readers generally expect a unifying thematic principle, lest a *logos* be only Table Talk. Aristotle puts Socratic dialogues into the genus *mimesis*, of which the palmary species, tragedy, should exhibit organic unity as a whole composed of parts (*Poetics* 7-8).

Second, in response to the hermeneutic circle problem, I suggest that a *skopos* has the status of hypothesis; it will prove its mettle by guiding *further* insights into the dialogue. We build those on an interpretative foundation that we construct from initial readings, while we remain open to modifying our "take" as we dig more deeply. But in the end, our vision of the dialogue

determines our vision of any part. As Burnyeat (1997, 4) said of a prologue, “far from the opening scene telling you how to read the philosophy that follows, it is the philosophy that tells you how to read the opening scene.”

Third, to the objection that *skopos* is bound up with Neoplatonic allegorizing, I do not claim that the *skopos* assumption supplies the one true hermeneutic, or even that a dialogue’s topic must be *rigidly* unitary. The assumption does help us dig into what a dialogue accomplishes. Aleknienė (2017) and Remes (2021) have used the *skopos* principle to illuminate the *Philebus* and the *Alcibiades*. Iamblichus’ notion of unity sought to reconcile diverse elements of a work within “some more inclusive structure in terms of which the apparently multiple purposes can be seen to be subserving the same end” (Coulter 1976, 81). The principle that every piece of the text serves the whole stimulates close reading and can elicit valuable insights.

To the fourth, one may make a case that Xenophon’s *Symposium*, perhaps even the opening parts of the *Timaeus*, fail the *skopos* test. Aristotle pilloried Isocrates’ *Helen* as lacking thematic unity (*Rhet.* 1414b27–28).

Although I agree with Notomi that our dialogue is unified thematically, I do not think that its unifying “target” is “the sophist.” Not all reviewers even understood this as Notomi’s conclusion, for some thought he posited “appearance” (Rowe, van der Merren) or his refinement, “the sophist in us” (van Camp), as unifying issue. Being and Not-being receive half again as much space as do attempts to define the sophist. The final definition describes a type of which not even Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are tokens. Features that do not fit known “sophists” include: knows nothing (*Sph.* 233a–c); does not speak before crowds (268b, but cf. *Ti.* 19e); does not make speeches (268b, but cf. *Ti.* 19e); fears he knows nothing (268a). Moreover, when Plato wrote the *Sophist*, wandering disputers charging fees were of waning influence as organized schools were rising. One may think it likely, therefore, that Plato’s primary target is a philosophical issue of contemporary concern rather than a type of intellectual no longer prominent.

Finally, to define an unknown via bifurcative division is a non-starter. In the division that defines the angler, the Visitor and Theaetetus already know what an angler is (218e). Theaetetus however, although he knows the name, “sophist,” does not know *what* is the thing it names (218c). Division suits a philosopher’s mapping of beings that are known to belong to a given kind (253c–e), but for defining an unknown, the kind needs to be identified by collection (*Phdr.* 265d). Cornford (1957, 187) and Bluck (1975, 53) suggested that the earlier divisions are in effect a collection made in preparation for the seventh division. Proper collection, though, precedes only the sixth division, where the Visitor collects crafts into a more general craft of cleansing (226b–

e). The Visitor does use the term “collect,” but at the *end* of his second division (224c9). Bluck himself noted (36) that division, if it is to yield knowledge, presumes that one already know both the object and the object’s kind. As Ryle (1939, 322) pointed out, however, a division can neglect kinds that lie “on neither side of the philosopher’s boundary lines,” and “there is room for almost any amount of arbitrariness.” In fact, the Visitor allows that his divisions operate from how these figures *appear* to *him* (221d13, 268b1). Yet in the *Statesman* he says that sophists change their forms (291b3). How, then, are appearances reliable? Such a dodgy method makes me reluctant to say that Plato’s principal philosophical interest was to define the sophist.

Among moderns who have proposed some other principal topic of the *Sophist*, Benardete (1993, 761) held out for “man as the vocalic bond between beast and god.” For Mouze (2020, 18-19) the topic is language. Trevaskis (1966, 99) and Molas and Villarroel (2013) opted for “the philosopher/philosophy.” Neal (in Bluck 1975, 22-29) thought the *Sophist* fundamentally “a treatise on negation.” Sabrier (2019, 2) says that the *Sophist* “centres on the issue of participation . . . among forms.” For Wiggins (1971, 268), von Fritz (1971, 435) and Schofield (1974, 42), the dialogue focuses on problems of not-being. Cordero’s view comes close to mine: Being is the “principal subject” (1993, 29) and the sophist, the “apparent subject” (32).

Neoplatonic sources already record a range of candidate *skopoi*: “the sophist” (Anon. *Proleg. in Plat. Philos.* 21.30-31); “method of division” (Anon. *Proleg. in Plat. Philos.* 23.8-9); “what is” (Olymp. *in Alc.* 110.8); “not-being” (Anon. *Proleg. in Plat. Philos.* 21.31-35); “sublunar demiurge” (Iamblichus, *Soph.* fr. 1 Dillon = *Schol. Pl. Sph.* s.v. Σοφιστής). Although too early for *skopos* to be a term of art, the anonymous Middle Platonist commentator on the *Theaetetus* already deployed the concept, reporting that “some people” held that the *Sophist* is about, περί, “things that are” (ἃ ἔστιν) (*in Tht.* 2.37-39). That view was also expressed by its second title, “on Being” (D.L. 3. 58).

Notomi (1999, 13) wrote that Proclus “takes [the sophist] as the *skopos*,” but Proclus does not voice this as his own view. Proclus is summarizing an argument of people who held that the title of the *Republic* is evidence that its *skopos* is the constitution, not justice. These interpreters adduced the *Sophist* as a parallel, saying, “this was the topic for investigation (προκείμενον) in that dialogue: [namely] the sophist” (*in R.* 1. 8.20-28). Proclus expresses his own view in his commentary on the *Parmenides*. There he refers to his earlier exegesis of the *Sophist*, “where Plato engages in dialectic principally about the genera of being’s participation or non-participation in each other” (*in Prm.* 2. 774.19-20).

Marsilio Ficino identified Being and Not-Being as the topic. Although he did not use an equivalent of the word, *skopos*, Ficino wrote in the introduction to his translation and in the introduction to his commentaries that Plato “disputes about being and not-being” in the *Sophist*.

Taking inspiration from Proclus, I expand Ficino’s encapsulation by blending. For Proclus, the *skopos* of the *Republic* blends justice and the state: “The person who teaches about justice, if he should see all of it and not merely some aspects, also teaches about constitutions, since he sees justice in all its aspects” (*in R.* 1. 12.3–4). I propose to blend “Being and Not-Being” with “the sophist” to yield “Being and Not-Being on every level.” That is, Being as Plato presents it descends by levels from Forms to phantasms in the embodied world, of which the sophist is a constituent. The search for the sophist, statesman, and philosopher, and the contrast between sophist and philosopher (253c–254b), call attention to divine intelligibles as true goods as against reputed virtues (267c). The aims of discussing levels of being *and* the humans who do or do not cognize being on those levels are really one. The sophist deals with not-being, the statesman, with embodied being, and the philosopher, with transcendent being plus the others (cf. 254a–b). For a title, though, “Sophist” is a “better-known name” than “Being etc.” would be (cf. *in R.* 1. 14.11–12).

Being, Not-Being, and related metaphysical concerns generate the dialogue’s notable philosophical achievements, e.g. an account of falsehood, distinction between name and statement, and the beginning of a theory of types and their mutual relations. The definition of the sophist, on the other hand, is problematic. Other proposals for the principal topic, like Neal’s “negation,” do not unify all the dialogue’s parts. Moreover, when the Visitor allows sensibles into Being (249b–d) and distinguishes between a whole’s conditional unity and absolute unity, which has no parts (245a), the dialogue picks up problems raised in the *Parmenides*, thus developing the metaphysics of the later Plato.

Objections to my proposed *skopos*. First, the Neoplatonists held that the *skopos* explains every part of a dialogue, but Being and Not-Being are not targets of the divisions that seek the angler or the sophist. The steps between those divisions are not ordered by necessity. Therefore, either there is no unifying target, or “the sophist” is the target.

Reply: a work need not make its unifying target explicit in every part. As Noël Carroll argues, we derive the theme by abduction from the parts (2009,

110). Neoplatonists allowed segments to have their own *skopoi*.² Socrates' picture of holistic medicine in the *Charmides* (156b-157c) provides a model, for although bodily parts do different work, each serves the whole.

A second objection would channel those interpreters we met in Proclus. They argued, "if one thing is thought worthy of investigation for the sake of something else," then the second topic "should be considered the *skopos*" (in *R.* 1. 7.20-23, 8.25). I reply by invoking Holger Thesleff's pedimental metaphor: a dialogue's philosophical apex lies at a turning point in its central section (1967, 34, 167). At the *Sophist's* center we find the parricide theme as the Visitor casts not-F as what is different from F, and sensibles are admitted among "beings." On those takeaways depend the definition of the sophist and also details in the frame like the philosopher's being called "divine" (216a-c). That characterization is explained by the core, where the philosopher alone knows the one form of Being (253c-254b). Assimilation to what is one in form makes something divine.³

A third objection: do we need *so many* definitions of the sophist? As Cordero complains, to illustrate division, one or two would have been enough (1993, 27 n. 19). Not all, then, serve a *skopos*. Reply: the definitions point to ways in which sophists were seen, and with them Plato pushes us to seek for the "one form" in investigation. That sort of search presupposes the notion of One Being, treated in the core. In the *Statesman*, Plato tries to parry such an objection, for the Visitor contends that his digressions were not "superfluous" or too long (286c1-2).

The *skopos* approach helps spotlight connections between the frame and the core. As Blondell has shown (2003), the Visitor's anonymity problematizes the dialogue's particularity and aligns its discourse with the universal. Not only his Eleatic origin but also memories about Parmenides make us think about Being and Not-Being. In a similar vein, Socrates' concern about genuine vs. fake philosophers (216c) calls for clarity about falsehood and Being, sought in the core. The search to define "sophist" employs the concepts of "kind," "same" and "different" (e.g. 223c), all awaiting clarification in the core. Cordero (1993, 218 n. 33) observes that during the divisions, the contents of each discarded, left-hand branch amount to instances of the kind, The Different, established in the core. The final definition of sophist as maker of semblances depends on the core's clarifying "not-being" as differ-

2 Cf. e.g. Procl. in *R.* 2. 7.8, 96.5, in *Ti.* 1. 92.15, in *Prm.* 6. 1061.12-13, 1064.17, 1071.4, 7. 1212.26, and on *skopoi* of segments, in *Alc.* 9.

3 The philosopher is divine (*Sph.* 254a8-b1, *R.* 500d1, 613b1, *Tht.* 176b1-2). Something is divine because it is "one in form," *μονοειδές* (*Smp.* 211e3-4, *Phd.* 80b1-3).

ence, and in the frame, the Visitor's treatment of perceptibles as "things that are" (219b-c, 234d4) needs the core's admission of changeable things into being (249b-d). By that move, Plato makes room for *epistēmē* to apply to our world and for non-philosophers to have some *epistēmē* in the *Statesman* and *Philebus*.⁴

The *skopos* assumption helps us appreciate a dialogue as a work, spot connections among its parts, and interpret features. The corollary, that segments have their own *skopoi*, helps us avoid forcing every detail to implicate the principal *skopos*. The search to define the sophist ties the core's metaphysics and logic to our world, giving us being and not-being on every level. If the unity of a philosophical dialogue lies in what is philosophically significant, I propose that *that* is Being and Not-being, not the problematic definition of the sophist.

4 On this step cf. Murphy 2023; Cordero 2013; Fronterotta 2013.

The Overt Argument Against Conceptualism in the *Parmenides* and the Covert Argument for Conceptualism in the *Sophist* (with a Particular Focus on the Being of Not-Being)

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This contribution begins by analysing the argument against conceptualism in the *Parmenides* and then extends it to “the not-being” (*to mê on*) in the *Sophist*, or that which “is what is not” (258c2-3). It concludes with the puzzle that, in this case, the being of “the not-being” also has “understanding (*nous*), life (*zôê*) and soul (*psychê*)” (249a9). The main new points are (1) if “the not-being” has understanding (*nous*), “the not-being” – according to the ontological argument of the *Parmenides* – also has thought (*noêma*), which has a second “not-being” as its object and (2) the question of whether Plato would have interpreted Fragment 3 of *Parmenides*, *to gar auto estin noein te kai einai*, not only in the sense that thinking implies being, but also in the sense that being implies thinking. concept (*noêma*), “the not-being”, Platonic realism about universals, Platonic conceptualism about universals

One of Plato’s greatest merits is the discovery of realism concerning universals, which is presented in the so-called Theory of Ideas or Theory of Forms (*eidê*). In the formulation found in the *Republic*, the argument for this realism runs as follows: “We usually assume one distinct form (*eidos*) for each group of many things to which we apply the same name” (Pl. R. 596a7-9, my transl.; cf. Pl. *Phd.* 75c10-d2, 78d3-4, 100b5-7).

This argument is referred to as the one-over-many argument for ideas or forms. The word “*eidos*”, rendered here as “form”, is a Platonic term for which, according to D. Ross, “the best name is probably ‘universals’”.¹ Although Ch. Kahn has argued that it is rather “misleading to interpret Plato’s [theory of] definitional essences as a theory of universals”,² these Platonic forms exist like the so-called *universalia ante rem* – that is, as

1 Ross 1951, 225: “The essence of the theory of Ideas lay in the conscious recognition of the fact that there is a class of entities, for which the best name is probably ‘universals’, that are entirely different from sensible things”.

2 Kahn 1996, 337 n. 11. Cf. for a fuller treatment Kahn 2021, 145-47. Yet even Kahn 2021, 142 admits: “Hence we may reasonably connect Plato’s theory with the problem of universals, as long we avoid the Aristotelian, anti-Platonic assumption that universals correspond to predicates rather than to objective entities”.

extra-mental essences that are independent of sensible things and of which, according to Plato's 'last word' in the *Timaeus*, the following predicates are true: "unchanging" (*kata tauta eidos echon*), "uncreated and indestructible" (*agenêton kai anôlethron*), "neither receiving anything else into itself from elsewhere nor itself entering into anything else anywhere", "imperceptible to sight or the other senses" and "that which thinking has as its object" (*touto ho dê noêsis eilêchen episkopein*) (*Ti.* 52a1-5, transl. Cornford, modified).³

If forms are what "thinking (*noêsis*) has as its object", forms are not acts of thinking, but rather the objects of these acts or, more precisely, the objects of the contents of these acts (*noêmata*). Once again following the traditional rendering, I refer to these *noêmata* as "concepts". Indeed, in *Parmenides* 132b7-c8 – which postdates the *Republic* (cf. *Pl. Prm.* 126a2) and antedates the *Timaeus*⁴ – we find an argument against conceptualism, of which John Burnet writes: "Observe how clearly Conceptualism is formulated, and how deliberately it is rejected".⁵

In the following, I first (I) analyse the argument against conceptualism in the *Parmenides* and then (II) extend this argument to "the not-being" (*to mê on*) in the *Sophist*, which "is what is not" (*Sph.* 258c2-3). I conclude (III) with the puzzle that, in this case, the being of "the not-being" also has "understanding (*nous*), life (*zôê*) and soul (*psychê*)" (*Sph.* 249a9).

I.

I shall divide the argument against conceptualism into two sections, a longer one and a shorter one.

Section 1

[S1] But Parmenides, said Socrates, may it not be that each of these forms (*eidê*) is a thought (*noêma*), and that it properly occurs only in souls (*psychais*)?

[S2] For in that way, each would still be one, and no longer undergo what was just now said.

[S3] Well, he said, is each of the thoughts one, but a thought of nothing?

[S4] No, that is impossible, he said.

[S5] A thought of something, then? Yes.

3 Cf. my interpretation 2020b, esp. 221-26.

4 Cf., for example, Thesleff 1982, 157-61; Sayre 1983, 256-67; Ferber 2020b, 215-21.

5 Burnet 1914, 258 n. 2.

[S6] Of something that is?

[S7] Of some one thing which that thought thinks as being over all (*henos tinos, ho epi pasin*), that is, of some one form (*mian tina ousan idean*)? Yes.

[S8] Then that which is thought (*touto to nooumenon*) to be one will be a form (*eidos*) ever the same over all? Again, it appears it must.

(Pl. *Prm.* 132b7-c8; transl. Allen, modified)

Section 2

[S1] Really! Then what about this, said Parmenides: in virtue of the necessity by which you say that the others (*talla*) [sensibles] participate in forms (*tôn eidôn*), does it not seem to you that [a] either each is composed of thoughts and all think, or [b] that being thoughts (*noêmata*) there are unthoughts (*anoêta*)?

[S2] But that, he said, is hardly reasonable.

(Pl. *Prm.* 132c9-11; transl. Allen, modified)

B. Russell considered this argument “a kind of ontological argument to prove the objective reality of ideas”.⁶ Let us therefore call it, in analogy with the ontological argument for the reality of an immortal soul in the *Phaedo* (Pl. *Phd.* 105c9-107a1),⁷ the ontological argument for the reality of universals.⁸

This argument has already been accorded due attention by the Neoplatonist Proclus (cf. in *Prm.* 890.30-906.2), as well as by scholars, including J. Burnet, A. E. Taylor, F. M. Cornford, H. Cherniss, D. Ross, R. E. Allen, M. Migliori, L. Brisson, B. Bossi, C. Helmig, C. Kahn, S. Assaturian and A. L. Braga de Silva.⁹ Bossi has also written a clear history of the *status quaestionis*.¹⁰ In the present context, I shall limit myself to raising some relatively neglected points about the first section, and then about the second one.

6 Russell 1945, 417: “The real question is: Is there anything we can think of which, by the mere fact that we can think of it, is shown to exist outside our thought? Every philosopher would like to say yes, because a philosopher’s job is to find out things about the world by thinking rather than observing. If yes is the right answer, there is a bridge from pure thought to things, if not, not. In this generalized form, Plato uses a kind of ontological argument to prove the objective reality of ideas [and the immortality of the soul]”.

7 Cf. my interpretation in Ferber 2021, 388, with further bibliographical references.

8 Cf. Ferber 2021, 388.

9 Burnet 1914, 258; Taylor 1926, 356-57; Cornford 1939, 91; Cherniss 1944, 214-16; Ross 1951, 88; Allen 1980; Migliori 1990, 146-48, especially n. 50; Brisson 1994, 39-41; Bossi 2005; Helmig 2007; Kahn 2013, 13-14; Assaturian 2020; Braga da Silva 2022.

10 Bossi 2005, 62-69.

On Section 1

[S1] suggests *ad modum experimenti* that these forms are thoughts (*noêmata*), that is, mental entities “in souls”. As Cornford has observed, the word “thought” (*noêma*) is ambiguous.¹¹ It can refer either to the (private) “act of thinking” or to the (public) content of this act, i.e. the *nooumenon*. For Cornford, *noêma* here can only mean “act of thinking”,¹² but since Cornford does not make the Fregean distinction between the idea (*Vorstellung*), which is private, and the sense (*Sinn*), which “may be the common property of many”,¹³ and since the Platonic forms are not private ideas (*Vorstellungen*), we can nevertheless take concepts (*noêmata*) to refer to the common contents of these acts of thinking in many different souls.

With regard to the question of who actually defended this thesis, the School of Eretria,¹⁴ Antisthenes¹⁵ and Speusippus¹⁶ have been mentioned, but suggestions like these cannot be proved or disproved, since we lack independent testimonies that would corroborate one another.¹⁷

[S2] suggests, without further explanation, that the dilemma of participation could be solved – that is, the question of whether particulars participate partially or wholly in the forms (i.e. in these mental entities).

[S3] postulates the unity of these thoughts or mental entities and their intentionality – that is, in this case, their objective reference.

[S4], [S5] and [S6] state that this reference must not be about nothing, but rather about something that is.

[S6] identifies this something with a unity over all beings, identifying it as a single form (*idea*), using the expression “*idea*” interchangeably with “*eidos*”.

[S7] draws the conclusion that this something is *one* form or *eidos*.

This conclusion seems valid to the author of the *Parmenides*, i.e. Plato, who later has Parmenides summarise the result as follows: “[...] I suppose that you and anyone else who assures that the nature and reality of each

11 Cornford 1939, 91-92.

12 Cornford 1939, 91.

13 Frege 1997, 155.

14 Taylor 1926, 357, who refers to Grote 1885, 74 n. 2.

15 Brancacci 1993, esp. 40-41; Braga da Silva 2022, 62-63.

16 Graeser 2003, 20-22.

17 Cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf 1919, 228: “Die verbreitete Annahme, dass die Einwände gegen die Ideenlehre, die Platon den Parmenides erheben lässt, ihm von anderen gemacht wären, lässt sich weder beweisen noch widerlegen, denn sie wird nur aus dem Dialoge selber erschlossen”.

thing exists as something alone by itself would agree, first of all, that none of them is in us" (Pl. *Prm.* 133c3-5, transl. Allen).

Thus, Ross writes: "The conceptualistic interpretation of universals is thus dismissed very summarily, and Plato never recurs to it".¹⁸ If Plato never "recurs" to the "conceptualistic interpretation of universals", then we can assume that he remained a realist about the universals until the end of his writing career, as the passage in the *Timaeus* (Pl. *Ti.* 52a1-5) confirms.

However, as Cornford remarks "Plato's *Parmenides* repudiates [with this argument] the doctrine which some critics ascribe to the *real* Parmenides, that 'to think is the same thing as to be': *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai* [...]".¹⁹ That is, by means of the argument against conceptualism, Plato's *Parmenides* also repudiates the interpretation of Fragment 3 as establishing an identity between thinking and being: Thinking is not the same as being.

Yet, if we can interpret Fragment 3 – which is unfortunately never quoted by Plato – in at least a *minimal* sense as claiming that thinking presupposes being, that is, that thinking presupposes something that exists as its object,²⁰ then we may also view this anti-conceptualistic argument as a reinterpretation of Fragment 3 on the part of Plato. H. Rochol, for example, even went so far as to write that "this theory concluding from the existence of thinking to the existence of an objectively existing object of thinking, is at the same time the gist and basic theory of Platonism".²¹

On Section 2

[S1] The first sentence of Section 2 contains two arguments: [a] an argument showing the impossibility of "panpsychism", at least if we can interpret "the others" (*talla*) as sensible things, and [b] a *reductio ad absurdum* showing that the existence of thoughts that do not think implies a contradiction. The impossibility of panpsychism derives from the impossibility that the sensible things participating in thoughts can themselves think. If this were

18 Ross 1951, 88.

19 Cornford 1939, 82, cf. 34 n. 1: "I cannot believe that Parmenides meant 'to think is the same thing as to be'. He nowhere suggests that his One Being thinks, and no Greek of his date or for long afterwards would have seen anything but nonsense in the statement that 'A exists' means the same thing as 'A thinks'".

20 Cf. Shorey 1900, esp. 210-12: "The only probable interpretation, if the text is sound, is that Thought is always of something (since it can't be of nothing) in and which it is spoken". For a maximalist interpretation, cf. Ferber 1989, 71-73.

21 Rochol 1971, 506-507, quoted in Dorter 1994, 35 n. 21.

true, not only would animals and plants participate in thinking, but also even stones, which would therefore be said to think in some way. The *reductio ad absurdum* formulated in [b] consists of the logical contradiction that these thinking sensible things do not think.

[S2] gives young Socrates' consent.

Thus, conceptualism about universals is refuted and realism seems to be true. In this case, however, we may not only fall into the "pit of nonsense" (*bythōn phylarias*) (Pl. *Prm.* 130d7), accepting the real existence of forms of things "like hair and mud and dirt" (Pl. *Prm.* 129c6-7), but we also have to accept negative forms, such as forms of the unjust (*adikou*) and of the bad (*kakou* (cf. Pl. *R.* 476a3)), as well as forms of negations. Thus, Aristotle writes in his critique of Plato's Theory of Ideas, "According to the 'one over many' argument there will be Forms even of negations" (Arist. *Metaph.* A9 990b12-13).²²

II.

Indeed, if we apply this ontological argument for the existence of ideas to "the not-being" (*to mê on*), then "the not-being" (*Sph.* 258e2) is also "a thought (*noêma*) of some one thing over all the [negative] things (*henos tinos, ho epi pasin*), that is, of some one form (*mian tina ousan idean*" (*Prm.* 132c3-4). Therefore, "the not-being" (*to mê on*) also *is*.

In fact, the *Politicus*, which concludes the trilogy *Theatetus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, summarises the *Sophist* with the phrase "the not-being is" (*einai to mê on*) (Pl. *Plt.* 284b8).²³ Indeed, after having introduced the term "the other" (*to heteron*) for "the not-being" (*to mê on*) (*Sph.* 257b3-4), Plato has the Visitor from Elea state that "the not-being" is a "single form (*eidōs hen*) numbered among the many things that are" (*Sph.* 258c2-3, transl. Rowe).

However, if "the not-being" (*to mê on*) is "one single form" (*eidōs hen*), then it also belongs to what "perfectly is" (*pantelōs on*) (*Sph.* 248d7-248a1).²⁴ But in this case (cf. *Sph.* 248c4-249a4) "the not-being" (*to mê on*), too, qua

22 For a good discussion, cf. Ross 1951, 166-67.

23 Cf. my interpretation 2020b, 219-20.

24 For a bibliography referring to *pantelōs on* in Pl. *Sph.* 248d7-248a1, see Krämer 1964, 193-94. Particularly valuable discussions are to be found in de Vogel 1970, 176-81, and Lafrance 2015, 319-39, especially 321: "Ainsi mis dans son contexte immédiat, le *pantelōs on* désigne l'être dans toute son extension, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui est immobile et tout ce qui est en mouvement. La connaissance autant que mouvement constitue une partie de ce *pantelōs on*. L'adverbe désigne moins ici l'absoluté et la perfection de l'être que la totalité de l'être envisagée sous l'angle du mouvement et du repos".

“the other” (*to heteron*), possesses “change (*kinêsis*)” (*Sph.* 248e6), “understanding (*nous*), life (*zôê*) and soul (*psychê*)” (*Sph.* 249a9).²⁵

But if “the not-being” has understanding (*nous*), then according to the ontological argument of the *Parmenides*, “the not-being” is also a thought (*noêma*) or concept which has “the not-being” as its object. Since “the [first] not-being” is already real, “the [second] not-being” cannot be a further mental object *outside* of the first, but must rather be a *noêma* or concept of itself, that is, a *noêma* of a higher order, meaning that “the not-being” would be a “thought” (*noêma*) of a “thought” (*noêmatos*).

Do we not fall here once again again, in thinking the not-being as having soul, into a new “pit of nonsense” (*bython phlyarias*) (*Prm.* 130d7) and, to avoid doing so, are we not forced to conclude with Ross and others that those who believe that Plato is abandoning here “his belief in the unchangeability of Ideas and assigning soul to them” are “mistaken”?²⁶ Or must we rather accept, with Plotinus, that if the forms have “change, life, soul and understanding (*nous*)” (*Sph.* 248e6-7), then Plato admits intellection (*noêsis*) on the part of essential being (*ousia*) (*Enn.* VI, 7, 39, 29-30), and the Platonic world of forms is, in the words of Szlezák, “a self-thinking, transcendent intellect”?²⁷

In this case, “the not-being” – which “is what is not” – can “act or be acted on” (*Sph.* 248b5) in the following sense: It can act on itself in the sense of “spiritual motion”,²⁸ or more exactly spiritual self-motion (cf. *Pl. Lg.* 896a3-4), when reflecting on itself, and it can be acted on, in the sense of being moved spiritually, when being reflected on by itself.

However, this is not explicitly stated, at least not in the passage quoted from the *Timaeus*: If what is “unchangeable” and “admitting no modification” (*Ti.* 52a1-5) belongs to the “perfectly real” (*pantelôs on*) (*Sph.* 248d7-249a1), then it “stands immutable in solemn aloofness, devoid of understanding” (*Sph.* 249a3, transl. Ross).

I do not see how to harmonise these contradictory statements, between, on the one hand, Plato’s realism about universals in the *Parmenides* and *Timaeus* and, on the other hand, his implicit conceptualism with regard to universals in the *Sophist*, where he equips them with “change (*kinêsis*),

25 For this difficult passage, see Ross 1951, 110-111.

26 Ross 1951, 110.

27 Szlezák 2021, 474-75, who refers to Schwabe 2001. For an overview of scholars who think that the position in the *Sophist* is not “incompatible with the metaphysics of other dialogues”, see Crivelli 2012, 95 n. 75.

28 Cornford 1939, 237. Quoted in de Vogel 1970, 179.

understanding (*nous*), life (*zôê*) and soul (*psychê*)” (*Sph.* 248e5-7). How, for example, could mathematical universals such as “the equal” (*to ison*) (cf. *Phd.* 74a5-75a3) or “the other” (*to heteron*) as “the not-being” (*to mê on*) (*Sph.* 257b3-4) have a subject that thinks? Perhaps it is a higher-order conceptualism in the sense that *universalia ante rem* are also concepts in the mind of the world, as “the complete living thing” (*to pantelês zôon*) (*Ti.* 30c1).²⁹ However, this would involve an extrapolation, if not a kind of “misinterpretation by inference” (Robinson 1953, 2-3). If that was what Plato actually meant, he could have said so. But he did not.

III.

I conclude with a puzzle: When the young Socrates interprets the Platonic forms as thoughts (*nêmata*) or concepts, he is led by the Platonic Parmenides back to the real being of forms. Conversely, when the young Theaetetus assumes the real being even of “the not-being” (*to mê on*), he is led by the Eleatic Stranger back to understanding (*nous*). In other words, conceptualism about “the not-being” implies Platonic realism about “the not-being”. But does Platonic realism about “the not-being” not imply conceptualism? Does Plato reinterpret, *pace* Cornford (cf. here p. 377), Fragment 3 of Parmenides (*to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*) not simply in the “minimal” sense that thinking presupposes being, but also in the sense of an identity between thinking and being? Moreover, since the relationship of identity is symmetrical, did he interpret this relationship not only “forwards”, in the sense that thinking implies being, but also “backwards”, in the sense that being implies thinking?³⁰ This is what Plotinus subsequently did when quoting Fragment 3: “[...] thinking is not outside but in being” (*Enn.* V.1.8-20-22).

Was this mutual implication or “circle” between thinking (*noein*) and being (*einai*) not perhaps predicted by the historical Parmenides: “It is indifferent to me where I make a beginning; for there I come back again” (*DK.* B5, transl. Gallop/Taràn)?³¹

29 Cf. Krämer 1964, 200-201.

30 Such an interpretation has indeed been defended, *pace* Cornford 1939, 34 and 92, by Long 2004, esp. 234-40, cf. 229: “Parmenides’ first call on us is not to think about being, but to think about thinking being”. Quoted without footnote.

31 Thanks are due to B. Bossi, L. Brown, A. L. Braga da Silva and S. Meister for some helpful remarks.

The *Eidos* of Non-existence in Plato's *Sophist*: 257a11-b4

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Some contemporary scholars (rightly) accept Ackrill's claim that in the *Sophist* the Eleatic Visitor recognizes three ways in which being can be predicated of a thing: it can be said to be identical to something, or to have some property, or to exist. But scholars generally maintain that the Visitor only recognizes *two* corresponding ways of predicating not-being: we can say that something is not identical to something, or that it does not have some property, but we cannot intelligibly say that it does not exist. I argue that at 257a11-b4 the Visitor does recognize this third way of predicating not-being, construing it as a special case of negative property predication. To predicate not-being of something is to say that it shares in the Form of Non-existence, viz. that part of Otherness that is set opposite the Form of Being (Existence). The scholarly resistance to this view is largely based not on the text of 257a11-b4, but rather on the *aporiai* raised for the intelligibility of the expression τὸ μὴ ὄν at 237b7-238c3. I argue that those *aporiai* are not meant to be decisive, and, in particular, that a claim that figures in the first, that the term "something" can only be intelligibly applied to something that exists, should not be thought to be endorsed as obviously true by Plato. In support I adduce *Parmenides* 160e, where the denial of that claim is persuasively argued for. Being, not-being, non-existence, negative predication

At the start of the *Theaetetus*, Euclides tells Terpsion that Theaetetus is near death from wounds and dysentery. As the two of them listen to a slave read aloud the account of Theaetetus' long-ago conversation with Socrates, they know that at any moment they may hear the news that Theaetetus is no more. We who read that dialogue, and its sequel, the *Sophist* – in which an Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus discuss, among other things, not-being – we, too, are reminded that Theaetetus (along with all the rest of them) is no more. Does the Visitor's discussion of not-being take into account this particular kind of not-being: the not-being of something that has ceased to exist? Strangely enough, the scholarly consensus is that it does not. According to this consensus, the Eleatic Visitor, and presumably Plato himself, remain under the spell of Eleaticism when it comes to non-existence: non-existence statements are unintelligible, and, indeed, unspeakable. This is, in my view, remarkable. *We all* think that non-existence statements are intelligible, and, often enough, true. There are well-known problems in accounting for their meaningfulness, to which Russell, Frege, and others have offered solutions. Neither does Plato shirk the task of explaining the meaningfulness

of non-existence statements. In order to account for their meaningfulness, Plato's Visitor takes pains to argue that there is a Form that gives sense to the predicate in such statements: the Form of Non-existence.

Before defending this claim let me point to a difference between Plato's main concern and that of Russell et al. The latter are typically concerned with the problem of the meaningfulness of statements that include non-referring singular terms, such as "Santa Claus." If the meaning of a singular term just is its reference, then non-referring singular terms, and the statements in which they occur, are meaningless.¹ Though Plato's discussion does bear on this issue, it primarily concerns a different problem: the meaningfulness of *predicating* not-being of something.² The expression with which he is concerned, τὸ μὴ ὄν, is not a name, nor does Plato treat it as one.³ It is, rather, a definite description: "that which is not," in which not-being occurs as a predicate. Plato's problem is the meaningfulness of *predicating* not-being of something – not of *referring to* what does not exist.

That this is Plato's concern helps explain why the Visitor treats non-existence statements as a special case of negative predication. The discussion of negative predication culminates, at 257a11-b4, in the Stanger's establishing the existence of a Form of Non-existence, which he analyzes as that part of Otherness that is directed toward (or set opposite) Being. This is what we invoke when we say that something does not exist, and this is what is involved, metaphysically, in making such statements true, when they are true. That this is a natural reading of 257a11-b4 has, I think, never been denied. Rather, the doctrine it would express has been thought to be so clearly at odds with assertions, elsewhere in the dialogue, of the unintelligibility of not-being that interpreters have felt the need to adopt other readings of the passage. Now the most important of these assertions of unintelligibility occur in the paradoxes concerning "that which in no way is" that are discussed at the beginning of the ontological section of the dialogue (237b7-238c3). Therefore, after a brief synopsis of what I take to be the dialogue's theory of being (or of what is), I shall start with a discussion of these paradoxes, and then go

1 Russell's solution to the problem is to deny that terms such as "Santa Claus" are in fact names or singular terms at all; they are disguised definite descriptions.

2 Wittgenstein, for one, did share Plato's interest in the meaningfulness of negative predications. Cf. Wittgenstein 1922, 4.0641 and idem 1961, 30. The Wittgenstein-Plato parallels are discussed by Lee 1972, 293-297 and Pippin 1979, 179-196.

3 In introducing the topic the Visitor does employ the words τοῦνομα[α] ... τοῦτο, τὸ μὴ ὄν (237c2), but I take it that ὄνομα does not here have the sense the Visitor assigns it at 262a6-7, and that the entire phrase is best translated simply as "this expression, 'that which is not.'"

on to argue that, once they are dismissed, the existentialist interpretation of 257a11-b4 emerges as the obvious and unobjectionable one. There are, to be sure, other passages that have also been offered as evidence that the *Sophist* does not countenance negative existential statements;⁴ these I shall have to leave for another occasion.

As far as the *Sophist*'s account of what is goes, I largely endorse the view of Ackrill,⁵ who argued that Plato here distinguishes (and gives an analysis of) three senses of "is": the existential sense, where "*a* is (exists)" is made true by *a*'s participating in the Form of Being; its use as a copula, where "*a* is *f*" is made true by *a*'s participating in the Form of *F*-ness; and its use in identity statements, where "*a* is (identical to) *b*" is made true by *a*'s participating in the Form of the Same with respect to *b*. Shorn of its focus on the meanings of the word "is," Ackrill's three-part analysis is correct: the *Sophist* does indeed analyze existence, property-possession, and identity in the ways indicated. Ackrill's analysis has been influentially contested by scholars who have raised doubts as to whether Plato (or the Greek language itself) clearly makes these distinctions.⁶ But more recently some scholars have argued that the Visitor does indeed make the relevant distinctions, and that he analyzes them in much the way Ackrill maintained.⁷ Furthermore, as regards non-being, these scholars (rightly) maintain that the Visitor provides, for two of these three positive kinds of being, analogous analyses of not-being: "*a* is not (identical) to *b*" is made true by *a*'s participating in the Form of the Other with respect to *b* (255e8-257a11), while "*a* is not *f*" is made true by *a*'s participating in that part of the Other that is directed toward *F*-ness (257b1-258a10). However, scholars have refused to allow that the Visitor supplies a comparable analysis for the third case, non-existence. I maintain that he does: "*a* is not (=does not exist)" is made true by *a*'s participating in that part of the Other that is directed toward Being (258a11-b7). (It will be objected: how can *a* participate in this alleged Form, if *a* does not exist, and so is not there to participate in anything? I cannot here fully address this issue. I simply note that in Plato's *Parmenides* Parmenides argues that we cannot infer from something's

4 Most important are 258d5-e1 and 260b7-8. Relevant to my response to these is the proper interpretation of 259a3-b7.

5 See Ackrill 1957. Ackrill summarizes his three-fold analysis in the last paragraph. Note that the Form of Being figures only in the analysis of the existential "is."

6 A pioneering work raising these concerns is Brown 1986, 49-70.

7 For defense of the claim that the *Sophist* gives (among other things) an account of existence, see O'Brien 2005; idem 2013b, idem 1995 and Crivelli 2012. The latter's distinction between the 'is' of definition, the 'is' of existence, and the 'is' of 'ordinary predication' is roughly equivalent to Ackrill's three-fold distinction.

participating in a Form *F* that it exists: 160e7-161a5. Unlike many, I take this to be a proposal that Plato himself should, and does, endorse.)

I now turn to what is thought to be a decisive objection to this interpretation: the Visitor's apparent dismissal from the very start of the intelligibility of non-existence (237b7-238c3). In this passage the Visitor lays out the initial *aporiai* concerning talk of what is not. He follows this up (after a digression, 239c4-242b9) with an extended presentation of *aporiai* concerning what is (at 242b10). He is only done with laying out difficulties at 250e, whereupon he begins to make the distinctions required to deal with these difficulties. Though the Visitor does not return to these *aporiai*, I submit that it is a mistake to assume that Plato thought them unsolvable. In the discussion following 250e we are provided the tools needed to resolve them.

The Visitor raises three difficulties: two are relevant to our concerns.⁸ The first considers what it is that we could apply the expression "what is not" to – that is, what subject it could be predicated of.⁹ The Visitor asserts that it cannot be applied to anything that is; nor even to anything to which we might apply the phrase "something," since the use of the latter phrase is always itself necessarily applied to something that *is*. Since there is nothing to serve as the subject for the predicate "what is not," and every predication needs a subject, we cannot so much as get a predication of not-being off the ground. The second difficulty concerns a paradox within the predicate itself. Insofar as our predicate expression must be either singular, dual, or plural,¹⁰ it turns out in fact to be a compound predicate: it predicates not only not-being, but also *number* of whatever it is asserted of. But only things that *are* can be of a certain number. Our predicate expression therefore predicates both not-being and a kind of being – being of a certain number. The predicate is, therefore, self-contradictory (see 238a1-c11).

Are these considerations sufficient grounds for dismissing the possibility of predicating not-being (understood as non-existence)? More specifically: does the Visitor – does Plato – think so? Presumably no modern commentator on the dialogue *in propria persona* thinks so; indeed, that they do not shows itself in the occasional awkwardness of their language when assuring us that Plato did.¹¹ It is true that, after establishing (as I maintain) that there

8 The third difficulty, which the Visitor calls greater than the other two (238d2), consists in the fact that the unintelligibility of not-being also infects any attempt to *declare* it unintelligible.

9 See 237c2: "to what (ποῖ) ought we apply this expression, 'what is not.'"

10 The Visitor refers to the singular and plural (238b10-c6); for the dual, cf. 237c7-e7.

11 Cf. "This may plausibly be taken to indicate that..." Crivelli 2012, 38.

really is a Form of Non-existence, the Visitor does not return to show how these paradoxes are to be solved. But neither does he indicate that we must abide by them and banish non-existence from our speech and thought.¹² And I will venture to put my finger on what I think is the weak claim in at least the first of the two paradoxes: the claim that when we utter “something” we necessarily apply it to something that is. Though never retracted in this dialogue, this claim is denied in the passage in the *Parmenides* to which I earlier referred.¹³ As for the second paradox, a simple counterexample may help resolve it. Our being quite certain that Snow White and the Seven Dwarves do not exist does not prevent us from tallying them up and determining that they are eight. Predicating number does *not* predicate being (i.e., existence), any more than predicating any other normal predicate does.

Let me now turn to the crucial passage in which the Visitor arrives at the Form of Non-existence. He begins with a rough statement of what will be his analysis of not-being (non-existence): “Whenever we talk about that which is not,¹⁴ as it appears, we are not talking about something contrary to what is, but only about something *other* than it” (257b3-4). When Theaetetus expresses his puzzlement, the Visitor begins a general analysis of negative predication. He points out that “not large” is not the contrary of “large” (viz., small), but only *other* than it. Thereupon he introduces the notion of the parts of otherness, one of which is assigned (e.g.) to beauty, to give a *bona fide* Form (*eidos*) of the Not-beautiful (257c7-e11). After applying this analysis to the Not-large¹⁵ and the Not-just (258a1-5), he generalizes the principle as follows:

And we will accordingly speak in the same way about the rest, since the nature of the Other has appeared to be among the things that are, and,

12 At 258e7-259a1 the Visitor says: “We’ve said good-bye long ago to any contrary of that which is, and to whether it is or not, and also to whether or not an account can be given of it” (trans. White 1993). What does he mean by “the contrary of that which is,” if not non-existence? I suggest that the term is meant to be equivalent to “what in no way is” (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν 237b7-8), and refers, not to non-existence, but to something that participates in no Form at all. So the Visitor is not here endorsing a previous rejection of a Form of Non-existence.

13 “Furthermore, the one that is not partakes of that and of something (τοῦ τινός) ...” (160e2-3, trans. Gill and Ryan 1996.) For discussion of the passage in which this occurs, see Tuozzo 2021.

14 Unless noted, translations are my own. In this passage I remove the quotation marks inserted by Duke, Hicken, Nicoll, Robinson, and Strachan 1995.

15 His application of the analysis to the not-large speaks against the contention in Lee 1972, 269 that 257b1-c4 is not part of the discussion of negative predication.

given that it *is*, it is accordingly necessary to posit that the parts of it, too, are no less things that are. (258a7-9)

In this passage, “the rest” (τᾶλλα) refers to all other Forms: just as there are parts of the Other assigned to the Beautiful and the Just, there is a part of the Other assigned to every other Form, and each such part is a being no less than the positive nature to which it is directed. The Visitor then goes on to apply this principle to the case he has been aiming at from the start: the case of not-being:

So it seems that the setting against each other (πρὸς ἄλληλα... ἀντίθεσις) of [i] a part of the nature of the other and [ii] the nature of that which is, is in no way less a being (οὐσία), if it is lawful to say so, than that which is itself. And it does not signify something contrary to that which is, but only something *other* than it. (258a11-b4, my reference numbers)

Although the translation of this terse passage has been the subject of dispute, the foregoing is, I think, the most natural way of reading it.¹⁶ An alternative translation assumes that the passage is elliptical, and that its first sentence is concerned with “the setting against each other of a part of the nature of the other and [of a part] of the nature of that which is,” where “a part of the nature of that which is” is taken to be a designation appropriate to any given Form. On such a reading, the passage simply restates the general principle just stated in 258a7-8. There are decisive reasons against such a reading, not least the fact that the *Sophist* nowhere else makes use of the notion of a part of Being.¹⁷ Oddly, however, even those who recognize the unsuitability of assuming an ellipsis here nonetheless endorse the sense that that reading would give: namely, that the reference to the nature of what is is meant distributively: it refers to each of the things that are, i.e., all the Forms. The plain sense of the text, I submit, is, rather, that there is a distinct part of Otherness directed towards Being, just as there is one directed towards Beauty, another towards Largeness, and so on – and that this is precisely the not-being that the inquiry into the sophist required us to find. Indeed, the rather solemn phrase, “if it is lawful to say so (εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν),” appropriately marks the momentous occasion of the transgression

16 See the brief but judicious remarks of Lee 1972, 283-284, and also Notomi 1999, 244. Pace Crivelli 2011, 121, τῆς θατέρου μορίου φύσεως is an unobjectionable, even characteristically Platonic, hyperbaton for μορίου τῆς θατέρου φύσεως. Compare Denniston 1952, 53 on hyberta and the “splitting up of unified phrases.”

17 So, again, Lee 1972, 283-284.

of Parmenides' interdiction. The continuation of the passage confirms the impression that something momentous has occurred:

Visitor: What, then, should we call it?

Theaetetus: It is clear that this is what is not, itself (τὸ μὴ ὄν ... αὐτό), which we were looking for on account of the sophist.

Visitor: Therefore doesn't it, as you said, fall short of none of the rest in being? And don't you have to gather courage at this point and say that what is not is firmly in possession of its own nature, just as the large was large and the beautiful was beautiful and the not large and the not beautiful,¹⁸ so too that which is not (τὸ μὴ ὄν) in the same way was and is not-being, one form numbering among the many beings? Or do we still have some ground for disbelieving this, Theaetetus?

Theaetetus: None. (258b6-c6)

The language here suggests *not* that what is not is simply the sum of the Not-large, the Not-beautiful, and all the other Not-*fs*, but is rather one single Form, on a par with them, but especially important because the positive nature towards which it is directed is Being itself. And if that is the case, I suggest that what we have here is an analysis of non-existence to put beside the earlier analyses of non-identity and negative predication. The Form they have discovered is the Form of Non-existence.

18 I omit the supplements printed in Duke, Hicken, Nicoll, Robinson, and Strachan 1995.

Two Ontological Functions of the Nature of Difference in Plato's *Sophist*

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To characterize the sophist as a maker of what is not, one must know what Not-Being is. *Sophist* 257c–258e elucidates Not-Being in terms of Difference. Although Not-Being was traditionally identified with Difference *itself* (Cherniss and Ross), most scholars today consider it *part* of Difference (Lee, Brown, Kahn, etc.). This paper advocates the traditional view by clarifying two ontological functions of Difference: ἀφορίζειν (marking off) and ἀντιτιθέναι (setting against). Section 1 analyzes the analogy of Difference and knowledge in 257c–d, showing that the nature of Difference functions as marking off a still indefinite Kind (being) from Being itself and other parts of Being—the “generic” function—and then specifying the content of the Kind at issue by setting it against a particular Kind—the “specific” function. Section 2 discusses the Not-Beautiful in 257d–e to explain how these two functions work. By the specific function of Difference, we learn what the Beautiful is, identifying paradigmatic exemplars of the Not-Beautiful in daily life. Section 3 interprets 258a–b as generalizing this account, concluding that the *antithesis* between a part of the nature of Difference and a part of the nature of Being is nothing but Not-Being. Thus, the context indicates that Not-Being is identical to Difference itself, which performs this *antithesis* as its function. Although the widespread view uses “τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόνιον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον” (258e2) as strong evidence, this participial phrase stands for the function of the nature of Difference, as ἀντιτιθέμενον is a dominant participle, thereby meaning “the part of it [the nature of Difference] *being set against* each being” as an example of the *ab urbe condita* construction.

Not-Being, Difference, Not-Beautiful, *antithesis*

Introduction

To characterize the sophist as a maker of what is not, one must know what Not-Being is. After careful scrutiny, the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus finally declare that they “have demonstrated what the form of Not-Being is” (258d6–7), recapitulating their argument as follows:

T1 258d7–e3: τὴν γὰρ θατέρου φύσιν ἀποδείξαντες οὐσάν τε καὶ κατακεκερματισμένην ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόνιον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον ἐτολήσαμεν εἰπεῖν ὡς αὐτὸ τοῦτό ἐστιν ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν. (OCT [1995])

By replacing the form of Not-Being with ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν, T1 elucidates the nature of Difference and its relationship with Not-Being. However, their connection is disputable. On one hand, as one of the greatest Kinds, Difference is treated as if it is on the same ontological level as Being. Hence, Not-Being is shown not to be the *opposite* of Being, but something *different* from it (257b3–4, 258a11–b4). As the Different is set against Being, Not-Being seems to be the same as Difference.¹ Yet, more recently, it has been assumed that “Part of Otherness, not merely Otherness by itself, defines the genuine non-Being” (Lee 1972, 267), for which T1 seemingly provides strong evidence.² In this context, a question remains regarding whether Not-Being is considered Difference (Otherness) or part of it. If Not-Being is not identified, we cannot appreciate the definition of the sophist in this dialogue.

In this paper, I discuss 257c5–258e3 and clarify the nature and functions of Difference. By doing so, I criticize the widely accepted approach in which Not-Being is identified as part of Difference, which does not consider two ontological functions of Difference: ἀφορίζειν (marking off) and ἀντιτιθέναι (setting against). In Section 1, I interpret the Visitor’s analogy of the nature of Difference and knowledge in 257c7–d6. This analogy helps us comprehend how parts of Difference come into being. In Section 2, I analyze the Visitor’s exposition of the Not-Beautiful as an example of part of Difference in 257d7–e11. This example enables us to explain how the two functions of Difference lead the Not-Beautiful into being. In Section 3, I conclude that Not-Being is defined as the *nature* of Difference, not as *part* of it, by discussing a controversial sentence (258a11–b4). Finally, I return to T1 and interpret 258e2–3 by shedding new light on the participial phrase “τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μῶριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον” in this context. My reading advocates the identification of Not-Being as the nature of Difference.

The Analogy of the Nature of Difference and Knowledge (257c7–d6)

At 257c7, the Visitor begins to explore the nature of Difference by investigating how it “has been cut up into pieces” (κατακεκερματίσθαι). What does he mean by “being cut up into pieces”? He first explains this in the case of knowledge:

- 1 Cherniss 1944, 93 n.61: “τὸ μὴ ὄν is the ‘idea of difference’”; 262: “[Plato] identifies [τὸ μὴ ὄν] rather with the idea of difference”; Ross 1951, 115: “[not-being] is not a sixth ‘greatest kind’, because it is simply difference under another name.”
- 2 Brown 2012, 249: “not being is not identified with the different, but with either one special part of it ... or with any part of the different”; Kahn 2013, 121.

T2 257c10–d1: Knowledge too, I suppose, is one, but each part of it, marked off (ἀφορισθὲν), is relating to a particular thing (ἐπὶ τῷ γιγνόμενον) and carries a particular name (ἐπωνυμίαν ἴσχει) that is peculiar to itself. (Rowe 2015, trans., slightly modified)

By analyzing the naming practice into two steps, T2 shows how knowledge is cut up into pieces. The second step is easier to understand than the first. For example, in relation to health and disease, a particular kind of knowledge is named “medicine.” Another kind concerning numbers is named “arithmetic.” In general, each branch of knowledge has a proper name in relation to its specific subject matter. Before this step, however, a particular kind of knowledge must *already* have been grasped as “part” of knowledge, since we are not interested in knowledge in general. This first step is expressed as “being marked off” (ἀφορίζεσθαι). But from what? The answer is that the relevant part must be marked off from both the whole of knowledge and its other parts. The reason is that calling something a part implies that it is not the whole of which it is a part, and that it is a part that is different from other parts.

Hence, the naming of a particular branch of knowledge consists of two steps. (1) We are concerned with knowledge, not as a whole but as a part of it, marked off from the whole as well as other parts. Logically, in this step, we still have no idea of the part of knowledge with which we are dealing. (2) By relating it to a particular subject matter, we find a specific type of knowledge by which we deal with this branch's proper object.

Using the analogy of knowledge, the Visitor tries to explain how the nature of Difference is cut up into pieces, assuming it “is one, and its parts have suffered the same” process as parts of knowledge have (257d4–5). Each part of Difference is named according to two steps: (1) being marked off from Difference and its other parts; and (2) according to its specific nature. Immediately, the Visitor replaces (2) with “being set against (ἀντιτίθεσθαι) some specific being” (cf. 257e2–4), thus discussing the Not-Beautiful as a part of Difference. How, then, are these two steps in naming related to the nature of Difference?³

At the end of the “five greatest Kinds” passage (254b–256e), which argues that each of the five Kinds is no other Kind and is different from all other Kinds by partaking of the nature of Difference (255b3, e5–6; cf. 256b2–3), the Visitor draws a general conclusion from the case of Motion: “with all Kinds (πάντα τὰ γένη), the nature of Difference, by making (ἀπεργαζομένη) each

3 Cf. Lee 1972, 269–76; Brown 2012, 243–48.

of them different from Being [itself], renders (ποιεῖ) it not Being (οὐκ ὄν)” (256d12–e2). Just as a sensible object’s participation in a transcendent Form represents a *causal* relationship in the middle works, so does the nature of Difference function (ἀπεργάζεσθαι, ποιεῖν) in a similar causal way to *make* each Kind different from Being and to *render* it not Being. Ontologically, without this function of Difference, no Kind could exist *distinctly* from Being. As each Kind comes to *be* (or exists) only by partaking of Being (256e3), Difference, with Being, serves to make each Kind one among beings (τὰ ὄντα), that is, a part of Being. Thus, the nature of Difference, as being one (μῖα οὐσης 257d4–5), is “cut up into pieces over *all* beings (ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα)” (258e1), and with Being, “pervades” (διεληλυθότε 259a4–6, cf. 255e4) *all* Kinds. Since this function of Difference can be applied generically to all Kinds, I call it the “generic function” of Difference. By this function, the nature of Difference generically marks off part of Being, which is also part of Difference, not only from Being itself, but also from other parts of Being.

Hence, the generic function of Difference is the first step in naming of a part of Difference, by which X is marked off from Difference itself and its other parts. It is not contradictory to say that X *is* and *is not*, as X *is* by partaking of Being, while X *is not* by partaking of Difference: X is different from Being and *is not* Being. Thus, Being and Difference cooperate to mark off X as being something (τὶ), but X remains as something *indefinite* at the stage, where the generic function of marking off is not enough to determine what X is (cf. 255e3–6). As in the case of knowledge, to specify what content X has by virtue of the nature of Difference, we must consider the second step in naming: the Not-Beautiful.

Not-Beautiful as a Part of Difference (257d7–e11)

The Visitor goes on to explain how parts of Difference come to possess their own names, focusing on the second step in the naming process. To his question of whether what is set against the Beautiful has a name, Theaetetus confidently replies:

T3 257d11–13: Yes, it has (“Εχον)! For that which we utter on each occasion (ἐκάστοτε φθεγγόμεθα) as “not-beautiful” is different from nothing else than the nature of the Beautiful (τῆς τοῦ καλοῦ φύσεως).

Contrary to the usual interpretation, T3 does not treat negative predications, as already shown by van Eck and Brown.⁴ The participle ἔχον stands for τῷ καλῷ τι θατέρου μῶριον ἀντιτιθέμενον (257d7), which is named “μὴ καλόν”; γάρ explains why this part of Difference is named “Not-Beautiful” by appealing to our daily experience of uttering “not-beautiful,” in which we call or name *this part* “Not-Beautiful.” So, the relative pronoun ὃ and its “postcedent” τοῦτο must refer to this part. Because the nature of Difference is regarded as a Kind, this part of it must be a Kind, and ἡ τοῦ καλοῦ φύσις, which is set against the Not-Beautiful, must also be a Kind, but not whatever is beautiful.⁵

Why, then, does Theatetus mention our daily experience of naming the relevant Kind “Not-Beautiful”? Consider the occasion on which we utter “not beautiful.” As noted above, this utterance is not a predication that says something about something else, nor is it plausible to imagine a theoretical discussion of the Not-Beautiful by using its name. The context of this passage requires us to reflect on the structure of how we name a part of Difference, so we may well expect Theatetus to vividly recall how he has so far demarcated the Beautiful and the Not-Beautiful in his life. If so, the use of φθέγγεσθαι seems to highlight our ostensive learning of the Beautiful in contrast to the Not-Beautiful. In trying to learn what the Beautiful is, we encounter something that is not beautiful at all, and suddenly exclaim in surprise, “No! Not beautiful!” This utterance never *describes* X before our very eyes as “X is not beautiful,” but it is a sign of *identifying* the Not-Beautiful in X, regardless of what X may be.

To illustrate this type of identification by analogy, consider how a child learns a color, say, “red.”⁶ A child is shown various color samples by a teacher—not only paradigmatic samples of red, such as apples and tomatoes, but also foils, which are paradigmatic samples of different colors, such as peaches and eggplants. The child is aware of learning a particular color. When the teacher shows another sample of red and asks whether it is called “red,” the child may correctly answer, “Red!” If the teacher shows a yellow ball, the child may shout, “Not red!” The child who is learning what red is tries to demarcate between red and not-red, focusing on the realm of color and ignoring where red or not-red exists. Through trial and error, the child learns what to call “red,” often by identifying what is not-red.

4 Van Eck 1995, 25–32; Brown 2012, 243–48.

5 Pace Bostock 1984, 115–16.

6 Cf. Quine 1969, 119ff.

This analogy can be used to illustrate the second step in naming. If, as Bluck suggests,⁷ “Theatetus’ reply at 257d ... in terms of concrete instances” is concerned with “paradigmatic standards,” we can easily interpret our utterance of “not-beautiful” based on recognizing foils—in contrast to paradigms—in the process of learning the Beautiful. We sometimes ostensibly identify the Not-Beautiful based on paradigmatic cases here and now, demarcating it from the Beautiful. This identification constitutes the second step in our naming of a part of Difference, which specifies its *indefinite* content by setting it against the Beautiful. I call this the “specific function” of Difference.

Accordingly, the Visitor explains the Not-Beautiful in terms of these two functions of Difference:

T4 257e2–4: Ἄλλο τι τῶν ὄντων τινὸς ἐνὸς γένους μέρος ἀφορισθέν, καὶ πρὸς τι τῶν ὄντων αὖ πάλιν ἀντιτεθέν, οὕτω συμβέβηκεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ καλόν;

Is it not this: a part of some one Kind, marked off from beings, and in turn, again, set against from some one of beings, this is how the Not-Beautiful turns out to be?

T4 is problematic both philosophically and philologically. Using my interpretation of the two functions of Difference, I submit my reading of T4 based on the new Oxford Classical Text.⁸ The first participial phrase explains the generic function of Difference [ἀφορίζειν], so τινὸς ἐνὸς γένους μέρος stands for a part of Difference, the content of which is still indefinite at this step, marked off from other parts of Being (τῶν ὄντων). The second participial phrase stands for the specific function of Difference [ἀντιτιθέναι], which shows that the content of the part of Difference in question is specified by being set against some part of Being (τι τῶν ὄντων), that is, the Beautiful. Through these two functions, Difference brings into being the part in question as the Not-Beautiful.

The Visitor’s paraphrase of T4 reveals the fusion of the function of Difference and its product: “the Not-Beautiful turns out to be a sort of *antithesis* of some being against some being” (257e6–7). This *antithesis* represents the specific function of Difference, in which a still indefinite being (ὄντος) is related to the Beautiful (πρὸς ὄν). As the Greek term ἔργον means both a function of something and a work produced by the function (cf. 218c2), the

⁷ Bluck 1975, 166; cf. 142, 148, 160.

⁸ Cf. Robinson 1999, 156–57.

Not-Beautiful is the specific work Difference produces in specializing the Beautiful, for which the phrase “a sort of (τις)” *antithesis* is used.

Not-Being as the Nature of Difference (258a1–e3)

The Visitor adds two more examples—the Not-Large and the Not-Just—and stresses that they are beings in much the same way as the Not-Beautiful (258a1–6). In general, since the nature of Difference emerges as one among beings, while being a cause (ἐκείνης δὲ οὐσης 258a8), we must also treat its parts as beings. In conclusion, the Visitor exposes the nature of Difference and its relation to Being itself:

T5 258a11–b4: Οὐκοῦν, ὥς ἔοικεν, ἡ τῆς θατέρου μορίου φύσεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων ἀντίθεσις οὐδὲν ἦττον, εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὄντος οὐσία ἐστίν, οὐκ ἐναντίον ἐκείνῳ σημαίνουσα ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον μόνον, ἕτερον ἐκείνου.

T5 is a highly controversial sentence. From 257b3–4, we can infer that “ἡ ... ἀντίθεσις” in T5 refers to Not-Being and that it is characterized as no less οὐσία than Being itself. So, when asked what this *antithesis* is, Theatetus unhesitatingly answers, “Clearly, Not-Being, which we were seeking for the sake of the sophist, is precisely *this* (αὐτό ἐστι τοῦτο)” (258b7–8).

Different from “a sort of” *antithesis* at 257e6, this *antithesis* denotes a formula signifying two functions of the nature of Difference in general. After the generic function of Difference marks off a part of the nature of Difference, its specific function sets that part against a particular being, which gives rise to a particular not-being. Then, this *antithesis* functions as a bridge between a part of the nature of Difference and a part of the nature of Being, which indicates that μορίου φύσεως—not merely φύσεως—is mentally supplied to τῆς τοῦ ὄντος at 258b1.⁹ Consequently, T5 answers a fundamental question from the beginning of the “greatest Kinds” passage: “How [these Kinds] stand in respect of capacity (function, δυνάμεως) to combine with each other” (254c5–6), a reply to which will somehow account for Being and Not-Being (c6–8). As a vowel-like Kind, the nature of Difference functions as a special bond (δεσμός, 253a5) not only generically between Being itself and a part of it, but specifically between any indefinite being—a part of Difference—and a particular being, so that a particular not-being comes into being. If the interlocutors still regard οὐσία as δύναμις (capacity or function),

9 Robinson 1999, 157; Brown 2012, 249–50; cf. Lee 1972, 282–83.

the idea of which they introduced at 247e, we can legitimately reason that they identify Not-Being with this *antithesis* as the function of Difference, specifically with the bearer of the *antithesis*.

Finally, let us return to T1, which recapitulates T5¹⁰ and concludes this passage:

T1 258d7–e3: τὴν γὰρ θατέρου φύσιν ἀποδείξαντες οὐσάν τε καὶ κατακεκερματισμένην ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόνιον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον ἐτολμήσαμεν εἰπεῖν ὡς αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν.¹¹

For, having demonstrated that the nature of Difference *is* and has been cut up into pieces over all beings against each other, as to the part of [the nature of Difference] being set against each being, we dared to say that it is precisely *this* that really Not-Being turns out to be.

As noted in the Introduction, many scholars have identified Not-Being as *Part* of the nature of Difference, taking the proleptic, participial phrase “τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόνιον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον” to mean “the part of the nature of Difference set against each being,”¹² which αὐτὸ τοῦτο restates. However, instead of this identification, T5 showed that Not-Being is the *antithesis* of a part of Difference and a part of Being, which consists of the function of the nature of Difference, restated by “αὐτό ... τοῦτο” at 258b8. As T1 paraphrases T5, it seems reasonable to take the participial phrase at issue as expressing this function of Difference. But is this grammatically possible?

Since T5 and 258b7–8 focus on the *antithesis* that signifies Not-Being, insofar as the participial phrase rephrases it, the central factor of the phrase must be the participle ἀντιτιθέμενον, which might be grammatically called “a dominant participle.”¹³ In this case, the phrase emphasizes not the *part* of Difference, but the *function* of Difference that sets the part of it against a particular part of Being. If this participial phrase is “used like an articular infinitive with its subject” (Goodwin 1890, 332, §829 (b)),¹⁴ we can translate it as “the part of it [i.e., the nature of Difference] *being set against* each being,” as an example of the *ab urbe condita* construction. Therefore, in the ὡς clause, “αὐτὸ τοῦτο,” as well as “αὐτό ... τοῦτο” (258b8), signifies the very

10 Note ἐτολμήσαμεν εἰπεῖν (258e3) refers back to εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν (b2).

11 I adopt ἕκαστον (Simp. in Ph. 238.26) rather than ἐκάστου (MSS; Simp. 135.26) and take it with τὸ ὄν, not with μόνιον.

12 Brown 2012, 251. Interpretations vary depending on whether one takes ἐκάστου or ἕκαστον with τὸ ὄν or with μόνιον.

13 Emde Boas et al. 2019, 630–31, §52.45.

14 Cf. Smyth 1956, 456, §2053.

function of the nature of Difference, which ὄντως τὸ μὴ ὄν—the form of Not-Being—proves to be.

Conclusion

I have argued that Not-Being is identical to the nature of Difference. Many scholars have mistaken it as *part* of the nature of Difference, disregarding the dominant use of ἀντιτιθέμενον at 258e2.¹⁵ They have also paid little attention to the two ontological functions of Difference. The generic function of Difference [ἀφορίζειν] helps Being itself bring any being (Kind) into existence, whereas its specific function [ἀντιτιθέναι] makes this indefinite being into a particular not-being by setting it against a particular being. The nature of Difference is cut into pieces over all beings and, with Being itself, pervades all Kinds. Hence, 257c–258e shows that Not-Being, as such, has been scattered throughout all beings (τὸ ... μὴ ὄν ... κατὰ πάντα τὰ ὄντα διεσπαρμένον 260b7–8), thus contributing to the rest of Plato's *Sophist*.¹⁶

15 To my knowledge, only Van Eck 2002, 81–83 considers the participial phrase at issue to mean “the fact that a part of it [i.e. of the nature of the different] is set against the being of each” (81). However, not only does van Eck not explain the grammar of ἀντιτιθέμενον, but he also identifies Not-Being with Part of the nature of Difference; cf. 1995, 24; 2002, 73–74.

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VI. Kinds

Sixty-five years of the communion of kinds: a reappraisal of Ackrill's 'Plato and the Copula'

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I offer a reappraisal of Ackrill's classic 1957 article 'Plato and the Copula' in the light of subsequent scholarship, and celebrate its lasting achievement. In a coda I defend the semantic continuity thesis of *einai* from some recent objections.
Ackrill, Frede, Crivelli, identity, predication

J.L. Ackrill published 'Plato and the Copula: *Sophist* 251-9' in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1957. It immediately achieved the status of a classic, and was reprinted in many collections. I am taking the opportunity of the invitation to give the Cornelia de Vogel lecture to reappraise this six-page gem.¹

1. Framework claims

Akrill began his 'brief and unargued outline of the passage' thus: 'Plato seeks to prove that concepts are related in certain definite ways, that there is a *symplekē eidōn* (an interweaving of Forms) 251d-252e'. In a footnote to 'concepts' he wrote

"The use of this term may seem provocative. But whether or not the *eidē* (Forms) and *genē* (kinds) of the *Sophist* are something more than mere concepts, a good deal of interpretation of 251-9 can satisfactorily proceed on the assumption that they are *at least* concepts." (fn 2)

It would take me too far afield to evaluate the now highly contested understanding of Forms and kinds as concepts, something Ackrill held to be true of the middle dialogues, as well as for the *Sophist*.² Given the *Sophist*'s unusual focus on 'what we say' (for instance at 236e, 239a8, 243b-e and a

1 All references to the 1957 article are to its reprinting in Ackrill 1997.

2 Ackrill 1997, 14 (originally published 1973) argued that *anamnēsis* in the *Phaedo* is invoked to explain our acquisition of concepts; a rival understanding (Scott 1995, 53-73) takes *anamnēsis* to be the province of the philosophers (not ordinary speakers) in their search for knowledge of true reality.

host of other *loci*), and the Eleatic Stranger's interest in *orthologia peri to mē on* (239b4), we can agree with Ackrill that a good deal of interpretation of the middle part can satisfactorily proceed on the assumption that—among their other more substantive roles—the *Sophist's* kinds are *at least* concepts.

On one point, however, Ackrill's interpretation is surprising and surely mistaken. I refer to his remarks about the *dia* locution, found in remarks such as '*Kinēsis* is because it shares in Being' or '*Kinēsis* is different because it shares in the Different'. He writes that this *dia* does not introduce a proof that *Kinēsis* is.

Nor obviously does it introduce the cause why *kinēsis estin*: it does not refer to some event or state which resulted in the further state described by *kinēsis estin*. The words introduced by *dia* give an expansion or analysis of *estin* as this word is used in *kinēsis estin*—that is, as used existentially'. (81-2).

(I return in Sec 7 to 'as used existentially' – which in my view is perfectly correct.) This account of the phrase *dia to metechēin tou ontos*—denying that it gives a cause—is in line with Ackrill's conviction that the role of the *megista genē* passage is to explicate the *meaning* of certain sentences in order to clear up confusions and put an end to puzzles. And there is some truth in that, of course. But if we take the phrase *dia to metechēin tou ontos* at face value it does indeed offer a cause. The notion of cause which Ackrill invokes, whereby a cause must be an event or a state, is different from that favoured by Plato, as Sedley argued in 'Platonic Causes'.³ He showed that, as well as *aitia*, Plato's favoured locutions for causal statements include use of the preposition *dia*—as we have here—, the dative case, and the verb *poiein*. For Plato, Sedley claims, a cause is typically a thing, not an event or a state; causal statements are conceptually self-evident, and the basic causal relationship is a matter of logic, on a par with the self-evidence of tautologies. Though he doesn't discuss the *Sophist*, what Sedley writes fits well with Plato's language in our dialogue, where we find not just the *dia* locution but also the verb *poiein* used of the form of the Different, at 256e2: the nature of the different makes each form *ouk on*. The causal reading, denied by Ackrill, is now widely accepted.⁴

³ Sedley 1998.

⁴ See for example Cordero 1993, 260 n. 301 'la valeur causale de la formule [sc. *dia to metechēin tou ontos*] est indéniable'.

If, *contra* Ackrill, locutions such as ‘because of sharing in ...’ do offer a cause, then it would seem that they give the ontological basis for the *truth* of the proposition in question, not merely *an analysis of its meaning*. Here we touch on another well-known controversy. In his article ‘Communion of Forms’ Robert Heinaman argued (against Ackrill’s 1955 *Symplokē Eidōn*) that for Plato the selective communion of forms grounds the *truth* of claims such as ‘*Kinēsis* is’ or ‘*kinēsis* is different from *stasis*’.⁵

2. Plato and the Copula: against Cornford

Here is how Ackrill states his aim:

The question I wish to discuss is this. Is it true to say that one of Plato’s achievements in this passage [sc. 251-9] is ‘the discovery of the copula’, or ‘the recognition of the ambiguity of *estin* as used on the one hand in statements of identity and on the other hand in attributive statements? The question is whether Plato made a philosophical advance which we might describe in such phrases as those just quoted, but no great stress is to be laid on these particular phrases. Thus it is no doubt odd to say to say that Plato (or anyone else) discovered the copula. But did he draw attention to it? Did he expound or expose the various roles of the verb *estin*? Many of his predecessors and contemporaries reached bizarre conclusions by confusing different uses of the word: did Plato respond by elucidating these different uses? These are real questions. (81)

In answering in the affirmative, Ackrill takes issue with two contributions, both by eminent Platonists, Robinson and Cornford. Robinson had denied that Plato in his Doctrine of Communion detected the confusion between identity and attribution: I return to that issue shortly, though it occupies the first part of Ackrill’s short article.

In the second half of the piece, Ackrill disputes Cornford’s claim that it is wrong to invoke the copula in elucidating Plato’s remarks in the Communion of Kinds stretch. Cornford denied that the relation between Forms designated as participation is the same that subsists between an individual thing (e.g. a man) and the Form Man that he partakes of. He added: ‘*Participation as between Forms* is a symmetric relation’.⁶ Cornford’s sole evidence for this astonishing claim is the famous and difficult passage

5 Heinaman 1983b

6 Cornford 1935, 256.

at 255e where *to on* is said to participate in (or ‘partake of’) both the *auto kath’hauto* and the *pros allo*. Ackrill’s demolition of this misguided claim by Cornford—that participation between Forms is a symmetrical relation—is so brilliantly done that it has stood the test of time, and is accepted on all hands. In a nutshell, Ackrill shows how there is difference among the various terms Plato uses for relations among *eidē*. There are the generic terms such as *koinōnia* and *koinōnein*, mixture and *summeignusthai*, which “stand for the rather indeterminate symmetrical relation ‘being connected with’”. Then there are others, like *metechein*, which we expect to be standing for some more determinate non-symmetrical relation.”(89) Ackrill showed convincingly, *contra* Cornford, that this is indeed the case, by a detailed examination of the passage. He also demonstrated, against Ross, that there is a significant difference between locutions where terms like *koinōnein* are used with the dative case and when they are used with the genitive. The dative construction “occurs in highly general remarks about the connection of *eidē*, while *koinōnein* plus genitive represents much the same as *metechein*.” In Ackrill’s terms, this is “that some *eidos* is (copula) such-and-such (e.g. different from ...) ; that is, it is used to express the fact that one concept falls under another”. Below (Sec 4) I comment on the Fregean terminology in which he puts the point. For now I just want to celebrate the definitive achievement of this stretch of the 1957 article.

3. Ackrill against Robinson on identity and attribution; the role of the Four Quartets (255e-257a)

Robinson agreed with Ackrill that the Late-learners’ error was to understand every ‘is’ as the identity sign.⁷ But he held that nowhere in the *Sophist* does Plato properly diagnose their error: the confusion between the identity and attributive uses of ‘is’, a confusion he also found at points in the arguments of Part II of the *Parmenides*. In Robinson’s view Plato *thought* he had refuted the Late-learners in the immediately following stretch, where the Stranger gives some arguments against the ‘no mixing’ thesis. But, he argued, the refutation was not successful; the identity/attribution confusion is not exposed and diagnosed in that stretch. On this point Ackrill agreed. But Robinson had not paid proper attention to a later passage, the exploration of the *megista genē* and how they combine with one another. For convenience

7 Robinson 1942b.

I shall use a label I gave the passage 255e-257a in my 2008 paper: the discussion of the Four Quartets.⁸ It is here, in this very carefully constructed stretch in which the Stranger explores the combination of *Kinēsis* with the other four kinds, that Ackrill found Plato's solution to the Late-learners' problem. (This much is agreed by the rival interpretation I shall turn to shortly, which I dub the self-predication interpretation.)

In this very well-known stretch, after some initial remarks about *Kinēsis* and *Stasis*, the Stranger turns to the other three kinds and offers the three pairs of apparently inconsistent sentences: *kinēsis* is and is not *tauton*, *kinēsis* is and is not *heteron*, and finally *kinēsis* is and is not *on*. With the help of a variety of explanations in terms of *metechein*, the ES shows that the pairs are not contradictory, spelling it out in detail for the pair: *kinēsis* is and is not *tauton*. "Change then is the same and not the same; we must agree this and not dispute it. For when we say [it is] the same and not the same, we are not speaking in a similar way".

That phrase: *ou homoiōs eirēkamen* gets interpreters excited, of course. And with justification, for here Plato offers an unusually explicit signpost. What different ways of speaking is the Stranger pointing out? Recall that his aim is to find *orthologia* about what is not: something that is in part achieved in this passage. Ackrill's line (which many before him had also maintained) is that Plato here points out two different uses of *estin*, the copula and (the denial of) the 'is' of identity.

He shows that (1) where *estin* is being used as the copula, it gets replaced in the philosopher's version by *metechei*; (2) the philosopher's version of 'ouk *estin*', where the *estin* is not the copula but the identity sign is (not *ou metechei* but) *metechei thaterou pros* (shares in difference from). (83)

This distinction (between the copula and the identity sign) is just what is required to immunize us against the paradoxes of the *opsimatheis* (251b) and Plato does suppose that his discussion puts these gentlemen in their place. (84)

4. Two approaches: Ackrill's and the Platonist/self-predication approach

I highlight and contrast two dominant lines of interpretation, which I label the Ackrill approach and the Platonist/self-predication approach.⁹ As we

8 Brown 2008, Sec 2.2.1; lightly revised version in Brown 2019.

9 What follows in part reprises Brown 2019, Sec 2.4, but from a more reflective standpoint.

know, Ackrill takes the issue Plato identifies and resolves to be the confusion of identity with attribution or predication or, in his terms, the copula. The influence of the work of Gottlob Frege on Ackrill's presentation of his case is palpable. He includes a long quotation from Frege's essay 'On Concept and Object' (Über Begriff und Gegenstand) in the translation by Geach and Black. Just as Frege had distinguished different meanings of 'is'/'ist' (the equals sign and the copula), so did Ackrill, and so, he argued, did Plato in his 'not speaking in a similar way' remark. Within this broad approach I include any view which accepts that it is the identity/predication distinction that Plato is drawing attention to, even if he doesn't do so by pinpointing uses of the verb to be. For now, I put that issue on one side, in order to distinguish the broad Ackrill approach from the Platonist/self-predication approach. I refer to two versions argued with great subtlety: first that of Michael Frede in the 1967 monograph, and repeated in Frede 1992; and second the very carefully argued position of Crivelli in his outstanding monograph, a view which, though somewhat different, in his words 'preserves the distinctive intuition' of Frede's approach.¹⁰

What I want to highlight is this. The Ackrill approach, which finds Plato indicating an identity/predication distinction, took inspiration from a classic of philosophical logic (Frege's 'On Concept and Object') and a host of twentieth century writings and logic textbooks. Frede and Crivelli, on the other hand, draw their inspiration from well-known issues in Plato's metaphysics: Plato's tendency to make claims such as that holiness is holy or (by implication in the *Phaedo*) that the beautiful is beautiful. Indeed in the *Sophist* itself we find 'the large is large' and 'the beautiful is beautiful' (258c1-2), as well as a handful of remarks about *the nature of* kinds. Hence the label: the Platonic/self-predication approach. In principle I am in sympathy with an interpretation which locates the issue Plato is offering to resolve (in the 'not speaking in a similar way' passage) in problems arising specifically from Platonic metaphysics. I say 'in principle' because below I argue that their approach does not fit our texts. Here's how its proponents argue their case.

Frede's diagnosis of the Late-learners' problem links their issue with those of the dualists, and hence with the metaphysics of the pre-Socratics.¹¹ On Frede's reading, the Late-learners held that 'x is only what x is *qua* x'; and this reminded Frede of the pre-Socratic world picture whereby the hot is hot, the wet is wet and so on.

10 Crivelli 2012, 107 n. 13.

11 Frede 1967, 67.

The Platonist/ self-predication approach takes the Late-learners to allow some sentences and disallow others; it has this in common with Ackrill. But Frede reads them not as denying all predications, but as denying only ‘other-predications’. What the Late-learners allow are not, as in the Ackrill approach, identity sentences, but self-predications, ones in which you say of something what it is in itself, or of itself, or *qua* the thing it is, or in relation to itself.¹² This is Frede’s famous ‘first use of ...is...’, as distinguished from an ordinary or ‘other-predicative’ use of ‘is’. Frede finds Plato drawing this very distinction in the Four Quartets passage, so that when the Stranger says that *Kinēsis* is not *tauton*, this is to be understood as the denial that *Kinēsis* is, in or of itself or *qua* itself, the same. For Frede, neither in the Late-learners’ stretch, nor in the Four Quartets passage is Plato interested in highlighting the ‘is’ of identity, but only the ‘is’ of self-predication: the only ‘...is...’ recognised by the Late-learners, on his reading.

It was central to Frede’s view that Plato showcased this distinction between the two uses of ‘is’ (self-predication and other-predication) when he introduced the *auta kath’hauta-pros alla* distinction at 255c13-14.¹³

Crivelli’s version is argued with great subtlety, and there are many differences from the account we find in Frede, but I don’t think it is a travesty to regard them as importantly similar, especially given Crivelli’s statement that his line ‘preserves the distinctive intuition’ of Frede’s approach’. For Crivelli the Late-learners’ position concerns what he calls essentialist predication – that being the only kind of sentence they allow. On his reading ‘the Late-learners believe that a name can be truly applied to a thing only if it fully expresses the thing’s essence.’¹⁴ ‘The Late-learners only allow us to apply the name good to the kind goodness, and the name man to the kind man (in sentences such as ‘Goodness is good’ and ‘Man is a man’), for, on their view, ‘only kinds have natures that can be fully described by means of predicative sentences’ (108). In contrast to both Ackrill and Frede, Crivelli does not hold that Plato distinguishes different uses of ‘*estin*’ in 255e-257a, or that he attributes a thesis about the use of ‘*estin*’ to the Late-learners. Rather, Plato distinguishes two readings of predicative sentences, definitional and ordinary (161). Only sentences about kinds have definitional readings. This

12 Frede 1992, 401 for the formulations ‘in itself’ and ‘of itself’; Frede 1967, 28 for ‘what x is *qua* itself’ and ‘in relation to itself’

13 Frede 1967, 12-35, reprised in Frede 1992, 399-402. For discussion of this distinction, cf. Crivelli 2012, 4.5, who translates ‘*auta kath’hauta*’ as ‘on their own’. This rendering is to be preferred to Frede’s ‘in themselves’ and certainly to ‘in relation to themselves’ (mit Bezug auf sich selbst), 1967, 28, 36.

14 Crivelli 2012, 107.

is the distinction Plato is drawing at 256a10-b4 when he explains how ‘we aren’t speaking in the same way’ when calling *kinēsis tauton kai ou tauton*.

For Crivelli (161), Plato’s point is that ‘*Kinēsis* is *tauton*’ is true on its ordinary reading, while ‘*kinēsis* is not *tauton*’ denies the *definitional* reading, i.e. denies that to be *tauton* is the definition of *kinēsis*. He argues that this difference in readings of sentences is also to be found at other important points of the dialogue, notably in the difficult argument (255ab) to prove that each of *tauton* and *heteron* is different from each of *Kinēsis* and *Stasis* (122ff.). But what concerns us now is his claim about the Four Quartets stretch (255e-257a): that here Plato makes the Eleatic Stranger ‘explicitly help himself to the distinction between ‘ordinary’ and ‘definitional’ readings of sentences’ (163, argued at 161).

These brief sketches of two versions of what I have called the self-predication interpretation, are, I hope, enough to show how this reading of the Late-learners’ difficulty and of the Four Quartets passage, draws its inspiration from issues in Plato’s metaphysics (as well as that of his predecessors, at least in Frede’s version). As such they are much to be welcomed and given a sympathetic hearing.

5. Difficulties for the self-predication readings of 255e-257a

But, sympathetic though I am, I find it impossible to square them with the key texts. The major objection derives from the Stranger’s counterfactual remark at 256b6-8. Each view reads Plato as obscuring, indeed in effect contradicting, the very point he just made—as they interpret him—when he had the Stranger draw attention to two ways of speaking. For Frede, ‘we are not speaking in the same way’ (*ou homoiōs eirēkamen*) points out two ways in which a kind can be F, either as an ordinary predication (as in ‘*Kinēsis* is the same’) or as in ‘in-itself predication’ (as in the denial that *Kinēsis* is *tauton*). This *should* allow the Stranger to say (as an ordinary predication) that *kinēsis* is *stasimos*, that the kind *kinēsis* is—like all kinds—stable. But a few lines later, at 256b6-8, we find the Stranger remarking that if *kinēsis* were to share in *stasis* (counterfactual) it would not be strange to call it *stasimon*. Instead of deploying his distinction (as Frede reads it) to show how *Kinēsis* is *stasimos* is true (as an ordinary predication), Plato makes the Stranger by implication deny it.

The very same objection applies to Crivelli's reading, and he devotes several pages to trying to meet it.¹⁵ As we saw, Crivelli holds that, with the remark about how we must grant that both *kinēsis* is *tauton* and *kinēsis* is not *tauton* because 'we are not speaking in the same way' (256a11-12), the Stranger points out two possible readings of predicative sentences, the ordinary and the definitional. But, if so, the Stranger should insist that there is a way in which it is possible to call *Kinēsis* stable—viz. as an ordinary predication—whereas in fact he by implication denies it. I find it impossible to accept an interpretation on which Plato obscures in such a blatant way the very distinction he has blazoned as the solution to the contradiction.¹⁶ For both versions of the Platonist/self-predication interpretation, it is a grave drawback that, on their reading, Plato makes such a mess of setting out his own distinction.

By contrast, on the Ackrill interpretation, an appropriate distinction is drawn between '*kinēsis* is not *tauton*' as a denial of identity, and '*kinēsis* is *tauton*' as a predication—or, in Ackrill's terms, as containing the copula. And the subsequent remark, implying that it would be absurd to call *kinēsis* stable, since it does not in any way share in *stasis*, does nothing to disturb that point. Another advantage of Ackrill's interpretation is that it can give a consistent reading of the four negative statements: *Kinēsis* is not *stasis*, *kinēsis* is not *tauton*, *kinēsis* is not *heteron*, and *kinēsis* is not *on*. Each of them is derived from the claim that *kinēsis* is different from the kind in question, and, on the simplest reading, all four are denials of identity between *Kinēsis* and the kind in question. But for Frede and Crivelli, the last three of these are to be read not as denials of identity, but as denials of a special kind of predication. However, since the last three follow the pattern established with '*kinēsis* is not *stasis*', Plato is surely preparing the reader to understand them too as denials of identity: *kinēsis* is not the kind *tauton* (even though it is predicatively the same [sc.as itself]), and so forth.

6. Identity vindicated, but not an 'is' of identity

Back, then, to the Ackrill interpretation. He is surely right that the negative conjuncts—*kinēsis* is not *tauton*, *kinēsis* is not *heteron* etc—are denials of identity, and not denials of some special kind of predication. Can it be saved

¹⁵ Crivelli 2012, 162-66.

¹⁶ By contrast, for Crivelli 'it beggars belief that Plato would have failed to realize [sc. that change is stable, even though not by its own nature] 163.

from charges of anachronism, of importing ideas from the philosophical logic of Gottlob Frege and much of the twentieth century?

Yes, it can. First, Ackrill's reading also has Plato responding to familiar problems. We know from the *Euthydemus* about a bunch of fallacies often left unsolved there but posing very pretty philosophical problems. And the one known as Dionysodorus' ox (300e-301a) surely fits the bill as a close relative at least of the Late-learners' problem.¹⁷ Are there beautiful things, Dionysodorus asks Socrates? Yes. The same as or different from the beautiful? Different, but beauty is present to them. So, if an ox is present to you, you are an ox! Here we get in effect a distinction between being the beautiful, (being the same as the beautiful), and being beautiful merely because beauty is present to you; in effect—to cut quite a few corners—between identity and predication. We even find the language of 'same as' and 'different from' in the *Euthydemus* passage. So, to find Plato distinguishing statements of identity from predications, in answer to the Late-learners who allowed only identity statements, does answer to earlier issues of interest.

Second, the objection that Ackrill was unduly influenced by the work of Gottlob Frege and his twentieth century adherents in finding Plato signal different meanings of 'is'. I reply that we can read the passage as drawing the crucial distinction between statements of identity and predications without finding a claim about different uses or meanings of 'is'. As I and others have argued, Ackrill may overstate his case when he finds Plato explicitly differentiating uses of the verb to be. The difficulty is well-known; the verb to be is conspicuously absent at the point at which the Stranger explains that 'we are not speaking likewise when we call it *tauton* and not *tauton*'.¹⁸ Plato may be drawing the requisite distinctions by adverting to different ways to understand sentences, (specifically, sentences of the form *kinēsis* is *tauton*) without thereby pointing out that they involve different uses of the verb to be, the identity sign and the copula.¹⁹ He has made the Stranger show satisfactorily that a thing can be what it also is not, as *kinēsis* can be *tauton* (i.e. can be predicatively the same, can share in sameness) without being (identical to) the kind *tauton*.²⁰ The same applies, of course, to the two subsequent apparently contradictory pairs of sentences: *kinēsis* is *heteron*

17 Cf. Brancacci 1999.

18 Eck, J. van 2000, 71-2 counters this difficulty by pointing to *gegonen* at 256b3.

19 Brown 2008, 2nd ed. 2019, 2.3.3

20 An alternative account, suggested by Owen 1999, 446 n. 62 is that Plato is offering different analyses of *tauton*, in effect as adjective and as abstract noun (Kinesis is not the Kind Sameness).

and not *heteron*; and finally the crucial one: *kinēsis* is *on* and not *on* (is a being and not Being (sc. not the kind Being)). I have argued that it is not a failure on Plato's part if he does not spotlight different uses of the verb to be in drawing the requisite distinctions.²¹

Indeed, Sedley has suggested that Plato is 'ideologically opposed to equivocation', that is, to a single word having more than one meaning.²² He claims that Plato is untroubled by different words having the same meaning, but is unwilling to countenance a single word having more than one meaning. The only clear exception, Socrates' discussion of *manthanein* in *Euthydemus* (277e3), is dismissed on the grounds that Plato discredits it by attributing the equivocation account to Prodicus! I'm not fully persuaded, but this view indicates how far scholarly opinion on the matter has travelled in recent years.

Here, then are my conclusions about Ackrill's claims. I argued in Section 1 that some of Ackrill's framework remarks are contestable: the emphasis on concepts and meaning, and his denial that the *dia* locutions offer a cause. The refutation of Cornford's view—that communion is a symmetrical relation—is a masterpiece. On Ackrill's claims about the 'is' of identity and the copula I have given my negative verdict, but I still regard myself as a disciple of the approach more broadly considered: the distinction of identity from predication, and thus the solution to some eristic but at the same time serious problems. The Stranger is the philosopher in action, capable not just of dealing in *aporiai*, as the sophist does, but of providing the solution to them. To have achieved all this in an article a mere six pages in length—true, JHS pages are bigger than most—is remarkable.

7. Coda: An existential 'is' at 256a1? The semantic continuity thesis defended

After getting agreement from Theaetetus that *kinēsis* is different from stasis, and therefore is not stasis, the Stranger adds: Ἔστι δέ γε διὰ τὸ μετέχειν τοῦ ὄντος. ΘΕΑΙ. Ἔστιν. Above (in 1) I endorsed Ackrill's understanding whereby Plato indicates that the *estin* in '*Kinēsis estin*' is used existentially.

I here rehearse, and defend from some recent criticism, my original discussion of the complete, existential *estin* here and elsewhere in the *Sophist*.²³

21 Brown 2008, 449. Brown 1994, 215 n. 3 notes scholars who have expressed skepticism about whether there is a discrete 'is' of identity.

22 Sedley 2006, 224–26.

23 Brown 1986.

My proposal has been dubbed ‘the semantic continuity thesis’.²⁴ Here are some points I argued for then, and would still defend. Ackrill and others were correct to claim that here Plato is using ‘is’ existentially: the Stranger is making the claim that *Kinēsis* exists. Similar existence claims had been made earlier.²⁵ Whether Plato is here marking off an ‘is’ of existence is a more delicate question. Since I doubt that in the next lines he is highlighting two other meanings or uses of ‘is’, I am not persuaded that he here marks off the existential ‘is’, though he certainly uses it existentially, and explains it by ‘shares in being’. I contested the key claim by Owen, Frede and Malcolm that this and other such apparently complete and existential uses should in fact be read as incomplete, elliptical uses, and I insisted that the above sentence manifests a complete use of ‘is’, one where no complement, no completion, is elided or expected or implied.

The thrust of my ‘semantic continuity thesis’ for the Greek verb to be is this: while there undoubtedly are uses of ‘is’ which are complete, and which mean ‘exist’, our texts suggest that for Greek writers and thinkers these are not seen as sharply distinct, either syntactically or semantically, from incomplete—that is, predicative—uses. I examine below some supporting texts. While the semantic continuity thesis did not deny that there are (in Plato as in other authors) uses of *esti* which are syntactically complete and existential in meaning, it offered a different understanding of the relation between the complete and incomplete uses of *esti*, proposing that the uses are semantically close, in a way that distinguishes them from the relation between English ‘exists’ and ‘is’.²⁶

Here are some criticisms of that proposal. Malcolm objects that if it is correct, then Plato is committed to the view that ‘X is F’ entails ‘X is’, and that this contravenes what he calls the ‘Uncommitted Copula’ condition: ‘something can have properties attributed to it without existing’.²⁷ Malcolm claims that ‘the difference between ‘what it is’ and ‘that it is’ is integral to rationality as such and, in all likelihood, was implicit in the thought-processes

24 By Leigh 2008, who disagrees with it. I consider one of her objections below.

25 250a11, 254d10.

26 In Brown 1986 I offered, for Greek ‘*estin*’, the analogy with the relation between (i) ‘Jane is teaching’ and (ii) ‘Jane is teaching French’, where (i) is a complete use, but closely related to sentences like (ii). Crivelli 2012, 202, who accepts a version of the semantic continuity thesis, prefers to compare the relation of ‘Jim is running’ to ‘Jim is running slowly’, on the grounds that ‘is teaching’ in (i) is dependent or parasitic on ‘is teaching’ in (ii). Crivelli’s suggestion avoids proposing a priority for the incomplete over the complete uses.

27 Malcolm 2006, 283.

of the Cro-Magnon', and hence Plato must be credited with recognising it. The issue is a weighty one. I can only repeat that I have found no evidence, in *Sophist* or elsewhere, that Plato rejected the inference from 'X is F' to 'X is', and plenty of evidence that he accepted it.²⁸

A different criticism of the semantic continuity thesis comes from those such as Leigh and O'Brien who find in ancient Greek, no less than in English, an existential use of '*estin*' that is entirely discrete from, and not semantically or syntactically continuous with, any incomplete uses. I consider their arguments after setting out some key texts on which (in part) the semantic continuity thesis depends.

Key Text 1. *Sophist* 259a6-8:

τὸ μὲν ἕτερον μετασχὼν τοῦ ὄντος ἔστι μὲν διὰ ταύτην τὴν μέθεξιν, οὐ μὴν ἐκεῖνό γε οὐ
μετέσχευεν ἀλλ' ἕτερον, ἕτερον δὲ τοῦ ὄντος ὃν ἔστι σαφέστατα ἐξ ἀνάγκης εἶναι μὴ ὄν.

.....the different, by partaking in being, is because of this partaking, but [it is] not that in which it partakes but something different

Key text 2 *Laws* 10, 901c8-d2

ΑΘ. Νῦν δὴ δύ' ὄντες τρισὶν ἡμῖν οὖσιν ἀποκρινάσθωσαν οἱ θεοὺς μὲν ἀμφοτέροι

ὁμολογοῦντες εἶναι, παραιτητοὺς δὲ ἄτερος, ὁ δὲ ἀμελεῖς τῶν σμικρῶν.

.....both of you maintaining that the gods are (i.e. exist), the one [saying that they are] venal, the other that they are careless of small matters.

Key text 3 *Laws* 10, 887b7-8, Kleinias speaking

διαφέρει δ' οὐ σμικρὸν ἀμῶς γέ πως πιθανότητά τινα τοὺς λόγους ἡμῶν ἔχειν, ὥς θεοὶ τ' εἰσὶν καὶ ἀγαθοί, δίκην τιμῶντες διαφερόντως ἀνθρώπων

..... our arguments that the gods exist and [are] good, respecting justice more than men do.

My original claim, about Key Text 1, was this.²⁹ Yes, we have to supply the verb *estin* from the first clause in the subsequent ones. Contra Owen (1971, 253), that does not prevent the verb in the first clause being a complete and existential use of *estin*. Rather, it shows that such a use can also do duty for

28 Crivelli 2012, 202 concurs, writing 'statements of predication have an existential component'. O'Brien, though rejecting the semantic continuity thesis, also accepts this point 2013b, 226-27.

29 Brown 1986, 55-56, 67.

the incomplete *estin* which has to be understood in the following clauses. We find exactly the same phenomenon in the next two passages.³⁰

Leigh objects that the verb *estin* need not be supplied from the first clause, but rather, in Key Text 2, ‘the copulas required for the second and third clauses [may] have been elided, as is standard practice in Greek.’³¹ I find this alternative construal unlikely, though it cannot be ruled out.

A different response to the phenomenon exemplified in these texts may be found in O’Brien, a fervent defender of an existential ‘is’ in Greek philosophy, especially (*contra* Owen, Frede and others) in the *Sophist*.³² Though he does not explicitly address the semantic continuity thesis, some of his remarks seem designed to negate the probative value of the key texts. He notes ‘the phenomenon whereby an author starts off with an existential *einai*, only to tack on a complement’: a description which fits the above texts well, comparing Empedocles B17.13. He suggests that ‘this doubling up of the verb is a deliberate stylistic device’.³³ Elsewhere (with reference to *Sophist* 258e3) he calls it ‘a deliberate play on the existential and copulative use of the verb’ and ‘an equivocation’.³⁴

Here is my reply. Those who are convinced that there must be, in ancient Greek, a sharp distinction between the self-standing *estin* and the incomplete uses will naturally try to explain away the occurrences such as the three texts I have cited, either as Leigh does or, with O’Brien, as a stylistic device: an ‘equivocation’, a ‘deliberate play on the two uses of the verb’. But to my ear, the passages quoted (and *Sophist* 258e3 instanced by O’Brien) are prosaic bits of writing. Consider Key Text 3: I doubt that Plato is putting into the mouth of Kleinias a deliberate play on words.³⁵ I conclude that in these

30 Crivelli 2012, 202 offers this helpful description of the phenomenon: ‘Plato sometimes places *einai* near the beginning of a sentence to make an existential claim, but then adds general terms without repeating the verb, so that the original occurrence of *einai* becomes predicative.’

31 Leigh 2008, 114 n. 15.

32 O’Brien raises a difficulty about the label ‘complete’ (O’Brien 2013b, 225). Referencing Burnyeat’s reformulation of Brown 1986, 53 (in Burnyeat 2003, 10), O’Brien objects that it involves ‘questionable logic’ and protests ‘How can something complete be completable?’ The label ‘self-standing’ will serve my purpose equally well to describe the uses of *estin* in 256a1, 250a11 etc, which, with Ackrill and O’Brien, and against Owen and Frede, I classed as existential uses, insisting that they are not elliptical (Brown 1986, 65–68).

33 O’Brien 2013a, 198–9 n. 10

34 O’Brien 2013b, 237 with n. 23

35 For an example of an equivocation/play on words compare ‘she left in a fit of rage and a taxi’. The key texts above present no similar equivocation, I submit.

passages we do not have a stylistic device or play on words. We must accept that it came quite naturally to Plato to use a single occurrence of the verb to be where it is a self-standing (or complete) use in the first clause, and has to be understood as the copula in what follows. It may not be possible in English, but it clearly was in the Greek Plato wrote. This is a major plank in my defence of the so-called semantic continuity thesis.³⁶

36 I would like to thank the President, Edward Halper, and the committee of the IPS for the very great honour of inviting me to give the Cornelia de Vogel lecture. Thanks go also to the audience for their lively responses to my presentation.

Why are Change and Stability Different from Difference and Sameness? A Reappraisal of *Sophist* 255a4-255b7¹

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In the center of Plato's *Sophist*, we find the Eleatic Stranger studying the relationship between five very important kinds: change, stability, sameness, difference and being. The Stranger notably attempts to prove that change and stability are distinct from sameness and difference (255a4-255b7). The argument offered to that effect raises an exegetical difficulty about the stability of the kind change. Part of the proof relies on regarding the stability of change as an impossible situation, whereas the Stranger's previous commitments in the dialogue should force him to grant the stability of change. Although the scholarly effort to solve this difficulty has been impressive, I argue that it calls for a reappraisal. In this paper, I propose an interpretation of the proof according to which the stability of change is rejected because, in the argument under consideration, the relation of participation affects the nature of the participant. I also argue that the proposed reading could be fruitfully applied to other passages belonging to the core of the *Sophist*.

Change, Stability, Sameness, Difference, Participation, Nature

What is a sophist? A producer of falsehood, replies the Eleatic Stranger, the main interlocutor of Plato's *Sophist* (216a1-237a2²). But producing falsehood implies saying what is not, something that Parmenides forbids. Hence, either Parmenides is wrong or the sophist is not a producer of falsehood (237a3-242b5). The Stranger's strategy for showing that Parmenides is wrong and that it is possible to say what is not relies on studying the relations between five very important kinds: change, stability, sameness, difference and being. The first part of his study consists in three arguments which prove that these kinds are different from each other (254e2-255e7). These proofs are difficult to interpret and require careful attention. In this paper, I

1 I would like to thank my audience at the Symposium Platonicum XIII, whose stimulating feedback helped me clarify certain parts of my argument. I also thank Lea Cantor for revising my English.

2 Throughout this paper, I use the text and line numbers of the new Oxford edition, Duke et. al. 1995.

will focus on the Stranger's attempt to distinguish change and stability from sameness and difference (255a4-255b7).

As I explain in the first section of the paper, the argument offered by the Stranger raises an exegetical difficulty about the stability of the kind change. Part of the proof relies on regarding the stability of change as an impossible situation, whereas the Stranger's previous commitments should force him to grant the stability of change. Although the scholarly effort to solve this difficulty has been impressive, I argue that it calls for a reappraisal. I therefore propose an interpretation of the proof according to which the stability of change is rejected because, in the argument under consideration, the relation of participation affects the nature of the participant. I end the paper by reflecting on the consequences of the proposed reading for other key passages in the dialogue.

1. The proof and the exegetical difficulty it raises

Let us consider the Greek text and a translation of the proof (255a4-255b7):

ΞΕ. ἀλλ' οὐ τι μὴν κίνησις γε καὶ στάσις οὐθ' ἕτερον 255a4
οὔτε ταυτόν ἐστι. a5

ΘΕΑΙ. πῶς; a6

ΞΕ. ὅτιπερ ἂν κοινή προσείπωμεν κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν, a7
τοῦτο οὐδέτερον αὐτοῖν οἶόν τε εἶναι. a8

ΘΕΑΙ. τί δή; a9

ΞΕ. κίνησις τε στήσεται καὶ στάσις αὖ κινήσεται. a10
περὶ γὰρ ἀμφοτέρα θάτερον ὅποτερον οὖν γιγνόμενον a11
αὐτοῖν ἀναγκάσει μεταβάλλειν αὖ θάτερον ἐπὶ τούναντίον a12
τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἅτε μετασχὼν τοῦ ἐναντίου. b1

ΘΕΑΙ. κομιδῇ γε. b2

ΞΕ. μετέχετον μὴν ἄμφω ταύτου καὶ θατέρου. b3

ΘΕΑΙ. ναί. b4

ΞΕ. μὴ τοῖνυν λέγωμεν κίνησιν γ' εἶναι ταυτόν ἢ b5
θάτερον, μηδ' αὖ στάσιν. b6

ΘΕΑΙ. μὴ γάρ. b7

*

Eleatic Stranger. But at least change and stability are neither difference nor sameness.

Theaetetus. How so?

Eleatic Stranger. Whatever we say in common of change and stability, this cannot be either of them.

Theaetetus. Why?

Eleatic Stranger. Change will be stable and stability will, in turn, change. For any of those things [i.e. of change and stability] which becomes of both will force the other to change into the contrary of its own nature, since it participates in this contrary.

Theaetetus. For sure.

Eleatic Stranger. Yet both participate in sameness and difference.

Theaetetus. Yes.

Eleatic Stranger. Let us not say, then, that change is sameness or difference, nor that stability is.

Theaetetus. Let us not say it.

At first glance, the proof says that if change or stability were sameness or difference, then, since sameness and difference apply both to change and stability, either stability (*ex hypothesi* identical to sameness or difference) will apply to change and change will be stable or change (*ex hypothesi* identical to sameness or difference) will apply to stability and stability will change. But both situations are taken to be impossible. Hence, neither change nor stability is identical to either sameness or difference.

The difficulty raised by this proof is that change and stability are very important kinds and that kinds, being the objects of knowledge, are supposed to be stable (249b8-c5). It is unclear, then, why the Stranger rejects the conclusion that change is stable as an impossibility and how his proof is meant to work.³ As I set out to show, the different solutions which have been suggested as a basis for fixing this problem are ultimately unsatisfying.

2. Existing attempts to solve the difficulty

First, some scholars believe that what is rejected is the conjunction 'stability changes *and* change is stable' (or even the conjunction 'stability changes and is stable, *and* change is stable and changes').⁴ Since only one member

3 This difficulty is helpfully explained by Crivelli 2012, 119. As Crivelli makes clear, the situation is not improved if one assumes that Plato accepts that there is a sense in which kinds change, because it then becomes hard to explain why the change of stability is regarded as an impossibility. (The solution I propose works whether or not some or all kinds change.)

4 See Teisserenc 2007, 261.

of a conjunction needs to be false for the entire conjunction to be false, and since it is false in the context of the *Sophist* that stability changes, the Stranger would be justified in believing that he has derived a false conclusion (whether or not change, like every kind, is stable). However, the Stranger does not deduce a conjunction. As his use of the particle $\alpha\tilde{\nu}$ indicates (at 255a10), he rather deduces two conclusions each resulting from two distinct hypotheses: either that change is sameness or difference, or that stability is sameness or difference.⁵

Second, some commentators argue that, in the conclusion ‘change is stable’, ‘change’ does not denote the kind change, but rather instances of change, which indeed cannot be stable, at least in exactly the same way as the one in which they change.⁶ Hence, the Stranger is justified in rejecting the conclusion according to which ‘change is stable’. However, change in this section of the dialogue consistently denotes a kind (indeed, a very important one).⁷ Even within the argument, the conclusion according to which change is stable derives from the participation of change in sameness and difference (255b3), a claim which certainly concerns the kind change, since it itself derives from the fact that the three first important kinds (change, stability, being) are the same as themselves and different from each other (254d14-15).⁸

Third, it is possible that the conclusion ‘change is stable’ is rejected because it is, in the Stranger’s view, not an ordinary predication about a property possessed by change, but the definition of change. ‘Change is stable’ is an impossible result because to be stable is not the definition of change. However, against this suggestion, one should once again note that ‘change is stable’ is derived from the participation of change in sameness and difference, an assumption that *cannot* be taken as a definition of change since the Stranger is precisely arguing that change is not sameness nor difference.⁹

Finally, some commentators understand the Stranger’s first premise (at 255a4-5) to be that anything said *in the same way(s)* of change as it is said of stability is different from both stability and change. This premise is true: suppose stability is said of change in the same way as it said of stability; since stability is said of stability in that it is identical to it, so too it would be said of

5 See Crivelli 2012, 133, whose discussion of the secondary literature I am following in the next two paragraphs.

6 See e.g. Bluck 1975, 113-114, 142.

7 See O’Brien 1995, 105.

8 As Bostock 1984, 108-109 has noticed.

9 Cf. Heinaman 1981, 61-62.

change in that it is identical to change, which is an absurdity; hence stability cannot be said of change in the same way as it said of stability (and similarly for change). Since difference and sameness *are said* of change in the same way as they are said of stability, they are different from both stability and change.¹⁰ I find it hard, however, to extract this reading from the Stranger's argument. In particular, the crucial qualification 'in exactly the same way as' seems to be missing from the Greek text.¹¹

3. A reappraisal of the proof

Given the difficulties facing existing interpretations of the proof, I propose to reassess the argument.¹² I start from the way the Stranger expresses what would happen if change or stability were sameness or difference. He says that, in this case, since both change and stability participate in sameness and difference, one of them, that is, whichever one is identical to sameness or difference, will force the other 'to change into the contrary of its own nature (τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως), because it participates in its contrary' (255a12-b1). According to this sentence, the hypothetical participation of change (stability) in stability (in change) necessarily transforms the nature of change (stability). In this sentence, then, when x participates in y , the nature of x is transformed.¹³ My interpretative suggestion is that participation grounds predications about the nature of the participant not only in this sentence, but in the entire argument. Once participation is understood to affect the nature of the participant, everything falls into place.

Suppose stability is identical to difference or sameness. Since stability and change participate in sameness and difference, that is, since sameness and difference transform the nature of change and stability, stability (which *ex*

10 See Moravcsik 1962, 45-47; Crivelli 2012, 131-136.

11 Crivelli 2012, 134-135, however argues that there is a parallel between the argument under consideration and two previous arguments in the dialogue showing that being is identical neither to the hot and the cold (243e4-7), nor to change and stability (250a8-c5) and that 'the adverb "in common" ("κοινῇ" at 255a7 [that is, in the present argument]) plays the same role as the adverb "in the same way" ("ὁμοίως") in the two earlier arguments (at 243e5 and 250a11)' (135).

12 My proposal develops some suggestions made by Berger 1965, 75-77.

13 Which is not to say that y is the definition of x , nor that x and y are identical. The nature of change, for instance, is not identical to the nature of the difference and is therefore insufficient for grounding the difference between change and the other kinds. The nature of change needs to be affected by its participation in difference to be different from the other kinds (this, at any rate, is how I take 255e4-6).

hypothesi is identical to sameness or difference) will transform the nature of change, which is impossible because change and stability have contrary natures. Hence stability is neither difference nor sameness. The same reasoning would hold if change were identical to difference or sameness. The argument becomes unimpeachable.

To be sure, the Stranger earlier committed himself to the view that kinds are stable insofar as they are objects of knowledge. So, he must think that change is stable *as* a kind. However, I suggest that, in the present argument, the Stranger does not contemplate what kinds are *as* kinds, but restricts himself to considering what the specific nature of each kind is and how the participation between the kinds affects their natures. From this point of view, the Stranger must have realized that the natures of change and stability are contrary and therefore cannot communicate. Hence, with this in mind, change is not stable and stability does not change.

4. Consequences for key passages of the *Sophist*

The main feature of my reading of the Stranger's proof is that participation transforms the nature of the participant. In other words, participation, in this argument, involves something different from an ordinary predication telling us what property a given kind has, displays or exemplifies. The idea that the relation of participation grounds something stronger than an ordinary predication and transforms the nature of the participants clarifies, I submit, other difficult passages of the dialogue.

For a start, previously in the *Sophist*, the Stranger rejected the idea that all kinds mix, because then stability will change and change will be stable (252d9-10). This is once again hard to understand, because change, like every kind, is stable. However, if I am right that the Stranger restricts himself to considering the nature of the kinds and to how the relation of participation affects the natures of kinds, it is to be expected that he should reject the idea that change is stable: the nature of change is not affected by the nature of stability.

Similarly, later in the dialogue, the Stranger says that 'if change itself had somehow participated in stability, there would be nothing strange to call it stable' (Οὐκοῦν καὶν εἴ πη μετελάμβανεν αὐτὴ κίνησις στάσεως, οὐδὲν ἂν ἄτοπον ἦν στάσιμον αὐτὴν προσαγορεύειν; (256b6-8). The sentence has the form of a counterfactual: it has εἴ + imperfect in the protasis, and ἂν and the

imperfect in the apodosis.¹⁴ Hence, the Stranger's formulation implies for a third time that change does not in fact participate in stability. If I am right, this is because the Stranger does not have in view relations grounding ordinary predications about change, but rather relations grounding predications about the nature of change, which is not affected by the nature of stability.

Finally, it is notoriously difficult to extract an account of negative predications from the Stranger's remarks on the semantics of negation (257b9-c3). On the one hand, key features seem to be missing from the Greek text to provide the Stranger with an adequate account of negative predication;¹⁵ on the other, alternative accounts of negative predication are either too narrow¹⁶ or do not fit other general lessons from Plato's dialogues.¹⁷ If I am right that participation does not ground ordinary predications in the central section of the *Sophist*, one can bracket the difficult task of extracting an account of negative ordinary predications from the Stranger's remarks on the semantics of negation at 257b9-c3 (which does not prevent the Stranger from offering up such an account at a later point of the dialogue where ordinary predication indeed comes into focus, see 263a2-d5).

To conclude, the idea that participation grounds predications about the nature of the participant not only helps clarify the logic of the argument about change, stability, difference and sameness that occurs at 255a4-b7, but it promises to be applied fruitfully to other difficult passages of the Stranger's argument in the *Sophist*.¹⁸

14 See e.g. Vlastos [1970] 1981b, 284-286, 293-294; Roberts 1986, 240 n. 5; van Eck 2000, 57 n.8.

15 See Crivelli 2012, 186-187's discussion of why the so-called 'Oxford interpretation' of negative predications cannot be read into 257b9-c3.

16 Accounts of negative predications in terms of 'incompatibility' or 'otherness into a range of incompatible forms' cannot account for sentences such as 'virtue is not square', as Crivelli 2012, 188-189, 191-192 convincingly argues.

17 The so-called 'extensional interpretation' of negative predications clashes with the fact that Plato generally accepts that the same thing can be both *f* and not *f*, as Szaif [1996] 1998, 436-437 remarks.

18 I have pursued this avenue of research in Zaks 2023.

Parts of Difference in Plato's *Sophist*, with Help from *Republic* V

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In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger develops an account of non-being according to which it is understood as a part of Different. Yet the precise language he uses to characterize the form Non-Being and other negative forms has two variations. In the first, a negative form is characterized as a part of the nature of Different contraposed to the nature of the form negated. Thus, Non-Beautiful is described as 'something different among beings that is marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed with something among beings' (257e2-4), and Non-Being is identified as 'the part of the nature of Different contraposed with the being of each thing' (258e2). In the second variation, however, a negative form is characterized as the contraposing (*antithesis*) of the nature of a part of Different relative to the nature of the form negated. Hence, Non-Beautiful 'turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being' (257e6-7) and Non-Being is 'the contraposing of the nature of a part of Different and of the nature of Being' (258a11-b1). In this essay, I develop an account of the parts of Different that explains the two variants in the Stranger's characterization of negative forms, focusing on the Stranger's description of the Non-Beautiful as a part of Different. Since the Stranger's account of the parts of Different is based on an analogy with parts of knowledge, I begin by examining what it means to be a part of knowledge, drawing on Socrates' account of knowledge in *Republic* V.

Plato, *Sophist*, *Republic*, Non-Being, Metaphysics

In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger develops an account of non-being according to which the form (εἶδος) Non-Being is understood in terms of the part (μέριον) of the nature (φύσις) of Different contraposed with the nature of Being. Yet the precise language he uses to characterize Non-Being, as well as other negative forms, has two variations. In the first, a negative form is characterized as a part of the nature of Different contraposed to the nature of the form negated. Thus, Non-Beautiful is described as 'something different among beings [that is] marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed with something among beings' (257e2-4; ἄλλο τι τῶν ὄντων τινὸς ἐνὸς γένους ἀφορισθὲν καὶ πρὸς τι τῶν ὄντων αὖ πάλιν ἀντιτεθὲν οὕτω συμβέβηκεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ καλόν;).¹ Likewise, Non-Being is identified as 'the part of the nature [of Different] contraposed with the being of each thing'

1 All translations are my own, in consultation with Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem (1996); Crivelli (2012); Rowe (2015¹).

(258e2; τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον).² In the second variation, however, a negative form is characterized as the contraposing (ἀντίθεσις)³ of the nature of a part of Different relative to the nature of the form negated. Hence, Non-Beautiful ‘turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being’ (257e6-7; ὄντος δὴ πρὸς ὄν ἀντίθεσις, ὡς ἔοικ’, εἶναι τις συμβαίνει τὸ μὴ καλόν), and Non-Being is ‘the contraposing of the nature of a part of Different and of the nature of Being, which have been contraposed in relation to one another’ (258a11-b1; ἡ τῆς θατέρου μορίου φύσεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων ἀντίθεσις).⁴ Although commentators, when they venture to note this variation at all, take the two formulations to be saying the same thing (e.g., Lee 1972, 277–84; Van Eck 2002, 78, 81; Crivelli 2012, 212), we should find that unsatisfying. A contraposing is not the same thing as something contraposed. A contraposing is presumably an act (ποίημα); whereas something contraposed is presumably the recipient of that act. In this essay, I develop an account of the parts of Different that explains the two variants in the Stranger’s characterization of negative forms, focusing on the Stranger’s description of Non-Beautiful as a part of Different. Since the Stranger’s account of the parts of Different is based on an analogy with arts (τέχναι) and sciences (ἐπιστήμαι) as parts of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), I will begin by examining what it means to be a part of knowledge, drawing on Socrates’ account of knowledge in *Republic V*.

2 I follow Owen (1971, 239n33), Van Eck (2002, 75–76), and Crivelli (2012, 219) in reading ἐκάστου here, instead of emending the text to ἑκαστον. In this I break with Campbell (1867, 163) and the Oxford editions of both Burnet (1900) and Duke et al. (1995). Cf. Robinson (1999, 158).

3 The term ἀντίθεσις in the *Sophist* is difficult to translate. ‘Opposition’ (used by Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem 1996, 69) is problematic because the Stranger is arguing that Non-Being is not the opposite (ἐναντίον) of Being (257b9–c3, 258b3). ‘Contrast’ or ‘contrasting’ are better (used by Cornford 1935, 292; Crivelli 2012, 205, 212, 215–16), but ‘con-’ suggests a symmetrical relationship. White (1993, 52) uses ‘setting against’, which captures ἀντίθεσις well, but as a two-word phrase can be a bit unwieldy. Rowe (2015¹, 161) uses ‘contraposition’, which in its construction nicely parallels ἀντίθεσις, ‘contra-’ matching ἀντί- and ‘position’ paralleling θέσις. Mitchell Miller suggested to me that ‘contraposing’ might be better, since the ‘-ing’ suffix captures the -σις ending. A weakness of ‘contraposition’ and ‘contraposing’ is that those terms have a meaning in logic that has nothing to do with ἀντίθεσις in the *Sophist*.

4 For debate on how to construe this passage, see Van Eck (2002, 77–78); Crivelli (2012, 216n122).

I. Parts of Knowledge

The Stranger explains that knowledge, although one, has been marked-off (ἀφορισθέν) into various parts corresponding with its various subject matters (257c10-d2). What the Stranger has in mind is that arithmetic, for example, is the part of knowledge set over (ἐπί) the combination and division of numbers, while cobblery is the part set over crafting shoes. Each part is presumably marked-off in the following way: knowledge, in knowing some determinate subject matter, x , marks-off a part of itself and sets that part over x . Knowledge, in other words, in knowing its various subject matters, produces parts of itself relative to those subject matters.

In order to get more precise on how the production and marking-off of a part of knowledge works, we can begin with Socrates' account of knowledge at the end of *Republic V* and note how the Stranger's account is more advanced.⁵ Socrates proposes that knowledge, like opinion, is a kind of power (δύναμις) (477b ff.). Further, he argues that one power is differentiated from another on the basis of two criteria: that which it is set over (ἐφ' ᾧ ἔστι) and that which it produces (ὃ ἀπεργάζεται) (477d1).

While these two criteria can be used to differentiate one power from another (477c6-d5), they cannot explain the relationship between a whole power and its parts.⁶ After all, a part is in one way the same and in another way different from the whole of which it is a part. Knowledge, on Socrates' account, is one power in that it is set over (ἐπί) one subject matter—being (τῷ ὄντι)—and produces one act—understanding (τὸ γινώσκειν) (see 477b10, 478a6). Yet, as the Stranger's ontology highlights, there are many beings, each different from the others. Hence, given that the subject matter of knowledge is being, and being is many, knowledge will be set over many subject matters. Furthermore, in relation to each subject matter, knowledge produces a distinct understanding. In relation to crafting shoes, for example, knowledge produces an understanding of how to craft shoes, while in relation to combining and dividing numbers, knowledge produces an understanding of how to combine and divide numbers. Therefore, the power we call knowledge is both set over many distinct subject matters and produces as many distinct understandings as there are subject matters. According

5 Socrates' account in *Republic V* is corrected and developed in various ways in the *Sophist*. In *Republic V*, for example, Socrates posits non-being as the unknowable object of ignorance, whereas the Stranger's shows that non-being both is and is knowable.

6 Although Socrates in *Republic IV*.438e explains how knowledge as such can become knowledge of a certain sort (ποιεῖ τινας)—e.g., medical knowledge—he does not characterize knowledge of a certain sort as a part of knowledge.

to Socrates' criteria, however, powers set over different things and that produce different things are different powers. Consequently, it appears that knowledge is not one power but many different powers. In order to avoid the contradiction that threatens here—that the power we call knowledge is both one and many—we will need something beyond Socrates' criteria that can explain why knowledge, which in one line of inquiry appears as one and the same power, and in another line of inquiry appears as many different powers, is in fact one whole power composed of many parts.

As the Stranger pointed out during his criticism of the monists earlier in the *Sophist*, in order to explain the unity of a whole, appeal must be made to a partless (ἀμερές) 'one itself' (τὸ ἐν αὐτό) (245a1-b5). Presumably something similar is needed in the case of knowledge. To explain why knowledge is one whole composed of many parts, we will need a kind of knowledge that is only one and not many, in reference to which the many parts of knowledge can be unified into one whole. Without such a partless one, the many arts and sciences will not be unified as parts of knowledge. Instead they will simply be many distinct powers that we happen to homonymously call 'knowledge'. Fortunately, such a partless knowledge is already implied in the account of knowledge as a power. Knowledge is one and not many insofar as it is one power causally prior to and responsible for the production of the many determinate acts of understanding relative to the many determinate subject matters. Yet, insofar as the power we call knowledge is engaged in producing acts of understanding relative to determinate subject matters, it is one whole composed of many parts, such that each part is marked-off in reference to the act of understanding each subject matter. That a part of knowledge is the power we call knowledge insofar as it is operative relative to a determinate subject matter is implied by the Stranger's wording when he says that 'each part [of knowledge], coming to be set over something (τὸ δ' ἐπὶ τῷ γιγνόμενον), is marked-off and has a certain title unique to it' (257c10-d1). It is only insofar as the power we call knowledge comes to be set over some determinate subject matter that a part of that power is marked-off. Prior to being set over a determinate subject matter, the power we call knowledge is a partless one.

To sum up, then, the power we call knowledge, prior to being set over a determinate subject matter, is a partless one. Yet the power we call knowledge produces determinate understandings relative to determinate subject matters. Insofar as it produces an understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, it is marked-off from the rest of knowledge as the part of knowledge relative to that subject matter. The marking-off, since it depends on the production of a determinate understanding, is causally posterior to

the production of that determinate understanding, whereas the power producing that determinate understanding is causally prior to that determinate understanding. The marking-off of cobblery from the rest of knowledge, for example, is causally posterior to the production of the understanding of how to craft shoes, while knowledge as such, which produces the understanding of how to craft shoes, is causally prior to that understanding.

One important consequence of the analysis so far is that a given art or science can be considered both as a power and as the act of understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, while knowledge as such is only a power. A given art or science can be considered as a power because it is the power we call knowledge in the act of producing understanding relative to a determinate subject matter. Yet, a given art or science can also be considered as the act of understanding a determinate subject matter, since only in reference to the act of understanding a determinate subject matter can the part of the power we call knowledge that produces that understanding be marked-off from the rest of knowledge. If we take cobblery again, on the one hand it can be considered the power we call knowledge insofar as that power has been marked-off as producing the act of understanding how to craft shoes. On the other hand, however, it can be considered the understanding of how to craft shoes in reference to which the part of knowledge set over crafting shoes is marked-off. Having identified the way in which the marking-off of a given part of knowledge is dependent upon the act of understanding a given subject matter, we are now in the position to turn to the Stranger's account of the parts of Different.

II. Parts of Different

The Stranger claims that although the nature of Different is one, its parts have been affected in the same way as the parts of knowledge (257d4-5). In order to give an account of the nature of Different that parallels the account of knowledge just developed, my first task will be to identify what kind of thing the nature of Different is. Let us assume, for the sake of argument at least, that the nature of Different is, like knowledge, a kind of power (*δύναμις*). After all, earlier in the digression the Stranger proposed that whatever possesses some power to affect or to be affected is a being, and that beings are nothing other than power (247d8-e4; see Leigh 2010). Given that the nature of Different is a being (see esp. 258a7-10), if we assume that it is also a power, the next question is 'what sort of power?' We can formulate a more sophisticated way of asking this question by employing Socrates'

criteria for distinguishing powers: What is the power we call the nature of Different set over and what does it produce? The Stranger claims that the nature of Different is set over each thing (255e3-6, 256d12-e2, 258d7-e2, 259a5-6). Likewise, he says that it produces each thing as different from being (256d12-e2). The 'being' here, however, is not only the form Being, for otherwise Being itself could not be a non-being relative to everything different from it (257a1-6, 259b1-5). Instead, the nature of Different produces differences relative to 'the being of each thing' (258e2). For example, it not only produces Motion as different from the form Being, but also as different from being-rest, being-same, being-different, being-beautiful, being-large, being-just, etc. (see Van Eck 2002).

The Stranger introduces the language of 'contraposing' to describe the production of determinate differences among natures, for example the difference of part of the nature of Different from the nature of Beautiful. Just as the power we call knowledge produces understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, so the nature of Different produces the contraposing of a part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of any form *F*. The act of contraposing, in other words, parallels the act of understanding. There is, however, a disanalogy between contraposing and understanding. The act of understanding takes one object, whereas the act of contraposing takes two. Understanding takes a given thing and transforms it into 'something understood' or a 'subject matter'. Contraposing, however, takes a given nature, on the one hand, and a part of the nature of Different, on the other, and transforms them both into things contraposed relative to one another (see *πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων* at 258b1). One act of contraposing, for example, takes the nature of Being and part of the nature of Different and renders them contraposed relative to one another, whereas another act of contraposing takes the nature of Beautiful and part of the nature of Different and renders them contraposed relative to one another.

The Stranger begins his account of the parts of Different by asking whether there is 'some part of Different contraposed to the Beautiful' (257d7). Theaetetus agrees that there is and says it is called the Non-Beautiful (257d8-13). The Stranger goes on to characterize the Non-Beautiful in two ways. First he has Theaetetus agree that the Non-Beautiful is 'something different among beings [that is] marked-off from some one kind and in turn contraposed in relation to something among beings' (257e32-4). Then he claims that 'the Non-Beautiful turns out to be a contraposing of being in relation to being' (257e6-7). Here we see the tension with which I began this essay. How can the Non-Beautiful be both a contraposing and something contraposed?

The account of the parts of knowledge I have offered provides resources to answer this question. According to the account of the parts of knowledge developed above, a given art or science can be considered in two ways. On the one hand, an art or science such as cobblery can be considered as a marked-off part of the power we call knowledge insofar as that power is producing an act of understanding relative to a determinate subject matter, such as crafting shoes. On the other hand, an art or science such as cobblery can be considered as the determinate act of understanding a determinate subject matter, such as crafting shoes, since only in reference to such an act of understanding can a part of the power we call knowledge be marked-off.

The Stranger's characterization of Non-Beautiful as a contraposing of being in relation to being (257e6-7) parallels an art or science considered in the second way, as a determinate act of understanding. The nature of Different produces a determinate contraposing in relation to the nature of Beautiful. Then, the nature of Different insofar as it is producing that contraposing is marked-off as the part of Different whose nature produces a contraposing in relation to the nature of Beautiful. The result is the part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful. Next, the contraposing produced by the part of the nature of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful renders the nature of that part of Different something contraposed relative to the nature of Beautiful. Non-Beautiful as this part of Different parallels the first way in which an art or science can be considered. Just as an art or science such as cobblery can be considered both as an act of understanding a determinate subject matter and as the part of the power of knowledge that produces that understanding, so Non-Beautiful can be considered on the one hand as an act of contraposing of the nature of part of Different relative to the nature of Beautiful, and on the other hand as the nature of the part of Different that produces that contraposing and thereby renders both the nature of the Beautiful and that part of the nature of Different things contraposed relative to one another.⁷

⁷ I would like to thank Mitchell Miller, Eric Sanday, Colin Smith, Peter Moore, Mary Cunningham, Joseph Li Vecchi, Rachel Kitzinger, and audiences at the SAGP, APS, and IPS for helping me think through the account of Non-Being in earlier versions of this essay and in related projects.

Self-Participation of Forms in Plato? An Analysis of *Sophist* 255e3-6

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In this paper, I will examine a short passage in the main part of the *Sophist* – lines 255e3-6 – to see whether it can be interpreted as evidence for the view that Plato considered – and maybe even assumed – the self-participation of Forms. I will discuss different grounds on which the passage has been taken as evidence for self-participation and evaluate objections raised against interpretations along these lines. I will then show that the assumption of self-participation of Forms would provide an elegant response to the Third Man Arguments in the first part of the *Parmenides*. I will discuss why a modification of the so-called Non-Identity Assumption (NI) may be a way out of the regress. Yet, this solution is in need of another explanation of why the Form F-ness is F if not by virtue of partaking of a different Form F-ness. One alternative explanation for its being F consists in the possibility of self-participation of the Form F-ness. Hence the importance of the passage from the *Sophist* for the consistency of Plato's Theory of Forms.

Self-participation, Third Man Arguments, Non-Identity Assumption, megista genê, Theory of Forms.

This paper has two aims. The first is to examine a short passage in the main part of the *Sophist* – lines 255e3-6 – to see whether it can be interpreted as evidence for the view that Plato considered – and maybe even assumed – the self-participation of Forms. The other aim is to examine whether – and if so, how – the self-participation of Forms offers a way out to rebut the Third Man Arguments (TMAs) in the first part of the *Parmenides*.

First, I will briefly introduce the passage from the *Sophist* in its context and examine whether it gives us reason to assume the self-participation of Forms in Plato. I will discuss different grounds on which the passage has been taken as evidence for self-participation ((Nehamas (1982) Kostman (1989)) and evaluate objections raised against interpretations along these lines (Vlastos (1969)). My provisional conclusion will be that although lines 255e3-6 can be understood as possible evidence for self-participation, this passage is not unambiguous. Notwithstanding, in the second part, I will show that the assumption of self-participation of Forms would provide an elegant response to the regress arguments in the *Parmenides*, the so-called Third Man Arguments. I will explain why a modification of the so-called

Non-Identity Assumption (NI) may be a way out of the regress. The idea is that a restriction of NI to participation relations between particulars and Forms provides a solution to the TMA, but only if it is accompanied by an alternative explanation of why the Form F-ness is F if not by virtue of partaking of a different Form F-ness. One alternative explanation for its being F consists in F-ness's partaking *of itself*, i.e. the self-participation of the Form F-ness. Hence the importance of the passage from the *Sophist* for the consistency of Plato's Theory of Forms.

Self-Participation in Plato?

Authors who argue that Plato accepted the assumption of the self-participation of Forms primarily refer to lines 255e3-6 in the main part of the *Sophist* (250-259) to support their view. Reference to the *Sophist* is obvious because the dialogue explicitly extends the relation of participation to the relationships between Forms. Forms can participate in each other, and it is because of this participation that they have their attributes. The Form Identity, for instance, is resting because of its participation in the Form Rest. If participation among Forms is allowed, it does not seem farfetched to suppose that the Form Identity is identical with itself in virtue of participating in itself.

Lines 255e3-6 and their context in the Sophist

The relevant passage of the *Sophist*, lines 255e3-6, occurs at the end of the section in which the five *megista gênê*, highest kinds or Forms, are distinguished. As the fifth and last of the *megista gênê*, the Form Difference is separated from the four others. After lines 255e3-6 follows a section in which the relations between the five *megista gênê* are examined in more detail. The purpose of the discussion in this section is to suggest that some apparently contradictory statements about Forms are, in fact, compatible once we realize that different things can be attributed to Forms with sentences of the same syntactic form. The problem for which a solution is sought can be illustrated by the example of the Form Change. On the one hand, we know from the middle dialogues that every Form is necessarily at rest or unchanged. Therefore, every reader of the middle dialogues will believe the sentence "The Form Change is at rest" to be true. On the other hand, the Eleatic visitor vehemently rejects this sentence and asks the following

leading question, which Theaetetus affirms unhesitatingly: “But this is most necessarily impossible, that change come to be at rest and rest change?” (*Sph.* 252d9-11).

In the passage before lines 255e3-6, the visitor explains the sense in which the sentence “The Form Change is at rest” can express a falsehood (251a-255d): the sentence expresses **something false** if we use it to assert the identity of the Forms Change and Rest. This reasoning helps to distinguish the five *megista genê* from each other. In lines 255e3-6, however, an important shift takes place, for now the analysis follows how the sentence “The Form Change is at rest” can also be used to say **something true** (255e8-256d11). The explanation here is, I take it, exactly the same as the explanation of why particular things are correctly said to be at rest, for the Form Change is said to be at rest just like the changeable particular things because of its participation in the Form Rest. Therefore, according to the visitor, the sentence “The Form Change is at rest” can be used to express different things, namely a truth and a falsehood, depending on how we understand its meaning.

I called lines 255e3-6 a shifting point in the discussion because from here on the relation of participation among Forms is examined and used to explain why Forms are such and such. For this purpose, the passage refers for the first time to participation among the *megista genê* in order to explain why we can correctly say of them that they are different.

[Eleatic visitor] “Therefore the nature of the Different must be said to be fifth among the Forms we are selecting.” – [Theaetetus] “Yes.” – [Eleatic visitor] “And we shall say that it runs through all of them: for each one is different from the others not by virtue of its own nature, but by virtue of participating in the Form of the different.” – [Theaetetus] “By all means.” (*Sph.* 255d9-e6]

Here, the visitor states that the Form Difference runs through all other *megista genê*, which means that all *megista genê* are different from at least one other thing. Furthermore, he adds the appropriate explanation to the statement that the *megista genê* are different: They are different because they participate in the Form Difference. So far, the meaning of the passage seems fairly clear. The interpretation becomes less clear when we turn to the question whether the visitor intends to explain the Form Difference’s being different in the same way, namely through participation in itself. Let us look at different views that have been put forward in the literature.

Alexander Nehamas

Nehamas defends the view that the Form Difference's being different is to be explained by self-participation:

Now this statement [sc. *Sph.* 255e3-6] suggests that in “going through” all the Forms, the Different goes through itself as well. As since to be “going through” by a Form seems to be identical with participation in it, the statement suggests that the Different participates in itself (Nehamas (1982) 353).

Nehamas takes these lines to mean that the being different of *all five megista genê* should be explained by the fact that they participate in the Form Difference. Yet he is well aware that the lines can also be understood entirely differently and translated accordingly:

And we shall say that it [sc. “the Nature” (or Idea, Form, Kind) of the Different, D9] goes through all them [*i.e. through Rest, Motion, Being, Identity*]; for each of these is different from [each of] the others not in virtue of its own nature but in virtue of participating in the Idea of the Different (Vlastos (1969) 340; my emphasis).

Vlastos emphasizes in the explicative parenthesis that he believes that only the being different of the **four** other *megista genê* (except the Form Difference) is to be explained by participation in the Form Difference. Although I believe that Nehamas draws attention to an important and possible reading of this crucial passage, his arguments in support for this view do not convince me. I will therefore discuss the view of another proponent of the assumption of self-participation in Plato, namely James Kostman.

James Kostman

Kostman's approach is of special interest because he links his stance on self-participation to his discussion of the TMA in the *Parmenides*. Before examining his interpretation in more detail, it is required to recall briefly the core idea of the TMA. Here is a semi-formal reconstruction of the first TMA:

(OM): For all x : If x is F , then there is a Form, F -ness, in virtue of which (*i.e.* by partaking of which) x is F .

(SP): The Form F -ness is F .

(NI): If anything has a given character by participating in a Form, it is not identical with that Form

From 1 and 2 one can deduce (4):

(4) If F-ness is F, then there is a Form, in virtue of which (i.e. by partaking of which) F-ness is F.

And from 4 and (NI) follows:

(5) F-ness is not identical with the Form in virtue of which F-ness is F.

Therefore, we need to assume another Form F-ness, F-ness₂, because (NI) excludes the possibility of F-ness's being F in virtue of itself. We can repeat the same procedure, starting now from a group of different F-particulars and the Form F-ness and deducing – with (SP) and (NI) – another Form F-ness, F-ness₃, *ad infinitum*. The derivation of a second Form of F-ness – and *a fortiori* the infinite regress – contradicts the uniqueness assumption which underlies Plato's Theory of Forms.

Now, there is an obvious way to stop the regress at the outset by restricting the Non-Identity Assumption in a way that only names for particulars are possible substitutes for "x". This means we are no longer allowed to insert "F-ness" (as a name for a non-particular, i.e. a Form) for "x" in (NI). Therefore, it is not the case that a Form F-ness cannot be identical with the Form in virtue of which (i.e. by partaking of which) it is F. Now, the regress does not ensue because the premises no longer exclude other grounds for the Form F-ness's being F (i.e. reasons other than F-ness's partaking of a different Form F-ness, with which it is not identical). It would be a very elegant way to reject the regress arguments by restricting NI. But so far, the restriction of NI remains a mere contention that requires further justification.

Constance Meinwald (Meinwald 1991 and 1992) famously suggested that it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of predication which allows to avoid the regress; however her solution seems to provide only a partial solution because there are still two types of counterexamples that are not captured by her proposal. Counterexamples of the first type arise for all Forms that allow for true PTA-predications. Counterexamples of the second type arise when the argument contains as premises exclusively true PH-predications.

Brian Frances believes that Plato has an answer to the counterexamples, namely the restriction of NI and the assumption of a different explanation for F-ness's being F than by partaking of a different Form F-ness (Frances 1996). But this answer remains incomplete as long as no alternative explana-

tion of F-ness's being F is provided. Obviously, self-participation of Forms would provide the wanted alternative explanation.

Let us now come back to Kostman. The merit of his interpretation shows that the responses to the TMA vary depending on the mode of predication that is applied in the premises. Kostman seems to agree with Meinwald's distinction between two possible readings of predications, PTA-predications ("ordinary predications") and PH-predications (predications that express something about the nature of the Form designated by the subject term). Kostman and Meinwald also agree that self-predications should in general be interpreted as PH-predications.

But Kostman seems to go beyond Meinwald's interpretation because he also deals with the two sorts of counterexamples that cause problems for her approach. To see why, lines 255e3-6 are crucial, for his discussion of the passage shows that it reveals not only one possible answer to the TMA but two, which correspond to the two kinds of counterexamples. The two different answers rely on two different explanations of why an object is F mentioned in this passage. With respect to one specific class of F-things, the nature of those things is the adequate explanation for their being F, while for another class of F-things participation is the correct explanation for their being F. I will discuss this second response to the TMA which is the relevant case for the issue of self-participation of Forms.

Counterexamples of the first type result from a set of premises that exclusively includes PTA-predications. This applies to all Forms for which it is true that a property corresponds to Forms that equally belongs to *every* object – including all Forms. These Forms include the Form Identity, the Form Being, the Form One, and perhaps the Form Difference (if there exists more than one object) and the Form Rest (the corresponding property, resting, applies to all Forms but not to every object whatsoever because there are, of course, moving particulars).¹

1 Here is an instance of a counterexample of the first type:

(OM)For all x: If x is *pros ta alla* at rest, then there exists only one Form, the Form Rest, in virtue of which x is *pros ta alla* at rest.

(A)The number 7 is *pros ta alla* at rest.

(SP) The Form Rest is *pros ta alla* at rest.

(SP*)The Form Rest is *pros heauto* at rest.

(NI)If the Form Rest is *pros ta alla* at rest, then the Form Rest is not identical with the Form Rest.

In this reconstruction, both formulations of SP (SP and SP*) turn out true, which means that the equivocation in the premises is removed and the vicious regress results again.

In this case, Kostman argues that the regress argument is unsound because it falsely involves the unrestricted version of NI, he gives another justification for this claim:

[...] there is a class of true statements about Forms, including “The One is one”, “The Same is same (as itself)”, “Rest is at rest”, etc., which are clearly ordinary predications [...]. [...] their truth is not to be explained (nor does Plato intend to explain it) in terms of the nature (in the sense of 255e3-6) of the Forms they are about. Their truth is rather to be *explained in terms of the relevant Form’s partaking of itself*, and this is precisely the account to which Plato is committed by 255e3-6. (Kostman (1989) 355-356; my emphasis)

Kostman tries to avoid this kind of counterexamples by applying the second mentioned explanation in 255e3-6: he explains Form F-ness’s being F by saying that it participates in itself. Thus, the possibility of self-participation also requires a restriction of NI because this is the extraordinary case in which the relata are identical.

So, with Nehamas and Kostman, we have two ways of supporting the view that lines 255e3-6 give us grounds to ascribe the assumption of self-participation to Plato. But, so far lines 255e3-6 are, I take it, not sufficient evidence for self-participation. Furthermore, there are other objections, primarily raised by Vlastos, against this interpretation which I will discuss next.

Objections to the assumption of self-participation

First, Vlastos argues that the metaphor of partaking is not compatible with the assumption of self-participation because partaking is an irreflexive relation and verbs of partaking in Greek are exclusively used to designate a relation between distinct objects: Second, he argues that in Plato’s dialogues we do not find any further – let alone clear – evidence for self-participation. This omission is all the more significant because self-participation would have been an important additional assumption for the Theory of Forms. Therefore, one might expect that greater consideration would have been given to this assumption.

Leaving aside the first worry, we must, in order to assess Vlastos’s second concern, examine whether other evidence for self-participation can be found in the dialogues. To be brief, I will summarize my standing to this point: although there are some passages in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* which one could refer to as evidence, these instances are, unfortunately, not only

ambiguous and controversial but can also be met by counterexamples. The first passage I have in mind are lines 256a7-8 in the *Sophist* (“But it [i.e. the Form Difference] was identical to itself because everything participates in the identical.”) But what applies to lines 255e3-6 also applies to this passage: it is not unambiguous insofar as “παῖν” could refer either to all five *megista genê* or only to the four highest Forms other than the Form Identity.

In the *Parmenides*, by contrast, there seems to be a passage that does not contain this ambiguity, namely lines 162a6-b3. According to this passage, the Form Being participates, ‘by what is’, in being, and since being belongs to the Form Being, it must be assumed that the Form Being participates in itself. If this is the meaning of this passage and if it is meant seriously, one might consider this passage as evidence of self-participation. But it would be another single piece of evidence which occurs in the extremely complex and controversial second part of the *Parmenides*. Furthermore, the second part of the *Parmenides* features a passage which seems to speak clearly against the assumption of self-participation, namely 157e4-158a6. According to this passage, the Form Unity does not have unity in virtue of participating in the Form Unity. But this does not mean, I take it, that the Form Unity, in contrast to all other things, does not have unity – this conclusion seems absurd. What it could mean, however, is that only the Form Unity has unity for a reason other than its participation in the Form Unity. In other words: this passage excludes the self-participation of the Forms.

The second passage from the *Parmenides* suggests that the Form F-ness’s being F requires another explanation than its participation in the Form F-ness. But the passage gives no further hint of what the alternative explanation for the being F of the Form F-ness could be. We might believe that such an alternative can be found in lines 255e3-6 in the *Sophist*, namely in virtue of the nature of the Form F-ness. After all, what could the nature of the Form F-ness be an adequate explanation for if not F-ness’s being F? This seems reasonable, but unfortunately the explanation is neither unpacked nor clarified by Plato in any of his dialogues.

Concluding remarks

The problem I have dealt with is the question whether it is possible to find sufficient evidence for the assumption of self-participation in Plato’s dialogues. We have seen that the assumption of self-participation would have a great impact on crucial challenges to the Theory of Forms, such as the TMA. I tried to show that there are some passages in the *Sophist* and

the *Parmenides* which one could refer to as evidence for self-participation. Unfortunately, these instances are not only ambiguous and controversial but can be met by counterexamples. Not only that, they are remarkably small in number given that they involve an important modification of the Theory of Forms. Therefore, I believe we are entitled to concede, on the one hand, that Plato did indeed recognize that there was a problem with the Theory of Forms, which becomes especially manifest in the TMA, and that he even might have seen a possible way out in modifying one of its implicit premises. On the other hand, Plato *defends* neither a restricted version of NI nor the assumption of self-participation. Thus, I doubt that he wholeheartedly endorsed self-participation or the corresponding restriction of NI, which is all the more notable because doing so would have been an elegant solution to major problems immanent to his theory.

VII. Truth and Falsehood

The *Sophist* on Truth and Falsehood: Between Aristotle and Frege

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In the *Sophist*, the Visitor and Theaetetus agree that to judge (or state) falsehoods is to judge (or state) the things which are not. It is because judging (and stating) the things which are not is allegedly impossible that the dialogue's central section embarks on a painstaking examination of not-being. It is therefore puzzling to realize that at the point of the dialogue where they examine false judgement (and false statement) as an episode of judging (and stating) the things which are not, the two inquirers agree that falsehood can also be present in a judgement (or statement) that judges (or states) the things which are: in an affirmative false judgement (or statement), the cognizer (or speaker) posits that the things which in fact are not, are; but in a negative false judgement (or statement), the cognizer (or speaker) posits that the things which in fact are, are not. The puzzlement has two reasons: first, one gets the impression that the account of false judgement (or statement) as judging (or stating) the things which are not is supposed to cover all cases (rather than, roughly, half of them); secondly, if, at least in some cases, a false judgement (or statement) judges (or states) the things which are, the possibility of false judgement (and statement) is not threatened by the difficulties that bedevil not-being so that much of the central section of the *Sophist* turns out to be pointless. A passage of the *Parmenides* solves the puzzle by showing that the cases of false judgement (or statement) which in the *Sophist* are described as judging (or stating) the things which are should also be regarded as judging (or stating) the things which are not. It is likely that the reasoning explicitly presented in the *Parmenides* lies behind the puzzling argument of the *Sophist*: in the latter dialogue, Plato moves very quickly and offers only scarce signposts of the argumentative route fully expounded in the former one.

I. Two puzzles about falsehood and not-being in the *Sophist*

The Sophist on falsehoods concerned with the things which are. Here is the passage of the *Sophist* where the Visitor and Theaetetus allow for the possibility that false judgement and false statement could be concerned with the things which are:

T1	ΞΕ.	Τί δὲ δῆ; τὴν τέχνην αὐτοῦ τίνα ἀφορίσαντες ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς συμφωνεῖν οἰοί τε ἐσόμεθα;	240c7
	ΘΕΑΙ.	Πῇ καὶ τὸ ποῖόν τι φοβούμενος οὕτω λέγεις;	
	ΞΕ.	Ὅταν περὶ τὸ φάντασμα αὐτὸν ἀπατᾶν φῶμεν καὶ τὴν τέχνην εἶναι τίνα ἀπατητικὴν αὐτοῦ, τότε πότερον	d

	ψευδῇ δοξάζειν τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν φήσομεν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐκείνου τέχνης, ἢ τί ποτ' ἐροῦμεν;	
ΘΕΑΙ.	Τοῦτο· τί γὰρ ἂν ἄλλο εἴπαμεν;	5
ΞΕ.	Ψευδῆς δ' αὖ δόξα ἔσται τάναντία τοῖς οὖσι δοξά- ζουσα, ἢ πῶς;	
ΘΕΑΙ.	Οὕτως· τάναντία.	
ΞΕ.	Λέγεις ἄρα τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν τὴν ψευδῇ δόξαν;	
ΘΕΑΙ.	Ἀνάγκη.	10
ΞΕ.	Πότερον μὴ εἶναι τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζουσιν, ἢ πως εἶναι τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα;	e
ΘΕΑΙ.	Εἶναί πως τὰ μὴ ὄντα δεῖ γε, εἴπερ ψεύσεται ποτέ τίς τι καὶ κατὰ βραχύ.	
ΞΕ.	Τί δ' ; οὐ καὶ μηδαμῶς εἶναι τὰ πάντως ὄντα δοξάζεται;	5
ΘΕΑΙ.	Ναί.	
ΞΕ.	Καὶ τοῦτο δὴ ψεῦδος;	
ΘΕΑΙ.	Καὶ τοῦτο.	
ΞΕ.	Καὶ λόγος οἶμαι ψευδῆς οὕτω κατὰ ταῦτα νομι- σθήσεται τὰ τε ὄντα λέγων μὴ εἶναι καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα εἶναι.	10 241a
ΘΕΑΙ.	Πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως τοιοῦτος γένοιτο;	2

Visitor: What about this? By offering what definition of his [sc. the sophist's] art will we be able to be consistent with ourselves?

Theaetetus: How do you mean? What do you fear in speaking thus?

Visitor: When we say that he deceives us about apparition¹ and that his art is one of deception, shall we say that our soul judges falsehoods because of his art? Or what shall we say?

Theaetetus: This: for what else could we say?

Visitor: And a false judgement will judge² the contraries of the things which are. Or what?

1 Cf. Pl. *Sph.* 234e7–236d4.

2 I translate 'δόξα' by 'judgement' and 'δοξάζειν' by 'to judge'. While the English 'to judge' cannot take as its grammatical object a noun-phrase denoting what a judgement it describes is about (if you say 'I am judging her', you will be taken to mean not that you have a judgement that is about her, but that you are conducting an evaluation of her, for instance in a trial), 'δοξάζειν' does allow a construction of this sort. McDowell 1973, 194–5 addresses this issue and decides to render some occurrences of 'δοξάζειν' by 'to judge', others by 'to have in one's judgement'. But it is preferable to keep a single translation of all occurrences of 'δοξάζειν' and pay the price of an awkward use of 'to judge'. A similar point holds with respect to the Greek verb 'λέγειν', which I translate by 'to state'. 'Λέγειν' can take as its grammatical object a noun-phrase referring to the thing

Theaetetus: Yes, the contraries.

Visitor: Do you then say that a false judgement judges the things which are not?

Theaetetus: Necessarily.

Visitor: By judging that the things which are not are not, or that the things which in no way are somehow are?

Theaetetus: It must judge that the things which are not somehow are, if anyone will ever somehow err even for a short time.

Visitor: And does it not also judge that the things which in all ways are are in no way?

Theaetetus: Yes.³

Visitor: Is this then also a falsehood?

Theaetetus: This too.

Visitor: Then, I think, a statement will also be regarded as false in the same way, by stating that the things which are are not and that the things which are not are.

Theaetetus: How else could it come to be such [*sc.* false]? (Pl. *Sph.* 240c7–241a2)

The train of thought in passage T1 is straightforward. At the beginning (240d6–10), false judgements are described as judging the things which are not. But then (240e1–9), while the description of false judgements as judging the things which are not is retained for judgements that portray what they are about as being, i.e. for affirmative false judgements, false judgements that portray what they are about as not being, i.e. negative false judgements, are described as judging the things which are (for, if they were to judge the things which are not, they would be not false but true). A similar account is offered for false statements (240e1–241a2).⁴

Passage T1 contains several bare occurrences of the verb ‘to be’, i.e. occurrences where the verb is not followed by any complement. These occurrences can be understood in four ways. (1) The verb ‘to be’ could have existential force. In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which do not exist, the passage would maintain that there are two types of false judgements, namely those which concern the things which do not exist and judge them to exist, on the one hand, and those which

which a speech-act of stating is about: if someone makes a statement about you, in Greek one can say that he or she λέγει you (cf. LSJ s.v. ‘λέγω’ III 2, 3, and 9a). In this respect, the English ‘to state’ behaves differently from the Greek ‘λέγειν’. I am allowing myself to treat the English ‘to state’ as if it could tolerate the same construction as its Greek counter-part.

3 The adverbs that accompany forms of ‘εἶναι’ (‘πως’ at 240e1 and e3, ‘μηδαμῶς’ at e2 and e5, and ‘πάντως’ at e5) are probably indicators of the strength with which claims are affirmed or denied: cf. Crivelli 2012, 61.

4 Several commentators agree on this reconstruction of T1’s train of thought: cf. Owen 1971, 260; Movia 1991, 237; Fronterotta 2007, 330–2; Crivelli 2012, 59–62.

concern the things which exist and judge them not to exist, on the other. (2) The verb ‘to be’ could have veridical force. In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which are not the case, the passage would proceed to hold that alongside the false judgements which concern the things which are not the case and judge them to be the case, there are also those which concern the things which are the case and judge them not to be the case. (3) The relevant occurrences of ‘to be’ might express the relation that obtains between kinds and what falls under them.⁵ In this case, after claiming that false judgements judge the things which are not ‘about their referents’, the passage would go on to hold that some false judgements concern the things which are not ‘about their referents’ and judge them to be ‘about their referents’, whereas others concern the things which are ‘about their referents’ and judge them not to be ‘about their referents’.⁶ Finally, (4) we might be faced with the predicative-elliptical use of the verb ‘to be’. In this case, after stating that false judgements judge the things which are not ‘so-and-so’, the passage would go on to declare that while some false judgements concern the things which are not ‘so-and-so’ and judge them to be ‘so-and-so’, others concern the things which are ‘so-and-so’ and judge them not to be ‘so-and-so’. Different readings have been adopted by different commentators.⁷ It cannot be excluded that one of these uses could be operative at the beginning of the passage and another one later, or that the account is intentionally vague.

The main puzzle posed by the Sophist’s account of falsehood in terms of not-being. Passage T1 poses two puzzles, a main one and a secondary one. The main puzzle has to do with the passage’s acknowledging a case of false judgement that is concerned with the things which are.

One reason why this is puzzling is that the claim that false judgements judge the things which are not seems to cover all false judgements. This is the impression one gets at the beginning of T1, especially at 240d9–10. The impression is confirmed by a passage later in the dialogue:

5 This ‘converse’ use of ‘to be’ plays a role in Plato’s final account of false statement, at 262e11–263b13.

6 I take the referent of a statement (or judgement) to be the entity to which the statement (or judgement) refers: for instance, the boy Theaetetus is the referent of the statement performed by uttering the words ‘Theaetetus is sitting’.

7 For references, cf. Crivelli 2012, 66.

T2	ΞΕ.	Μὴ μειγνυμένου μὲν αὐτοῦ τούτοις ἀναγκαῖον ἀληθῆ πάντ' εἶναι, μειγνυμένου δὲ δοῦσα τε ψευδὴς γίγνεται καὶ λόγος· τὸ γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἢ λέγειν, τοῦτ' ἔστι που τὸ ψεῦδος ἐν διανοίᾳ τε καὶ λόγοις γιγνόμενον.	260c 4

Visitor: If it [sc. what is not] does not mix with them [sc. judgement and statement], it is necessary that they be all true, while, if it mixes, false judgement and statement come to be: for to judge or state the things which are not – this, I suppose, is falsehood coming to be in thought and statements. (Pl. *Sph.* 260c1–4)

Passage T2 straightforwardly and explicitly identifies judging falsehoods with judging the things which are not, and stating falsehoods with stating the things which are not. It does not contain the slightest hint that its description of falsehood in judgements and statements as concerned with the things which are not could have a restricted application. In particular, it does not in any way suggest that it could hold only for affirmative judgements or statements.⁸

Another reason why T1's acknowledgement of a case of false judgement concerned with the things which are is puzzling is that it seems to render the *Sophist's* long examination of not-being unjustified. For, if some false judgements are concerned (not with the things which are not, but) with the things which are, defining the sophist in terms of falsehood does not require examining not-being.⁹

One might be tempted to solve the main puzzle by claiming that the reason why the description of false judgement as judging the things which are not can be retained for negative judgements is that negative judgements,

⁸ Other passages in Plato's works describe false judgement as a judgement about the things which are not (cf. *Phdr.* 262b2–3; *Tht.* 167a7–8; 188c10–d10; 189b1–6) and false statement as a statement about the things which are not (cf. *Euthd.* 284b1–c6; *Cra.* 429d5–6).

9 Most commentators have not paid attention to TI's shift from an account of false judgement as a judgement that judges the things which are not to an account of false judgement that distinguishes between false affirmative judgements, which judge the things which are not, and negative judgements, which judge the things which are. In Crivelli 2012, 62–3 it is suggested that the shift might be due to the second account's being more apt to being brought under Plato's solution at 259d9–264b5 (while 'Theaetetus is flying' is false because flying is not about Theaetetus, 'Theaetetus is not seated' is false because seated is about Theaetetus). However, this suggestion is open to two objections: first, the sophist might refuse to concede a move that eases the solution; secondly, granted that negative kinds are acknowledged in the Sophist (cf. Crivelli 2012, 204–14), the first account would also be apt to being brought under Plato's solution at 259d9–264b5 ('Theaetetus is not seated' is false because not-seated is not about Theaetetus).

precisely because they are negative, ‘judge the things which are not’ in that they portray things as not being. However, this solution is unsatisfactory because it saddles the *Sophist* passage with an unwelcome ambiguity. For, if the solution suggested were on the right track, the problem faced by Plato would resemble the difficulty one might formulate by saying: ‘I cannot go to the bank since it is Saturday and moreover the police have sealed off the area around the river because a crime took place there’.

A secondary puzzle posed by the Sophist’s account of falsehood in terms of not-being. Passage T1 also presents a further, secondary puzzle. The description of false judgement as ‘judging the contraries of the things which are’ (Pl. *Sph.* 240d6–7) comes as a surprise. It is not inferred from the claim that a false judgement judges the things which are not — rather, it is the premiss from which that claim is inferred, at 240d9–10. In other words, it is because it judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’ that a false judgement judges the things which are not; it is not because it judges the things which are not that a false judgement judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’. Thus, the idea that a false judgement judges ‘the contraries of the things which are’ is treated as basic, almost as axiomatic. Why should one accept it?

II. The *Parmenides* on being and truth

The main puzzle solved. A passage from the *Parmenides* suggests a solution of the main puzzle. In a nutshell, the *Parmenides* passage makes it plausible to assume that false negative statements (and false negative judgements) also are concerned with the things which are not but can in the same breath be described as concerned with the things which are.

The *Parmenides* passage comes from the dialogue’s second half, which contains eight deductions: the first four from the positive hypothesis that the one is, the last four from the negative hypothesis that the one is not. Of the first four deductions from the positive hypothesis that the one is, the first two concentrate on the results that concern the one itself while the last two on those that concern other things. Within these two pairs, one member spells out positive results, the other negative ones. The group of the last four deductions is similarly structured. Thus, of the last four deductions from the negative hypothesis that the one is not, the first two concentrate on the results that concern the one itself while the last two on those that concern other things. Within these two pairs, one member spells out positive results, the other negative ones. The passage I intend to focus on comes from

the fifth deduction, namely the first of the four that start from the negative hypothesis that the one is not. It spells out results that concern the one itself and are positive. Here is the passage:

T3	– Καὶ μὴν καὶ οὐσίας γε δεῖ αὐτὸ μετέχειν πη. – Πῶς	161e3
	δῆ; – “Ἐχειν αὐτὸ δεῖ οὕτως ὡς λέγομεν· εἰ γὰρ μὴ οὕτως ἔχει,	
	οὐκ ἂν ἀληθῆ λέγοιμεν ἡμεῖς λέγοντες τὸ ἐν μὴ εἶναι· εἰ	5
	δὲ ἀληθῆ, δῆλον ὅτι ὄντα αὐτὰ λέγομεν· ἢ οὐχ οὕτως; –	
	Οὕτω μὲν οὖν. – Ἐπειδὴ δὲ φαμεν ἀληθῆ λέγειν, ἀνάγκη	
	ἡμῖν φάναι καὶ ὄντα λέγειν. – Ἀνάγκη. – “Ἔστιν ἄρα, ὡς	162a
	ἔοικε, τὸ ἐν οὐκ ὄν· εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἔσται μὴ ὄν, ἀλλὰ πη τοῦ	
	εἶναι ἀνήσει πρὸς τὸ μὴ εἶναι, εὐθύς ἔσται ὄν. – Παντάπασι	
	μὲν οὖν. – Δεῖ ἄρα αὐτὸ δεσμὸν ἔχειν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τὸ εἶναι	
	μὴ ὄν, εἰ μέλλει μὴ εἶναι, ὁμοίως ὥσπερ τὸ ὄν τὸ μὴ ὄν	5
	ἔχειν μὴ εἶναι, ἵνα τελέως αὐ [εἶναι] ¹⁰ ᾗ· οὕτως γὰρ ἂν τό τε	
	ὄν μάλιστ’ ἂν εἴη καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν οὐκ ἂν εἴη, μετέχοντα τὸ	
	μὲν ὄν οὐσίας τοῦ εἶναι ὄν, μὴ οὐσίας δὲ τοῦ <μὴ> εἶναι μὴ	
	ὄν, εἰ μέλλει τελέως εἶναι, τὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν μὴ οὐσίας μὲν τοῦ μὴ	b
	εἶναι [μὴ] ὄν, οὐσίας δὲ τοῦ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, εἰ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐ	
	τελέως μὴ ἔσται. – Ἀληθέστατα.	3

– Moreover, it [sc. the one that is not] must somehow partake also of being.¹¹ – How? – It must keep in the way in which we state <it>: for, if it does not keep in this way, we would not state the truth when we state that the one is not; but, if <we state> the truth, clearly we state the things

10 I follow Shorey 1891 in deleting the second occurrence of ‘εἶναι’ at 162a6 (another possibility contemplated by Shorey is to replace it with ‘ὄν’), in inserting ‘μὴ’ at 162a8, and in deleting the first occurrence of ‘μὴ’ at 162b2. Burnet 1900 and Kahn 1981, 117 adopt all three of Shorey’s emendations, while Diès 1923 and Moreschini 1966 stand by the text of the MSS. Gill 2002 defends the text of the MSS. Her defence is interesting and worthy of careful study because it gives Plato a coherent position. Adopting it would not go against the main claims of the present study. I cannot address the issue with the care it deserves. I restrict myself to the observation that Gill’s proposal seems to sit uneasily with the ‘γάρ’ at 162a6, which suggests that the cases thereby introduced pick up what precedes. Those who are convinced by Gill’s defence of the text of the MSS may adopt it without finding in it evidence against the interpretation proposed in the present study.

11 I render ‘οὐσία’ by ‘being’. This is not ideal because I employ ‘being’ also in rendering ‘ὄν’ and ‘εἶναι’, but, as far as I can see, there are no better options: ‘essence’ cannot do because it has acquired a technical meaning that goes beyond its etymological connection with the Latin verb for ‘to be’; ‘existence’ would be even worse because there is no reason to think that the existential use of ‘εἶναι’ is involved in the passage.

which are themselves. Isn't it so? – It is so.¹² – And since we say that we state the truth, it is necessary for us to say also that we state things which are. – It is necessary. – So, it seems, the one is not-being:¹³ for, if it will not be not-being, but will let somehow go of being in relation to not-being, it will immediately be being. – By all means. – It must therefore have being not-being as a link to not-being, if it is bound not to be, just as what is <must> have not-being not-being [sc. as a link to not-being], in order completely to be. For, this is how what is would be to the greatest extent and what is not would not be, what is by partaking of being in order to be being,¹⁴ on the one hand, and of not-being in order not to be not-being on the other, if it is bound completely to be, what is not <by partaking> of not-being in order not to be being, on the one hand, and of being in order to be not-being on the other, if what is not also will completely not be. – Most true. (Pl. *Prm.* 161e3–162b3)

Passage T3 may be divided into three parts: the first (161e3–162a1) uses the concept of truth to argue that whoever makes a true statement states the things which are; the second (162a1–6) introduces the idea of both being and not-being operating as links between the referent of a statement and not-being treated as a complementing property; and the third (162a6–b3) considers both being and not-being operating as links between the referent of a statement and both being and not-being treated as complementing properties.

In the first part (161e3–162a1), Parmenides appeals to a 'comparative' account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated (I use 'to keep' as a translation of ἔχειν¹⁵ in order to avoid using the verb 'to be', which comes on the scene in the immediate sequel). 'Comparative' accounts of truth are widespread in Plato.¹⁶ In

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- 12 Parmenides' question ('Isn't it so?', 161e6) and Aristotle's answer ('It is so', 161e7) provide a sort of 'pragmatic confirmation' of the point just made, namely that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated.
- 13 Since in Greek there is no indefinite article, the translation here could also be '... the one is a not-being', where 'not-being' is treated as a noun-phrase (similarly with other analogous points of the English translation). I prefer avoiding the article and to treat 'not-being' as an adjectival phrase.
- 14 Following Shorey 1891, 352, I take the four articular infinitives in the genitive (τοῦ εἶναι ὄν, τοῦ μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, τοῦ μὴ εἶναι ὄν, and τοῦ εἶναι μὴ ὄν) to be final infinitives (cf. Smyth 1956, 451, Shorey mentions *Grg.* 457e5 and *R.* 7. 518d5–7 as further Platonic examples of this construction). My interpretation would hold also if they were treated as possessive genitives, but such a construal sits uneasily with the absence of the article in front of οὐσίας and μὴ οὐσίας (if they were possessive genitives, one would expect τῆς οὐσίας and τῆς μὴ οὐσίας).
- 15 I am appealing to the use of 'to keep' displayed in sentences like 'He is keeping well' (meaning 'He is still in good shape').
- 16 Cf. *Ap.* 38a7; *Chrm.* 161a10; *Hp.Ma.* 282a4; 284e8–9; 300b3; *Hp.Mi.* 367a5; *Men.* 78c1–2; 79a2; 96c2; 99b10; *Smp.* 201c7; *Phd.* 68c4; 73a8–9; 102d3–4; 114d1–2; *Euthd.* 281e1–2; 284c7–d7; 285e9–286a3; *Cra.* 384c8–9; 385b7–8; 423a7; 440a5; *R.* 5. 474b2; 477b10–11; 478a6; *Prm.* 128e5–6; *Sph.* 255d8; *Lg.* 10. 893e5.

the present passage an account of this sort is appealed to in order to justify the claim that a true statement states the things which are. Parmenides is probably employing the predicative elliptical use of 'to be': granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is tempting to infer that a statement is true just if the entity referred to is what the statement attributes to it, and this may be succinctly formulated by saying that a true statement states the things which are (at this stage the predicative-elliptical use of 'to be' comes in: a true statement states, i.e. refers to,¹⁷ the things which are <what the statement attributes to them>).¹⁸ This holds also for a negative statement which states about the one that it is not: if such a statement is true, the one keeps as the statement states it, i.e. is what the statement attributes to it, and therefore is not-being (because what the statement attributes to the one is precisely not-being). The dialogue's speakers, being presently committed to the truth of the statement that the one is not (cf. '... we say that we state the truth', 161e7), are committed also to the one's being not-being, and therefore to its being (cf. '... it is necessary for us to say also that we state things which are', 161e7–162a1).

In the second part (162a1–6), Parmenides first argues that the one must be not-being. His argument is *per absurdum*: if the one 'will not be not-being, but will let somehow go of being in relation to not being,¹⁹ it will immediately be being' (162a2–3). Parmenides then introduces the idea of a link to not-being, where not-being is a complementing property to which an object can be linked. He distinguishes two ways in which an object can have a link to not-being. On the one hand, an object can have being operating as a link that connects it with not-being, by being not-being. This happens in the case

17 Cf. note 2 above.

18 According to Kahn 1981, 116–7, the occurrences of forms of 'to be' at 161e6 and 162a1 are applied to propositions expressed by complete sentences and therefore involve the veridical use of 'to be', whereby the verb means something like 'to be the case' and has no complement (not even understood). This solution is surely possible. But it sits uneasily with the inference drawn by Parmenides, namely that 'the one is not-being' (162a1–2): here 'is' is clearly predicative. The point becomes even clearer in the argument's sequel, where the idea that being functions as a link is introduced.

19 I construe the 'πρός' at 162a3 with the preceding 'τοῦ εἶναι' and I take it to introduce its complement, namely 'τὸ μὴ εἶναι': this is the interpretation of Heindorf 1806, 286 and Allen 1997, 57. Stallbaum 1839, 455, Cornford 1939, 226, and Kahn 1981, 116 construe this 'πρός' with 'ἀνήσει' (162a3) and take it to express the direction in which the one goes when it 'lets go' of being. I find the use of 'πρός' in combination 'ἀνήσει' linguistically hard; and construing the 'πρός' with 'τοῦ εἶναι' provides an introduction to the idea of being functioning as a link. Cf. also the 'εἰς' at 162b5. However, if the alternative translation were preferred, nothing substantial would change.

of what is not: what is not is not-being.²⁰ On the other hand, an object can have not-being operating as a link that connects it with not-being, by not being not-being. This happens in the case of what is: what is is-not not-being. The idea of being and not-being operating as links brings to one's mind the fact that in the *Sophist* (253c1–3, cf. 256b2–3) Plato seems to distinguish two types of vowel-kinds, namely those responsible for mixture and those responsible for division. In the present *Parmenides* passage the concept of a link is introduced as the opposite of that of 'letting go', mentioned at 162a3.

In the third part (162a6–b3), Parmenides offers a full description of all the possible situations that may arise both with respect to what is and with respect to what is not. What is partakes both of 'being in order to be being' (162a8), i.e. of the being that is the first component (the 'linking' component) within the concept of being being, and of 'not being in order not to be not-being' (162a8–b1), i.e. of the not-being that is the first component (again, the 'linking' component) within the concept of not-being not-being. In other words, what is partakes both of being, in that it *is* being, and of not-being, in that it *is-not* not-being. Parallel considerations apply to what is not. What is not partakes both of 'not being in order not to be being' (162b1–2), i.e. of the not-being that is the first component (the 'linking' component) within the concept of not-being being, and of 'being in order to be not-being' (162b2), i.e. of the being that is the first component (again, the 'linking' component) within the concept of being not-being. In other words, what is not partakes both of not-being, in that it *is-not* being, and of being, in that it *is* not-being. A consequence (on which Parmenides does not linger, but is interesting with a view to the painfully detailed arguments of the *Sophist*) is that what is partakes of not-being and what is not partakes of being.²¹

In Parmenides' argumentation, being and not-being operate as links in that they are counter-parts of, respectively, true and false statements (this is an implicit consequence of the way in which the idea that the one which is not is not-being was introduced in the first part). Thus, for every statement *s*,

20 Cf. *Sph.* 258c2–3; Arist. *Metaph.* Γ2, 1003b10; Z4, 1030a25–6; *Rh.* 2.24, 1402a4–5.

21 Cf. Kahn 1981, 117.

if [1] <i>s</i> is true, then	[1a] if what <i>s</i> attributes is being, then <i>s</i> 's referent <i>is</i> in that it <i>is</i> being
	[1b] if what <i>s</i> attributes is not-being, then <i>s</i> 's referent <i>is</i> in that it <i>is</i> not-being
if [2] <i>s</i> is false, then	[2a] if what <i>s</i> attributes is being, then <i>s</i> 's referent <i>is not</i> in that it <i>is-not</i> being
	[2b] if what <i>s</i> attributes is not-being, then <i>s</i> 's referent <i>is not</i> in that it <i>is-not</i> not-being

In the above schemata, all the occurrences of 'being' can (though need not) be regarded as involving the predicative-elliptical use of 'to be' (in other words, all occurrences of 'being' can be replaced with 'being what *s* attributes to it').

Both case [1a] and (most importantly) case [2b] are treated by Parmenides as cases where the statement's referent may be described as being: the referent may be described as being both because the referent is being (case [1a]) and because it is-not not-being (case [2b]). In parallel fashion, case [1b] and case [2a] are both treated by Parmenides as cases where the referent may be described as not being: the referent may be described as not being both because the referent is not-being (case [1b]) and because it is-not being (case [2a]).

The account of false statement in [2] implies that the description of a false statement as stating the things which are not can be preserved even when in one of the cases contemplated the false statement can be described also as stating the things which are: if what the false statement attributes is being (i.e. if the false statement is affirmative), then it states the things which are not because its referent is-not being; if what the false statement attributes is not-being (i.e. if the false statement is negative), then it states the things which are not because its referent is-not not-being, but in this case the statement also states the things which are because its referent, by not-being not-being, is. The same account holds, of course, for false judgement.

If the bare occurrences of the verb 'to be' in the *Sophist*'s description of false judgement and false statement in passage T1 are understood as cases of the predicative-elliptical use of the verb,²² then the result just described provides a solution for the main puzzle generated by the passage: also in the case where the false judgement or false statement is described as concerned

22 This is the fourth and last use of 'to be' mentioned above, in the paragraph to n. 5.

with the things which are, the judgement and the statement in fact deal with the things which are not, namely with the things which are-not not-beings. This vindicates the initial impression that the description of false judgement and false statement as dealing with the things which are not can be regarded as covering all false judgements and false statements, and it shows also that the *Sophist's* worry about the possibility of false judgement and false statement prompted by their connection with the things which are not is not misplaced.

The secondary puzzle solved. This solution for the main puzzle raised by passage T1 suggests one also for the other, secondary puzzle. In correspondence with the 'comparative' account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, Plato might be operating with a 'comparative' account of falsehood, according to which a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike what is stated. It might be the case that a 'comparative' account of falsehood roughly along these lines lies behind the premiss of the inference at lines 240d6–10 of passage T1: 'a false judgement will judge the contraries of the things which are' (240d6–7) in that the judgement's referent is unlike what the judgement posits it to be; for this reason, 'a false judgement judges the things which are not' (240d9). This would explain the otherwise somewhat surprising beginning of the inference, i.e. the fact that it starts from the premiss that a false judgement is concerned with the *contraries* of the things which are.

Why would the Visitor introduce the concept of contrariety in order to describe the situation of the cognizer judging otherwise than how the things are? The most plausible answer is that the difference between what the cognizer is judging and the condition of the object he or she is judging about concerns attributes that are competing for the same slot: for instance, different sizes (the object is small but the cognizer judges it to be large), or colours (the object is yellow but the cognizer judges it to be red), or biological kinds (the object is a mammal but the cognizer judges it to be a fish). In such situations, the attributes involved are typically reciprocally incompatible, and may therefore be described as 'contraries'.²³

23 The use of the expression 'contrary' (ἐναντίος) to mean 'inconsistent' or 'incompatible' is widely attested in Plato (cf. *La.* 196b4; *Prt.* 339b9; 340b3; etc.). It should not be confused with its use to mean 'polarly opposed' (attested, for instance, at *Sph.* 257b3–10). Some commentators think that the connection between contrariety and negation in T1, at 240d6–10, is linked to the discussion of polar opposition and negation at 257b1–c4. This is unlikely because 257b1–c4 describes a mistaken conception of the

III. Two ways of understanding the claim that truths speak of the world as it is

Why two different descriptions of falsehood? One difficult but important question remains: why, in passage T1, do the two inquirers offer in immediate succession two quite different descriptions of falsehood, one of which claims that all false statements and judgements (both affirmative and negative) are concerned with the things which are not, while the other claims that false affirmative statements and judgements are concerned with the things which are not whereas false negative statements and judgements are concerned with the things which are? The answer to this question is bound to be speculative because the passage gives no hint of an answer. A plausible guess is that the two descriptions of falsehood are born of two different ways of developing the 'comparative' account of truth, according to which a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated (I concentrate on statements, the corresponding treatment of judgements can be easily worked out by extrapolation).

The first way in which the 'comparative' account of truth can be developed may be seen in passage T3: granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is temptingly easy to infer that a statement is true just if the entity referred to *is* what the statement attributes to it (it suffices to replace 'ἔχειν οὕτως ὥς' with 'εἶναι τοῦτο ὅ'). Since an affirmative statement attributes being to its referent, an affirmative statement is true just if its referent *is* being; since a negative statement attributes not-being to its referent, a negative statement is true just if its referent *is* not-being. In all cases, a statement (affirmative or negative) is true just if its referent *is*, *sc.* *is* something or other. This may be succinctly formulated by saying that every true statement (affirmative or negative) states the things which are. What corresponds to the 'comparative' account of truth is a 'comparative' account of falsehood: a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike what is stated. From this it is temptingly easy to infer that a statement is false just if the entity referred to *is not* what the statement attributes to it. Since an affirmative statement attributes being to its referent, an affirmative statement is false just if its referent *is-not* being; since a negative statement attributes not-being to its referent, a negative statement is false just if its referent *is-not* not-being. In all cases, a statement (affirmative or negative) is false just if its referent *is not*, *sc.* *is not*

relationship between polar opposition and negation (specifically, the phenomenon of neg-raising) while 240d6–10 displays a valid inference (if x is the contrary of so-and-so then x is not so-and-so).

something or other. This may be succinctly formulated by saying that every false statement (affirmative or negative) states the things which are not.

The second way in which the 'comparative' account of truth can be developed treats the comparison as bearing on the affirmative or negative quality of the statement: granted that a statement is true just if the entity referred to keeps as it is stated, it is temptingly easy to infer that an affirmative statement, which states that its referent is in a certain condition, is true just if its referent is in that condition, whereas a negative statement, which states that its referent is not in a certain condition, is true just if its referent is not in that condition. Again, to the 'comparative' account of truth there corresponds a 'comparative' account of falsehood: a statement is false just if the entity referred to keeps unlike the way it is stated. It is then temptingly easy to infer that an affirmative statement, which states that its referent is in a certain condition, is false just if its referent is not in that condition, whereas a negative statement, which states that its referent is not in a certain condition, is false just if its referent is in that condition. My speculative suggestion is that the two descriptions of falsehood offered in passage T1 derive from two ways of developing the 'comparative' accounts of truth and falsehood. Passage T3 shows that the outcomes of the two developments are reciprocally consistent.

Between Aristotle and Frege. The main difference between the two ways of developing the 'comparative' accounts of truth and falsehood depends on how the relationship between statements and their affirmative or negative quality is conceived. In the first development, all statements are in a way regarded as basically affirmative in that they all attribute a certain trait, which can be either the trait of being or the trait of not-being. In the second development, the difference between the affirmative and negative quality of a statement is regarded as closer to the statement's core, as pertaining to ways of stating: it is not the case that all statements are basically affirmative, rather some statements are basically affirmative whereas others are basically negative. In the second development, there seem to be two fundamental speech-acts of stating, namely affirming (i.e. attributing) and denying (i.e. something like subtracting).

The point of view on which the second development is based seems to be close to Aristotle, who distinguishes affirmation and negation as speech-acts

of stating-about and stating-away-from.²⁴ And it is not perhaps by chance that one finds again in Aristotle the description of truth and falsehood that is typical of the second development: an affirmation is true just if its referent is, false just if its referent is not; a negation is true just if its referent is not, false just if its referent is.²⁵ By contrast, the point of view on which the first development is based brings to a modern reader's mind the position of Frege, who argued against the thesis that there is a special speech-act of denial corresponding to negative statements, acknowledged only one assertoric speech-act, namely assertion, and located negation in the propositional content (which, for Plato, would have come down to the property attributed because in his view the negative particle 'not' attaches to predicates rather than to complete sentences).²⁶ Plato appears to stand between Aristotle and Frege in that he allows both ways of developing the 'comparative' accounts of truth and falsehood.

24 Cf. Arist. *Int.* 5, 17a20–21; 6, 17a25–26; 7, 17b38–18a4; *APr.* 1.30, 46a14–15; 32, 47b3; 2.15, 64a13–15; *APo.* 1.2, 72a13–14; *Metaph.* Γ6, 1011b19–20; Θ2, 1046b13–15.

25 Cf. Arist. *Int.* 6, 17a26–29; *Metaph.* Γ7, 1011b25–27; E4, 1027b20–23.

26 Cf. Frege 1918–19, 151–54.

Ἀληθὴς δόξα in the *Sophist* between *Theaetetus* and *Seventh Letter*

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The problem of defining and distinguishing true and false speech is a central concern of the *Sophist*. But the problem of discerning true and false opinion (δόξα) is closely related. In this respect, the *Sophist* takes up issues raised in the *Theaetetus*, where ἀληθὴς δόξα plays a central role in the search for a definition of knowledge. The *Sophist* sets out to resolve problems left open in the *Theaetetus* by providing a more advanced concept of λόγος as a combination of nouns and verbs, and by developing criteria for truth and falsity by the establishment of the five “most important classes” and the inclusion therein of Otherness (τὸ ἕτερον). In both dialogues, λόγος and δόξα are closely linked by way of thought (διάνοια) as the mediating element, so that the criteria for truth and falsity of λόγοι are applicable also to truth and falsity of opinions. In the *Seventh Letter*, in the hierarchical pyramid of the means for acquisition of knowledge, true opinion rises to even higher epistemological dignity, since it is paralleled with intelligence (νοῦς) and knowledge and thus placed above name, λόγος and image and closest to the supreme fifth element (the εἶδος). This role of ἀληθὴς δόξα in *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Seventh Letter* also fits in with the general role of ἀληθὴς δόξα in Platonic epistemology in the early and middle dialogues. Thus, ἀληθὴς δόξα needs to be taken seriously as an essential element in Plato’s epistemological thinking, and the *Sophist* occupies a central position in this context.

dianoia, doxa, epistemology, logos, truth

The problem of true and false speech is one of the principal concerns of the *Sophist*. A substantial passage of the last part of the dialogue (259d-264b) is dedicated to the question of how false speech (ψευδὴς λόγος) is possible. Yet it is often overlooked that the concept of ἀληθὴς δόξα (true opinion) and, for that matter, also ψευδὴς δόξα (false opinion), is closely linked to that topic. As a matter of fact, the concepts of speech (λόγος) and opinion (δόξα) appear to be interconnected throughout the entire passage. At 260b10-c4, for instance, the Eleatic Visitor sets the task: “The next thing is to inquire whether Non-being mingles with opinion and speech (τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο σκεπτέον εἰ δόξῃ τε καὶ λόγῳ μίγνυται [sc. τὸ μὴ ὄν].).” And he explains: “if it does, false opinion and false discourse come about; for to believe or say what is not—that may well be falsehood arising in thought and in words (μειγνυμένου δὲ δόξα τε ψευδὴς γίγνεται καὶ λόγος· τὸ γὰρ τὰ μὴ ὄντα δοξάζειν ἢ λέγειν, τοῦτ’ ἔστι πού τὸ ψεῦδος ἐν διανοίᾳ τε καὶ λόγοις γιγνόμενον).” The Greek for “believe or say” is δοξάζειν ἢ λέγειν, which

again couples the two notions. Similarly, in 261b1-2, Theaetetus concurs: “We must prove that falsehood exists in relation to speech and to opinion (δεῖ δὴ ψεῦδος ὡς ἔστι καὶ περὶ λόγον καὶ περὶ δόξαν ἀποδείξαι).” These are two citations out of many in which speech and opinion appear closely linked. Hence, the question of true and false speech is related to the question of true and false opinion. Of course, the primary focus here is on explanation of *false* speech and opinion; but clearly there can’t be false speech or opinion without true speech or opinion.

Yet the epistemological question of how true and false opinions can be discerned refers directly back to the *Theaetetus*, to which the *Sophist* is the dramatic sequel. In the *Theaetetus*, ἀληθὴς δόξα plays a central role in the search for a definition of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Theaetetus’ third attempt at defining is that knowledge may be the same as true opinion (*Th.* 187b5-6), a notion duly refuted as overly naive by Socrates. Consequently, in Theaetetus’ fourth attempt (*Th.* 201c9-d1), the concept gets refined, and true opinion is complemented by λόγος (in the sense of explanation or account, as in λόγον διδόναι, “to give an account”, *Th.* 202c2). Yet it soon turns out that the problem has only been shifted, since now it is a reliable definition of λόγος that is elusive, as it runs into circularity, because if this account must itself include correct opinion (ὀρθὴ δόξα) on how the object in question differs from other objects, it will amount to a tautology (*Th.* 209d8-10), which is why for the time being the dialogue ends in aporia. But the problem as such is only adjourned until the next day, which is the setting of the *Sophist*.

My argument will have four parts: First, it will be shown how the *Sophist* tries to find solutions to issues left open by the *Theaetetus*. Next, it will be demonstrated in which way Plato links the problem of true and false opinions to that of true and false λόγοι in both dialogues. In a third part, the account of the *Sophist* will be compared with the epistemological passage in the *Seventh Letter*, pointing to significant differences. Finally, it will be asked how all this fits in with the overall role of ἀληθὴς δόξα in Plato’s epistemology.

To begin with, it seems obvious that the *Sophist* sets out to stop the aporetic gap left open at the end of the *Theaetetus* by finding a consistent account of λόγος that makes it possible to distinguish true λόγοι from false, and thereby implicitly to resolve the *Theaetetus*’ problem of a definition of knowledge.

In the *Sophist*, the possibility of discerning true λόγοι from false is ascertained by a more advanced definition of λόγος. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato still proceeds from a simpler concept of λόγος as a combination (συμπλοκή) of “names” (ὀνόματα, *Th.* 202b4-5). This concept of λόγος as a mere ag-

gregate of ὀνόματα, a concept that reduces speaking (λέγειν) to “naming” (ὀνομάζειν) and makes truth and falsity of a λόγος a function of the semantic “truth or falsity” of its constituent “names”, had already been underlying the debate about the correctness of names in the *Cratylus* (*Cra.* 385b2-d1; 431a8-c2; the term there being σύνθεσις). This “accumulative model” (Derbolav, 1972, 113–15) is overcome in the *Sophist* and replaced by a new model of λόγος as a combination (the terms still are συμπλοκή and συμπλέκειν), yet not of names with names, but of nouns (ὀνόματα) with verbs (ῥήματα) (*Sph.* 262d4; de Rijk, 1986, 196–202). This is a major advance over the accumulative model still retained in the *Theaetetus* (which is ultimately responsible for the failure of a definition of λόγος in that dialogue). It may be surmised, though, that even in the *Theaetetus* Plato was already aware of the developed concept of the *Sophist*: At one single moment this concept flashes up in a seemingly incidental remark (*Tht.* 206d2-5), when Socrates insinuates that making one’s thought (διάνοια) and opinion (δόξα) explicit through voice by means of verbs and nouns (μετὰ ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων: “words and verbal expressions”, Burnyeat-Levett, 1990, 345; “names (...) and phrases”, Polansky, 1992, 223; “expressions and names”, McDowell, 1973, 102) might be a workable definition of λόγος (οὐ δοκεῖ σοι τὸ τοιοῦτον λόγος εἶναι;); this is a crucial remark, since it brings together a number of pivotal notions that will recur (yet inverted) in the *Sophist*; yet for the time being it is quickly brushed aside in favor of the accumulative model that leads to aporia. Mind that ῥήματα do pop up as early as in the *Cratylus* (e.g. 431b5-7), yet perhaps in a different sense (“compound expressions”; de Rijk, 1986, 222–25).

In the *Sophist*, however, the fact that a λόγος must combine ὀνόματα and ῥήματα is only a minimum requirement that makes it a λόγος in the first place. For qualification as true or false, additional criteria are required (Detel, 1972): Not only must a λόγος be a λόγος “about what is” (περὶ τῶν ὄντων, *Sph.* 262d2, i.e. it must have an existing referent), but its combination of nouns and verbs must also meet the rules for admissible combinations of forms. As the Eleatic Visitor’s contrastive examples of “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies” demonstrate, not any form can be combined with any, but the realm of forms has its combinatory rules. And, he adds, “just as some things fit each other and some do not, so too some vocal signs do not fit, but those that do fit form a statement” (καθάπερ τὰ πράγματα τὰ μὲν ἀλλήλοις ἡρμοττεν, τὰ δ’ οὐ, καὶ περὶ τὰ τῆς φωνῆς αὐ σημεία τὰ μὲν οὐχ ἀρμόττει, τὰ δὲ ἀρμόττοντα αὐτῶν λόγον ἀπηργάσατο, *Sph.* 262d8-e1). Whenever a phrase states of “what-is that it is”, it will be a true statement; but whenever it states “what is different from what-is” (ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων, 263b7), or of “what-is-not that it is” (τὰ μὴ ὄντ’ ἄρα ὡς ὄντα, 263b9), it will be a false

statement. So, even a false statement does say about its subject something that is, but something different from what is the case (ὄντων δέ γε ὄντα ἕτερα, 263b11). In this way, the criterion for truth or falsity of speech (λόγοι) is intrinsically tied to the pivotal discovery of Otherness (τὸ ἕτερον) as Non-Being qua difference, which makes for a more manageable replacement for the stumbling block of Eleatic absolute Non-Being (μὴ ὄν) (*Sph.* 255c-e). A firm criterion for admissibility or inadmissibility of any combination of nouns and verbs is thus ultimately provided by the establishment of the five μέγιστα γένη and the inclusion among them of Otherness (τὸ ἕτερον). These highest forms, too, only admit of limited mutual communion (κοινωνία) with each other.

Yet now that a criterion for true and false speech has been established, how does one get from true and false speech to true and false opinion (δόξα)? The key connector between the two turns out to be διάνοια (thought). On the one hand, thought is closely associated with speech. As the Eleatic Visitor affirms, “thought and speech are the same; except that the silent inner conversation of the soul with itself has been given the special name of thought.” (οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταυτόν· πλὴν ὁ μὲν ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς πρὸς αὐτὴν διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς γιγνόμενος τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ ἡμῖν ἐπωνομάσθη, διάνοια; *Sph.* 263e3-5). Yet on the other hand, “when this happens in thought and silently within the soul, can you give it any other name than opinion (δόξα)?” (ὅταν οὖν τοῦτο ἐν ψυχῇ κατὰ διάνοιαν ἐγγίγνηται μετὰ σιγῆς, πλὴν δόξης ἔχεις ὅτι προσείπης αὐτό; *Sph.* 264a1-2). As a consequence, since truth and falsity apply to λόγος, thought is conversation of the soul with itself, and “opinion the final result of thought” (δόξα δὲ διανοίας ἀποτελεύτησις), “it is inevitable that, since these are all akin to speech, some of them must sometimes be false” (ἀνάγκη δὲ καὶ τούτων τῷ λόγῳ συγγενῶν ὄντων ψευδῇ τε αὐτῶν ἓνια καὶ ἐνίστε εἶναι, *Sph.* 264b2-3). This is exactly what the Visitor had observed in the first place, namely that “thought, opinion and fancy all arise in our souls as both false and true” (διάνοιά τε καὶ δόξα καὶ φαντασία, μὴ οὐκ ἤδη δῆλον ὅτι ταῦτά γε ψευδῇ τε καὶ ἀληθῇ πάνθ’ ἡμῶν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἐγγίγνεται; *Sph.* 263d6-8; on thought and opinion as elements of cognitive processes see de Rijk, 1986, 212).

This chain of reasoning clearly draws on a famous notion established in the *Theaetetus*, namely that thinking (διανοεῖσθαι) is an inward conversation of the soul with itself. Socrates there likewise describes the forming of an opinion (δόξα) by way of this inner conversation: “But when the soul has arrived at a decision, (...) is agreed and not in doubt, this is what we call its opinion” (ὅταν δὲ ὀρίσασα [...] τὸ αὐτὸ ἤδη φῇ καὶ μὴ διστάζῃ, δόξαν

ταύτην τίθεμεν αὐτῆς, *Tht.* 190a2-4; for discussions of this passage, especially of the relationship of διάνοια with δόξα and truth and falsity, see Dixsaut 1997, 10; 2015, 38; Narcy 2013a, 101; Gonzalez 2020, 184–85).

As shown above, a similar link between λόγος and δόξα by way of διάνοια had been suggested at the end of the *Theaetetus* (206d), if in inverse sense: whereas there δόξα, via διάνοια, found expression in speech, in the *Sophist* it is truth and falsity in speech (λόγος) that is – by way of true and false thinking (διάνοια) – extended to true and false opinion (δόξα); in other words, the possibility of discerning true and false λόγος will also assure the possibility of identifying false thinking and opinion and of telling it from true opinion.

Looking at things this way, the criteria described for the truth and falsity of λόγοι (based on κοινωνία of forms) appear to be equally applicable to the truth and falsity of opinions. The procedure of collection and division employed in the *diaereseis* of the *Sophist* actually practices a method of definition that comes close to what had been aimed at in the last attempt at defining λόγος in the *Theaetetus*.

It is thus evident that the *Sophist* in many ways continues the *Theaetetus*' search for an account of true knowledge by taking up various strands from the earlier dialogue, among them the question of true and false δόξα and its links with true and false speech.

In this context, one must not forget that Plato's concern about the role of language in philosophy was arguably prompted by theories on language and human knowledge that had been set up by the sophists, especially so by Gorgias of Leontinoi. Gorgias had advanced the view that, since true knowledge was unattainable, a powerful capacity of λόγος consisted in its ability to replace one opinion (δόξα) by another (*Helen*, *Frg.* B 11, 13). Since Plato's understanding of philosophy as a dialectical process leading to cognition of truth is essentially based on language as a tool both for communication and for classification of reality (ὄργανον διδασκαλικόν καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας, *Cra.* 388b13–c1), he could not get around clarifying the conditions of the reliability of language. But in view of Gorgias's well-known partisanship of δόξα, clarifying the concept of δόξα was equally inevitable. It may hence be that the “daring” (Rosen 1983, 313; de Rijk 1986, 214) neologistic description of the sophist as a champion of “opinion-imitation” (δοξομιμητική, *Sph.* 267e1), bereft of real knowledge, is actually a subtle dig at Gorgias.

If, on the other hand, from the *Sophist* we look ahead to the epistemological passage in the *Seventh Letter* (342a–e), significant shifts come to the fore. In the hierarchical pyramid of the means by which knowledge of an object is attained, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), the fourth element, is first placed

separately above the triad of name (ὄνομα), definition (λόγος) and image (εἶδωλον). In that passage, however, precisely as in the *Sophist*, λόγος is defined as a compound of nouns and verbs (ἐξ ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων συγκαίμενος, 342b6-7), which seems to be an unmistakable cross reference to that dialogue.

Yet only a few lines later ἐπιστήμη is closely paralleled with two other epistemological instances: intelligence (νοῦς) and – true opinion (ἐπιστήμη καὶ νοῦς ἀληθὴς τε δόξα, 342c4-5); but, since these three are explicitly said to form a single whole (ὥς δὲ ἓν τοῦτο αὐτὸ πᾶν θετέον) detached from the lower three (name, definition, image), when it is said (*Ep.* 7. 342d1-2) that out of these four it is νοῦς that comes closest (ἐγγύτατα ... πεπλησίακεν) to the fifth and supreme one (the εἶδος), this same superior dignity would also befit knowledge, and true opinion likewise.

What is striking is that within this epistemological hierarchy the rank of ἀληθὴς δόξα turns out even higher than that of λόγος. This may be interpreted in the sense that for the late Plato ἀληθὴς δόξα (jointly with νοῦς) is in fact regarded as an essential element for the acquisition of knowledge (when supported by a true λόγος).

If we sum up what we have found about the role of ἀληθὴς δόξα in *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Seventh Letter*, a coherent pattern emerges in which the clarifications of the *Sophist* play a central role, and in which the dignity and import of ἀληθὴς δόξα gradually increase. In a nutshell, if knowledge may be defined as ἀληθὴς δόξα combined with λόγος, as the *Theaetetus* suggests, what is required to ensure its ἀλήθεια is that it complies with the criteria of truth established in the *Sophist* for both λόγος and δόξα alike.

But also if we look beyond this group of works, these observations nicely fit in with the general role of ἀληθὴς δόξα in Platonic epistemology (see Kraus 2018). It can be demonstrated that in the early and middle dialogues more often than not Socrates' attempt to find the truth about a certain problem takes its first start from a pretty vague opinion (which mostly comes either from rumours Socrates has heard from others "on the grapevine", or from proposals ventured by way of a "shot in the dark" by some interlocutor; see Erler 2003). This initial opinion will then be put to test by dialectical examination, until it is found whether or not it qualifies as a *true* opinion. In the majority of cases, of course, the result will be negative, which will necessitate a new start. Notwithstanding, the truth criteria developed for λόγος in the *Sophist* are essential also for the testing of opinions for truth in Platonic dialectic and epistemology.

In the *Meno*, for instance, in the process of solving the problem of doubling a square, Socrates explains that what he elicits from the uneducated

slave-boy are the boy's own δόξαι (*Men.* 85b8, c4, c10, e7), which, when duly examined and corrected, may become ἀληθεῖς δόξαι (*Men.* 85c7). This evokes Plato's hypothesis method: δόξαι are brought forward by the boy as hypotheses, then examined and refuted by Socrates, until ἀληθὴς δόξα is reached.

But, it may be objected, in the Divided Line in the *Republic* the realms of δόξα and ἐπιστήμη are neatly kept apart from each other. Yes, apparently so. But if we accept, if hypothetically, that ἀληθὴς δόξα combined with ἀληθὴς λόγος may in fact rise to ἐπιστήμη, a bridge can be built that would permit transition (Kraus 2018, 269). Keep in mind that the lower part of the realm of ἐπιστήμη, the one conterminous with δόξα, is assigned by Plato to διάνοια, the same cognitive faculty that in the *Sophist* is repeatedly associated with both λόγος and δόξα as a mediating link. As we have learned, διάνοια, too, can partake of truth and falsity, just as δόξα can.

Looking at things in this way, a more positive assessment of the role of ἀληθὴς δόξα within Plato's epistemology emerges. As he often does, Plato may deliberately have adopted the sophistic concept and catchword of δόξα and reframed and adapted it to his own philosophical thinking. If this is so, ἀληθὴς δόξα needs to be taken seriously as an element of Plato's epistemology, and the *Sophist*, sandwiched between *Theaetetus* and *Seventh Letter*, occupies a central position in this development.

L'homme apprend, Théétète est-assis et Théétète vole.

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The sophist finally takes shelter behind the inexistence of falsity: how could one say what is not since what is not is not? And even if nonbeing is just the other of being, when one says something other than what is, what is he talking about? Of his own image of the thing he's speaking of. In what genus of spoken images, eikastics or phantastics, should be filed those produced by the sophist? The answer rests in an analysis of the constitutive elements of the smallest logos, the first instance of which is 'Man learns'. Learning is remembering the power of the intelligent part of the soul, alone able to undergo intelligible realities and gain some knowledge of them. Knowledge is infallible, only opinion can be true or false. 'Theaetetus sits' would then formulate a true opinion issuing from a perception, and for 'Theaetetus flies', its falsity depends on what 'Theaetetus' refers to. These two propositions interweave an actor designated by a noun with an action expressed by a verb: they are verbal and not predicative, a verb being no predicate since it introduces a temporality and a 'voice' of its own. Only a dialectical discourse which questions and answers can be truly true, otherwise it is a *muthos*. Yet what is Plato doing if not setting a fictitious character opposite a dead Theaetetus? His story is so convincing that we hold that it is true that Theaetetus sits and remain deaf to the difference between the fictitious and the false because both invest whatever they speak of with a discursive reality. The sophist abuses this power and so might lead us to deny language any possibility of telling the truth. To rescue the logos, to inscribe it within being: such is the purpose of the *Sophist*.
power, logos, truth, falsity, fiction.

Le passage que je vais tenter d'expliquer se situe au terme d'une longue chasse qui a pour particularité d'ignorer la nature du gibier qu'elle veut empêcher de nuire¹ – d'être une sorte de chasse au snark. L'Étranger avait pourtant déclaré d'emblée que pour répondre à la question de Socrate sur l'existence distincte de ces trois genres, sophiste, politique et philosophe, il fallait commencer par définir chacun. Mais la première partie du Dialogue a montré que le sophiste est un homme « à multiples têtes (πολυκεφαλος, *Sph.* 240c4) », de sorte que son aspect varie en fonction de ceux qui le regardent. L'Étranger en déduit qu'il faut cesser de définir son art, la sophistique, mais dire enfin ce qu'il est, sa nature. Il est apparu qu'elle ne pouvait être saisie

1 Cette conférence est la reprise un peu modifiée du commentaire figurant dans Dixsaut 2022, 666-710.

qu'à travers la puissance qu'il attribue à ce grand despote qu'est pour lui le *logos*.

Un discours auto-destructeur

Les théoriciens du langage pour lesquels tous les genres communiquent avec tous ou aucun avec aucun se contredisent eux-mêmes en le disant. Restent donc ceux pour qui le discours est fait de mots vides qui peuvent s'accorder ou s'opposer à volonté précisément parce que ce ne sont que des mots : les sophistes. Protagoras affirmait hier (par la bouche de Socrate) que la sensation ne saurait être trompeuse (*Tht.*152a-c), mais comme chacun est selon lui la mesure de ce qu'il sent, étant absolument subjective elle est indécidable, *alogos*. « Celui qui dit dit, mais non pas une couleur, ni une chose » généralise Gorgias (*De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia* 980b7, établi et traduit par Cassin 1980). Le discours ne dit que du dire, ainsi parlent Protagoras et Gorgias². Cette séparation radicale de l'être et du dire confère au discours une autonomie qui en garantit la toute-puissance et permet au sophiste de détourner à son profit la majestueuse route de vérité de Parménide. Et, dieu de la réfutation, il perçoit toutes les faiblesses de la langue des mortels à deux-têtes. C'est pourquoi ce qu'il dit mérite d'être entendu.

Hier, les trois sens du mot logos

Théétète ne comprend pas pourquoi ils devraient arriver à un accord concernant le discours. Il n'est pas seulement en proie à une crise de découragement, il a de bonnes raisons de douter qu'un tel accord soit possible. Car Socrate avait montré la veille qu'adjoindre un *logos* à une *doxa*, c'est adjoindre un *logos* à ce qui est déjà un *logos*, et il avait examiné les trois sens possibles de ce terme. En un premier sens, c'est « un courant qui vient de l'âme et sort par la bouche en émettant un son (*Tht.* 208c4-5, cf. *Sph.* 263e7-8) ». Si savoir consiste à ajouter à une opinion droite un *logos* entendu en ce sens phonétique, le *logos* est le propre de l'homme. Selon Xénophon Socrate affirmait en effet que la Providence divine avait beaucoup mieux pourvu l'homme que les animaux en lui fournissant la station droite, l'indépendance des mains et la mobilité de la langue « de telle sorte qu'en touchant la bouche, tantôt ici, tantôt là, elle articule la voix ». La structure de son corps permet aux

2 Mais ainsi Platon force à parler aussi Parménide ; cf. Dixsaut 2000, 175-223.

hommes d'avoir un langage articulé qui peut « signifier (σημαίνειν) tout ce que nous désirons nous communiquer les uns aux autres (*Mem.* I 4 12) ». Quand le flux de la voix s'articule, nous hommes ne proférons pas des sons, nous parlons.

Le deuxième sens restitue au *logos* un caractère dialogique : « être capable quand on est interrogé sur telle ou telle chose de donner une réponse à celui qui questionne en parcourant les éléments. (*Tht.* 206e6-207a1). » Ce *logos* progresse de manière continue et irréversible, il n'y a aucun va-et-vient entre interroger et répondre, et celui qui répond doit déjà avoir la réponse pour pouvoir la donner. Les deux exemples avancés, la fabrication d'un chariot et l'écriture, sont d'ailleurs des techniques qui ne recourent que très peu au *logos* (*Grg.* 450c). Quant au troisième sens, il s'agirait de l'explication de la différence caractéristique. Là encore, les exemples servent à dévaloriser le *logos* qu'ils sont censés illustrer : « le soleil est le plus brillant des corps qui se promènent dans le ciel autour de la Terre » n'est pas un énoncé scientifique et l'aplatissement du nez de Théétète n'a que peu de rapport avec la différence spécifique d'Aristote. À quoi sert alors la différence caractéristique ? À assurer un bon ajustement des sensations présentes aux traces mnémiques déposées par une sensation passée, ce qui permet de les identifier, les nommer, et d'inscrire des discours en nos âmes.

Aucun de ces sens n'est rejeté mais ils se heurtent tous à la même objection : « Ce que nous avons (ἔχομεν), nous enjoindre de l'ajouter pour que nous comprenions ce dont nous avons l'opinion, cela semble fort être le fait de qui serait entièrement et authentiquement plongé dans l'obscurité (*Tht.* 209e3-4). » L'addition d'un *logos* à une opinion droite aboutit toujours à un résultat nul puisqu'un *logos* doit lui avoir été présent pour qu'elle soit droite.

Modalités

Une même séquence, *διάνοιά, δόξα, λόγος* se retrouve dans le *Théétète*, le *Sophiste* et dans le *Philèbe* lors de l'épisode du promeneur³. L'opinion (*δόξα*) y est toujours décrite comme un état de l'âme et non comme un acte logique, un jugement⁴; opiner (*δοξάζειν*) c'est dire (*λέγειν*), la seule différence entre *δόξα* et *λόγος* étant que l'une est silencieuse et l'autre proféré (*Tht.* 190a4-6, *Sph.* 264a1-2). Or cette différence n'en est finalement pas une : si quelqu'un

3 Pour une analyse plus complète, voir Dixsaut 2000, 45-70.

4 Qu'il s'agisse d'opiner ou de savoir, chez Platon penser n'est pas juger; voir Rosen 1983, 307.

est présent aux côtés du promeneur, il lui dira « les mêmes choses que celles qu'il se disait à lui-même, et ainsi devient discours (λόγος) ce que nous appelions alors opinion (δόξα) (*Phil.* 38c2-e7) ».

L'Étranger ajoute cependant à ce qui est dit dans le *Théétète* et le *Philebe* quelque chose qui est loin d'être négligeable et est pourtant rarement relevé :

L'ÉTRANGER — Et dans les discours nous savons qu'il y a de plus ceci...
THÉÉTÈTE - Quoi ? L'ÉTRANGER — Affirmation et négation (Φάσιν τε καὶ ἀπόφασιν). THÉÉTÈTE — Nous le savons. L'ÉTRANGER — Quand donc cela advient en l'âme en pensée (κατὰ διάνοιαν) et silencieusement, as-tu pour le désigner un autre mot que celui d'opinion ? (*Sph.* 264a1-2).

D'autres discours pourraient donc avoir des modalités différentes de celles de l'opinion. Lesquels ? Lorsque l'âme se ressouvient de sa puissance, elle découvre que c'est d'elle-même et par elle-même qu'elle peut tout comprendre et poser des réalités que sa partie intelligente est seule à pouvoir saisir. La différence entre l'opinion droite et le savoir, cette unique chose que Socrate « mettrait au nombre de celles qu'il sait (*Men.* 98b) » est ainsi ontologiquement garantie mais il ne suffit pas de dire à quoi le savoir s'applique, il faut préciser quel est son ἔργον propre : un raisonnement (λογισμός) doit alors accompagner l'opinion. Un raisonnement n'est ni singulier, ni général mais universel, et c'est pourquoi un mathématicien peut fournir des démonstrations aboutissant à des conclusions qui sont non seulement *a priori* mais nécessaires : leur modalité est apodictique⁵. Mais qu'en est-il des discours qui ne rompent pas seulement avec l'opinion, mais avec cette sorte de pensée nommée par Platon dianoétique (*R.* 510c1-511c2) ? Ils sont propres à celui qui sait interroger et répondre : interroger et répondre ne sont pas des rôles à répartir lors d'un dialogue, ce sont les modalités du discours dialectique (*Cra.* 390c2-11). Un discours dialectique fait appel à la partie intelligente de l'âme et il ne se réduit pas à résoudre des problèmes, car celui qui est questionné doit faire sienne la question pour pouvoir y répondre, et celui qui questionne doit savoir vers où aller pour réussir à répondre. Cependant, si questions et réponses portent sur des réalités intelligibles, Socrate s'était demandé lors de son « rêve » comment un discours par nature complexe pourrait s'appliquer à des Idées simples (*Th.* 201e-206b, cf. Aristote, *Metaph.* H 3 1043b 28-38). Je me contenterai de renvoyer au *Phèdre* :

5 Selon Aristote l'*epistèmè* est *apodeiktikè* (cf. *A.Pr.* 32b18, *Metaph.* Z 3 1029b3, *EN* VI 3 1139b31); pour la définition de ce terme, voir Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* I 2^e § 9.

N'est-ce pas ainsi qu'il faut procéder pour se faire une idée de la nature de quoi que ce soit ? D'abord se demander si elle est simple ou multiforme (...) Puis, à supposer qu'elle soit simple, déterminer quelle puissance elle recèle : puissance d'agir par nature sur quoi, puissance d'être affecté par quoi (Pl. *Phdr.*, 270c10-d7).

La notion de puissance (δύναμις) résout l'aporie. Même si on ne peut pas diviser en ses espèces une Idée dont la nature est simple, celle-ci n'offre pas le mutisme obtus de l'élément ; possédant une puissance, elle possède une articulation interne : agir et sur quoi / pâtir et de quoi. Mais ce qui distingue plus profondément ce discours est qu'il répond à la question développée dans le *Philèbe* (58d-59b) : est-ce que « de nature, nos âmes possèdent une puissance d'aimer le vrai et de tout faire en vue de lui ? » Si le vrai est un objet d'amour, il ne saurait être réduit à être le prédicat d'un jugement correct ou d'un raisonnement cohérent. Quand un discours prend en erôs sa source, tous ses énoncés se trouvent dépendre de la nature de celui qui l'énonce : il choisit en fonction de son amour du vrai ses objets et ses fins et détermine ainsi la sorte de puissance qu'il accorde au langage, la sorte de réalités dont il le juge capable de parler et la sorte de vérité qu'on peut lui accorder. Or qu'est-ce qui pourrait accorder cette vérité au discours, sinon un discours ? Le logos doit donc être jugé capable de se retourner sur lui-même et de se demander s'il lui est ou non possible de dire la vérité – ce que fait le sophiste, qui pour sa part répond négativement, mais ce que doit faire aussi le philosophe s'il veut être philosophe et non pas philodoxe, car le savoir est « la plus forte de toutes les puissances », et à la différence de l'opinion, il est infaillible (*R.* 477d7-e1). Telles sont donc les deux sortes de discours mises en réserve à la fin du *Théétète*⁶. Cela étant réglé, du moins je l'espère, une question subsiste. Une fois établi que les genres communiquent entre eux et que l'être et l'autre circulent à travers tous et l'un à travers l'autre – de sorte que l'être n'est pas l'ensemble de tous les autres genres moins lui-même, et que le non-être n'est pas son contraire mais son autre – reste à établir ce qu'il en est de la puissance qui a permis au logos d'énoncer ces deux vérités.

6 Contrairement à ce qu'affirme Rowe 2013.

Le premier et plus petit discours

Pour répondre à cette question, l'Étranger estime devoir soumettre le logos à une analyse de ses éléments constitutifs. Nous humains disposons de deux genres de signes vocaux : le verbe (ῥῆμα), qui est une monstration (δήλωμα) s'appliquant à des actions (ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσιν) ; quant aux agents qui les accomplissent, le signe vocal qui les montre est un nom (ὄνομα). Les deux termes reçoivent ici une signification restreinte : ὄνομα désigne usuellement le mot en général, tous les mots, car même s'ils ne possèdent qu'une fonction syntaxique et non pas dénominate, ils signifient quelque chose. Quant à ῥῆμα, le terme avait gardé jusque-là son sens d'expression, par exemple quand il s'est appliqué à non-grand ou non-beau (*Sph.* 257b6-7) ; parent de ῥήτωρ et dérivé du verbe dire, ἐρέω, ῥῆμα comporte une coloration juridique, religieuse et solennelle : les ῥήματα désignaient les sentences des sept sages de la Grèce et les paroles de la déesse de Parménide⁷. Dans le *Sophiste*, le langage est l'instrument que sophistes et rhéteurs utilisent pour acquérir leur puissance, privée et publique. Il faut donc découvrir la nature de cet instrument et faire du langage, et non pas de la langue (γλῶσσα), l'objet d'une analyse en premier lieu grammaticale. Cependant, le langage « a beau être lui-même disposé, déployé et analysé sous le regard d'une science, il resurgit toujours à côté du sujet qui le connaît – dès qu'il s'agit pour lui d'énoncer ce qu'il sait (Foucault 1966, 30) ». Dans le *Sophiste* le discours qui « surgit à côté » constate que le langage est une affaire de puissance, celle que se disputent sophiste, philosophe et politique.

L'entrelacement minimal

Une suite de noms pas plus qu'une suite de verbes ne fera jamais un discours, car dans les deux cas « les sons vocalement proférés (τὰ φωνηθέντα) ne montrent (δηλοῖ) ni action (πράξιν) ni inaction (ἀπραξίαν) ni manière d'être (οὐσίαν) de ce qui est ou de ce qui n'est pas (*Sph.* 262c2-4) ». Pour apporter des exemples de noms primitifs, Socrate énonce à la file dans le *Cratyle* (423a9-b1) « flot, aller et disposition », soit deux noms et un verbe, alors que l'Étranger énumère trois actions, « marche court vole », et trois

7 Parménide VII 6 : la déesse invite le jeune homme à départager les voies en fonction « des paroles que moi je viens d'énoncer (ἐξ ἐμέθεν ῥηθέντα) ». Pour ce sens solennel cf. *Prt.* 343a-b, *Smp.* 198b et pour celui d'expression ou locution cf. *Euthd.*, 287c2-e4, *Cra.*, 421e1-2, 425a1, 432b5-6. Voir Fournier 1946, Chantaine, 1999 II, sv. 2 eirô.

agents, « lion cerf cheval ». Mais après tout, attribuer la distinction entre les noms et les verbes au Socrate du *Cratyle* ou à l'Étranger du *Sophiste*, quelle importance cela peut-il avoir ? Une importance certaine, car alors que le *Cratyle* situe cet assemblage (σύνθεσις) qu'est un logos en haut d'une échelle de complexité croissante allant des noms composés d'une ou de peu de syllabes à des expressions (ῥήματα) composées de syllabes en plus grand nombre, l'Étranger déclare que, lorsqu'un nom se mélange (κεράσῃ) avec un verbe, leur entrelacement (συμπλοκή) « engendre un discours, sans doute le premier et le plus petit de tous (*Sph.*, 261c2-7) ». Nom et verbe ne sont donc pas des réalités distinctes qu'une copule mettrait en relation en attribuant une action, à un agent. Entrelacement et mélange ont en effet ceci de commun que ce sont *les éléments eux-mêmes qui se lient* sans faire appel à un troisième terme pour les tenir ensemble. Ce logos minimal est donc une proposition verbale, non une proposition prédicative : son sujet n'est pas conçu comme étant le substrat ou le centre de gravité des prédicats qu'on lui attribue, il est l'agent qui accomplit l'action, et les verbes ne sont pas des prédicats parce qu'ils introduisent le mode de temporalité requis par la sorte de puissance impliquée par leur voie active, moyenne ou passive. Entre l'agent et l'action il y a donc, si on ose dire, action et passion réciproques. En admettant que l'on puisse parler de relation, il est manifeste que celle qui unit l'agent à son action n'est pas la même que celle qui relie un sujet à un prédicat, dont les deux possibilités sont définies par Aristote : ou bien le prédicat est essentiel, et il se dit du sujet, ou bien il est accidentel, et il est dans un sujet (*Cat.* 5, 2a34-2b7). En conséquence de quoi, le verbe être reçoit une fonction de copule (*A.Pr.* 51b13 *sq.*, *Metaph.* Δ 1017a28) et c'est elle qui relie des termes qui sans elle seraient restés extérieurs l'un à l'autre. Or les verbes ne partagent ni la neutralité logique de la copule, extérieure aux termes qu'elle sépare autant qu'elle les relie, ni son atemporalité, car bien que le verbe être puisse se conjuguer quand il sert de copule, il a une fonction qu'un simple symbole peut aussi bien remplir.

L'homme apprend : une brève histoire du terme apprendre chez Platon

Le premier exemple de discours minimal avancé par l'Étranger est « l'homme apprend (ἄνθρωπος μανθάνει) ». Il n'a pas donné et à ma connaissance ne donne toujours pas lieu à un torrent interprétatif comparable à celui suscité par les exemples qui suivent. Il mériterait pourtant qu'on s'y attarde, car hier Socrate disait du philosophe : « ce que peut bien être

un homme, ce qu'à une telle nature, à la différence des autres, il convient de faire ou de subir, voilà ce qu'il cherche et ce qu'il se soucie d'exposer (*Tht.* 174b4-6) ». Définir philosophiquement, c'est donc définir la *puissance* propre à l'objet cherché et c'est à cette condition qu'on cessera « de s'amuser à tirailler les mots » « savoir » (ἐπίστασθαι) et « apprendre » (μανθάνειν) (*Tht.* 199a4-7) ». Davantage en effet que le double sens de l'adjectif σοφός, savant et sage, c'est celui du verbe μανθάνειν, apprendre et comprendre, qui est à l'origine du sophisme de l'*Euthydème* (275c-276c) : apprendre c'est forcément apprendre ce qu'on ne savait pas : ce sont donc les ignorants qui apprennent, mais comprendre c'est forcément comprendre ce qu'on sait, et seuls ceux qui sont avisés en sont capables. Cet argument éristique est rediscuté dans le *Ménon* (81d-e) et c'est en affirmant qu'apprendre c'est se ressouvenir qu'on peut se prémunir contre lui. Lorsque l'âme comprend elle se ressouvient de sa puissance et découvre que c'est d'elle-même et par elle-même qu'elle peut tout apprendre. En son sens faible de faculté de l'âme comme en son sens fort d'accès à des êtres qui sont, la réminiscence est la médiation qui permet de passer de l'opinion même droite au savoir. Elle a ainsi une double fonction : relier le savoir à l'âme intelligente et la relier au seul mode d'être dont un savoir est possible. L'âme voit alors dans ce qui est là ce qui n'est pas là et qui ne manque qu'à une âme qui en a le désir. La réminiscence ne procure cependant aucune connaissance puisque la totalité du savoir est renvoyée à un temps dit à la fois « passé et temps de toujours » : le passé de la pensée intelligente la constitue si complètement qu'elle ne peut que l'oublier d'un coup et prendre chaque fois le temps de le réapprendre, sans se soucier du temps. Ruptures et reprises sont permises puisque toutes les divagations de la pensée en proviennent et y reviennent sans qu'elle ait à le vouloir : cela se fera sans elle. On avance à reculons, on apprend en se ressouvenant⁸. Ces processus sont temporels même s'ils se produisent dans un drôle de temps. Tel est le sens du passage célèbre du *Phédon* 73c-75e.

Au livre VI de la *République* (486c1-d2) la facilité à apprendre et conserver les choses que l'on aura apprises en cette vie est une des qualités que doit posséder un naturel philosophe : il doit être εὐμαθής, pas δυσμαθής. Sa puissance d'apprendre inscrit l'homme dans un devenir qui conjugue « l'avènement en instance, le passé proche ou lointain, et l'avenir qu'il ouvre (V. Jankélévitch 1957, 73) ». Mais pour être prouvée, elle réclame un examen dialectique de la nature de l'âme humaine afin de voir si elle contient une ou plusieurs parties capables d'apprendre, verbe qui doit à son tour faire l'objet

8 Voir Dixsaut 2006.

d'un examen. Une bonne moitié des Dialogues de Platon est consacrée à ces deux questions. Cette vérité-là ne pourrait pas se dire en deux mots, c'est une vérité intelligible, donc non conclusive car elle soulève en chemin autant de questions que de réponses – ce qui est d'ailleurs la seule manière d'apprendre.

Théétète est-assis et Théétète vole

Tant que l'on se contente de dire que le logos peut montrer et signifier, il peut y avoir erreur, méprise, mais pas fausseté, or l'inexistence de la fausseté est le dernier rempart derrière lequel le sophiste s'abrite. L'Étranger propose alors un exemple « unissant une chose à une action (πρᾶγμα πράξει) grâce à un nom et un verbe : Théétète est-assis (Θεαίτητος κάθεται), et il affirme que ce qu'il dit est vrai⁹. De quelle sorte de vérité ce discours est-il vrai ? Évidemment pas d'une vérité essentielle mais d'une vérité essentiellement fugitive : sitôt que Théétète se lèvera, ce discours deviendra faux. Sa vérité est la vérité du « maintenant est la nuit » de Hegel, une vérité que le devenir voue à être contredite et en l'occurrence agent et action sont tous deux des réalités soumises à un devenir changeant.

Non que la sensation soit *en elle-même* trompeuse, elle peut attester de la vérité fugitive d'une chose en devenir. Mais pourquoi diable Platon prend-il cet exemple d'une vérité sensible, singulière et instable comme exemple de discours vrai ? Parce que seul le discours énonçant une opinion peut être vrai ou faux. Dire par exemple que l'homme est un bipède sans plumes (*Plt.* 266d11-267a3)¹⁰ n'est pas faux et ne s'oppose pas au fait qu'il est capable d'apprendre. Ces deux affirmations sont issues de deux perspectives différentes mais également possibles : l'une parle de ce qu'il est, de la puissance qui lui est propre, l'autre avance qu'il est une espèce d'animal, et les deux sont vraies. Or dans la première la nature du sujet qui affirme doit intervenir : témoin à la fois oculaire et auditif, on doit pouvoir lui faire confiance à condition que, comme l'exige Gorgias (*Pal*, D.K. B 11a§22), il nous dise « de quelle façon, où, à quel moment, quand et comment » il a vu Théétète assis. D'où la distinction établie par l'Étranger entre *de quoi* le discours parle et ce *à propos de quoi* il parle. Théétète est-assis n'est vrai que si l'Étranger apporte

9 « Être-assis »: *kathetai*, d'où le trait d'union signalant qu'en grec il s'agit d'un seul verbe.

10 Voir Dixsaut *et al.*, 2018, 322-26.

deux précisions : Théétète est « celui avec qui moi je discute », et discute « maintenant ». Toutes deux sont nécessaires pour montrer que Théétète vole est un discours faux, mais aussi pour indiquer *a contrario* quelle sorte de vérité énonce « Théétète est-assis ». C'est une vérité singulière, celle d'un objet visé par le discours comme étant extra-discursif ; mais intégré à un discours, cet objet devient le sujet du verbe, son agent, et devient lui aussi un élément discursif. « Il est évident que c'est à propos de moi et de moi (περὶ ἐμοῦ τε καὶ ἐμός) que tu parles », dit Théétète, et l'Étranger confirme qu'il est « celui avec qui moi maintenant je discute »¹¹. Dans ces deux énoncés l'agent se nomme Théétète, mais tous deux se *réfèrent* à un toi ou à un moi, et *jamaïs* à Théétète. Ce toi et ce moi sont les êtres *dont* le discours parle, alors que Théétète est le nom signifiant l'agent *à propos duquel* le discours vrai dit qu'il est-assis et le discours faux qu'il vole. Signaler que ce nom, Théétète, désigne celui avec qui moi maintenant je discute écarte la possibilité que ce nom soit celui d'un individu homonyme ou d'une créature fantastique, d'un nouvel Icare, et pourquoi pas d'un oiseau apprivoisé ? Si cet oiseau était perçu voletant à l'horizon, le discours affirmant que [l'oiseau] Théétète vole serait vrai. C'est donc seulement si Théétète désigne ce toi avec qui l'Étranger discute qu'il est faux de dire qu'il vole et vrai de dire qu'il est-assis. Encore faut-il ajouter que c'est maintenant qu'il est-assis, puisque Théétète n'est certainement pas toujours dans cette position. Vérité et fausseté portent donc sur l'ensemble de l'énoncé *et pas seulement sur le verbe, l'action*, comme le supposent la plupart des commentaires de ce passage.

Mais la question revient : faire de la sensation le critère de leur vérité autant que de leur fausseté, cela ne confère-t-il pas à ces énoncés la relativité dénoncée par Protagoras ? De fait, cela la contredit, d'abord parce que cela ne vaut que pour certains discours, ceux qui portent sur des choses sensibles. Leur vérité et leur fausseté doivent alors être rapportées à ce qui s'insère *entre* le mot et la chose, à l'opinion ou à la représentation imagée qu'en a celui qui affirme ou qui nie. L'opinion est vraisemblable quand l'âme pâtit (par chance, inspiration ou bon naturel) de la chose-même ; elle est fausse quand elle porte soit sur ce dont il n'y a pas de perception possible, soit qu'une distance spatiale ou temporelle infranchissable sépare le sujet percevant de l'objet de son opinion. Lorsqu'elle se fixe en affirmation ou négation, l'opinion tranche donc dans une double absence : celle, bien sûr, d'un savoir véritable qui atteindrait l'essence, dont elle ne soupçonne sans doute même

11 De moi et à propos de moi: *Sph.* 263a5, 9-10; de toi (*sos* 263c7) et à propos de toi (*peri sou*) 263b5-11, c1, d1.

pas l'existence, et une absence de doute quant à ce qu'elle perçoit. Que savoir consiste à percevoir est en effet l'opinion implicite en toute opinion, l'opinion constitutive de toute opinion ; en elle parle la nostalgie d'un savoir immédiat et si évident qu'il dispense l'âme de penser même cette pauvre pensée à laquelle nous sommes condamnés quand nous percevons mal, ou pas du tout. En affirmant et en niant, l'âme surmonte son dédoublement, se réunifie, elle ne se parle plus, elle affirme son affirmation ou sa négation, et face à elle, l'objet lui aussi s'unifie : il ne provoque aucune incertitude et est tenu pour être tel qu'il apparaît. L'inquiétude de la pensée naît de la possible différence entre l'être et l'apparence ; en la supprimant, l'opinion est, au double sens du terme, un achèvement (*ἀποτελεύτησις*) de la pensée (*Sph.* 264b1) qui la précédait : elle y met fin et elle remplit son attente. C'est ce que souhaite le promeneur et pourquoi il finit par se dire à lui-même : « c'est un homme », ou « c'est une statue ». Comment s'opère ce passage ? Rien ne l'indique : l'arrêt sur une opinion est toujours possible en fait, mais il n'a aucune possibilité transcendante ni aucune légitimité. Si elle est plus soucieuse de stabilité et de croyance que de vérité, l'âme peut affirmer ou nier une opinion dont le contenu peut être aussi bien inexistant qu'existant.

De la fausseté dans les discours à celle « parente » des images

La voix et l'image psychique possèdent une mystérieuse puissance : la première rend sensible ce qui ne l'est pas en manifestant la pensée par des sons, l'autre transforme en images un discours intérieur fait de mots. Elles résultent donc d'une union particulièrement étroite entre l'âme et le corps. Pour paraphraser la formule kantienne, un double « art caché dans les profondeurs de l'âme humaine » lui permet de moduler oralement ce qu'elle se dit en silence ou de le mettre en images. On comprend ainsi pourquoi la fausseté constitutive de l'image est parente de celle qui se mêle à l'opinion et au discours : le discours vrai produit en l'âme une opinion et une image vraisemblables de la chose et leur fausseté ne s'oppose qu'à cette sorte de vérité. Elles sont fausses si elles tiennent à distance les choses qui sont :

Insinuée dans la perception elle-même, mêlée aux opérations de la mémoire, ouvrant autour de nous l'horizon du possible, escortant le projet, l'espoir, la crainte, les conjectures, l'imagination est beaucoup plus qu'une faculté d'évoquer des images qui doubleraient le monde de nos perceptions directes, c'est un pouvoir d'écart grâce auquel nous nous représentons les choses distantes et nous nous distançons des réalités présentes (Starobinski 2000, 73-74).

Ce pouvoir d'écart d'avec les réalités (présentes ou non) fait que la vérité de ce monde imaginaire ne peut être que vrai-semblance. Une image est vraisemblable (εἰκός) quand l'âme *pâtît* de la chose même et affirme ce qu'elle lui semble être, et elle est fausse quand, s'écartant de la chose, elle lui *substitue* l'opinion ou l'image psychique qu'elle s'en fait. Alors qu'il pouvait paraître impossible de démontrer qu'opinions et images pouvaient être fausses, leur parenté avec le discours a permis de le faire plus vite que prévu.

Des choses qui sont et ne sont pas autour de chaque étant

Or « nous venons de dire, je pense, qu'autour de chaque étant, il y a beaucoup d'étants et beaucoup de non-étants (*Sph.* 263b11-12) ». Quels sont ces multiples étants ? Tous les êtres qui diffèrent de l'être dont on parle. Quand ils diffèrent de cet être en tant qu'il *est* et *est autre* que tous les autres êtres, il n'y en a pas alors beaucoup, mais une quantité illimitée donc incalculable¹². S'agissant de cette altérité quantitative entre des *étants* toute méprise suppose une similitude générique : un homme peut être pris pour un autre homme, pas pour un triangle ou une marmite à moins d'être complètement fou. Et quand ces multiples étants diffèrent de *ce qu'est* cet être, de son *ousia*, il y en a aussi une énorme quantité. C'est pourquoi en 263b11 il faut lire ὄντως : « dire à ton propos des choses qui sont ontiquement autres », et non pas « dire des choses qui sont autres que celles qui sont (ὄντων) ». Dans ce passage controversé, la différence entre ces deux lectures est fondamentale, car si les choses qui sont affirmées de Théétète sont autres non parce qu'elles ne sont *réellement* pas mais parce qu'elles diffèrent *des choses qui sont* à son propos (comme fait David Keyt 1973, 292, en complétant la définition du discours faux par « à propos de toi ») – cela réclamerait un inventaire complet de celles qui sont, inventaire non seulement impossible mais absurde. Or Platon ne dit pas cela, il dit que les images diffèrent des choses qui sont parce qu'elles *semblent ou paraissent* être sans être *réellement*. Mais que sont alors les multiples non-étants qui gravitent autour de Théétète ? Ses ombres, ses reflets, ses apparitions en songe, ou encore ses portraits et ses statues mais aussi toutes les images de lui que produisent les discours faux, « les images parlées (εἰδωλα λεγόμενα, *Sph.* 234c6) », « les apparences illusoires véhiculées dans les discours (τὰ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις φαντάσματα, *Sph.* 234e1-2) ».

12 Voir la note 1 de Diès 1925 à 257b citant Malebranche : « Ma main n'est pas ma chaise, ma chambre... Elle renferme pour ainsi dire une infinité de néants, les néants de tout ce qu'elle n'est point ». Voir aussi Queneau 1933, 374-376.

Le passage d'images à apparences illusoires précise de quelle espèce d'images il s'agit ; car si ce sont des semblants (εἰκόνες) elles peuvent avoir pour origine une opinion vraie et donner lieu à un discours vraisemblable, ce qui n'est pas le cas des apparences fabriquées par un discours faux. Toutes étant structurées comme des discours, ces images peuvent être très convaincantes. Mais certaines se contentent de diffuser celles véhiculées par la langue (γλῶσσα) qu'on parle, et comme celle-ci procède des opinions de son nomothète (public ou privé) elles se trouvent d'emblée relativisées, tandis que d'autres les produisent : est faux le discours qui affirme comme étant *même* que la chose l'image qu'il produit en en parlant. « Théétète vole » est faux parce qu'il n'existe pas de toi-même volant, or le discours non seulement en produit un mais il affirme ce Théétète volant comme existant et comme même que ce Théétète avec qui moi à présent je discute. Un Théétète volant, ce serait un Théétète mythique, pas un Théétète réel, alors qu'un Théétète dit être marchant alors qu'il serait-assis serait un Théétète un peu plus jeune ou un peu plus vieux. La confusion s'opérerait alors entre un Théétète pris à deux moments du temps, entre un souvenir et une anticipation, donc entre une image psychique et une perception présente. La vérité et la fausseté d'un discours doivent donc être rapportées à ce qui s'insère *entre* le mot et la chose : l'opinion qu'en a celui qui affirme ou qui nie, ou l'image psychique qu'il produit et donne à voir. Il y a fausseté lorsque l'on affirme que ce qui n'a pour être que d'être autre, l'image, est la chose même. À quoi on pourrait objecter qu'il existe des degrés dans la fausseté et que le discours qui affirme un Théétète marchant alors qu'il est-assis est moins faux que celui qui dit volant ce Théétète avec qui maintenant je converse. Voire.

Mise en scène

Le sérieux avec lequel certains interprètes glosent cet exercice de mimétique n'a en effet d'égal que leur inconscience du fait que c'est bien de *mimesis*, d'une espèce de *production imitative*, qu'il s'agit (Benardete 1984, II.157-160 est ici une exception notable). « Théétète est-assis » n'est vrai que parce que Platon nous le fait croire et qu'il nous paraît vraisemblable que Théétète le soit, plus vraisemblable assurément que s'il nous avait représenté un interlocuteur volant. Mais le choix de ces exemples ne peut sembler innocent qu'aux innocents qui croient que lorsque Platon achève son Dialogue sur l'art mimétique propre au sophiste, il fait pour sa part de la mimétique sans le savoir. Ce *toi* et ce *moi* sur lesquels est censé porter le discours vrai aussi bien que le discours faux sont les héros d'une scène que nous tenons pour

réelle parce qu'elle a toutes les apparences de la réalité. Or Théétète n'est que l'image produite par l'écriture de Platon d'un Théétète réel mort depuis longtemps :

Dramatically, we, the audience, are on our Monday in the company of Euclides and Terpsion in Megara in 369, while the middle-aged Theaetetus is dying and when Socrates has been dead for thirty years. But on our Tuesday we are, dramatically, in Athens in 399 in the lively company of Socrates, Theodorus, the Stranger and the promising lad Theaetetus (G. Ryle, *Plato's Progress* 30).

Quant à l'Étranger éléatique, c'est un masque. Il nous faut donc avoir foi en la valeur du témoignage d'un personnage fictif conversant avec un Théétète mort depuis longtemps et qui est aussi peu assis que l'actuel Roi de France est chauve : le dialogue qui les met face à face ne peut, lui aussi, qu'être une fiction. Aucun des deux exemples que vient d'avancer l'Étranger n'est donc vraiment vrai, mais l'un peut *sembler* vrai et pas l'autre. Nous ne croyons à la scène qui nous est racontée que parce que Platon est capable de nous y faire croire et il prouve ainsi la puissance mimétique, poétique, du discours, puissance qu'il tient de sa nature verbale. Quand il situe ce qu'il affirme dans le temps des horloges et pas dans le temps de toujours, un verbe fait du discours le récit d'un événement. En d'autres termes, Platon nous raconte un roman et il le met en scène ; privé de toute dimension interrogative, un discours ne peut en effet être qu'un $\mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\acute{o}\varsigma$, pas un logos. Quant à ceux qui jugeraient ces considérations fantaisistes, ce que je pourrais leur conseiller de mieux serait d'aller voir ce que dit Diès (1923, n.1) de la scène d'ouverture du *Parménide* : « Le but est de rendre la fiction vraisemblable, mais sans qu'elle cesse d'être sentie et goûtée comme fiction. » Soyons un peu moins dupes de cette bonne mimétique platonicienne – bonne en ce qu'elle devrait pousser à s'interroger sur la sorte de vérité dont pourrait être vrai un énoncé tel que « Théétète est-assis ». Mais en disant que « Théétète vole » est faux, Platon a du même coup différencié le fictif et le faux : un $\mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\acute{o}\varsigma$ n'est pas faux du seul fait d'être un récit, il peut sembler à certains être vrai et à d'autres être faux, et « si on nous offre en ces matières une vraisemblable histoire, il ne convient pas d'aller chercher plus loin (*Ti.* 28c7, cf. *Grg.* 523a1-2, *Plt.* 275b1, voir Brisson 1982). Ne cherchons donc pas plus loin, ou cessons au moins de croire à la vérité incontestable d'un Théétète mort assis face à un Étranger anonyme.

La question de savoir dans quelle espèce de fabrication d'images ranger le sophiste (l'eikastique ou la phantastique) était restée ouverte tant que l'existence de la fausseté n'avait pas été démontrée, mais il était néanmoins

entendu que le sophiste devait être rangé dans l'une ou dans l'autre. Les conditions permettant de trancher étant à présent réunies, il est possible de procéder à une dernière division et de définir enfin la nature du sophiste.

Sulla lotta e le altre τέχναι. Protagora nel *Sofista*

Michele Corradi

Pisa

Plato's *Sophist* ascribes to Protagoras a treatise on wrestling and other techniques, containing arguments that can challenge the specialists of any τέχνη (232d-e). Other evidence allows us to reconstruct the nature of Protagoras' attack against the τέχναι. On the basis of the Hippocratic treatise *Περὶ τέχνης*, which was probably written as a response to Protagoras, it is possible to suppose that the sophist used arguments of Eleatic origin. Moreover, Protagoras continues to be one of Plato's main polemical targets in the *Sophist* well beyond the section where he is explicitly referred to: parallels from other dialogues show that the Eleatic argument concerning the impossibility of falsehood developed by the Stranger of Elea at 236e-241d may have Protagoras' writings as model.

Protagoras, *technai*, not-Being, antilogic, Eleatics.

A differenza di quanto accade nella produzione giovanile, in cui Platone si misura con le diverse figure di sofisti che danno nome ai vari dialoghi, Protagora, Gorgia e Ippia, o che comunque svolgono in essi un ruolo importante, com'è il caso di Polo, Prodicco e Trasimaco, nel *Sofista* la ricerca assume una prospettiva più universale, spostandosi per così dire dalle figure individuali al genere del sofista. E nonostante si possa tentare di riconoscere questo o quel sofista dietro le caratteristiche evocate nel susseguirsi delle διαίρεσεις, nel passaggio dal particolare all'universale, che costituisce la differenza principale tra il *Sofista* e i dialoghi precedenti, i nomi scompaiono. C'è però un'eccezione molto significativa: Protagora. Per quanto il nome di Protagora non sia direttamente menzionato, ma evocato da Teeteto con l'aggettivo Πρωταγόρεια (232d), quella del sofista di Abdera è l'unica figura a cui il *Sofista* rinvia esplicitamente¹. Il dato di per sé colpisce, ma, al di là dell'aggettivo Πρωταγόρεια, è forse possibile scoprire nel dialogo una più ampia trama di riferimenti a Protagora. Del resto, non dobbiamo dimenticare che il *Sofista* è concepito da Platone quale continuazione del *Teeteto*, dialogo che per più di un terzo della sua estensione si confronta con il principio protagoreo dell'uomo-misura². Inoltre, molte definizioni proposte

1 Cf. Robinson 2013.

2 Cf. Friedländer 1975, 224-28.

nel *Sofista* sembrano riprendere temi del dialogo che ha il sofista di Abdera come protagonista, per l'appunto il *Protagora*³.

Ma osserviamo da vicino il contesto del *Sofista* in cui il riferimento a Protagora si fa più esplicito. Dopo la problematica evocazione della γενναία σοφιστική (226a-231b), lo Straniero di Elea decide di riprendere la definizione a suo avviso più indicativa, cioè la quinta, in cui il sofista è presentato quale esperto dell'antilogia (224e-226a). Lo Straniero offre allora un catalogo degli argomenti intorno ai quali il sofista insegna a praticare quest'arte: divino, mondo fisico, γένεσις e οὐσία, νόμοι e politica (232b-d). Il sofista inoltre rende i propri allievi capaci di discutere per antilogie su tutte le arti, tanto nel loro complesso quanto prese singolarmente: c'è infatti un'ampia circolazione di scritti contenenti argomentazioni con cui poter controbattere, ἀντειπεῖν, a proposito di ogni τέχνη gli stessi δημιουργοί. Teeteto identifica tali scritti con la produzione di Protagora sulla lotta e le altre arti, περί τε πάλης καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν (232d-e = 80 B 8 DK = 31 D 2 LM). Lo Straniero precisa che molti altri sofisti hanno composto opere di questo tipo e che in sostanza la peculiarità della tecnica antilogica è poter mettere in discussione ogni cosa: è però impossibile che un uomo sia in grado di conoscere veramente ogni cosa così da poter contraddire lo specialista nella propria disciplina⁴. Il sofista, dunque, dà soltanto l'impressione di essere competente su ogni argomento, ma non possiede l'ἀλήθεια bensì una paradossale δοξαστική ἐπιστήμη, scienza che rende capaci di esprimere opinioni su tutto senza possedere un sapere saldo (232e-233c).

A che tipo di scritto di Protagora si riferisce lo Straniero? Non è chiaro se l'immagine della lotta richiamata quale oggetto dell'opera sia da prendere alla lettera – in questo senso anche la lotta sarebbe stata inclusa fra le τέχναι attaccate da Protagora⁵ – o sia una metafora per indicare il metodo antilogico⁶. M. Untersteiner ipotizza che questo scritto fosse una parte delle *Antilogie*, opera in due libri che compare, proprio a lato di un Περί πάλης, nel catalogo degli scritti di Protagora trasmesso da Diogene Laerzio (IX 55 = 80 A 1 DK = 31 D 1 LM)⁷. Secondo Untersteiner il passo nel suo insieme farebbe allusione a quest'opera: la lista degli argomenti intorno ai quali,

3 Per una rassegna delle analogie, cf. Narcy 2013b.

4 La posizione di Protagora è particolarmente problematica all'interno del dialogo in ragione del ruolo che lo Straniero di Elea attribuisce alle τέχναι per la ricerca della definizione del sofista. Cf. Dixsaut 2022, 337-434.

5 Cf. Fait 2021.

6 Cf. Gavray 2021.

7 Untersteiner 1947-1948.

secondo lo Straniero, si sarebbe esercitato l'insegnamento dell'arte antilogica corrisponderebbe in modo puntuale alle diverse sezioni delle *Antilogie* di Protagora. L'ipotesi, per quanto affascinante, è difficile da dimostrare. Del resto, nel passo del *Sofista*, oltre la menzione del Περὶ πάλης, sono presenti altre possibili allusioni a titoli di Protagora noti alla tradizione. Se il costante riferimento alla tecnica antilogica (232b, 232e, 233b e 233c) può certo richiamare le già citate *Antilogie* (80 B 5 DK = 31 R 1 LM e IX 55 = 80 A 1 DK = 31 D 1 LM), si deve notare l'uso del verbo καταβάλλειν (232d7) per indicare la stesura degli scritti antilogici: Καταβάλλοντες era probabilmente un titolo alternativo dell'Ἀλήθεια, documentato da Sesto Empirico (*M.* VII 60 = 80 B 1 DK = 31 R 20 LM). Ma lo stesso titolo Ἀλήθεια, al quale Platone fa riferimento, con una certa enfasi, anche nel *Cratilo* (391c = 80 A 24 DK = 31 D 5 LM) e nel *Teeteto* (161c = 80 B 1 DK = 31 D5a LM, 162a, 166c-d = 80 A 21a DK = 31 D 38 LM, 170e-171a e 171c), risuona forse nelle parole dello Straniero secondo cui il sofista non possiede l'ἀλήθεια ma solo una certa δοξαστική ἐπιστήμη (233c)⁸. Con queste allusioni, Platone sembra segnalare che l'intera sezione del *Sofista* intende descrivere un tipo di sofista che molto si avvicina a Protagora.

Ma in che cosa consisteva concretamente l'attacco protagoreo alle τέχναι? Altre testimonianze offrono indicazioni in proposito. Il *Protagora* mostra che il sofista svalutava dal punto di vista pedagogico τέχναι quali calcolo, astronomia, geometria e musica nel nome dell'insegnamento dell'εὐβουλία (318d-319a = 80 A 5 DK = 31 D 37 LM). Inoltre, nel mito di Prometeo (320c-322d = 80 C 1 DK = 31 D 40 LM), Protagora oppone chiaramente la πολιτική τέχνη, oggetto del proprio insegnamento, alle τέχναι artigianali⁹. Una puntuale critica del sofista nei confronti della geometria è testimoniata da Aristotele (*Metaph.* B.997b-998a = 80 B 7 DK = 31 D 33 LM). Ma anche la medicina doveva essere coinvolta nella polemica di Protagora, se è vero che, come è stato sostenuto con buoni argomenti in ultimo da J. E. Mann¹⁰, il sofista era uno di quei professionisti della diffamazione delle arti ai quali risponde il trattato ippocratico Περὶ τέχνης (I). Fra gli argomenti avanzati in difesa della medicina nel trattato vorrei soffermarmi in particolare su quello che significativamente apre l'argomentazione. All'inizio del cap. II si afferma che in generale non vi è nessuna τέχνη che non esista, οὐκ ἐοῦσα. Infatti è ἄλογον reputare che qualcuna delle cose che sono non esista. Ci si domanda infatti quale οὐσίη delle cose che non sono, τῶν γε μὴ ὄντων,

8 Cf. Corradi 2012, 197-202.

9 Cf. Bonazzi 2022.

10 Mann 2012, 39-49.

potrebbe essere mai osservata, θεησάμενος, così che si possa dire che esista, ἀπαγγεῖλαιεν ὡς ἔστιν. Ma, se anche fosse possibile vedere τὰ μὴ ἔόντα proprio come si vedono τὰ ἔόντα, non si sa come qualcuno potrebbe pensare che non esistano proprio quelle cose che si possono vedere con gli occhi e che la mente può concepire come esistenti, ἃ γε εἴη καὶ ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδεῖν καὶ γνώμη νοῆσαι ὡς ἔστιν. Ma, al contrario, secondo l'autore del trattato, le cose che sono, τὰ μὲν ἔόντα, sono sempre viste e conosciute, αἰεὶ ὁρᾶταί τε καὶ γινώσκεται, mentre quelle che non sono, τὰ δὲ μὴ ἔόντα, né sono viste né sono conosciute, οὔτε ὁρᾶται οὔτε γινώσκεται. E dal momento che ormai sono state insegnate, le arti sono conosciute, γινώσκεται, e non ve n'è alcuna che non sia osservata a partire da una qualche forma visibile, ἕκ τινος εἶδεος. Del resto, secondo l'autore ippocratico, le τέχναι hanno ricevuto i nomi a causa degli εἶδεα: è infatti assurdo ed impossibile reputare che gli εἶδεα si producano, βλαστάνειν, dai nomi, perché gli ὀνόματα sono convenzioni della natura, φύσιος νομοθετήματα, mentre gli εἶδεα non sono νομοθετήματα, ma sono sue produzioni, βλαστήματα.

Non è possibile soffermarsi sui numerosi problemi esegetici relativi al testo. Com'è stato sottolineato da J. Jouanna¹¹, evidente è qui il rapporto con l'eleatismo nell'affermazione che è impossibile che ciò che non è esista e sia conosciuto. Contrariamente alla tesi parmenidea però gli oggetti della percezione sensibile, in particolare della vista, partecipano pienamente dell'essere. Lo stesso apparire delle τέχναι e la loro efficacia è garanzia del loro esistere, il loro nome, pur convenzionale, deriva da forme dell'essere. L'eleatismo aveva probabilmente costituito un problema per l'arte medica: per Melisso, espressamente citato nel *De natura hominis* (1 = 30 A 6 DK = 21 R 1 LM), l'essere è esente da ogni forma di trasformazione e di sofferenza (30 B 7 DK = 21 D 10 LM; cfr. *Nat.Hom.* 2). Nel *Περὶ τέχνης* gli argomenti di matrice eleatica sono però avanzati in difesa delle τέχναι. È possibile pensare che l'impiego di questa particolare strategia di difesa rispondesse ad un qualche uso di argomenti eleatici da parte dell'avversario delle τέχναι?

Certo la tradizione ci consegna l'immagine di un Protagora oppositore dell'eleatismo: nel *Περὶ τοῦ ὄντος* (80 B 2 DK = 31 R 2 LM) formulava argomenti contro chi concepiva l'essere come uno. Inoltre, la stessa Ἀλήθεια di Protagora sembra costituire una risposta alla posizione di Parmenide. E alla problematica eleatica può forse essere ricondotta la tesi dell'οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν che all'ambiente di Protagora assegna Platone (*Euthd.* 286c = 80 A 19 DK = 31 R 10 LM). In alcuni casi, è possibile dimostrare che, come

11 Jouanna 1988, 175-176.

Gorgia, Protagora polemizzasse con l'eleatismo tramite l'uso di argomenti di origine eleatica: la posizione protagorea in base alla quale ogni opinione è vera, almeno nella ricostruzione che ne offre Platone nel *Teeteto*, sembra basarsi sul presupposto eleatico dell'impossibilità del non essere (166c-167d = 80 A 21a DK = 31 D 38 LM)¹².

Purtroppo non è possibile ricostruire in che modo Protagora applicasse argomenti di natura eleatica all'ambito delle τέχναι: certo vale la pena sottolineare come la già ricordata critica alla geometria (80 B 7 DK = 31 D 33 LM) sia chiaramente fondata sul problema del rapporto tra essere e αἴσθησις, centrale per Parmenide, ma risolto da Protagora in modo opposto agli eleati, ossia in termini sensistici. Se da quanto detto appare dunque plausibile che Protagora facesse ricorso ad argomenti di matrice eleatica nella critica alle τέχναι, all'interno del *Sofista* il passaggio alla settima definizione risulterebbe più graduale.

Come abbiamo messo in evidenza, sulla base dell'ἀντιλογικὴ τέχνη lo Straniero giunge ad attribuire al sofista la δοξαστικὴ ἐπιστήμη, capace di produrre opinione e non verità su ogni cosa. La sofistica appartarrebbe dunque all'ambito dell'inganno e della μίμησις (233c-236d). Si giunge così al problema della possibilità di dire e opinare il falso: come si può sostenere che dire e opinare il falso siano qualcosa di reale senza incorrere in contraddizione? In effetti tale λόγος implica che il non essere sia: vale infatti l'equivalenza, tipica della lingua greca, fra le espressioni τὰ μὴ ὄντα λέγειν e ψευδῆ λέγειν. Per lo Straniero, questo λόγος si pone dunque chiaramente in contrasto con l'interdizione parmenidea del non essere, puntualmente richiamata con una citazione del Περὶ φύσεως (28 B 7 DK = 19 D 8 LM). Per lo Straniero il non essere non può essere riferito a nessuna delle cose che sono. Non si può riferire a un τί, a qualche cosa, perché ogni τί si riferisce a qualcosa che è. E non dire un τί equivale a non dire nulla di sensato, παντάπασι μηδὲν λέγειν. A ciò che non è non può essere riferito il numero, nonostante siamo soliti usare le espressioni, rispettivamente singolare e plurale, τὸ μὴ ὄν e τὰ μὴ ὄντα. Non è dunque possibile né pronunciare, φθέγξασθαι, correttamente, ὀρθῶς, né dire, εἰπεῖν, né pensare, διανοηθῆναι, il non essere, preso di per sé, αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό: questo è infatti ἀδιανόητον, ἄρρητον, ἀφθεγκτον e ἄλογον (238c). L'attribuzione di questi predicati al non essere pone però ulteriori problemi: essi si riferiscono al μὴ ὄν come se fosse uno. Ma il μὴ ὄν, se ci si esprime correttamente, ὀρθῶς, non può essere detto né uno né molteplice. Lo Straniero si dichiara vinto: si deve rinunciare

12 Sui rapporti tra Protagora e l'eleatismo cf. ora Corradi 2022 e Corradi 2023, con ulteriori rimandi bibliografici.

a cercare nelle sue parole l'ὁρθολογία περὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν, il modo corretto di esprimersi su ciò che non è (236e-239b). A questo punto si apre una seconda fase della ricerca che riprende il problema della definizione dell'εἶδωλον: l'εἶδωλον ad un tempo non è realmente, ὄντως, ma è realmente ciò che diciamo εἰκόν, immagine somigliante. Inoltre, lo Straniero constata come, per mezzo dell'arte dell'inganno, l'ἀπατητική, il sofista faccia sì che la nostra anima opini il falso, ψευδῇ δοξάζειν. L'opinione falsa è quella che opina l'opposto di ciò che è, τάναντία τοῖς οὔσι, ossia ciò che non è: in base ad essa le cose che non sono si trovano in qualche modo ad essere. E il discorso falso è quello che dice essere le cose che sono e non essere le cose che non sono, τὰ τε ὄντα λέγων μὴ εἶναι καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα εἶναι. Il sofista secondo lo Straniero non potrà mai accettare la conclusione raggiunta, sulla base del presupposto parmenideo, precedentemente accolto, per cui il non essere non può in nessun modo essere. A questo punto allo Straniero non resta che operare il celebre parricidio e, superando la tesi di Parmenide, ammettere che il non essere in qualche misura possa essere (239b-241d).

Ci troviamo di fronte ad un argomento, quello dell'impossibilità del discorso e dell'opinione falsi che ricorre in molti altri dialoghi di Platone: è sviluppato nell'*Eutidemo* (283e-284a), dove è messo in relazione con la già ricordata dottrina protagorea dell'οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν (285e-286c = 80 A 19 DK = 31 R 10 LM). Nel *Teeteto* la tesi per cui non è possibile τὰ μὴ ὄντα ... δοξάζσαι (167a), ripresa anche nella seconda parte del dialogo (188d-189b), è attribuita a Protagora. Ci sono tracce dell'argomento anche nel *Cratilo* (429c-d), nella *Repubblica* (478b) e nel *Parmenide* (142a), dialoghi in cui è possibile scorgere una presenza più o meno ampia della riflessione di Protagora¹³. Mettendo a confronto il passo del *Sofista* che abbiamo appena analizzato con *Eutidemo* (283e-284a, 285e-286b) e *Teeteto* (188d-189b), A. Capizzi¹⁴ mostra come nei tre dialoghi Platone si riferisca ad uno stesso argomento, ascrivibile probabilmente a Protagora. Per quanto *Eutidemo* e *Sofista* si concentrino sul problema dello ψεύδεσθαι mentre il *Teeteto* su quello dello ψευδῇ δοξάζειν (che preferisco rendere con “opinare” e non con “immaginare”, come invece fa Capizzi) e per quanto la discussione del *Sofista* presenti una maggiore complessità, emergono infatti in modo chiaro articolazioni analoghe¹⁵. Secondo Capizzi, l'argomento si svilupperebbe in 6 tappe che si trovano, pur in ordine diverso, in tutti e tre i testi: 1) dire (o

13 Cf. Notomi 1999, 179-183

14 Capizzi 1955, 51-61.

15 Lo sottolinea Notomi 1999, 183-189.

opinare) il vero equivale a dire (o opinare) ciò che è, mentre dire (o opinare) il falso equivale a dire (o opinare) ciò che non è (*Euthd.* 284a, *Sph.* 237a, *Tht.* 188d); 2) ma nessuno può dire (o opinare) ciò che non è (*Euthd.* 284c, *Sph.* 238c, *Tht.* 189b); 3) perché chi dice (o opina) qualcosa dice (o opina) ciò che è (*Euthd.* 284a, *Sph.* 237d, *Tht.* 189a); 4) mentre chi dice (o opina) ciò che non è, non dice (o opina) nulla (*Euthd.* 286c, *Sph.* 237e, *Tht.* 189a); 5) perciò il dire (o l'opinare) il falso non esiste (*Euthd.* 286c, *Sph.* 236e, *Tht.* 188c); 6) e neanche può esistere la δόξα falsa (*Euthd.* 286d, *Sph.* 236e, *Tht.* 189b). Nonostante la ricostruzione di Capizzi, spesso ignorata dai commentatori del dialogo, abbia un carattere ipotetico, mi pare plausibile che in questa sezione del *Sofista* Platone possa ancora riferirsi a tesi di Protagora e che pertanto il sofista di Abdera continui ad essere uno dei principali obiettivi polemici di Platone ben oltre la sezione in cui è esplicitamente richiamato. Si noti tra l'altro la particolare insistenza, in relazione al non essere, sul piano linguistico dell'ὀρθῶς φηγέσθαι e dell'ὀρθῶς εἰπεῖν (238c), che certo suggerisce un rapporto con il tema dell'ὀρθοεπεία, centrale per le ricerche di Protagora (80 A 26 DK = 31 D 22 LM)¹⁶. Colpisce tra l'altro la presenza del termine ὀρθολογία (239b), *hapax* in Platone e *primum dictum* nella letteratura greca, che può forse essere interpretato come una velata allusione proprio alla parola ὀρθοεπεία.

Se le ipotesi formulate colgono in qualche misura nel segno, la particolare successione degli argomenti nel testo del *Sofista* svela come un'ampia porzione del dialogo contenga un confronto a distanza con Protagora. Come emerge dalla testimonianza del *Περὶ τέχνης*, il sofista di Abdera aveva forse ripreso argomenti eleatici per sviluppare una polemica nei confronti delle τέχναι tramite l'antilogia, tecnica che tra l'altro proprio nell'eleatismo affonda con Zenone le proprie radici, e, molto probabilmente, con la dottrina dell'uomo-misura, aveva esteso al piano della δόξα quel divieto parmenideo del non essere su cui la dea fondava il cammino dell'ἀλήθεια¹⁷. Proprio quella strana alleanza tra la sofistica e il grande Parmenide, che nel pensiero di Protagora trova una significativa manifestazione, costituisce per Platone una delle sfide più complesse per la propria ontologia: contro di essa il filosofo, con la maschera dello Straniero, è chiamato a combattere nel *Sofista* la più aspra delle battaglie.

16 Cf. Corradi 2012, 144-175.

17 Vale la pena ricordare che sulla base del principio dell'uomo-misura per Protagora alle cose che non sono è comunque possibile attribuire il non essere. Cf. Corradi 2022, 92-93.

VIII. Before and After the Sophist

Socratic Philosophy on Trial: Plato's *Sophist* and its Homeric Model

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The *Sophist* begins with Socrates' concern that the Eleatic Stranger may be a god in disguise, come to punish him for some "weakness in speeches"—as Socrates accused himself in the *Theaetetus*. Socrates apparently anticipates a philosophic trial in the context of his political trial. He provides a model for it, citing two passages in Homer's *Odyssey*: Odysseus warning the Cyclops about Zeus avenging wrong done to strangers is echoed by an anonymous suitor warning the wicked Antinous against abusing the beggar who may be a god in disguise. Applying the idea of a hidden god to the being of the philosopher behind the apparitions of sophist and statesman, Socrates introduces the theme of the conversations that follow. The idea of a punitive god, on the other hand, in Odysseus' warning to the Cyclops, provides a template for the interaction of Socrates with Theodorus and the Stranger, whose multiple roles display the trial of Socratic philosophy in light of two rivals. While the status of mathematics is taken up in the *Statesman*, the *Sophist* highlights the Stranger's technical method: his separation of like from like, paying no attention to rank, is contrasted with an art of purification that separates better from worse, which sounds like Socratic midwifery. But when the Stranger's procedure proves unable to separate Socrates from the ignoble sophist, he must resort to Socrates' evaluative inquiry. The Eleatic Stranger, like the Megarian and Pythagorean narrators of the *Theaetetus* and *Phaedo*, prefigures the schools of philosophy that will emerge after the death of Socrates. In demonstrating the limits of those post-Socratic schools to transmit Socratic philosophy, Plato's dialogues show their own indispensable accomplishment.

Odyssey, Socrates' philosophic trial, post-Socratic

Introduction

Immersed in the complex ontological issues of Plato's *Sophist*, it can be easy to forget that the dialogue belongs in the sequence representing Socrates' trial and death.¹ On the day following his conversation with the young mathematician Theaetetus, which initiates this series, Socrates meets up with

1 The set of dialogues—*Tht.*, *Euthyphr.*, *Sph.*, *Plt.*, *Ap.*, *Cri.*, *Phd.*—includes the quartet of practical conversations centered on Socrates' political trial and the theoretical trilogy that begins with the question, What is knowledge? Actually, the *Sophist* is introduced as the second dialogue in a promised quartet, to be followed by the *Plt.* and completed by *The Philosopher*—a plan confirmed at the opening of the *Plt.* (257a-b).

a Stranger from Elea and expresses fear that he may be a god in disguise, come to punish him for some failing: Socrates apparently anticipates some kind of philosophic trial in the context of his political trial. To conduct it, the Stranger will have to examine the problem of non-being, falsehood and image in his search for the sophist, which is in turn the way into the question, What is the philosopher? Why must that question be addressed so indirectly, through a trial of Socrates, which he cannot conduct himself?

Plato provides some clues in Socrates' opening reception of the Eleatic Stranger through a double reference to Homer's *Odyssey*.² Socrates indicates the primary application of the Homeric model to himself. But Plato's multifaceted portrayal of three interlocutors—Socrates, Theodorus, and the Stranger—invites a thought-experiment exploring other permutations, applied to the mathematics teacher who struggled with Socrates in the prior conversation and the Parmenidean philosopher he has brought with him on this occasion. The significance goes beyond their individual natures to their importance as representatives of alternatives to Socratic philosophy. Can mathematics defend its status as the paradigm of precise knowledge? Is the Eleatic method superior to Socratic examination of opinion? While mathematics is taken up in the *Statesman*, the *Sophist* highlights the contrast between the Stranger and Socrates, for which the Homeric model provides a basis.³

I. The God of Strangers in the *Odyssey*

The first reference to the *Odyssey*, which Socrates paraphrases with an explicit appeal to Homer, comes from Book 9, when Odysseus exhorts the monstrous Cyclops to fear Zeus, the guest god who requites wrong done to strangers and suppliants. The second reference, a partial quotation, comes from Book 17, when a young, unnamed suitor exhorts Antinous, the worst

2 See the Appendix at the end of this paper. Scholars who comment on the Homeric passages in the *Sophist* include: Benardete 1984, II. 69-70; Rosen 1983, 62-66; Howland 1997, 49-50, 170-171; Casadesús Bordoy 2013, 17-18; Francois Renaud, "Socrate citateur d'Homère dans le prologue du *Sophiste*," this volume.

3 Mathematics becomes an explicit issue at the center of the *Plt.*, when the Stranger puts forward the measure of the mean as superior to mathematical measure (cf. note 12 below). The self-defense of Socratic philosophy takes shape throughout the Platonic corpus in confrontation with two great challenges: the philosophic life vs. the political life and the philosopher vs. the poet. Those contests remain on the horizon of the trilogy, where the rivals to Socratic political philosophy belong within the theoretical sphere, each with a claim to possess knowledge in a more technical form.

of the lot, that the beggar he is mistreating—Odysseus in disguise—may be one of the gods who appear among us in the semblance of strangers. This double reference indicates with wonderful brevity the fundamental structure of the *Odyssey*: Odysseus' narrative of his fantasy adventures in the first half of the poem is mirrored, in the second half, by the reality of the domestic and political situation he faces back home. While the cannibalistic giant represents a pre-civilized condition of bestiality, his realistic replacement is a cruel man who abuses the stranger in his midst. The Odysseus of Book 9 is the "man of many ways" and the narration of his fantasy adventures exhibits a theoretical interest in understanding the nature of things, especially human beings in all their diversity. Everything he learned in that journey colors Odysseus' experience back in Ithaca, where he faces the practical task of taking back his wife and his estate. Both episodes capture the significance of guest-friendship: while that practice promotes the recognition of humanity, beyond any particular political identity, it is supported by the idea that the stranger could be a hidden god.

With his appropriation of these *Odyssey* passages at the opening of the *Sophist*, Plato builds on Homer's foundation, but he provides a sign of his own philosophic concerns by means of a slight alteration. He has Socrates re-mix the two passages, inserting into Odysseus' speech about the punitive god of strangers the young suitor's caution about the gods' watching over human outrage, leaving in that speech only the conception of the gods' shifting shapes as they roam through the cities. Applying the paradigm of hidden gods to the being of the philosopher behind his apparitions, Socrates introduces the theme of the two dialogues. The idea of punitive gods meting out justice, on the other hand, governs the "action" of the dialogues: Odysseus' warning the criminal Cyclops about an avenging god serves as the template for the interaction of the three interlocutors and speculation on their multiple roles provides a lens through which to view the philosophic trial of Socratic philosophy.

II. The Being of the Philosopher and His Apparitions

It is Theodorus' introduction of his guest from Elea as a "very philosophic man" that leads Socrates to respond immediately with his appeal to Homer: Zeus *Xenios* attends strangers with a sense of just shame (*Sophist* 216a, *Odyssey* IX. 270-271), and gods appearing as strangers watch over human *hubris* and lawfulness (*Odyssey* XVII.487). Socrates' concern that the Stranger may be "some kind of refutative god" come to punish them for

being “poor in speeches” echoes the terms Socrates applied to himself and Theaetetus in the previous conversation, when they failed in their effort to define knowledge (*Theaetetus* 197a). Theodorus rejects Socrates’ concern along with his poetic language: it is no god he has brought with him, though he calls the Stranger, like all philosophers, “divine.” Socrates pounces on the mathematician’s literal-minded correction to introduce the central problem of the dialogue. The Stranger may not be a god in disguise, but it is just as hard to recognize the true being of the philosophers, who, due to the ignorance of the many, are bound to appear at times as sophists, at times as statesmen, while sometimes giving the impression of being crazy. The Stranger is about to undertake a paired inquiry into sophist and statesman, while he realizes he may himself appear crazy when his effort to capture the sophist compels him to attack his intellectual father, Parmenides (242a-b).

The philosopher’s likeness to the Homeric gods prompts the task of the inquiry Socrates assigns to the Stranger (216d-217a): if it is pleasing to him, Socrates would like to know “what those in that place”—the Eleatics? the philosophers who look down from on high?—“believe and name these”: sophist, statesman, philosopher. To Theodorus’ reasonable query, What about them?, Socrates clarifies: Did they consider them one, two, or, like their names, three? Theodorus offers his guest’s willingness, without consulting him at all, to take on the assignment. The Stranger can immediately report the simple answer “three”: a plurality of independent units, each in itself a Parmenidean one, displays the paradoxical affinity of Eleatic thought with mathematics. Counting the beings attached to three names raises no problem of a hidden nature behind multiple appearances. In contrast, the Stranger admits, it is a real challenge to address the Socratic question “What is it?”.

His guest is making excuses now, Theodorus complains, as he did in a similar discussion on their way to the present gathering. Socrates presses the Stranger not to refuse this favor, but only to choose the manner of inquiry: would the Stranger be more pleased to deliver a long speech himself, or proceed through questions? Socrates recollects the occasion in his youth when he heard the aged Parmenides conduct “all-beautiful speeches” through questioning. Of course, in that “laborious game” (*Parmenides* 137b), the venerable philosopher hardly seemed concerned with the opinions of his youthful interlocutor, and the Stranger now reveals his Parmenidean heritage: questioning through dialogue is easier as long as the other participates painlessly, but if he doubts or resists, it’s easier by oneself. Socrates recommends Theaetetus. But the Stranger is torn: he feels shame, coming together with this group for the first time, if he were simply to deliver a

long speech by himself or in reply to another, as if making a display, but the issue before them really requires a monologue (217d). And yet, refusing to gratify Socrates and the others would appear unfriendly, “unbecoming a stranger (*axenos*) and savage.” So, in the end he accepts Theaetetus as his docile partner in the conversation.

III. The Interlocutors of the Sophist on the Homeric Model

This opening exchange about the conduct of the inquiry already hints at the interaction of Socrates, Theodorus, and the Stranger on Homer's mythical model of Odysseus' speech to the Cyclops.⁴

1a) Socrates' explicit paraphrase of that passage implies his self-identification as Odysseus, addressing a warning to Theodorus as the Cyclops, about the Stranger as a disguised god with punitive intentions. The suitability of this role for Theodorus is suggested by the way he introduced Socrates to his star student the day before. Worried that his high praise could be construed as a sign of desire for the youth, he makes sure to note that Theaetetus is not beautiful—in fact, he tells Socrates, with his snub nose and bulging eyes, the young man bears a close resemblance to you (*Theaetetus* 143e)! As the discussion proceeds Theodorus pushes Theaetetus forward with little concern for his consent, while repeatedly struggling himself to escape from Socrates' examination of his opinions.⁵

1b) Socrates' worry, however, about the punishment of “those of us poor in speeches” must mean above all himself. He is alluding to the self-critique he shared with Theaetetus when he remarked on how shameless it seems to be using words like “to know” precisely while lacking an answer to the question, What is knowledge? Theaetetus wonders how it would be possible to proceed without that. A contradictor (*antilogikos*), Socrates admits, would never allow them to go forward, but being so inferior, they should dare to say what it is to know. Theaetetus urges, “Dare, by Zeus! (197a), but Socrates worries now that he is paying the price for that boldness.

4 See the Appendix for an outline of the permutations that follow.

5 This is bound to be disastrous for a teacher of geometry attracted to Protagoras' sophistic relativism (see especially *Tht.* 170d-171c). The *Plt.* begins with Socrates expressing gratitude to Theodorus for enabling his acquaintance with Theaetetus and the Stranger in their search for the sophist. But when Theodorus promises he will be three times more grateful after going through the statesman and philosopher, Socrates mocks “the great calculator and geometer,” who thinks of the three having equal value. Theodorus accepts Socrates' playful abuse, while threatening to get back at him some other time (257a-b).

Socrates' anticipation of an impending trial by the Stranger looks like a very dark assessment of his preceding conversation with Theaetetus. After all, he was not even able to give an account of how false opinion is possible—a problem that lies at the heart of his philosophic enterprise. Apparently obsessed with this sense of failure, Socrates, in the time leading up to his death, repeatedly recounts the conversation to its future narrator (*Theaetetus* 142c-143a). Socrates' criticism of his own inadequacy in *logoi*, which he conveys late in his conversation with Theaetetus, is anticipated in the initial account he gives of his practice as a midwife of ideas: he entreats Theaetetus not to get angry if his ideas are judged a mere image and not true—like a woman getting angry at the loss of her first child in birth. In fact, Socrates admits, many of those whose offspring he takes away are almost ready to bite him (*Theaetetus* 151c-d)!

1c and 1d) While Socrates appears to place himself in the role of the Cyclops whom the Stranger has come to punish, it was precisely their inferior condition, he assured Theaetetus, that made it possible to continue the inquiry, while they would have been stopped in their tracks by a “contradictor”—a characterization that runs through all the shapes of the sophist (*Sophist* 232b, cf. 225b). If the Stranger has come to refute Socrates, he would be that contradictor, a Cyclopean sophist standing in the way of philosophic inquiry. The Stranger suggests that identity at the outset when he admits his natural inclination for monologue, though it would appear unfriendly (*axenos*) and harsh. And he will condemn his criminality at the center of the *Sophist*, although the victim is not Socrates but his “father” Parmenides (241d). If Socrates is Odysseus issuing an admonition to the Stranger, he would be cautioning him to be on the lookout, either for Theodorus' punitive motive in setting up this gathering or for his own part in assigning the task the Stranger must undertake, which will involve this act of intellectual parricide.

2a and 2b) It is not only Socrates, however, who fits the role of an Odysseus warning the criminal against the presence of a punitive deity. Theodorus could be said to play that part when he levels his accusation against the Stranger for making excuses about not reporting what he must have heard among the Eleatics (*Sophist* 217b), as if the Stranger is willfully withholding the answer to the Socratic question, which he should be able to recite from memory. Theodorus could be cautioning the Stranger, then, that the conversation he has arranged has a punitive purpose, or especially, that he should be on guard for Socrates as the “refutative god” who is exercising indirect control through the inquiry he has imposed.

Indeed, Socrates adopts that role in the conversation the day before. The analogy of his intellectual midwifery with females who preside at birth requires one qualification. Female midwives are never barren women, but only those past childbearing, for while Artemis, the goddess of childbirth, is herself childless, human nature is too weak to acquire an art without prior experience. Socrates, in contrast, possesses his art of midwifery though he is himself barren, with no progeny of his own soul (*Theaetetus* 150C): if he possesses an art of refuting ideas, but no human can acquire an art without experience, he must therefore be a “refutative god”! Socrates confirms this suggestion when he expresses hope that, if he has to take some foolish notion away, Theaetetus will not be indignant like so many others, who just don’t realize that no god is unkind to humans (*Theaetetus* 151c-d)!

2c and 2d) Whatever critical view of the Stranger Theodorus may entertain, it pales in contrast to his recognition of Socrates as the guilty party. Theodorus introduces his guest as “a very philosophic man” and assures Socrates that the Stranger is more measured than those who are fanatically contentious. This characteristic sign of the sophist (225e) is a trait Theodorus must associate with Socrates, having compared him to the mythical giant Antaeus, who would not let anyone pass by and escape from wrestling with him (*Theaetetus* 169b). Theodorus might be ready to warn this Cyclopean zealot in contentiousness of the punishment he should expect from him, or from the divine philosopher he has brought along with him for this purpose.

3a and 3b) One further set of possibilities emerges with the Stranger playing the part of Odysseus. Having become acquainted with Theodorus and Theaetetus in their earlier conversation, he might recognize the resentment the mathematics teacher harbors about the way he was treated by Socrates. He could feel obligated, in that case, to forewarn Socrates of his Cyclopean character in the eyes of Theodorus, who would be intending to take revenge. Of course, the Stranger might realize the good grounds for Socrates’ punitive treatment of Theodorus, which would lead him to alert the mathematician to its potential continuation.

3c and 3d) The most important application of the Homeric passage, however, if the Stranger is playing the part of Odysseus, would be the expectation of his own testing of Socratic philosophy, which he is about to undertake through his search for the sophist. He puts to work, for this purpose, a technical method of division, starting out from the category of *technē*. His first split enables him to defer analysis of the productive arts until after he introduces the problem of image-making. Plunging, instead, into the acquisitive arts, he pursues a hunt for the sophist, while uncovering

Socrates hiding in many forms along the way,⁶ distinguished only by the slightest variations from the “many-headed” beast under pursuit. If, however, the Stranger is not confirming Socrates’ harsh self-judgment, it could be his own technical method that should be subjected to a critical assessment, held up to the standard of Socratic inquiry.⁷

IV. *The Eleatic Method and the Socratic Art of Purification*

The Stranger’s inability to get hold of the slippery sophist in the course of five attempted definitions is also a failure to differentiate that multi-colored creature from the philosopher, more precisely, from Socrates. It is not until he makes a new start, with the recognition of their own activity of separation, that the Stranger brings to light, in the diacritical art, an internal division of philosophy: the method of separating like from like, which the Stranger claims as his own, is set over against the separation of better from worse, an art of purification that looks like a version of Socrates’ midwifery (*Sophist* 226d, cf. 227a-c).

This differentiation occurs at a very strange moment in the analysis of purification. Before turning to the more obvious separation between purification of bodies and of soul, the Stranger proposes a seemingly unnecessary split between ensouled bodies, inside vs. outside, and soul-less, noting the trivial arts in that last class, such as *kosmetikē*, the art of beautification (226e-227c).⁸ The Stranger’s comment on the many laughable names of such arts leads him to characterize his own procedure: its separation of like from like takes no account of what is thought ridiculous or serious, treating every subject as of equal value, like the units of mathematics: the lice-catcher belongs in the art of hunting on a par with the most renowned general.

6 Socrates first shows up as the private hunter who practices an erotic art through exchanges by gift-bearing, then as a merchant who associates for gratification, demanding only his own nurture as a wage; he looks like the sophist as a retailer who sells soul wares remaining in the city; and when the sophist is traced from the competitive art as a money-making eristic, Socrates seems to be only a garrulous money-wasting eristic (*adoleschikos*, 225d)—a term he applied to himself (*Tht.* 195b-c; cf. *Plt.* 299b).

7 The technical character of the Eleatic method is reflected, not only in the choice of *technē* as the starting point for the Stranger’s divisions, but also in his eventual discovery of philosophy in the form of a “dialectical science” (253c-254b).

8 In the *Gorg.*, the “cosmetic art” appears in the proportion Socrates proposes between arts that care for body and soul and the practices of “flattery” that shadow them (464b-465c): [gymnastics : medicine : : cosmetics : : cookery : : legislation : justice : : sophistics : rhetoric].

The “*methodos* of the speeches” has no more concern with sponge-bathing than *pharmakon*-drinking (227a-c). Suddenly, the *Sophist* opens into the death scene of the *Phaedo*: Socrates first goes out to bathe himself, to save the women the trouble of cleansing his corpse, and that “soul-less body” is produced by the *pharmakon* he will drink, which “purifies” the inside of the body by bringing life to an end. The Stranger acknowledges that his method is incapable of determining which benefit is greater: it cannot make a judgment on the worth of life and death.

From the death of Socrates, hiding in the class of purification of bodies, the Stranger turns to the purification of soul, which he analyzes through an analogy with two defective states of the body: disease as an inner conflict of elements and ugliness as an impulse that fails to reach its target, the one treated by medicine, the other by gymnastics. The psychic counterpart to disease, which should be inner conflict, Theaetetus associates with moral vices, while psychic ugliness is ignorance, which falls short of the knowledge at which it aims. Perfect health of soul, then, would be moral virtue, while beauty of soul would be omniscience. In the absence of those conditions, medicine is said to have its counterpart in punitive justice, and gymnastics in an art of instruction. But the instructive art must be subject to one further cut, based on a differentiation of ignorance: for despite recommending a cut down the middle of ignorance, the Stranger sees a single greatest form separate from all the rest, and that is thinking one knows what one does not really know—the condition of *doxosophia* that is the target of Socrates’ examination of opinion.⁹ Parents try to handle this folly by admonishing their children’s errors, but that seems useless to those who believe no improvement is possible as long as someone holds a false belief that he has knowledge. They aim to eliminate that belief by bringing out the individual’s contradictory opinions through examination, and this refutation, the Stranger adds, leads the subject to be angry with himself, while growing gentle toward others.¹⁰ At the very point when Socrates lamented his midwifery

9 Treatment of the greatest form of ignorance, Theaetetus asserts, is called *paideia* by “us here,” presumably the Athenians, and, the Stranger adds, “by all the Greeks,” hinting at the conventional status of education. In fact, one might say, far from being a cure for *doxosophia*, education in transmitting information can be a powerful source of that condition.

10 As Socrates comments in his trial, the young who follow him take great pleasure hearing him refute those with a pretense to know, but those subjects are full of anger at him (*Ap.* 23c). Pleasure and benefit could coincide, perhaps, only if the individual purified of his pretense to know could stand back to observe the experience as a spectator—the special opportunity, in fact, that Plato extends to his reader.

making his ungrateful subject ready to bite him (151c-d), the Stranger puts his “cosmetic” art to work and beautifies Socratic examination.

The Stranger compares this soul-purifier to the doctor who holds that the body cannot benefit from food until any impediments are removed. The treatment of ignorance as ugliness of soul, which was supposed to be the task of a psychic gymnastics, has shifted into a psychic medicine. But anyone who remains unrefuted, the Stranger concludes, suffering the greatest impurity, is ugly in just the way one who is to be happy should be most pure and beautiful. An amazing turn-around in the argument! According to the original analysis, health of soul would be moral virtue and beauty omniscience; now to be freed from *doxosophia* is to be cured of both psychic disease and ugliness, while knowledge of ignorance counts as both health and beauty of soul.

The Stranger’s final comments on this division mark a decisive moment in the dialogue. He is afraid to label one who practices the art of purification a “sophist,” granting that title too high an honor. Theaetetus, however, who was subjected to Socrates’ refutation, has no doubt that their account “resembles some such” (231a). The Stranger cautions: they must be on guard against likenesses, since they are dealing with a most slippery genus.¹¹ He has restricted his own procedure to separating like from like; but to do that in the case of Socrates and the sophist he must abandon the indifference of his method to shame or honor: the “refutation of vain *doxosophia*,” he concedes to Theaetetus, has come to light for them as the “noble or well-born sophistic genus” (231b). The Stranger does his best to save Socrates from the designation of “sophist” by including the qualification “noble.” But for that he must have recourse to the discrimination of better and worse, which was the defining mark of the art of purification.¹² By the end of the analysis of the

11 Theaetetus introduces, unwittingly, the ontological issues of likeness and class formation that become thematic in the discussion. When Stranger comments that a wolf is like a dog, the most wild like the most tame, he appears to mean the tame philosopher vs. the wild sophist, but if the sophist only succeeds by putting to work the popular opinions of his audience, perhaps he is the one “tamed” by the role he plays in the city.

12 The criticism Socrates levels at the beginning of the *Plt.* against Theodorus’ mathematics (cf. note 3 above) applies as well to the Stranger’s practice of division in that dialogue. His “pursuit of speeches” cares no more for the august than what is not: it leads to the king as herdsman over a two-footed herd, distinguished from the swineherd with his four-footed one (*Plt.* 266c-d). The Eleatic method looks as incapable of bringing the royal art to light as of discovering the philosopher behind his phantom images.

diacritical art, it is the Stranger's own technical method that has been put on trial, precisely by means of a consideration that belongs to the Socratic way.¹³

V. Socratic Philosophy After the Death of Socrates

The *Sophist* began with Socrates' double reference to Homer's *Odyssey*, which on its most obvious reading puts Socrates in the role of Odysseus, but at the same time the Cyclops, who fears a punishing god. The guilt Socrates claims to experience, of course, is not for barbaric crimes beneath the level of civilization, but for the inadequate conduct of his previous conversation. The punishment he claims to fear is not divine retribution in Hades, but a rejection of his procedure in that inquiry, while the agent who exacts it is not a punitive god but the Eleatic Stranger, about to introduce a new method of investigation. The gods who take on all sorts of apparitions as they roam through the cities are the philosophers, whose appearance in phantom images is blamed on the ignorance of the many. But the failure to recognize the being of the philosopher, unlike a punitive god, would not invite retribution—at least not *from* the philosopher. If punishment is involved, it is *of* the philosopher who is misunderstood: Socrates is about to go on trial for injustice and impiety, to be convicted by the city and put to death.¹⁴ It is puzzling, then, that Socrates anticipates a philosophic trial in which the alleged shortcoming in his conduct of inquiry becomes a crime and its potential correction a punishment.

Why does Plato portray Socrates at the end of his life adopting this perspective of the city with its practice of punitive justice? And once he does,

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- 13 This judgment finds some support in the center of each conversation the Stranger conducts. In the *Sph.*, the intellectual parricide he commits against his Parmenidean heritage makes it possible to recognize the being of non-being in the form of the other (241d-242b, cf. 258b-259b). And that discovery allows, not only for an account of images, but for the distinction of kinds, which is required for the method of division. At the center of the *Plt.*, the Stranger introduces the measure of the mean, and subordinates the mathematical measure to it, since the fitting, the opportune, or the needful is the standard for anything good and beautiful (284b-d). The measure of the mean, over against excess or deficiency, belongs in the sphere of better and worse, recognized only by the Socratic art of purification and beyond the scope of the Eleatic method.
- 14 That momentous event, in the background of Plato's trilogy, comes into view conspicuously during the Stranger's examination of law in the *Plt.*: given the authority of the law, anyone even seeking knowledge "contrary to the writings" could be labeled a garrulous sophist, hauled into court on the charge of corrupting the youth, and if convicted, punished with the most severe penalties (299a-e).

why is not possible for Socrates to achieve on his own self-knowledge about his philosophic life? Does Socrates' repeated return to his conversation with Theaetetus, which he regards as a significant failure, indicate too severe a judgment of himself?¹⁵ Has the association of that conversation with his political trial colored his assessment of his worth as a philosopher?¹⁶ If, in any case, the trial of Socrates requires uncovering the being of the philosopher behind his mistaken appearance as a sophist, that entails an investigation of the nature of images, and with that the ontological problem of non-being, which belongs naturally to a critical Eleatic philosopher.¹⁷

It is possible, though hardly obvious, that Plato's intention is to demonstrate the superiority of the Stranger's technical method of division over Socrates' customary manner of examination of opinion. In fact, the many idiosyncratic moments in the Stranger's process of division, beginning with the angler as paradigm for the sophist, cast strong doubts on its status as a strictly rule-governed method. The Stranger's success with Theaetetus turns on his adapting many, if not all steps in the divisions to his understanding of the young man, to what he needs and what he will accept. Despite his original inclination to monologue, the Stranger appears to have something like the knowledge of soul that is the mark of Socratic philosophy.¹⁸ Why, then, does Plato exaggerate the status of the Stranger's procedure as a systematic *technē*?

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- 15 The original conversation takes place just before Socrates gets the indictment in the *Euthyphr.*, meeting up next with the Eleatic Stranger. It is sometime after those encounters that Socrates is engaged in reporting his conversation to Euclides, possibly before the trial, but also in prison afterwards. Plato's *Theaetetus*, Alex Priou proposes, should be read with an eye to how Socrates might have presented his original exchange with Theaetetus in response to the *Sph.* and *Plt.* conversations and perhaps his trial as well. In this light, it has a claim to count as the missing fourth dialogue, *The Philosopher*. See *Defending Socrates: Political Philosophy Before the Tribunal of Science*, "Overture."
 - 16 As the closest thing to a Socratic writing, the *Tht.* points to Socrates' awareness of one limitation— not having produced a written corpus that would preserve his distinctive philosophic way. Of course, this implicit self-critique amounts to a decisive praise of Plato's art of writing.
 - 17 It is less clear why the Eleatic Stranger is the necessary leader of the conversation in search of the statesman.
 - 18 If the *Sph.* presents Plato's vindication of Socrates, that would be accomplished, Matthew Dinan 2013, 117, 136 argues, through a critical portrayal of the Stranger, in his lack of "Socrates' characteristic self-knowledge." Evanthia Speliotis 2013, 198, in contrast, thinking of the need for another true philosopher to recognize the truth of Socrates behind his appearance as a sophist, wonders if that is the role the Stranger is playing.

The purpose of that strategy is suggested by the form of the dialogues that frame the series surrounding Socrates' trial and death. Plato chooses to present the conversations of the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedo* through the voice of narrators who belong to the schools of philosophy that emerge after the death of Socrates. Like the Megarian and Neo-Pythagorean narrators of those dialogues, the Eleatic Stranger appears to offer a technical method that could carry on after the loss of the unique individual who is somehow *the* paradigmatic philosopher. But the philosophic sects that follow in Socrates' footsteps will inevitably take up some partial aspect of his thought and transform it into a doctrinaire form, in particular ignoring or suppressing the distinctive Socratic discovery of political philosophy. The conversations Plato sets at the end of Socrates' life display the limits of the post-Socratic schools as a means of preserving and transmitting Socratic philosophy. In doing so, they demonstrate the vital importance of the Platonic dialogues as the medium in which Socrates can live on. The *Sophist* began with Socrates invoking Odysseus' warning to the Cyclops about punitive gods, troubled that it might apply to himself as the potential subject of the Stranger's correction. It looks as if Plato, in the end, puts that apprehension into question, or rather, turns it around into a vindication of Socratic philosophy.

APPENDIX

Sophist 216a-b

Socrates: Have you really then failed to observe, Theodorus, that in accordance with Homer's speech it's no stranger you lead but a kind of god? He asserts that not only do **different gods accompany all those human beings who share in a just shame**, but that also, in particular, **the god of strangers proves not least to be their companion and looks down on the acts of outrage and of law-abidingness of human beings**? So perhaps your stranger who attends you might also be one of the Mightier, come to look over and refute us who are poor in speeches, and is a kind of refutative god.

Theodorus: No, Socrates, this is not the stranger's way. He's more measured than those whose zeal is devoted to contentiousness. And the man, in my opinion, is in no way a god; he is, however, divine, for I address all the philosophers as of this sort.

Socrates: And beautifully, my friend. This genus, however, is in all probability scarcely much easier to discern than that of the god. For on account of the ignorance of everyone else, these men—those who not in a fabricated

way but in their being are philosophers—certainly **show up in all sorts of apparitions and haunt the cities, looking down from on high on the life of those below.** And in the opinion of some they are worth nothing and of some everything, and at times they take on the apparitions of statesmen, and at times of sophists, and there are times when they give some the impression that they are altogether crazy.

Odyssey 9. 266-271

So [the Cyclops] spoke, and the inward heart in us was broken. . . “We are Achaians coming from Troy, beaten off our true course. . . but now in turn we come to you and are suppliants at your knees. . . Therefore stand in awe of the gods, O best of men. We are your suppliants, and Zeus **the god of strangers, who accompanies reverend strangers,** avenges any wrong toward strangers and suppliants.”

Odysseus	warns the Cyclops	about Zeus who accompanies reverend strangers
1a) Socrates	warns Theodorus	about the Stranger as a refutative god
1b) Socrates	warns himself	about Stranger as a refutative god
1c) Socrates	warns the Stranger	about Theodorus as a refutative god
1d) Socrates	warns the Stranger	about himself as a refutative god
2a) Theodorus	warns the Stranger	about himself as a refutative god
2b) Theodorus	warns the Stranger	about Socrates as a refutative god
2c) Theodorus	warns Socrates	about himself as a refutative god
2d) Theodorus	warns Socrates	about the Stranger as a refutative god
3a) the Stranger	warns Socrates	about Theodorus as a refutative god
3b) the Stranger	warns Theodorus	about Socrates as a refutative god
3c) the Stranger	warns Socrates	about himself as a refutative god
3d) the Stranger	warns himself	about Socrates as a refutative god

Odyssey 17. 483-487

And this is the way one of these haughty young men would speak to him: “Antinous, you did badly to hit the unhappy vagabond: a curse on you if he

turns out to be some god from heaven. **For the gods do take on all sorts of transformations, appearing as strangers from elsewhere, and thus they range at large through the cities, looking down on the acts of outrage and law-abidingness of humans.**

anonymous suitor	warns Antinous	about the beggar as one of the gods in disguise, who roam through the cities, watching over the outrage and lawabidingness of human beings

What is Wrong with Theaetetus' Flight? Antisthenes and the Eleatic Hints in Plato's *Sophist*

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It can be demonstrated that in the *Sophist*, Plato does not limit himself to occasional allusions to Antisthenes' philosophy, as has often been interpreted. Instead, key developments in the text highlight the intellectual struggle between them, suggesting a rich scenario of theoretical exchanges. This article explores Antisthenes' *episkepsis onomaton* as a broadening of Parmenides' metaphysical exercise to provide an experience of certainty, and Plato's strategy to counter this attempt. The discussion involves a review of the strong similarities between the "method of division" and Antisthenes' method, an analysis of the objections to this view, and the contribution of these debates to Plato's own position. These analyses culminate in an interpretation of the famous statements "Theaetetus sits" and "Theaetetus flies" in the *Sophist*, as a final blow against Antisthenes' views.

Antisthenes, Parmenides, method, parricide, dialectic

The traces of the Socratics in Plato's texts are often considered to be few and highly critical of this group. The case of the *Sophist* is no exception. It is usually said that Plato might be alluding to Antisthenes when he mentions the brutal materialists that dragged everything down to the earth (246a-b) or those who paid attention to philosophy in their old age (251e), as hints of a hurtful invective. However, recent scholarship on Antisthenes enables deeper research into his ideas and, consequently, a better comprehension of the theoretical connections with Plato's views. Within this context, this paper claims that Antisthenes serves as a wide-ranging reference in this dialogue, highlighting substantial divergences within the Socratic milieu concerning logical and metaphysical issues.

This approach will underscore the Eleatic background, describing Antisthenes' view as a reshaping of Parmenides' metaphysical exercise, wherein the examination of the notion of being can be broadened and applied to any term within the language. This potent and efficient framework led to the curious assertion about the impossibility of falsehood whenever we use a name, posing a formidable challenge to Plato's philosophy. After some attempts, Plato developed better grounds to counter Antisthenes' perspective by re-evaluating the link between language and reality. In this dialogue, Plato elucidates why the method of investigating names (*episkepsis ton onomaton*)

is insufficient and offers an alternative that surpasses Antisthenes' shortcomings.

Therefore, I will show that Plato did not restrict himself to occasional allusions to his troublesome fellow in the *Sophist*. To substantiate this claim, I will outline Antisthenes' approach in light of the broader conflict with Plato's ideas. Then, I will highlight three specific aspects that reveal the conflictive dialogue with Antisthenes' views: First, concerning the method, the link between the "method of division" and Antisthenes' *dialegein kata gene* as a criticism against those who rely too much on semantic analysis; second, concerning the metaphysical background, the identification of shortcomings in Parmenides and other philosophers that lead to redefining the ontological basis; and third, concerning the truth, the role of these achievements in the proposal of new grounds to understand reality. This path will allow us to comprehend the famous statements "Theaetetus sits" and "Theaetetus flies" as a synthesis of Plato's approach, intended as a decisive *coup de grâce* against Antisthenes' approach.

1. The motives of tension

Let us begin with a brief outline of Antisthenes' philosophy, which forces us to take a step back in time. Crucial moments of this story occurred earlier in Western Greece. At the Cilento, Parmenides set the benchmarks for the question about truth and the surrounding world, appealing to the link between being, thought, and language. Shortly after, Gorgias raised his voice from Sicily, formulating the sceptical objection related to the lack of guarantees of these bonds. The Athenian intellectual environment and the Socratic circle were deeply interested in these issues, and so Antisthenes entered the scene. Indeed, some sources say that Gorgias was his teacher for some time.¹ If so, he seems to have inverted his approach to recover the original, Parmenidean intent. Gorgias stated in his *On non-being* that nothing exists; if it does, it cannot be grasped, and if grasped, it cannot be expressed. On the contrary, Antisthenes claims that there is a strict correlation between language and reality to the extent that falsehood is impossible.

In this framework, reality leaves behind many pesky traits. Antisthenes was a materialist and consequently claimed that only corporeal, qualified

1 See Diogenes Laertius 6.1 (SSR V.A.II, FS 749).

things exist.² These things are wholly represented in language, which entails an *oikeios logos* for each thing, i.e. a name for each kind of thing. Disruptions originated in human thought do not threaten the correspondence between both poles. The link between reality and language is so strong that thought is an almost transparent element in charge of producing the connection. Hence, Antisthenes' approach merges these three components. It ends up operating as a dyad of reality and language, leaving thought as an unproblematic nexus. That is, thought connects being and language, which is understood as a set of names so that each thing has its *logos*.

Furthermore, given this strong correspondence, the approach allows focusing just on one of the main components, i.e. language, without losing relevant information about its counterpart. Then, ontology can be put in the background. Gorgias may be right in the first thesis of his *On non being* because reality is quite complex, but if it can be grasped by thought and expressed through language, the problem is solved. The result is a simple and clever theory: there is only one concrete reality, which can be grasped through a method based on linguistic analysis, the *episkepsis onomaton*,³ whose effectiveness is guaranteed by the nature of *logos*, which shows what was or is without distortion.⁴

The link between this approach and the theories of *orthotes onomaton* is evident in the way Antisthenes comprehends this correlation, taking as reference the *onoma*, and paying attention to the correspondence between language and the world. From this strict correspondence emerges the thesis discussed in the *Sophist*: it is impossible to contradict, and falsehood has no sense since when we say a name, we name a thing that exists, then it is impossible to say what is not, that is, what is false. Hence, truth is an automatic outcome.⁵

2 In his *Sathon*, he mocked Plato with the joke repeated in the sources, all of them including the formula "I see the horse, but I do not see horseness"; for instance, Simplicius (*In Arist. Categ.* 208.28-32 = SSR V.A.149, FS 948).

3 Epictetus (*Diss.* I.17.102 = SSR V.A.160, FS 979) offers a description saying: "Who did write 'the examination of words if the principle of education (*arche paideuseos he ton onomaton episkepsis*)'".

4 Diogenes Laertius, VI.3 (SSR, V.A.151, FS 958) claims that "Antisthenes defined, for the first time, *logos* saying: *logos* is what shows what was or is (*ho to ti en e esti delon*)". Language shows reality, a point underlined through the forms of the verb *eimi* in past and present, which emphasises the function of indication and as a result, the correlation between language and reality.

5 Antisthenes' argument is summarised by Proclus (*In Plat. Cratyl.* 37, SSR V.A.155, FS 969): "Antisthenes said that contradiction is not possible, because, he says, every state-

In this framework, philosophy studies the relationship between names as an antecedent of the contemporary analysis of semantic fields. At this point, again, we find a strong “family resemblance” with Plato’s *Sophist*, because in this dialogue, the method used to clarify concepts is based on the analysis of relevant notions through the exposure of their reciprocal links. According to the testimony offered by Aristotle, Antisthenes claimed that “it is impossible to define what a thing is (for the definition, they say, is a lengthy formula), but it is possible actually to teach others what a thing is like; e.g., we cannot say what silver is, but we can say that it is like tin”.⁶ That is, we should not try to define “silver”. Instead, we can explore other similarities and differences until we reach the proper description of the realm of the metals, thus exhibiting a region of reality.⁷

The economy of the method is remarkable. It does not need long training. To be a native speaker is enough to proceed with this kind of analysis. It applies to everything which bears a name, unlike Plato’s theory of Forms and its limitations. The outcome is not a definition expressing what a given thing is but some features that manifest how it is. Then, the relevant question is not *ti esti* but *poion esti*, which is also a Socratic question in Antisthenes’ case.

Because of that, Plato had reasons to attack this approach, and he did it in many of his works. In the early *Ion*, he rejects Antisthenes’ interest in Homeric exegesis, and the same happens in the *Hippias Minor*. The paradox of the impossibility of falsehood occupies an important place in the *Euthydemus*, and significant analyses about naturalism in the *Cratylus* are primarily targeted against Antisthenes.⁸ The closing words of this dialogue, asking us to examine things and not only language, are tailored-made for attacking this kind of theory. Something similar can be said about the passage of the hypothetical method in the *Phaedo*, where we find a significant antecedent of the *Sophist*. Indeed, the *Cratylus* keeps discussing the adequation of names, whereas the *Phaedo* goes a step further and stresses the role of *logos* and its complexity in a way that Antisthenes’ approach cannot explain. However, this rivalry is primarily addressed in the *Sophist*, in which Plato seems to

ment says the truth. Because that who says, says something, that who says something says what it is, and that what says what it is says the truth”. See Prince 2015, ad loc.

6 Aristotle, *Met.* VIII.3.1043b (SSR, V.A.150, FS 956), where *hen eph’ henos* and its neuter form seems to constitute, as it has been noted by several authors, a literal Antisthenes’ formula not related to *logos* but to another neuter term, that could be *onoma*.

7 *Met.* VIII.3, 1043b23ff. (SSR V.A.150, FS 956). See Marsico 2014b, Prince 2015, ad loc. and Meijer 2017.

8 On this hypothesis, see Marsico 2005.

develop the proper arguments to challenge his companion's ideas. Therefore, it can be considered at once a step further in creating his own approach and a powerful anti-Antisthenian device.

2. Antisthenes and the method of division

Let us examine now how Antisthenes is alluded to in the *Sophist*, highlighting that by pulling this thread, we obtain a fresh view of the intra-Socratic struggles that vivified classical Greek philosophy.⁹ It is worth noting that Plato presents the Stranger of Elea underlining his origin, that is, he is an Eleatic, but claiming at the same time that he is different (216a) and more moderate than the experts in discussions usually associated with this feature (216c). Indeed, the Megarians and Antisthenes were well-known for their Eleatic and eristic features. We could say that a moderate Eleatic will help refute the crazy Eleatics to rectify the course of philosophical research.

The dialogue begins by trying to distinguish between the politician, the sophist and the philosopher. This problem could have been especially apt to apply Antisthenes' approach, i.e. *episkepsis ton onomaton*. Still, Plato hastens to clarify that a definition of the sophist, its *ti esti*, should be established because if this point remained unclear, there were no guarantees that they were thinking of the same thing (218b-c). That is, Antisthenes' starting point, "one name for each thing", based on the *poion esti* question, is unsound and could be helpful if and only if the *ti esti* question is properly addressed first. If, as we said before, Antisthenes' scheme was a dyad of reality and language, Plato brings thought back to the scene by denying its supposed transparency and the strong correspondence between both components. If so, focusing primarily on language becomes useless and the philosopher is forced to pay attention to reality. This is why we should "agree about the thing itself based on definitions, instead of considering only the name, without its definition" (218c). Again, this means that Antisthenes' method is inefficient because leaving aside ontology is impossible.

What follows is the well-known "method of division", which has received much attention.¹⁰ Indeed, in previous analyses, especially *Phaedo*, 99c ff., the method is based on *logoi* and not on *concepts*. This turn made some scholars think that Plato changed his mind, but we should consider that this passage

9 For instance, Brancacci 1990 and 2005.

10 On this issue, see Mié 2001.

is placed in a polemical context. It has strong similarities with Antisthenes' *episkepsis onomaton*. Hence, it can be understood as a means to identify the shortcomings of that view, which is quite attached to linguistic analysis. An initial dichotomy allows separating the genre in two through the criterion of distinction. This procedure can be applied several times until the intended species is reached or the indivisible species that closes the map of that genre appears. Many scholars have underlined that it is based on already existing knowledge, which is entirely consistent with Antisthenes' claims.¹¹

As we know, this exercise does not offer one but seven definitions of the sophist.¹² Moreover, after the sixth, it is necessary to step back and take another path. The results are inconsistent, showing that sophistry seems not to be among the acquisition techniques but the productive ones. Then, the following definition appeals to certain skills to question everything (232e), which raises the problem of the relation between things and images. The moral is that no matter how much we want to escape, the metaphysical dimension is inevitable. This implies that the semantic analysis method only produces superficial features, and unsatisfactory effects of meaning, as reflected in its confusing outcomes. It is worth remembering that division also produces weak results when applied in the *Politicus*, which could reinforce the idea that Plato was criticising more than adopting this procedure.¹³

Let us take a closer look at the discovery of the mistake in *Sof.* 231a, characterised as the confusion between the dog and the wolf. Since the sophist knows about refutation, he appears as a purifier, which is quite a positive feature. However, far from a reference to a noble side of sophistry, this is a warning against hasty inferences: the dog and the wolf also resemble each other, but it is wrong to consider them truly similar. At this point, it is worth recalling a parallel passage in Xenophon's *Cynegeticus* that also describes the sophist. In this context, the hunt is a valuable activity that demands thinking, speaking, and acting correctly (13.18) since it provides training to evaluate and make quick decisions. Still, not all types of hunting are the same. This caveat allows Xenophon to distinguish the sophist from

11 See, for instance, the traditional works of Cornford 1957, 160 and Bluck 1975, 30.

12 He appears first as a hunter of rich young people for a payment, then as a merchant of knowledge about the soul, in the third place as a producer, then as vendor of knowledge, in the fifth place as a verbal athlete, and in the sixth place as a purifier of the opinions that prevent the soul of getting knowledge. In this point, the sink of the exploration occurs, and amid the confusion the sophist seems not to be different from the philosopher, i.e. there is a mix "of the wolf with the dog" (231a). On this point, see Marsico 2022.

13 On the case of the *Politicus*, see Gill 2010.

the philosopher by saying that the sophist uses a negative hunt, making him even more dangerous than the beasts. He hunts people, even his friends, while the philosopher uses his strength and skills to protect them. As in Plato's *Sophist*, the resemblance between both profiles is deceptive, and it is not easy to recognise their differences at first sight.

What is the relevance of this passage about hunting? On the one hand, Antisthenes wrote about this issue at least in a book,¹⁴ and the figure of the wolf is not negligible. In PFlor 113, which contains Socratic anecdotes including references to Antisthenes,¹⁵ it is said that the dogs, when the wolfs attack, could drive them off, but they fail to help their master against men known to them.¹⁶ So, some men are as dangerous as wolves. Besides that, PFlor 113 also recounts a symposium in which some guests tried to hunt a young boy with whom Antisthenes was in love. That is, hunt, dogs, and wolves seem to have been Antisthenes' typical analogies to account for human relationships.¹⁷ On the other hand, the figure of wolves in early Greek literature is significant, and it is already associated with rhetoric and deception as a *locus communis*.¹⁸ Antisthenes is no exception, and he had a strong influence on Xenophon. Then, possibly both used this comparison between dogs and wolves in the same sense. Indeed, Xenophon puts this comparison in Antisthenes' mouth in *Symp.* 4, alluding to the greedy people who cannot calm the inner wolf that gnaws their vitals, which could be another hint of the weight of this image in Antisthenes. It is also significant in Plato's texts, in which the wolf is the counter-face of the dog.¹⁹ If so, Plato could have used it against Antisthenes as part of his battery of arguments to suggest that his method, far from clarifying the terms and avoiding the mistake, is at its very root. His strategy to escape from ontology focuses on images, which prompts confusion between the philosopher and the sophist.

As a result, Theaetetus is lost and repeats several times that he does not know where they have arrived. If defining through semantic analysis was so easy as in Aristotle's example of the silver in *Met.* VIII.3, the solution should have arrived much earlier and without so many upheavals. Above all, it should not lead us to confuse the dog with the wolf, that is, the philosopher with the sophist, nor reality with mere phantasmatic images.

14 Diogenes Laertius, 6.15-18 (SSR, V.A.41; FS, 792).

15 See SSR, V.A.175; FS, 994, and the philological analysis in Luz 2015.

16 See Luz 2015, 206.

17 On the figure of the wolf in Greek culture, see Buxton 2013.

18 See Irwin 2005, 252-254.

19 See especially the case of the wolf in the *Republic* in Long 2015.

Indeed, the result is a collection of traditional opinions about sophistry without clarity. Hence, the problem lies in the method, which is stressed by saying that it is necessary to be cautious regarding resemblances because this is the most slippery genre (231a). Antisthenes' method of semantic analysis, slipping over resemblances, is just a story of slips, trips, and falls. It could be helpful to organise the approach by studying the main concepts, but it cannot be considered the *ultima ratio* of any serious research. Again, the moral is that it is necessary to enter the ontological discussion. However, this negative approach is not enough to show a robust alternative. For this reason, the dialogue also includes a *pars construens* that keeps the struggle against Antisthenes' theses alive.

3. *Antisthenes and Parmenides' parricide*

That *pars construens* appeals to ontology and reveals another point of conflict between both views. After all the mess, a solid point appears in 232b. It clearly defies Antisthenes' position: the sophist is a contradictor. It is worth remembering that one of his most famous theses was, precisely, that contradiction is impossible. Hence, the abandonment of the method of semantic analysis leads to the opposite starting point. Moreover, in this passage, we also find the allusion to Antisthenes' famous statement about falsehood as something hard to attain. It includes an interesting historical reference by saying that it has been difficult "both before and now", that is, both in Parmenides' approach and in later variants from Plato's times, for instance, Antisthenes' argument.

Why is Parmenides so important in this struggle? Indeed, as I have suggested before, Antisthenes' approach can be comprehended as a transformation of Parmenides' views. He keeps Parmenides' triadic scheme to define truth and falsehood and carefully describes the role of reality, thought, and language. We can say that he broadens Parmenides' views through a new version of his metaphysical exercise. In Parmenides' poem, more than conveying a message, the goddess provides his visitor with all the tools to produce an experience of certainty. If the young man follows the instructions and reaches that peculiar perspective, he can grasp true and necessary traits of the notion of being, which are completely different from the unsteady horizon of our everyday experience.

In contrast with the hazy outlook of the rest of human knowledge, Parmenides identifies a solid ground. Through this exercise, he proves that truth is possible and explains its nature related to the combination of being,

thought, and language, thus opening the variant of *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*. If we abandon the everyday use of the notion of being to take it in its absolute sense, it shows evident features. Hence, we can grasp reality and its basic structure with total certainty. We could say that Parmenides' major contribution is not only the argument about being and truth but above all the description of an experience of truth that can be iterable.

Now, Antisthenes goes beyond that isolated experience of certainty, claiming that the method of *episkepsis onomaton* allows applying the status of being to every content. As a result, that level of certainty applies to all the cases and concepts. Of course, this procedure requires significant calibrations. On the one hand, although unity remains associated with the notion of being as an encompassing horizon of existing entities, the new central concept, *oikeion*, stresses the difference between various entities and their link with the corresponding *onomata*. By enriching the notion of being, diversity ceases to be a problem and constitutes, on the contrary, the element that allows paring up names and things. Therefore, after sacrificing Parmenides' thesis about language as a troublesome issue and adopting an optimistic view, each notion entails a basis for knowledge, conceived as the application of Parmenides' procedure about being to the rest of the concepts, thus making it possible to explore their traits.

From Antisthenes' perspective, Parmenides' procedure can be broadened beyond being to all the names in our language, which are at the same time things in reality. The investigation of being, its relation to non-being and its necessary features follows the same pattern. It is equally guaranteed than our review of silver and its link with the metals. If so, Parmenides was wrong when he denounced language as something deceptive. It can be our best ally to extend the results he has already achieved concerning being to other cases. From Antisthenes' perspective, each thing exists and is related to other things, and as each one has a name, the whole network can be apprehended through linguistic analysis, which shows the relative place of each item within the whole. Therefore, Parmenides' metaphysical exercise to attain certainty is behind Antisthenes' proposal and allows for comprehending its aims.

Given these bonds between name and thing, Antisthenes considers contradiction impossible. Each time we say something, we say something that it is, and when we say something that it is, we are telling the truth, as in Proclus' synthesis.²⁰ This is the paradox of systematic truth. Even if we do not realise it, we live as the visitor of the Goddess in Parmenides' poem, with

20 In *Plat. Cratyl.* 37; SSR, V.A.155.

the experience of truth at hand. As native speakers of any language, we can experience certainty when we identify things within reality and comprehend its structure. We can skip ontology by transforming philosophy into a kind of linguistics.

This movement is behind Plato's parricide of Parmenides in the *Sophist*. If Parmenides' views are dismantled, those that follow them, even partially, could suffer a similar destiny. Resemblance, the slippery notion in 231a, allows Plato to characterise the image as something similar to reality. What is similar is something that is not, and the image "is for real what is not" (240b). Therefore, not-being "is combined with being", which is far from Parmenides' assumptions. Also Antisthenes' views are in trouble since combination implies that the analysis of the links between things is much more complex than its solution suggests. This turn is defined in 241d as "a kind of parricide" that calls into question the Eleatic roots and the previous thought in general because of its simplifying strategies.

In this framework, let us mention another passage related to Antisthenes. In 246a, we find the assessment of the second group of philosophical strands that tried to characterise the principles. Some of them drag everything down to earth, and "they define existence and body, or matter, as identical, and if anyone says that anything else, which has no body, exists, they despise him utterly" (246b).²¹ The other team, engaged with ideal entities, is also broad and could include the Megarians or Plato himself in his middle dialogues. The materialists are compelled to acknowledge the relevance of invisible elements and to correlate being and potency. Instead, the friends of the Ideas must consider the communication between entities, that is, the dimension of *koinonia* that characterises reality but was undermined in their approach. Then, a bit later, in 251b, Plato criticises those who devoted themselves to philosophy in their old age and accepted indefensible eristic theses. The reference can address other figures, but Antisthenes' view is indeed consistent with this profile, at least from Plato's perspective. This is precisely the kind of approach that he tries to overcome. The starting point, indicated in 252e, states that some things can communicate and others do not. Thus, we know the relation between Forms when we grasp that kind of communication (253d). This knowledge is ontological, not limited to the linguistic sphere,

21 Some scholars are enthusiastic with a possible criticism to Democritus, Protagoras, Aristippus or Antisthenes, with different arguments to choose one or the others. In fact, this is a criticism against the materialist in general, so that all of them are comprehended in the rejection and mock against their roughness.

and for this reason, as it is said in 253e, in that place, we will find the philosopher.

4. Antisthenes, language, and truth

At this point, Plato has enough tools for cornering his opponent and rejecting the onomastic perspective on reliable grounds. The description of the ontological realm identifies a series of supreme genres that organise reality and account for being and difference. In 257c-d, it is said that each part of nature “has a name of its own”, according to its own character. The formula is strikingly similar to Antisthenes' description. Hence, we can consider this passage as a significant part of the response to the thesis of *oikeios logos*. It implies that semantic regions correspond to things, but this correlation does not justify *episkepsis onomaton* as a method. Even more important, this procedure does not examine the proper name and its resemblances, as in the example of the silver that Aristotle mentions to describe Antisthenes' thesis, but includes the expression of differences, that is, what a thing is not. Thus, “the not-beautiful is a distinct part of some one class of being” (257e), which exceeds the links among proper names. Again, the difference on which the relationship between entities is based goes beyond the onomastic level. Some names are not the proper name and still offer relevant data about a particular real thing.

Reality is a system, a plexus of combinations, which leads the Stranger to say in 259e that trying to separate each thing from all is senseless. Isolating notions imply “the final annihilation” of all discourse because it is rooted in “the mutual combination of Forms”. As it said in 260a, “if we were deprived of this, we should be deprived of philosophy”. Therefore, this conception of *logos* buries the onomastic perspective and leads to thinking of language in terms of a combination of diverse components.

As it happens in reality, being and not-being are also mixed in judgement and language, which constitute the key to explaining falsehood (260c). For this reason, in 260d, the sophist appears as someone who takes refuge in images and appearances, denying the existence of falsehood. This denial is his strategy for hiding, following the metaphor of the whole dialogue. At this point, given that the existence of not-being has already been proven, it can also be proved the existence of falsehood. It is understood as a linguistic phenomenon related to the expression of something different from what it is.

Indeed, in 261d-e, language appears similar to reality in its behaviour regarding combination, as it admits some cases but not others. The linguistic passage of 262a describes the relation between *onoma* and *rhema*, i.e. name and predicate or verb, defined as the author of the action and the indication of that action, respectively. Both are prerequisites for combination and hence for meaning.²² Thus, as it is said in 262c, every statement is about something, i.e. implies a reference. This reference relies on a *logos* understood as a combination of name and predicate, and not only on a name. We do not refer to something through its proper name, but through the proposition that combines in the language the same that is connected at the ontological level, and for this reason, Antisthenes is mistaken.

Which is the root of that mistake? Indeed, in its review of the links between reality and language, the *Sophist* goes further than previous dialogues in providing tools to refute Antisthenes' position.²³ From Plato's perspective, his companion had already committed a kind of parricide against Parmenides when broadening the original mechanism. To Plato's eyes, Antisthenes' step seems exaggerated and must be countered by a strategy involving a different sort of parricide to kill off Antisthenes' position in the process. In this case, Antisthenes' extension is called into question because it assumes, without solid grounds, the perfect link between language and reality.

Plato shares with Antisthenes that reality cannot be limited to the pure unity of being, and he populates it with Forms. The scheme of the mature works transfers unity to each Form. It thereby enables compatibility between ontological and linguistic levels. Both levels have a kind of diversity that can be parsed, at least in some cases and under certain conditions, through dialectic, employing the method of hypotheses. In *Phaedo* 100a, Plato outlines a strategy of response to Antisthenes, alluding to the refuge in the *logoi*, whose examples are sentences and collide with Antisthenes' onomastic approach.

Indeed, these two Socratics introduced complexity at the level of reality. Still, while Antisthenes populated it with anything with a name to analyse their linguistic links, Plato placed there the Forms, which are linked to the sensible level by participation. He also developed a method to identify

22 Aristotle's approach in the *Categories* reflects this development, usually seen as a milestone within grammatical studies. At the same time, according to Ildefonse's view, it manifests a turn that blocked the studies about language in itself because of its emphasis on the link with the ontological level (Ildefonse 1997). On the evolution of the theories about the parts of the sentence, see Marsico 2007.

23 On the allusions to Antisthenes in the *Sophist*, see Marsico 2024.

the statements that express the features of reality without distortion. In the *Sophist*, a further step is taken in this direction by revising the characterisation of the eidetic level and rejecting the pure unity of the Forms by reinterpreting non-being as difference. The adoption of difference as an intrinsic feature of the Forms allows for suggesting the idea of an ontological *symploke*, which is connected with the combination we find in language.

At this point, Plato can show what is wrong with Antisthenes' approach by pointing out that there is no automatic adequacy between reality and language because language combines more than what is combinable at the eidetic level. In this sense, the attack against Parmenides is primarily an attack against other lines of thought that appeal to the Eleatic tenets to get biased results. This polemic has sense because Antisthenes' procedure transfers the strength of Parmenides' metaphysical exercise to everything with an *oikeion onoma*. Thus, Antisthenes' method of *episkepsis onomaton* was an extension of Parmenides' views aimed at multiplying its achievements.

To strengthen the anti-Antisthenic atmosphere, we immediately find the refutation of Antisthenes' thesis about the impossibility of contradiction, which brings us back to the title of this presentation: what is wrong with Theaetetus' flight. In 263a, the Stranger introduces an exercise that highlights the very structure of language: *ti peri tinos*, "something about something", which stresses the relevance of predication. He does so by analysing two statements: *Theaitetos kathetai*, "Theaetetus sits", and *Theaitetos, hoi nun ego dialegomai, petetai*, "Theaetetus, with whom I am now talking, flies". Many well-known interpretations of this passage usually consider correspondence with eidetic content or the factual environment as the main alternatives. However, the example of "Theaetetus sits" and "Theaetetus flies" can also be interpreted in a different light as a final stroke to Antisthenes' position. From this perspective, it is relevant that the double example says opposite things about Theaetetus, emphasising that both refer to him. One of them reflects in a linguistic combination the combination in reality. On the contrary, the other shows something different and, therefore, it is false (262d).

Considering Antisthenes' views, two points are worth noting. First, using a proper name and a particular situation underlines the relevance of a sphere not well-addressed by *episkepsis onomaton*. The statement does not deal with man, sitting or flying as isolated words supposed to have a real counterpart, but with Theaetetus, "with whom I am now talking" and about whom I make assertions using names and predicates. Second, against what is usually claimed, beyond the reason why the statement "Theaetetus flies" is false, the

most significant point is the very fact that we can formulate contradictions. They can be solved through extra-linguistic references or eidetic analysis,²⁴ but more importantly, no Antisthenic subtleties based on *episkepsis onomaton* can unravel this case satisfactorily because neglects combination. In sum, the structure of language, according to reality, is based on *symploke*; there is *logos* only when there is affirmation or negation, and depending on its combination, the statement will be true or false. It implies that, against Antisthenes' paradox, we can formulate contradictions, and, again, against his focus on semantic analysis, we must solve that contradiction through ontological references, which constitutes Plato's final blow to his controversial fellow.

All these elements emphasise the failure of the onomastic view. If so, Antisthenes is wrong, and his approach is unable to indicate what is the problem with Theaetetus' flight and keeps him trapped in mere semantics.

5. Corollaries

The final characterisation claims that the *techne* of the sophist is the proper imitation of the art of opinion, which is part of the art of discussion, with an ironic approach, through the simulation with images to produce illusion (268c). Antisthenes' *episkepsis ton onomaton* and its denial to address reality directly fall into this category, thus underlining the controversial character of the dialogue. From Plato's perspective, he built an economic and vivid system, dangerous because of its broad scope but insufficient to solve the issue of the link between reality and language. Therefore, the objections against Antisthenes' theses constitute a significant subtext in the *Sophist* that explains several argumentative strategies and allusions.

In the same way that Parmenides claimed that non-being is impossible, Antisthenes stated that falsehood does not exist since being is a shared feature of all entities, and they can be grasped with full certainty through their proper name (*oikeios logos*). Hence, this view and its Eleatic roots had to be weakened to break down Antisthenes' approach. Antisthenes was trapped in his analysis of the link between notions, depicting their similarities and differences, whereas Plato brought to the forefront the ontological aspect, examining how language can express that combination. Hence, against what has been done before, we should not look for Antisthenes in isolated allusions to the brutal materialist with dirty fingernails or the old man that

24 On the analyses of this passage, see Marcos 1991 and Cordero 2020.

discovered philosophy at the wrong time. Nor should we try to interpret Plato's arguments as he had been arguing with no one. On the contrary, Antisthenes was present in the very formulation of Plato's problem. It ranges from the initial confusing wanderings related to the method of division to the parricide and the review of the link between language and reality. The colourful episodes in this struggle make this dialogue not only a testimony of Plato's mastery but also a trail of the rich discussions that traversed the Socratic circle and an invitation to keep an eye open to the intra-group controversies.

The Place of the *Sophist* in Old Academic Theory and Curriculum

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I argue that the *Sophist* occupied a central place in Platonist curricula from the Old Academy on. The Megista Gene in particular were thought by Plutarch to relate to various passages in late Plato, and Plutarch engages with Xenocrates and Crantor on the basis of *Phaedrus* and hiatus-avoiding dialogues, excluding *Epinomis*. Hence Old Academic constructions of truly Platonic doctrine were founded principally on dialogues from *Phaedrus* to *Laws*. This reflects Apuleius' view that the true Plato (in whom philosophy was tripartite as in Xenocrates) emerged only *after* its base in Socratic ethics was supplemented by Pythagorean physics and Eleatic logic.

Xenocrates, corpus, curriculum, Plutarch, Apuleius

My focus here is on Xenocrates and to a lesser extent on Crantor, labelled the 'first exegete' by Proclus (*in Tim.* I 76. 10). Before them came Speusippus, well known for his classificatory activities in his *Homoia* and elsewhere. This involved division and is probably related to *Sophist*, for Speusippus was linked with the classificatory activities of Plato (and Menedemus) in the famous Epicrates fragment (fr. 11 = Speusippus T33 Tarán) in which the correct classification of a gourd-like vegetable is discussed with pupils. But Speusippus' *Homoia*, which did indeed group plants and animals on the basis of similarity,¹ probably pre-dated the *Sophist*, which warns of the pitfalls of this method.² Rather than see Speusippus ignoring Plato's warnings here and in *Philebus*, and writing a ten-book (*Republic* length!) work uncritically classifying things by degrees of similarity, I should see *Sophist*, presumably written when Speusippus was past the age of forty, as already responding to his early interests. Another Old Academic, Hermodorus, was, like Xenocrates, interested in categories-theory. Hermodorus is widely sus-

1 The following words denoting similarity are used in this context: παραπλήσιος (F8, 9, 12a, 12b, 18a, 20, 23), ὅμοιος (12c, 15a, 16, 21, 24), ἐμφερής (14, 22), and εἰκώς (F6).

2 See especially 231a7-8: δεῖ πάντων μάλιστα περὶ τὰς ὁμοιότητας αἰεὶ ποιεῖσθαι τὴν φυλακὴν. Cf. *Phil.* 13d4-5 for Socrates' satirical response to Protarchus' question about pleasure being the most similar thing to itself (12e1): τὸ ἀνομοιοτάτον ἐστὶ τῷ ὁμοιοτάτῳ πάντων ὁμοιοτάτον.

pected of being indebted to *Sophist* in the famous fragment that reaches us through Simplicius, Porphyry and Dercyllides (F5 I-P²).³

I attempt to build instead on the foundation of Sedley (2021a), which argues that Xenocrates' attempt to systematize Platonism is built upon the twin pillars of Timaeus' exposition in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*' palinode, with the possible addition of the *Sophist* for a theory of categories (29). I shall argue that Xenocrates and subsequently Crantor in fact had a rather wider canon of Platonic dialogues in mind, all relatively late. The place of the *Sophist* in the building of a canon underpinning the Old Academic system is virtually certain. This dialogue remained an essential part of the reduced curricula found in Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 200 BCE), the new Apuleius (*Expositio Compendiosa*), and Neoplatonism from Iamblichus to Olympiodorus. No ancient commentary survives, but such commentaries have been attributed to Porphyry, Proclus and Olympiodorus,⁴ while the dialogue attracts 54 entries in an index to Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*,⁵ behind the 68 for *Timaeus*, but ahead of the 48 for *Phaedrus* and 39 for *Republic*.

Earlier its importance was taken for granted by Plutarch of Chaeronea whose extant works perhaps demonstrate a greater awareness of Old Academic treatment of Platonic texts than any others. He devoted the tenth of his *Platonic Questions* (1009b-1011e) to discussing the statement at 262c that a *logos* is a blend of *onoma* and *rhêma*, and introduces the Megista Gene at *De Animae Procreatione* 1013d (cf. 1024d-1025a), at *De E apud Delphos* 391b-c (also alluding to them at 393b, Jones 1916: 148), and at *De Defectu Oraculorum* 428c-d. The *De Animae Procreatione* originated from Old Academic debate, while the other two works depict the younger Plutarch or his brother Lamprias drawing on what is presumably traditional material in the presence of his teacher Ammonius. Either device suggests that the mature Plutarch was not wholly committed to the views being expressed, and that they belonged in an earlier context.

De E 391b-c offers the view that the *meikton* (or *gignomenon*), *peras*, *apeiron*, cause of mixture, and cause of separation at *Phlb.* 23c-e are reflections in the familiar world of being, rest, motion, sameness and difference in the intellectual world.

3 See now Granieri 2023, 3-13.

4 See Gerson 2010, 915-965, for lists of ancient works, lost or surviving.

5 Morrow & Dillon 1987.

He demonstrates in the *Sophist* that there are five supreme principles, being, same and different, plus a fourth and fifth in addition to these, motion and rest, while, using a different method of division again in the *Philebus*, he says that the unlimited is one thing, limit another, and that all generation is established when these are mixed together; he posits the cause by which it is mixed as a fourth kind, and has suggested to us that we should suspect a fifth, by which the ingredients are distinguished and separated. I claim that these latter are spoken of like images of the former, what comes to be of what is, the unlimited of motion, the limit of rest, the mixing principle of the same, and the distinguishing principle of the different.⁶

Some such pattern is again detected immediately below (c-d), where the good is supposedly manifested 'in five Gene' at *Phlb.* 66a-c, of which 'the measured is first, the proportionate second, intelligence third, knowledge crafts and true opinion in the soul fourth and any pure pleasure unmixed with the painful fifth'.⁷ *De Defectu* 428c-d thinks of the five regular solids of the *Timaeus* as a different set of imitations or representations (*mimêma*, *eidôlon*) of the Gene: the cube of rest, the pyramid of motion, the dodecahedron of being, the icosahedron of difference and the octahedron of sameness.⁸ The Megista Gene are also assumed to be closely akin to, if not identical with, the five ingredients of soul at *Timaeus* 35a (*An.Proc.* 1013d), for it is on the basis of these Gene that Plutarch refutes the Xenocratean interpretation of the construction of the world-soul.⁹ This in turn would mean

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- 6 πέντε μὲν ἐν Σοφιστῇ τὰς κυριωτάτας ἀποδείκνυσιν ἀρχάς, τὸ ὄν τὸ ταῦτόν τὸ ἕτερον, τέταρτον δὲ καὶ πέμπτον ἐπὶ τούτοις κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν. ἄλλω δ' αὖ τρόπῳ διαιρέσεως ἐν Φιλήβῳ χρώμενος ἐν μὲν εἶναι φησι τὸ ἄπειρον ἕτερον δὲ τὸ πέρας, τούτων δὲ μινυμένων πᾶσαν συνίστασθαι γένεσιν· αἰτίαν δ', ὅφ' ἥς μίγνυται, τέταρτον γένος τίθεται· καὶ πέμπτον ἡμῖν ὑπονοεῖν ἀπολέλοιπεν, ὃ τὰ μίχθέντα πάλιν ἴσχει διάκρισιν καὶ διάστασιν. τεκμαίρομαι δὲ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων ὥσπερ εἰκόνας λέγεσθαι, τοῦ μὲν ὄντος τὸ γινόμενον, κινήσεως δὲ τὸ ἄπειρον, τὸ δὲ πέρας τῆς στάσεως, ταυτοῦ δὲ τὴν μινύουσιν ἀρχήν, θατέρου δὲ τὴν διακρίνουσαν.
- 7 ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ τάγαθὸν ἐν πέντε γένεσι φανταζόμενον κατανοήσας, ὧν πρῶτόν ἐστι τὸ μέτριον δεύτερον δὲ τὸ σύμμετρον, καὶ τρίτον ὁ νοῦς καὶ τέταρτον αἰ περὶ ψυχὴν ἐπιστήμαι καὶ τέχναι καὶ δόξαι ἀληθεῖς, πέμπτον <δ> εἴ τις ἡδονὴ καθαρὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸ λυποῦν ἄκρατος, ἐνταῦθα λήγει
- 8 ... ὁ Πλάτων τό τ' ὄν εἶναι φησι καὶ τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ κίνησιν καὶ στάσιν. ὄντων οὖν πέντε τούτων οὐ θαυμαστὸν ἦν, εἰ τῶν πέντε σωματικῶν στοιχείων ἐκείνων ἕκαστον ἐκάστου μίμημα τῇ φύσει καὶ εἰδωλὸν ἐστὶ γεγεννημένον οὐκ ἄμικτον οὐδ' εἰλικρινές, ἀλλὰ τῷ μάλιστα μετέχειν ἕκαστον ἐκάστης δυνάμεως.
- 9 αὐτοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐν τῷ Σοφιστῇ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ταῦτόν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν, ὡς ἕκαστον ἐκάστου διαφέρον καὶ πέντε ὄντα χωρὶς ἀλλήλων

that the most basic constituents of the cosmos as a whole should somehow be reflected in the constituents of the cosmic soul. Even if Xenocrates had not made this assumption,¹⁰ Plutarch makes it clear that Crantor had done so, assuming that the ingredients of the soul needed to resemble the ingredients of the wider world in order to perceive them.¹¹

Hence a web of connections link key passages across three hiatus-avoiding dialogues according to three key Plutarchian works, constituting an attempt to create a metaphysic far more tightly knit than Plutarch would ordinarily attempt, and one to which the mature Plutarch seems uncommitted. Whoever it was who stressed these links, the Megista Gene of the *Sophist* are at the centre of it.

The systematization of Plato is regularly linked instead with Xenocrates, and Ge (2019) suspects this systematization extended to the organization of the corpus too. Yet his name is also linked prominently with the account of an *oral* tradition in the Old Academy that Hermias tells us went hand in hand with the written tradition,¹² so that Plato's written works cannot be his only source of Platonic authority, and it is rather unlikely that all of them provided similar authority in his eyes. A closer look at *De Animae Procreatione* suggests that, for as long as Plutarch deals with Xenocrates and Crantor, he is concerned with a restricted corpus of late dialogues,¹³ including *Laws* (1013e-f, 1015e), *Statesman* (1015a, c, 1017c, cf. 1026e), and even *Critias* (1017c) as well as *Timaeus*, *Sophist*, and *Philebus*. All these dialogues plus *Phaedrus* (particularly the palinode, 1013c, 1015e, 1016a)¹⁴ and a rather personal remark about *Phaedo* (1013d: note οἶμαι) enter the argument before *Republic* is first mentioned at 1017c.¹⁵

τιθεμένου καὶ διορίζοντος. Plutarch is using this to disprove Xenocrates' idea (F108, F78 I-P2), stated earlier, that sameness and difference can be the causes of rest and motion respectively.

- 10 Opsomer 2020 suggests that Plutarch distinguishes too sharply between the theories of Xenocrates and Crantor, and I am inclined to agree.
- 11 Crantor (*De An. Proc.* 1012f = F10. 2 Mette) is applying the like-by-like theory of cognition that Aristotle and Theophrastus, and subsequently Posidonius (Sextus, *Adv. Math.* 7. 93) had found in the Presocratics and in the *Timaeus*. On Crantor's theory see Opsomer 2020.
- 12 Hermias discovers advice for determining when writing will be preferable at *in Phdr.* 271. 10–18). See also Tarrant and Baltzly 2018, 494–496.
- 13 On the limited corpus with which Plutarch here deals see Tarrant forthcoming.
- 14 Also mentioned later at 1026d.
- 15 A reference to the Nuptial Number passage, 546b; the Sirens in the Myth of Er (*R.* 617b) are later mentioned 1029c, but, even supposing Plutarch is still in dialogue

It is natural to ask whether this pattern of Platonic references in the discussion of Old Academic interpretation of Plato bears any relation to the corpus employed by Xenocrates and Crantor. Sedley explicitly excludes *Republic's* having been important for him,¹⁶ but we are not expecting evidence for every dialogue that was thought authoritative by Xenocrates' followers. Olga Alieva's paper at our conference began its consideration of Xenocratean dialectic from four passages in particular: *Phlb.* 17b-c, *Sph.* 253a-b, *Tht.* 206a-b and *Plt.* 278d,¹⁷ supporting the impression that Xenocrates built his system on the philosophy of dialogues thought later than the *Republic*, if not always stylistically late.¹⁸ I would thus argue that Xenocrates took dialogues from *Phaedrus* to *Laws* (but excluding *Epinomis*)¹⁹ as being truly representative of Platonic philosophy, and thus as endorsing the position of those who offered a chronological arrangement of dialogues from *Phaedrus* to *Laws* according to the anonymous *Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy*.²⁰

While Szlezák too has adopted the position that the *Republic* is pivotal, seeing a fundamental difference between earlier dialogues looking forwards to the *Republic*, and a new phase looking towards the *agrapha dogmata*, I suspect that Xenocrates distinguished two groups of similar composition based on rather different criteria: he recognized the Plato *that he had known* principally in the later dialogues, and saw what preceded as essentially 'Socratic' in nature (cf. *Ep.* II 314c), a view now found in the new Apuleius (*Ex-*

with Crantor, the 'inspired' purple passages where Socrates adopts a different, more imagistic, voice, seem to have had a special status.

- 16 It might be more accurate to say that the *Republic* was important in specific ways; Horky (2022), 108, refers to Xenocrates' 'creative readings of Plato's imagistic passages, including the Divided Line, the Myth of Er in *Republic* X and the cosmological account of *Timaeus* ...'.
- 17 For an expanded treatment see now Alieva 2024, especially 125.
- 18 *Phdr.* and *Tht.* do not share the same exaggerated avoidance of hiatus and of certain clausulae as stylistically late dialogues, but most would regard them, with *Prm.*, as post-dating the *Republic*. I have special doubts about whether *Tht.* is so late, but at very least I should have to postulate a revision not long before the dialogue was adopted as a prelude to *Sph.*, and a revision especially of passages exhibiting the most advanced dialectical theory.
- 19 This is noteworthy in view of the attention paid to *Epinomis* by Plutarch's contemporary Theon of Smyrna and by the new Apuleius, which treats it as the thirteenth book of the *Laws*, as opposed to Plutarch himself. I find no list of parallels between Plutarch and the *Epinomis* in Jones 1916.
- 20 See 24. 7-19, and note that Xenocrates would have been at a particular advantage when affirming what the actual chronological order of dialogues was. For the view that the early-*Phaedrus* arrangement simply did not include dialogues earlier than *Phaedrus* see Tarrant (forthcoming).

pos. 14 in Stover 2016) where the works presenting ‘Socratic’ philosophy included *R.*, *Euthphr.*, *Ap.*, *Cr.*, *Ph.* and *Menex.*, and possibly others.²¹ These are contrasted with a group employing Pythagorean or Eleatic protagonists,²² and those where Plato sets out his own views in a more thinly veiled way: *Lg.* (with *Epin.* = *Lg.* XIII) and *Ep.*

So could the Apuleian *Expositio* be ultimately of Xenocratean inspiration? There were in fact important and obvious differences. Apuleius accepts that dialogues up to the *Republic* were Socratic, but for him Socratic philosophy was philosophy in the truest sense of the word.²³ He also regards *Epinomis* as authentic, and sees *Laws* and *Epistles* as being most openly Platonic works, supposing that the other hiatus-avoiding works rather present Eleatic and Pythagorean doctrine. While this seems to involve conscious modification of any division of dialogues attributable to Xenocrates, one wonders whether Apuleius’ life of Plato does not nevertheless preserve the true considerations behind the notion that Platonic philosophy began with *Phaedrus*. Plato is said to have brought philosophy to completion by supplementing Socratic ethics with Pythagorean physics and Eleatic logic (*De Platone* 1. 3. 187).²⁴ Only when the two latter elements are blended with Socratic ethics does the complete three-part Platonic philosophy come about: and the notion that philosophy has just these three parts is reliably attributed to Xenocrates and his school by Sextus (*Math.* 7.16 = F1 I-P2). For him the true Platonic philosophy must include all three parts, and presupposes some cosmology and some serious logic. Even in the later dialogues Xenocrates probably saw Plato working towards a position that had been left for his true successor, i.e. himself,²⁵ to explain clearly and in detail. Among these Xenocrates would have included *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*. The rationale for regarding these works as authentic, i.e. the presence of cosmology or logic in the Pythagorean or Eleatic traditions, might easily have entailed the inclusion of *Parmenides* as in the corresponding group in the *Expositio*, while the position of Xenocrates regarding *Theaetetus* is unclear. The respect afforded to Parmenides at 183e-184a, as well as the type of argument in the false-opinion and dream sections may well have merited its inclusion.

21 An initial lacuna means that a small amount of material pertaining to other allegedly ‘Socratic’ dialogues could be missing.

22 Yet apparently including *Critias*.

23 Note at *Expos.* 14: *Socraticae ... philosophiae, quae eadem est verae philosophiae* [= ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφία?], in his maxime libris

24 See Stover 2016, 24.

25 cf. Sedley 2021b, Tarrant and Baltzly 2018, 494-496; Tarrant 2020, 199-200.

Hence, I would attribute to Xenocrates a 'Platonic' corpus of which *Phaedrus* could be described as chronologically the first dialogue (though not of course an immature one), showing Plato still debating whether to record *his own teachings* or not,²⁶ and *Laws* the last, as reported in the anonymous *Prolegomena*, 24. 7-19—excluding *Epinomis*, which the adherents of this corpus ascribed to Philip of Opus. This tradition of the 'early' *Phaedrus* with its dithyrambic nature is also accepted in the lives of Plato early in the *Prolegomena* (3. 3-4) and Olympiodorus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* (2. 63-65), while Diogenes Laertius (3. 62) also acknowledges that an arrangement beginning with *Phaedrus* had existed.

Xenocrates exercised a considerable influence over how Plato was seen in later antiquity. Apart from the *Critias*, and also the *Laws*, which was used a good deal but did not meet the criteria of a 'dialogue', the works that we here assign to his corpus are also present in the Neoplatonist corpus that endured from Iamblichus to the school of Olympiodorus in sixth century Alexandria. Nor does the situation seem to have differed much for Plotinus, in whom the *Timaeus* remains supreme, the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist*, and *Philebus* continue to be broadly used, and the *Statesman* and *Laws* are used rather selectively. As in Plutarch, the Megista Gene of *Sph.* 254-255 remain of central interest. As in Plutarch, I would claim, the Xenocratean influence endures, but by no means dictates.

26 Note that 'Socrates' here seems constantly to adopt unfamiliar voices, inspired by his situation and his love of discourse; he also resorts to discussing such unfamiliar subjects as the heavens and dialectical or rhetorical procedures.

L'eredità del *Sofista* nell'isagogica neoplatonica: le testimonianze di Giamblico e Proclo

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The aim of this paper is to establish the importance of the dialectic of the *Sophist* not only for the creation of the Neoplatonist metaphysical system, but also for the isagogical system. I think that if there is an essential relationship between dialectical methods and metaphysical movements, then it is possible to assume that there is also a relationship between the division of the parts of the dialogue, as a procession, and the definition of *skopos* as an epistrophic moment. To demonstrate this, I will discuss the place that the *Sophist* probably occupied in the reading order of Plato's dialogues according to Iamblichus and how the relationship between dialectical methods applied to isagogics and metaphysical movements can benefit from the solution Proclus proposes in order to resolve the apparent contradiction between the descriptions of the two dialectical moments in the *Phaedrus* (265d3-266c1) and the four in the *Sophist* (253d5-e2). Iamblichus, Proclus, *skopos*, dialectics, isagogics.

1.

Dall'unico frammento giamblicheo attribuibile a un commento tardo-antico al *Sofista* (fr. 1 Dillon)¹ emerge che lo σκοπός del dialogo è il Demiurgo sublunare: Platone descriverebbe un Demiurgo legato al non-essere, il quale foggia realtà materiali e abbraccia il falso, cioè la materia. Questo Demiurgo, da un lato, volge lo sguardo verso il vero essere, e, dall'altro, lo volge verso la materia. Il risultato di sguardi verso oggetti appartenenti a realtà diverse ha come conseguenza diversi prodotti: quando guarda al versante inferiore, e cioè foggia a partire dalla materia, il Demiurgo fabbrica quelle immagini che non possono che essere apparenze. Una tale lettura del non-essere in relazione al Demiurgo sublunare è tenuta in conto anche nei commenti neoplatonici al *Parmenide* e al *Timeo*. Del resto, l'idea che il *corpus Platonicum* rappresenti un sistema coerente all'interno del quale i dialoghi interagiscono, rimandando l'uno all'altro così da formare un cosmo unitario, sembra poter risalire proprio a Giamblico. Questi avrebbe stabilito l'ordine corretto

1 Cf. Dillon 1973.

per leggere tale cosmo, collocando, secondo la ricostruzione di Westerink,² il *Sofista* prima del *Politico* così da creare una gerarchia demiurgica che si conclude con il *Timeo*.³

Tuttavia, non solo l'insieme dei dialoghi è un cosmo: innanzitutto ogni singolo dialogo è un cosmo. Giamblico, in effetti, offre un'interpretazione dei personaggi del *Sofista* in linea con la cosiddetta teoria cosmo-letteraria:⁴ lo Straniero di Elea è l'analogo letterario del padre sovra-celeste e trascendente gli altri demiurghi, mentre gli ascoltatori corrispondono alle intellezioni demiurgiche. Lo stesso ordine in cui avviene la discussione tra i personaggi riflette l'organizzazione del cosmo metafisico: lo Straniero comunica dapprima, cioè nel momento della processione, con Teodoro, e poi, durante il processo di conversione, con Socrate, che è immagine di Zeus. Questa lettura del susseguirsi delle conversazioni è sostenuta dalla riflessione che la demiurgia va dall'incompleto al completo e che il dialogo ha natura mimetica.

Giamblico, pertanto, apre alla possibilità di comprendere i dialoghi attraverso riferimenti analogici alla struttura del cosmo metafisico; ma Giamblico è anche colui che, teorizzando lo σκοπός, influenza la riflessione sulla natura mimetica persino dei metodi esegetici. Per stabilire analogie tra i dialoghi e il cosmo è necessario procedere per alterità e somiglianza, cioè distinguere per poi collegare in vista della definizione; e lo stesso processo si sviluppa quando si usano le questioni isagogiche che riproducono mimeticamente i movimenti metafisici di πρόοδος ed ἐπιστροφή. Dunque, questo contributo ha un duplice obiettivo: in primo luogo, individuare e far emergere l'importanza della dialettica del *Sofista* per l'isagogica neoplatonica in generale, e poi, e in particolare, per l'isagogica dei dialoghi; in secondo luogo, mostrare in che modo l'esegesi neoplatonica del *Sofista* abbia inciso sulla teorizzazione di una relazione mimetica tra metodi dialettici e movimenti metafisici, o meglio tra διαίρεσις (che nell'isagogica deve essere sempre posta in relazione allo σκοπός) e movimenti metafisici.

2 Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 26, 40-41. Sulla lacuna e la ricostruzione di Westerink, cf. Motta 2014, 142 n. 287 e la bibliografia ivi citata.

3 I tre dialoghi fisici si occupano del Demiurgo sublunare (*Sofista*), del Demiurgo celeste (*Politico*) e del padre dei Demiurghi (*Timeo*).

4 Sulla teoria cosmo-letteraria, cf. Motta 2018 e la bibliografia ivi citata.

2.

Lasciando da parte la questione dello σκοπός del *Sofista*, procederò analizzando l'importanza della dialettica per la costruzione di schemi isagogici metafisici. La mia idea è che gli schemi isagogici neoplatonici – cioè le questioni introduttive discusse prima della lettura dei dialoghi – siano il riflesso didattico-letterario dell'ordine metafisico del cosmo, come mostra la definizione del dialogo platonico come un κόσμος.⁵ A questa definizione si arriva attraverso l'individuazione nel dialogo di elementi analoghi a quelli che ci sono nel cosmo.

Proprio questa definizione di dialogo, che consente di guardare assieme all'aspetto biologico (la relazione parti e intero) e teleologico (l'intento finalistico e unitario) della creazione platonica, è ciò che permette di valutare la caratterizzazione metafisica delle questioni isagogiche applicate ai dialoghi. Mi sembra, inoltre, non irrilevante che, tra le questioni isagogiche,⁶ la divisione – come accade per lo σκοπός – sia affrontata all'inizio delle sezioni introduttive di *tutti* i dialoghi di Platone. A mio parere, il *Sofista* concorre a evidenziare il perché della imprescindibilità che la divisione condivide con lo σκοπός: nel *Sofista* il momento diairetico è parte della caccia all'essere; inoltre, dal punto di vista letterario, la definizione dello σκοπός, presentata nei *Prolegomeni a Platone* come una sorta di caccia – il verbo utilizzato è θηράω⁷ –, segue il momento diairetico. Pertanto, διαίρεσις e σκοπός riproducono, nell'isagogica, la dialettica di cui parla il *Sofista*, ossia l'onnipotenza di un metodo donato dagli dèi cui nulla sfugge.

Per procedere correttamente alla lettura dei dialoghi è necessario operare alcune fondamentali divisioni secondo criteri ben stabiliti. In linea con quanto Giamblico considerava opportuno,⁸ i *Prolegomeni a Platone* invitano a stabilire un criterio che consenta di dividere il dialogo,⁹ ossia un essere vivente non omeomero, le cui parti hanno funzioni diverse. La divisione tiene in conto come avvenga la partecipazione di tutte le diverse parti in cui il testo viene diviso a un intero che è lo σκοπός. Nella dialettica intero/parti, cogliere lo σκοπός del dialogo è indispensabile per comprendere le diverse sezioni in cui è possibile dividerlo; ma anche la valutazione del contributo

5 Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 15, 17.

6 Sull'isagogica tardoantica e i suoi schemi, cf. Motta & Petrucci 2022 e la bibliografia ivi citata.

7 Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 1, 2; 21, 16-17.

8 Cf. Procl. *in Alc.* 13, 20-28 (cf. Iambl. fr. 2 Dillon).

9 Cf. Anon. *Prol.* 19, 1-19.

delle diverse parti è importante per l'acquisizione di un'adeguata conoscenza dell'intero. Lo σκοπός si rivela, come lo è l'Uno a livello metafisico, centrale anche per la διαίρεσις, perché la divisione è possibile a partire da un intero.¹⁰ Al contempo, lo σκοπός è parte del processo dialettico, perché è, per così dire, la definizione del dialogo. Questo aspetto emerge non solo nelle norme che i *Prolegomeni a Platone* presentano per individuare correttamente lo σκοπός, ma – come proverò ad argomentare – anche dall'esegesi di un noto passo del *Sofista*.

È vero che il dialogo, nel suo essere un cosmo, è il miglior essere vivente, e dunque la questione della διαίρεσις richiamerebbe immediatamente l'immagine del dialettico e del cattivo macellaio di *Fedro* 265e1-4, dialogo che sostiene la teoria cosmo-letteraria assieme al *Timeo*. Tuttavia, ciò non vuol dire che la questione della divisione trovi nel *Fedro* il suo unico punto di forza. Come la teoria cosmo-letteraria chiama in causa il *Timeo* per superare una prospettiva essenzialmente biologica e abbracciarne una teleologica, così anche la questione della διαίρεσις non è conclusa in sé stessa, ma ha bisogno di essere ricondotta all'unità teologica e teleologica tramite lo σκοπός.

Tornerò nelle conclusioni su questo punto; prima, però, e per chiudere questa sezione, conviene accennare all'importanza della διαίρεσις non solo per l'isagogica dei dialoghi platonici, ma anche per l'isagogica dell'intero *cursus* filosofico. In questo senso è opportuno rilevare che la prima parte del titolo della versione armena dei *Prolegomeni alla filosofia* di Davide l'Invincibile – uno scritto di introduzione alla filosofia – sia *Definizioni e divisioni della filosofia*.¹¹ Questo titolo concorre a sottolineare la rilevanza della dialettica nell'isagogica e nella didattica della filosofia, benché non mostri ancora il debito che la sua applicazione isagogica ha con la lettura neoplatonica del *Sofista*.

3.

La tradizione latina medievale sembra più chiaramente confermare che la divisione – intesa come procedura isagogica – è un metodo caratteristico del *Sofista*, che ne mette in luce la centralità nell'intero *cursus studiorum*. Il *De divisione* di Boezio non attesta solo l'esistenza di un commento porfiriano al *Sofista*, ma anche che lo stesso Boezio avrebbe potuto attingere ai *prole-*

10 Cf. Procl. in *Remp.* I 6, 24-7, 1.

11 Cf. Calzolari & Barnes 2009, 39.

gomeni al Sofista per redigere la sua introduzione al metodo della διαίρεσις.¹² I *prolegomeni* al Sofista di Porfirio dovevano a loro volta contenere riferimenti al libro sulla διαίρεσις composto da Andronico di Rodi.¹³

Il fatto invece che tale metodo rappresenti mimeticamente movimenti metafisici sembra deducibile dal rapporto che – secondo Giamblico – emerge tra il sofista e il filosofo. È una certa natura mimetica che rende il filosofo sofista, perché segue mimeticamente il modello sia del demiurgo celeste, sia del demiurgo che presiede alla generazione. Anche il suo strumento di indagine privilegiato, cioè l'arte della divisione, ha natura mimetica, perché riproduce la processione delle realtà a partire dall'Uno. Nell'evidenziare il ruolo della μίμησις per la creazione di una gerarchia demiurgica che consenta di comprendere il posto assegnato al Demiurgo sublunare, Giamblico accenna a un approccio molto interessante all'arte della divisione (estendibile alla dialettica nel suo avvalersi di divisioni e di definizioni).

Dal momento che l'arte della divisione riproduce la processione degli esseri dall'Uno, l'ipotesi che vorrei ora analizzare, assieme alle sue conseguenze, è che esista un rapporto mimetico tra metodi dialettici e movimenti metafisici, e più specificamente, da una parte, tra divisione e πρόοδος e, dall'altra, tra definizione dello σκοπός ed ἐπιστροφή. Poiché però la testimonianza di Giamblico è eccessivamente sintetica, procederò esaminando come il rapporto tra metodi dialettici applicati all'isagogica e movimenti metafisici possa giovare della soluzione che Proclo propone per risolvere l'apparente contraddizione tra le descrizioni dei due momenti dialettici nel *Fedro* (265d3-5 e 265e1-4) e dei quattro nel *Sofista* (253d5-e2).

In linea con quanto aveva affermato Giamblico, ma estendendo esplicitamente il discorso mimetico anche alla definizione, Proclo ribadisce che la dialettica si serve di divisione e definizione: divisione e definizione sono strumenti utili per la conoscenza anche e soprattutto perché mimetici. Dell'insieme di questi strumenti, cioè della dialettica, Platone si serve innanzitutto nel *Parmenide*. Ed è appunto nel suo *Commento al Parmenide* (I 650, 15-651, 9) che Proclo ritorna su *Sph.* 253d5-e2.

12 Cf. Magee 1998.

13 Cf. Boeth. *De div.* 875d3-8.

4.

Proclo afferma che i quattro procedimenti dialettici di *Sph.* 253d5-e2, volti a ricostruire la trama delle relazioni tra le idee, sono in accordo con i due (divisione e definizione) riconducibili alla sinossi di *Phdr.* 265d3-5¹⁴ e alla diairesi di *Phdr.* 265e1-4. Questi procedimenti spiegano la relazione dinamica che esiste tra unità e molteplicità nel mondo noetico neoplatonico, attraverso un movimento conoscitivo che parte dal genere per andare alle specie (discensivo), e che dalle specie va al genere (ascensivo). Per dimostrare ciò, Proclo individua nel suddetto passo del *Sofista* due soli procedimenti dialettici, divisione (che ha il compito di fare dell'uno molti) e definizione (che ha il compito di raccogliere i molti in uno). Divisione e definizione si articolano *rispettivamente* in due movimenti conoscitivi: uno discensivo che considera il genere in rapporto alla specie e uno ascensivo che considera la specie in rapporto al genere.

Il primo passaggio del *Sofista* commentato, e nel quale Proclo riconosce la διαίρεσις, è il seguente (253d5-9):

Dunque, chi è capace di fare questo, percepisce un'unica idea attraverso molti – ciascuno dei quali (sc. generi) è uno e giace separatamente – che si estende dappertutto, e molte altre diverse le une dalle altre, abbracciate esternamente da una unica.¹⁵

Commentando questo passaggio,¹⁶ Proclo individua come prima fase della διαίρεσις – che è il presupposto della definizione e procede dall'alto – la divisione dei generi nelle specie, dove per genere intende un'unica idea estesa attraverso molte che rimangono separate. In questo caso, l'idea, che funge da genere, è un'unità non assimilabile alla giustapposizione delle parti di un intero. L'idea è un intero che, in sé unitario e anteriore alle molteplicità delle specie, determina l'essenza di queste in quanto è partecipato da ciascuna, ognuna delle quali tuttavia rimane separata sia dalle altre specie sia dal genere stesso. Quanto alle specie, sono molte idee diverse le une dalle altre, ma abbracciate esternamente da un'unica idea, cioè il genere che le trascende. Ed è a questo punto che Proclo inserisce la questione del rapporto genere-specie per esplicitare la relazione tra la causa (il genere) e il causato (la specie): le cause delle singole idee risiedono in un'idea più generale, che le produce rimanendo in sé inalterata ed esterna ai suoi effetti. Spetta alla

14 Pace Bechtle 2002, 200-213.

15 Trad. Centrone 2008.

16 Cf. Procl. in *Prm.* I 650, 18-34.

divisione – anche guardata dal punto di vista della specie – riconoscere che il genere è la realtà dotata di maggior grado e prioritaria. Intesa dapprima come partecipazione a un intero dal punto di vista delle singole componenti, poi come pre-comprensione causale di tutte le singole componenti dal punto di vista dell'intero, la diairesi ha il compito di riconoscere sia la presenza del genere in tutte le sue specie, sia la duplice collocazione delle cause delle singole specie, che sono preesistenti nel genere e insite nelle specie stesse per la partecipazione al genere.

Il secondo procedimento dialettico che Proclo individua nel *Sofista*, e che si sviluppa sempre in due momenti conoscitivi, è la definizione (che procede dal basso)(253d9-e3):

[...] e una unica attraverso molti interi, raccolta in uno (di questi), e molte separatamente, totalmente distinte; ciò significa saper distinguere, relativamente a un genere, dove ciascuno può comunicare e dove no.¹⁷

Commentando queste linee sulla definizione,¹⁸ Proclo afferma che le singole specie devono essere esaminate nella loro esistenza separata sia dall'intero, a cui danno origine tramite connessione, sia dalle altre, a cui possono essere intrecciate. Prima però di poter ricavare dal molteplice un'unità, occorre considerare le singole alterità individuali che costituiscono il molteplice. Dalle molte idee, ciascuna considerata in sé stessa come un intero che si intreccia con le altre, e dal loro insieme emerge per raccoglimento del molteplice un'idea 'totale', che, in virtù della connessione e al di là della differenza, realizza un'unità. Di conseguenza, all'unità, cioè a un'idea unica che congiunge in unità le molte, si risale grazie al principio della connessione dei molteplici attributi.

In questa sezione del *Commento al Parmenide*, Proclo sottolinea come non ci siano incoerenze tra gli scritti platonici, e lo fa invertendo l'ordine dei procedimenti rispetto al modo in cui sono presentati nel *Fedro*, e recuperando sempre da questo dialogo, e dal *Filebo*, il criterio del fare dei molti uno e dell'uno molti: nella sua esegesi, in effetti, la divisione precede la definizione.¹⁹ Proclo rinviene nella dialettica, e nei suoi due momenti – divisione e definizione –, il dinamismo insito nei movimenti metafisici di processione e ritorno. Inoltre, la ragione della validità epistemologica della procedura dialettica, in vista della conoscenza dell'essere, sta nella natura mimetica delle sue fasi: esse riproducono le direzioni dei movimenti

17 Trad. Centrone 2008.

18 Cf. Procl. in *Prm.* I 650, 37-651, 9.

19 Così anche Procl. in *Prm.* V 982, 11-15.

metafisici anche nei diversi movimenti epistemologici. Dunque, il *Sofista* potrebbe rientrare tra i dialoghi fisici anche per il metodo che il Demiurgo sublunare usa e che è proprio del filosofo: questi, con lo sguardo verso il basso e verso l'alto, è in grado di creare un'analogia tra i movimenti dialettici e quelli cosmici.

5.

In virtù della natura mimetica propria anche degli schemi isagogici, le divisioni da operare sui dialoghi e la ricerca dello σκοπός sono procedure 'corrette' solo se intese non come mero esercizio preparatorio alla lettura di essi, ma come tracce²⁰ di quei movimenti metafisici che consentono la caccia all'essere. Operare correttamente le divisioni vuol dire certamente ricostruire l'ordine naturale di molteplici movimenti dottrinali, ma vuol dire anche, nell'isagogica, e da un punto di vista generale, giungere alla definizione del dialogo come un κόσμος, cioè un organismo che ha coerenza in sé stesso e in relazione agli altri. Le divisioni permettono, infatti, di guardare allo σκοπός come a un'unica idea estesa attraverso le diverse parti in cui è diviso il singolo dialogo, e di riconoscere la presenza di esso in tutte le sue parti. È invece a partire dallo σκοπός che è possibile riflettere sulla connessione dei diversi dialoghi rispetto al tutto. Di conseguenza, è necessario considerare il dialogo in sé come un intero intrecciato con gli altri.

In assenza di un commento neoplatonico al *Sofista* non è possibile ricostruire le divisioni che i commentatori operavano su questo dialogo; tuttavia, non sembra essere preclusa la possibilità di comprendere quale sia stata la sua relazione con il cosmo dei dialoghi. Lo σκοπός del *Sofista*, citato in apertura, giustifica la vicinanza di questo dialogo al *Politico* e al *Timeo*. Il metodo dialettico utilizzato da Platone nel *Sofista* sottolinea invece l'importanza dell'appartenenza a un cosmo fisico che si allarga a quello dialettico del *Fedro* e del *Parmenide*. Dunque, sembra innegabile il ruolo di Giamblico per lo sviluppo sia di una διαίρεσις mimetica, che diviene momento isagogico imprescindibile verso la 'definizione' del cosmo metafisico-letterario neoplatonico, sia per l'inizio della riflessione sulla relazione dialettica tra διαίρεσις e σκοπός, due questioni isagogiche il cui fondamento metafisico è legato a una specifica interpretazione neoplatonica del *Sofista*.

20 Cf. Procl. in *Remp.* I 5, 12-25 e Motta & Petrucci 2022.

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