

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 a 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 wolves 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.

