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

Mauro Bonazzi
Utrecht University

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 δεσπόταις 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, 1949[6], 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 refugee from themselves in philosophy": Pl. *Tht,* 167e-168a.

and from the illusion that he knows what he does not know, will become "gentler" (ἠμερώτερος).[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 *elenchus*, 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 techne* (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 *techne* 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 πάτριον, 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 (πατρικῷ 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…ἠρέμα). 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 remarked[27], 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.