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*Beatriz Bossi,
Thomas M. Robinson (Eds.)*

PLATO'S ›SOPHIST‹ REVISITED



TRENDS IN CLASSICS

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Plato's *Sophist* Revisited

Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes

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Preface

This book consists of a selection of papers presented at the *International Spring Seminar on Plato's Sophist* (26–31 May 2009, Centro de Ciencias de Benasque 'Pedro Pascual', Spain) with the financial support of MICINN, CSIC, Universidad de Zaragoza and Gobierno de Aragón. The Conference was organized by the editors, under the auspices of the Director of the Centre, Prof. José Ignacio Latorre, who provided invaluable assistance at every stage of the Conference, up to its close with a lecture on Quantum Physics for Philosophers.

The aim of the conference was the promotion of Plato studies in Spain in the framework of discussions with a number of international scholars of distinction in the field, whilst at the same time looking afresh at one of Plato's most philosophically profound dialogues. Readers will find papers by scholars from Spain (Bernabé, Bossi, Casadesús, de Garay, Monserrat, Solana), France (Cordero, Narcy, O'Brien), Italy (Fronterotta, Palumbo), Portugal (Mesquita), Mexico (Hülsz), Chile (Sandoval) and the Anglo-Saxon orbit (Ambuel, Dorter, Robinson).

The papers included fall into three broad categories: a) those dealing directly with the ostensible aim of the dialogue, the definition of a sophist; b) a number which tackle a specific question that is raised in the dialogue, namely how Plato relates to Heraclitus and to Parmenides in the matter of his understanding of being and non-being; and c) those discussing various other broad issues brought to the fore in the dialogue, such as the 'greatest kinds', true and false statement, difference and *mimesis*.

The volume opens with a paper by T. M. Robinson which argues that the final definition of the *Sophist* might well reflect the (very negative) views of the later Plato on sophists, but is unlikely to reflect the views of Socrates, who would almost certainly have wished to exclude Protagoras from so drastic a portrayal. F. Casadesús lays stress on Plato's description of sophists as slippery Proteans, who, though greatly skilled in evading capture, can still be captured in the end by dialectic. J. Monserrat and P. Sandoval argue that the search to define a sophist leads tangentially but very fruitfully to a description of what a *philosopher* is, i. e., an endless enquirer into Being. And A. Bernabé offers evidence to show that religious concepts anchor the whole argumentation of the sixth def-

inition of the sophist (26b–231c); a sophist is at base ‘a false prophet of a false religion who promises a false purification’.

A paper by M. Narcy offers a careful description of the first five attempts to define a sophist, concluding with a strong statement of how Socrates might meaningfully have considered himself a sophist (as he apparently was by some Eleans), though with the *caveat*, voiced by the Stranger, that his own sophistry, unlike that of others, is ‘faithful to its lineage’. The idea that there might be different types of sophistry is further pursued by J. Solana, who, like Bernabé, examines the famous sixth definition of a sophist, where sophistry is said to purify the soul by a maieutic method which seems remarkably if not indeed uniquely Socratic, and he contrasts the (epistemological) catharsis brought about by such genuine sophistry (characterized as that of ‘noble lineage’) with that of the other forms of sophistry which Plato scrutinizes. A final paper in this section, by K. Dorter, examines the question of the peculiar technique of division employed by Socrates to reach a definition of the sophist, that of bisection, by contrast with the method of natural joints between species which we find in the *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*.

In the book’s central section, E. Hülsz argues that a brief but significant reference in the *Sophist* to Heraclitus offers evidence that Plato was aware of the intimate relation between being, unity and identity in Heraclitus, and that this serves as a useful counterweight to the stress on his doctrine of flux which we find in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus*. On the question of whether Parmenides’ doctrine of non-being is destroyed by Plato in the *Sophist*, D. O’Brien argues colourfully and at length that no such thing happens; B. Bossi that something is indeed demolished, but that *what* is demolished is in fact a caricature of Parmenides’ thought put together by the Eleatic Stranger; and A. P. Mesquita that Parmenides’ doctrine of non-being is merely *re-fashioned* in the *Sophist*, i. e., as something ‘other’; it is never refuted. In this re-fashioning, he maintains, Plato sets out to show that one can talk without contradiction of being either absolutely and ‘in itself’ or relatively and ‘in relation to something other’. The section concludes with a paper by N. L. Cordero which discusses at length the centrality of the doctrine of separation of Forms and sense-world in Plato, and shows how, in the *Sophist*, the ‘relative non-being’ of each Form makes it constitutively ‘other’ than any and all other Forms, and how this opens up the possibility of meaningful thought and speech.

The final section of the book begins with a closely-argued discussion, by F. Fronterotta, of ontology, predication and truth in the *Sophist*,

which emphasizes the importance of separating falsehood from what-is-not and situates it in the connection of subject and predicate. J. de Garay, writing on a topic closely germane to this, discusses falsehood and negation in the *Sophist*, but this time as understood by Proclus. D. Ambuel, in a broad ranging discussion of the *megista gene*, argues that the analysis by which the *gene* are differentiated in the dialogue is an exercise in studied ambiguities informed by an Eleatic logic of strict dichotomy that was underpinning of the *Sophist's* method of division. By this dialectical drill, Plato shows that the metaphysics underlying the Visitor's method fails to adequately distinguish what it means to be a character, and therefore remains inadequate to track down the sophist or to distinguish him from the philosopher: Eleaticism, as critically examined by Plato, proves to be means to disguise, not to discover the sophist. The section (and the book) concludes with a wide-ranging paper by L. Palumbo which sets out to show that in the *Sophist* falsity is closely linked to *mimesis*, all falsity being for Plato mimetic though not every *mimesis* false.

During the Conference there was a video presentation by C. Kahn which provoked a fruitful debate with D. O'Brien and N. Notomi. After the sessions, informal meetings gave young researchers the opportunity to discuss ideas with A. Bernabé, N. Cordero and T.M. Robinson.

Finally, we should like to thank Prof. Germán Sierra for his aid and encouragement from the very beginning; without his support the Conference would have never taken place. We are also deeply grateful to Tracey Paterson, David Fuentes and Anna Gili for their warm hospitality and for their valuable help with the overall organization of the Conference, including a visit to the waterfalls, which took us out of the 'Academy' for a memorable afternoon in the woods.

The editors, Spring 2012

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I. Defining Sophistry

Protagoras and the Definition of ‘Sophist’ in the *Sophist*

Thomas M. Robinson

I should like to begin by setting out as clearly as I can what seem to be the main things that can be said about Protagoras, and offer an evaluation of them. This will be in large part without reference to the final definition of ‘sophist’ in the *Sophist*. I shall then turn to the definition, and see where if anywhere it appears to fit into the picture, and what can be said about the definition as a definition.

Let me begin with the claim that, like many sophists, Protagoras thought that *arete* was teachable,¹ and made it his business to teach it. On the face of it, this does not seem too extravagant a claim, once we realize that the basic meaning of *arete* was ‘efficiency’, as emerges very clearly in a strong argument by Socrates in the closing lines of *Republic* 1 (352d ff.) A pruning knife has *arete* if it cuts well; a war-horse has *arete* if it gets its rider safely into and out of battle, etc. A person has *arete* if he/she has appropriate skills in the social and political sphere. And particularly in the political sphere; we are talking of a world in which as, Pericles put it, an *idiotes*, or person centered on himself, is of no value to the polis.²

So a claim to teach *arete* in such a context is a claim to be able to educate the young in, among other things, what it takes to make one’s contribution to the life of the polis. This in itself seems unexceptionable, unless one is convinced that the only persons qualified to do the teaching are either parents themselves or persons selected by the parents *in loco parentis*. And there were certainly plenty of parents who made that claim, as seems clear from Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (cf. Pl. *Prot.* 325d7–9).

As it happens, in his dialogue *Protagoras* Plato puts into the mouth of Protagoras an excellent defense of the view that the young can be given a good moral and political education just as they can be given a good

1 Pl. *Prot.* 323c3–324d1

2 Thuc. 2. 40

education in mathematics, and the only way Socrates can attack it is in terms of his own theory that ‘virtue is knowledge’. But the only philosophers who have ever attempted to defend this extravagant view were Socrates and Plato themselves; its weaknesses were rapidly pointed out by Aristotle, with his careful distinction, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, between moral and intellectual virtues,³ and it has never seemed convincing since.

So what we are left with (323c ff.) is Protagoras’ very fine *defense* of what now seems to most people more or less self-evident, and that is that there *is* such a thing as moral and political education. Naturally, this does not involve the extravagant rider that such education can *make* a person good, any more than one can compel a horse led to water to drink. We remain free and responsible agents. So much so that Protagoras, in the same dialogue, cites the educational value of punishment seen as deterrence. The passage is worth a second hearing (324a ff.):

‘No one punishes those who do wrong, simply concentrating on the fact that the man had done wrong in the past, unless he is taking blind vengeance like a wild animal. Someone who aims to punish in a rational way ... does so for the sake of the future, so that neither the wrongdoer himself nor anyone else who sees him punished will do wrong again. A man who holds this view considers that virtue *can* be taught by education. For at the very least he is punishing in order to deter’.

If so far what Protagoras has been saying seems innocuous, and indeed just common sense, what of the charge against him of impiety, which led apparently to a conviction and the burning of his books (D. L. *Protag.* 3)? As it happens, we have what seems to be a quotation from him on the matter, as follows:

‘Concerning the gods, I am not in position to know that (or : how) they are or that (or: how) they are not, or what they are like in appearance; for there are many things that get in the way of knowledge – the obscurity of the subject matter and the shortness of life’. (fr. 4 DK)

3 It should, however, be pointed out that the claim seems much less extravagant once it is made clear that *arete* was heard by Greeks as an ‘efficiency’ word as well as a word for ‘virtue’, and that *epistasthai* served frequently to indicate knowledge ‘how’. In a word, efficiency in the sphere of action is know-how in the sphere of action (and who would ever deny that efficiency is or involves know-how?).

What is being claimed here is somewhat doubtful; a conjunction that can be translated as either 'that' or 'how' leaves us in some doubt as to whether he was saying whether the gods exist or not, or that it was hard to say anything about the manner of their existence. The phrase 'or what they are like in appearance' might be seen as a suasion in favor of the latter interpretation, but if it is read as simply a short form for the longer phrase, 'or, *if* they exist, what they look like', it is no longer such a suasion. Either way, it is hardly a statement of atheism, as one ancient critic (Diogenes of Oenoanda) claimed.⁴ If anything, it might have been understood as claiming agnosticism about the existence and/or characteristics of the gods most Greeks believed in, a charge – 'impiety' – which was to bring Socrates, too, the death penalty. So in this Protagoras was in fairly distinguished company, along with Socrates and Anaxagoras (see D. L. *Anaxag.* 9).

But again it was something unlikely to endear him to conservative, anti-Periclean elders alarmed at what the sophists might just be putting into the heads of their children, especially during a time of a war to the death with Sparta, when the social cohesiveness underpinned by common religious beliefs and common socio-political commitments seemed to be an imperative, not something to be lightly discussed, and possibly lightly dismissed, by some itinerant sophist.

A third thing that needs to be mentioned is that Protagoras 'was the first to say there were two arguments concerning everything, these being opposed to each other'. (D. L. *Protag.* 3) And we may actually have an example of what he was talking about in the *Dissoi Logoi*, a document that looks like a little manual of arguments put out by some sophist in the fourth century, around the time of Socrates' death.⁵ In this document a set of arguments is proposed for saying that good and evil, or beautiful and ugly, or true and false, and so on, are one and the same, followed immediately by a set of arguments setting out to show that they are different, with little or nothing by way of discussion about the relative *worth* of any of the arguments being put forward.

This sort of thing seems to have led to a lot of opposition, of the type found in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, where a personified 'Just Argument' is set up against a personified 'Unjust Argument'. And one can certainly

4 See G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981), 165

5 See T. M. Robinson, *Contrasting Arguments: An Edition of the Dissoi Logoi* (New York: Arno Series, 1979)

understand any critic who saw this sort of thing as mere intellectual cleverness, at best worthless, and at worst possibly dangerous, and Plato provides a good example of it in the logic-chopping of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus in the *Euthydemus*.

But there is nothing in Protagoras' own words to suggest support for any such goings-on. His claim is in fact the perfectly respectable one that arguments can invariably be found for both sides of any question. It is not the claim of a Sextus Empiricus, many centuries later, that each of the two arguments is of equal *valence*! On the contrary, it should be read in conjunction with his belief – shared with other sophists, such as Antiphon (B44 DK) – that some arguments are better or more 'straight' (*orthos*) than others (A10 DK). Our job as thinkers is simply to give each side of a question the best run for its money, before coming to a conclusion as to which side is the stronger.

The same, it might be added, goes for the notorious attribution to Protagoras by Aristotle⁶ (possibly alluded to earlier by Aristophanes in the *Clouds* [C2 DK]) that he used to 'make the weaker argument the stronger'. This may well have been the conclusion of elders hearing their children, after a session with Protagoras, putting arguments in favor of things which they were profoundly uncomfortable with. (An example might just have been, 'Wisdom is not necessarily something that only the elderly can lay claim to'). But, as in the case of the 'two sides to every argument' point just mentioned, Protagoras could have easily defended himself by saying that, had they been participants in the full discussion, they would rapidly have realized that he was merely encouraging his students to put the best case for each side of an argument, including perhaps (or rather, very likely) the often unfashionable and uncomfortable side. But this is in no sense an attempt to make a weak-looking argument strong when, upon examination of the evidence, it continues to seem weak. And it also looks remarkably like what Socrates was up to, among other things, in *his* discussions with the young.

Let us look finally at possibly the most famous thing ever attributed to Protagoras, and that is the statement 'man is the measure of all things, of things that are that (or: how) they are, and of things that are not that (or: how) they are not'. [D. L. *Protag.* 3] It is a statement rife with ambiguities on many points.

6 Ar. *Rhet.* 1402a5–28

- By 'man' does he mean 'mankind' or 'any given man'? Both interpretations are theoretically possible, and scholars have taken different sides on the matter, though it is fair to say the majority have opted for the interpretation 'any given man'.
- Is he talking about the existence/non-existence of *entities*, or the genuineness/non-genuineness of *states-of-affairs*? Both interpretations seem theoretically possible, given the fact that the verb *einai* can be used of both existence and truth.
- Whether he is talking about existence of entities or genuineness of states of affairs (or, to complicate things further, possibly both), is he talking about the *fact* of such existence/non-existence or such genuineness/non-genuineness or the *ways in which* various entities exist/do not exist, or various states-of-affairs are genuine/non-genuine?

This is a very large topic, and worth a piece in itself. But I must be briefer. Notoriously, Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, interpreted the statement as a claim that, as far as perception at any rate is concerned, I am the sole arbiter of my own perceptions. If a particular item of food seems bitter to me, then no-one can gainsay this; that perception is 'true for me', and cannot be made untrue by any statement as to *why* I have that perception and others appear not to (for example, I have a sickness, and the others don't) [166e–167a].

With this as his starting point Plato argues in the *Theaetetus* that the natural consequence is that 'all perceptions are true' [167a–b]. From this it is a natural step to argue that no perceptions are false; from that point it is an equally natural-looking step to argue that it is not possible to *say* anything that is false; and from that position to conclude that 'it is not possible to contradict' (a move made by Dionysodorus and Euthydemus in the *Euthydemus*).

But here we must demur. It is one thing to argue that these things are natural conclusions to draw from Plato's interpretations of Protagoras' famous sentence about 'man the measure'. But one needs to be sure that Plato's interpretation is itself plausible, and then whether, even if it is plausible, those are indeed natural conclusions following from it. That others might have been puzzled enough to finish up drawn to a different interpretation is strongly hinted at when Plato describes the doctrine (i. e., the doctrine of the infallibility of sensation) as a 'secret' doctrine of Protagoras, to be 'revealed' <only?> to his disciples [152c].

As for the things supposedly *stemming* from the doctrine, it is only in one dialogue, the *Euthydemus*, that Plato puts into the mouth of his Soc-

rates-character the statement (286c) that he has ‘heard this argument (i. e., about its being impossible to make a false statement and to contradict, TMR) from many people on many occasions – for Protagoras and those associated with him used to make great use of it, as did others even earlier than him’. But this is very thin evidence; Socrates is operating simply on hearsay, not from personally hearing Protagoras on the matter or reading it in any of his works. The most we might wish to assert, and then only on the basis of a very late source (Didymus the Blind, fourth century A. D.), is that Protagoras’ pupil Prodicus did apparently draw that conclusion.⁷

Which leads me back to Plato’s interpretation of the term ‘man’, in the ‘man the measure statement’, as ‘any given man’ rather than ‘mankind’. Because, as we saw, both interpretations are linguistically possible. And, in fact, I would claim, Plato himself was inclined to one or the other interpretation, depending on what was most on his mind on any given occasion. In the *Theaetetus* it is important for him to read the term as ‘any given man’ to reinforce the view of the infallibility of sensation. But he did admit that this was a ‘secret’ doctrine of Protagoras, and part of the secret, it turns out, may well have been that particular reading of the term ‘man’. Because on two occasions Plato contrasts the doctrine with *other* possibilities, once in the *Theaetetus* and once in the *Laws*. In the *Theaetetus* he brings up as an absurdity the counter-possibility that ‘pig’ might just as well have been proffered by Protagoras as the measure of all things [161c], and in the *Laws* he affirms magisterially, and in clear contradistinction to Protagoras, that, not man, but *God* is more appropriately describable as the measure of all things [716c].

This is, I think, remarkable on a number of counts, not least because it seems to have as its basis a reading of ‘man’ in Protagoras’ famous sentence as meaning ‘mankind’; what are being contrasted, it seems, are the non-rational kingdom of animals, the rational kingdom of mankind, and the supra-rational domain of the divine. On this interpretation of the term ‘man’ in Protagoras’ statement, he is claiming that only man, the sole creature that we know for certain to be rational (on occasion), and no creature from the animal kingdom can claim to adjudicate in matters of existence and truth. (Whether the gods exist, or whether, if they exist, we can know anything about their supposed rationality, he cannot tell, as we saw earlier).

7 For details see Kerferd (above, n. 4) 89–90

As for that of which man is the measure, Protagoras' statement, on this interpretation, makes it clear that he is no absolute skeptic and no absolute relativist. There *are* certain realities/states-of-affairs; but for their adjudication the presence of a rational mind, that of man, is imperative.

What all this means in practice, I think, is that we need to be careful to keep separate at all times three different persons or sets of persons: Protagoras himself and two sets of persons seeing him as in some measure their precursor. What Protagoras might reasonably be said to have held, including very likely a doctrine of the infallibility of sensation, I have just tried to set out. What one *line* of his would-be disciples, epitomized by younger sophists like Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, either claimed he held, or thought naturally followed from what he held, is there for all to read in the *Euthydemus*.

What a second set of followers, like the author of the *Dissoi Logoi* and even in some measure, I would say, Socrates, took from him, is a lot more interesting, and a lot more likely to reflect his real claims to fame. Each is in agreement with Protagoras that there exist argument and counter-argument for every question, and it could well be said that the doctrine is in fact the very spirit of Plato's dialogues. As for his skepticism about things divine, Socrates made it very clear, in the *Apology*, that this was his own stance, and he was prepared to die in its defense.

On the matter of the infallibility of sensation, Plato, and very likely Socrates before him, was very happy to take over the doctrine from Protagoras (if, that is, it really was his view). And finally, even the 'man the measure' doctrine, which caused so much scandal, was almost certainly something that Socrates, given his skepticism about things divine, could easily have accepted.

What I am saying, in a word, is that Socrates, the great humanist, had a significant predecessor in many regards – Protagoras, another great humanist, and pride of Abdera.

So far I have painted a fairly positive portrait of Protagoras, in which he comes across as more of what we might call a humanist than a sophist.

I turn now to comments about the sophist leading to Plato's final definition of a sophist in the *Sophist*.

He is, we are told (221c ff.) a hunter of men, who catches his prey, not in the arena of public discourse (the domain of other huntsmen, public orators), but by private persuasion in more intimate groupings.

He also takes money for what he does, described by the Stranger as ‘bogus education’ (*doxopaideutike*), the goal of which he, the sophist, claims to be *arete*.

His hunting takes the form of travelling salesmanship, where this particular salesman is out to sell to rich young men in particular, and what he sells are various forms of knowledge, including knowledge of *arete*, for the purpose of what is called soul-nourishment.

He is characterized by ‘eristic’ (literally, ‘the art of strife’, or possibly ‘the art of operating by the use of strife’), and is again to be distinguished in this from the forensic orator by the fact that he does so in more intimate contexts, not the public arena. The eristic he engages in is described as contentious and disputatious, but it does follow rules, which turn out to be a technique involving what is called ‘the small change of question and answer’.

Some of these eristics do what they do for the money; others of them because they just like babbling (*adoleschein*).

But there is also another type of sophist, it seems. And to describe him we need to change the metaphor from hunting to cleansing, or purification. This sophist, described as one ‘of noble lineage’ (231b), cleanses not the sicknesses of body but those of soul, its vices, using the art of chastisement. He also educates the soul (229a–b) away from any state of ignorance (*amathia*) that characterizes it, and this turns out to be ignorance, in the sense of thinking you know something when you do not (229c). The educational technique involved is what has become famous as that of ‘examination’ (*elenchus*) (230b–d).

This group of sophists the Stranger shrinks from actually calling sophists (230e), on the grounds that in so doing he would be ascribing to them ‘too high a function; (which seems to mean ‘a claim to be possessed of wisdom [*sophia*] or the power to transmit it or both’). (Or is the correct translation here ‘paying them too high an honour’ [White]?). He finishes up calling him analogous to sophists, though only as a dog is to a wolf, but eventually he seems to pull back somewhat from this position, and agrees to let the description ‘sophist’ stand (231a). But in context he appears to be letting it stand only for the moment; a slightly obscure sentence immediately following may be suggesting that a distinction might eventually be made which would give this particular practitioner a different title than sophist altogether. But as things stand we are left seeing them called ‘sophists of noble lineage’.

As the dialogue draws to a close an intense, and uncompromisingly negative definition of the sophist is finally offered, and this one un-

doubtedly excludes what had earlier been called the sophist of noble lineage. The sophist (268c) is now described as a *mimetes* who operates on the basis of belief not knowledge, by contrast with *mimetai* who operate on the basis of knowledge not belief. More precisely the *mimesis* characterizing a sophist is said to be a) *mimesis* of that which is 'insincere', of that which is productive of 'contradictions', and of that which is non-knowing; b) *mimesis* of that specific form of copy-making that constitutes appearance-making; and c) *mimesis* of that species of production which is marked off as human not divine.

We shall return to this definition, but before that let us get back to Protagoras for a while. On the face of it, the Stranger's first description, in the opening pages of the dialogue, of the characteristics of a sophist leads us away from our own rather positive earlier description of the salient features of Protagoras, and in the direction of more negative features that we have from the beginning learned to expect from Plato/Socrates. Protagoras, if he is a sophist like the others, such as Hippias and Prodicus, will for example be a travelling salesman like the others, and in the dialogue which bears his name he is indeed so described by Socrates in some detail (*Prot.* 313e–314b), with the further allegation that it is risky to one's soul buying his wares if one is not a very knowledgeable consumer. His administrations to the soul are also purchased for money, like those of other sophists. He likes money a lot, as it happens, and he hunts down the wealthy young in particular, such as Callicles, in whose house Plato stages his dialogue *Protagoras*.

So far the template fits very well. But what about the further, final definition of the sophist, at the very end of the dialogue, in terms of *mimesis*? There are problems with it, it seems to me, in regard to both denotation and connotation. As far as denotation is concerned, by allusion at least it seems at the outset to accommodate within its range both a Thrasymachus and the Demiurge [265e ff.], but this seems impossible to reconcile with the argument's closing words [268c–d], where only sophists of the likes of Thrasymachus can be deemed serious candidates for the title 'sophist'. As far as connotation is concerned, the argument's strength lies in the force of its description of what, in the eyes of Socrates and Plato, sophists of the time set out to do and often do, and of their lack of qualifications to do any such thing or indeed to know what exactly they are attempting to accomplish. The weakness lies in what are chosen as the distinguishing features of the definition. And I really need only one example of this to make my point. It is one thing to assert that sophists claim knowledge but are ig-

norant, or, to put it in the Stranger's terms, believe, simple-mindedly, that their ignorance is *knowledge* (268a *init.*), quite another to assert that they have a fair suspicion that what passes for their knowledge in the eyes of the world really *is* ignorance – and then do nothing to set right the mistake. This, on the face of it, is a simple accusation of *mauvaise foi* against all sophists. Some sophists, of course, might well have been guilty of it. But to claim that it is an *essential* feature of *all* sophists goes far beyond this, and in making it the Stranger has landed himself in the position of all who have failed to see that the supposed *universality* of any general proposition is invariably the result of an inductive process, and hence, in the final analysis, illusory – whether one is talking about all sophists, all unicorns, all democrats or any supposed totality, and whether or not one expects the reader to take the phrase 'all sophists' here to be understood as 'all sophists except those of noble lineage' (such as, presumably, Socrates and his intellectual descendants).

I should add that, even if the logical problem I have mentioned could be overcome, the definition as the Stranger propounds it excludes from its purview so many of the *rest* of *Protagoras'* activities, which in fact make him in fact remarkably *Socratic*, that on these grounds too the Stranger's definition makes a very awkward fit. (So much so that the Socrates of history would in my estimation have found it difficult if not impossible to accept; his Protagoras is criticized, but never on the all-encompassing grounds proposed by Plato, and most certainly never on grounds of *mauvaise foi*).

In the matter of connotation, it is furthermore far from clear that sophistry *has* an essence, and, if it does (granting, *argumenti causa*, that *anything* has an essence), whether that essence is *mimesis* of some sort, and whether it is an essence which manifests *mauvaise foi*; when Plato first broached the question, earlier in the dialogue, it was in terms, not of *mimesis*, but of the sophists' contentious and eristical nature, their claims to be able to teach virtue, and their pursuit of money. How these two pictures fit together is not easy to see, since some sophists (one thinks of Thrasymachus and Callicles) might well be thought to fit both descriptions and some (like Protagoras, and possibly the author of the *Dissoi Logoi*) at best the first one. Here, of course, we are back into denotation, and Plato's apparent conclusion that sophists fall into two groups, the morally unacceptable and the morally acceptable (those of 'noble descent'). A division of this type *within* a class seems unexceptionable; the problem lies in Plato's apparent belief that the latter can remain within the class yet be excluded from the overall definition

of the class. But this is not good enough. Who, for example, would ever believe that there are morally praiseworthy and morally repugnant members of the class '*homo sapiens*' but that only the morally praiseworthy ones fall within the *definition* '*homo sapiens*'?

But these, I suppose, are the occupational risks of definition-making.

Why is it so Difficult to Catch a Sophist?

Pl. *Sph.* 218d3 and 261a5

Francesc Casadesús Bordoy

At the beginning of the *Sophist*, Plato uses Socrates' opening words – the only ones he pronounces in the whole dialogue – to anticipate with great subtlety the argument that is developed throughout the work. Indeed, with its characteristically ironic tone¹ Socrates' first intervention uses, as a pretext, words spoken initially by Theodorus, who has just introduced the Stranger as “a member of the group who gather round Parmenides and Zeno”, and described him as “a man who is a true philosopher”². In response, Socrates resorts to a veiled quotation from Homer to correct Theodorus, and replies that he has in fact arrived accompanied not by a stranger but by a god, one of the gods that

‘enter into companionship with men who have a share of due reverence, and behold the deeds, both violent and righteous, of mankind’³

To be sure, the allusion to the patron of hospitality and guests, τὸν ξένιον θεόν, has led most scholars to believe that Socrates was actually referring to *Odyssey* IX 270–271, where Odysseus begs Zeus, as protective god of foreigners and guests, for protection from the menacing Cyclops:

‘So, good sir, respect the gods. We’re here as suppliants to you, and Zeus protects all suppliants and strangers; as god of guests, he cares for all respected visitors.’⁴

1 The ironic tone of these introductory words was underscored by Verdenius. However, following G. J de Vries, *Spel bij Plato*, 157, this scholar offers a different interpretation of these ironic words from that proposed in this paper: “The ironic flavour of the passage (rightly pointed out by G. J de Vries, *Spel bij Plato*, 157) is heightened by the above interpretation. Socrates directs his irony against the Eleatic stranger, whom he suspects to be an ἐριστικός, but also against Theodorus himself, whom he ridicules for his pompous introduction by representing him as the venerable protégé of the Eleatic god”, Verdenius (1955) 285.

2 Pl. *Sph.* 216a2–3.

3 Cf. *Lgs.* 730a.

4 Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετῶν τε ξείνων τε, ξείνιος, ὃς ξείνοισιν ἄμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηθεῖ.

As noted by scholars, Socrates alludes brilliantly to the venerable and respectable treatment deserved by the stranger who was just introduced to him by Theodorus, given that he is a guest protected by Zeus himself.⁵

However, Socrates immediately raises a doubt as to whether the Stranger is himself a “kind of god of refutation”, θεὸς ὧν τις ἔλεγκτικός, making his appearance as a stranger with a view to observing the philosophical discussions they are having.

Faced with this apprehension, Theodorus reassures Socrates, stating that:

‘I do not think he is a god at all, but I do think he is divine, for I call all philosophers that.’

These words are immediately met by Socrates’ response:

‘I fancy it is not much easier, if I may say so, to recognize this class, than that of the gods. For these men – I mean those who are not feignedly but really philosophers – appear disguised in all sorts of shapes, thanks to the ignorance of the rest of mankind, and visit the cities, beholding from above the life of those below, and they seem to some to be of no worth and to others to be worth everything. And sometimes they appear disguised as statesmen and sometimes as sophists, and sometimes they may give some people the impression that they are altogether mad.’⁶

Once again Plato frames his answer in terms of Homeric poetry. When Socrates alludes to those who “visit the cities” disguised in all sorts of shapes, he is clearly referring to *Odyssey* XVII 483–487, where one of the suitors reproaches the other, Antinous, for having harshly threatened the foreigner, ξένος, and beggar, behind whose derelict appearance, did they but know it, hides Odysseus:

‘Antinous, it was wrong of you to hit a wretched vagrant. And you may be doomed, if somehow he’s a god come down from heaven. For, in fact, gods make themselves appear like foreign strangers, disguised in all sorts of shapes and haunting cities, to investigate men’s pride and their obedience to the laws.’

By means of this second quotation, Socrates upholds the initial argument that a god who keeps watch over men’s behaviour may be hiding

5 Cf. Benardete (1963), who thinks that “the Stranger is another Odysseus”.

6 The identification of the philosopher with someone mad, παντάπασιν ἔχοντες μανικῶς, is consequent upon the “divine” condition that has just been attributed to him. Socrates is probably alluding to his condition of being “enthused”, which allows him access to knowledge of divine truth. Cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 244a ff and 252b ff.

behind the Stranger, with the aim of scrutinizing their dialectical capabilities, to allow him to subtly shift our attention to the fact that these men, in reference now to true philosophers, “visit cities” assuming many shapes, ἄνδρες οὔτοι παντοῖοι φανταζόμενοι διὰ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν “ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόλης”. Although Socrates’ introductory words do not seem to go beyond what might be considered a courteous joke, our detailed analysis will attempt to show that they contain, after the manner of the Trojan horse, the argument developed throughout the dialogue with the goal of exposing the sophist.⁷

Note, then, that when Plato introduces this new reference to Homer he is interested in underscoring the faculty possessed by Homeric gods of mutating into multiple and varied human forms, as expressed in the lines of the *Odyssey* mentioned by Socrates: θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἐοικότες ἄλλοδαποῖσι, παντοῖοι τελέθοντες, ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόλης. To put it another way: What Plato really intended by this – at least apparently naïve – preamble, was to warn about the presumed capacity of the gods of Olympus, or alternatively, their emulators the philosophers, of being multi-form, παντοῖοι φανταζόμενοι. Indeed, the purpose of the feature highlighted by the Homeric adjective παντοῖοι, repeated by Socrates in his response to Theodorus, was to prepare the argument that will become the *leitmotiv* which justifies the writing of the dialogue, in the framework of the broader Platonic project of distinguishing the sophist from the politician and the philosopher. After a brief introduction by Socrates, the Stranger is about to undertake this project, with Theaetetus’ invaluable help, after having admitted that defining each of these characters with clarity “is no small or easy task”⁸, given their varied nature.

So, contrary to what Socrates’ initial words might suggest if taken superficially, Plato’s intention might well have been to indicate subtly in advance that the difficulty of defining the sophist lies in the variety of forms in which sophists manifest themselves, a capacity to mutate

7 In line with what D. Clay has attempted to show (not fully satisfactorily), the true sense of the initial words of Platonic dialogues is only comprehensible when related to the set of which they form part: “The problem, then, of coming to terms with Plato’s first words is not only to understand the beginnings of his dialogues in their relation to the whole of which they form a part – if, indeed, they are a part of the whole, it also entails the difficult task of understanding Plato’s choice of the style of a given dialogue and his choice of the purely dramatic dialogue, the dialogue narrated by Socrates, and the frame dialogue”, Clay (1992) 118.

8 Pl. *Sph.* 217b 3–4.

which is similar to that of Homeric gods who can take the form of any kind of human figure, and is the reason why, thanks to ignorance, *diagnōian*, they are not recognized as such by the majority of men.

It is significant that, following this interpretation, both passages from the *Odyssey* alluded to by Socrates are related to two of the most renowned ruses devised by the astute and cunning Odysseus. In the first case, the hero deceives the Cyclops by the ploy of telling him that his name is “Nobody,” *outis*⁹, shortly after having appealed to Zeus who “protects all suppliants and strangers”. In the second case, it is well known that the poor man who is humiliated mercilessly by the suitors is a false beggar, since it is Odysseus who hides behind the disguise, eager to punish them for their affront and to regain control of his palace.

In light of this, in this context of “Odyssean” deceptions to which the Homeric quotations refer it is clear that Plato uses these passages of the *Odyssey* to advance one of the most questioned and criticized characteristics of the sophist: his ability to find refuge in the falsehood of not-being and his talent for changing his appearance. These abilities make it very difficult to find and catch him.

The hidden sense of Socrates’ allusions is revealed when they are compared with pages 380b–382a of the *Republic*, a text that has still not been sufficiently considered, and one which helps improve our understanding of the sense of the introduction to the *Sophist* we are discussing. This comparison leads to the conclusion that it is beyond mere speculation that Socrates aimed at advancing one of the dialogue’s main arguments by his ironic allusions to a god transformed into the Stranger. Thus, after having proclaimed the goodness of the divinity, Socrates asks Adeimantus in this passage from the *Republic*:

‘Shall I ask you whether God is a magician, and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape, and now in another – sometimes himself changing and passing into many forms, sometimes deceiving us with the semblance of such transformations; or is he one and the same immutably fixed in his own proper image?’¹⁰

ἄρα γόητα τὸν θεὸν οἶει εἶναι καὶ οἷον ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ιδέαις τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γιγνόμενον, [καὶ] ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὐτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς, τοτὲ δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀπατῶντα καὶ ποιοῦντα περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖν, ἢ ἀπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ πάντων ἥκιστα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ιδέας ἐκβαίνειν;

9 A formulation which might be considered the first ontological postulate that not being is.

10 Pl. R. 380d.

In this context, Plato resorts to citing the same lines from the *Odyssey* as were mentioned by Socrates in the *Sophist*, with the intention of highlighting the negative character of the deity's possible sorcery, γόητα, which, according to the Homeric evidence, allowed him to manifest himself under different forms at different times, φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ἰδέαις, to the point of altering his own appearance to take on several diverse forms, ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὐτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς. However, what we should like to emphasize here is that, surprisingly, on this occasion Plato expresses his real opinion about sophists in a much less subtle way than in the *Sophist*, when he says plainly, and in a reproving tone:

'Let none of the poets tell us that...gods make themselves appear like foreign strangers, disguised in all sorts of shapes and haunting cities; and let no one slander Proteus and Thetis, neither let any one, either in tragedy or in any other kind of poetry, introduce Hera disguised in the likeness of a priestess'...¹¹

Given the force of the arguments Plato adduces in justification of his rejection of these lines of Homer, along with his references to Proteus, to Thetis, and to Hera's transformation into a vagabond priestess, it is appropriate to recall the arguments he used to ground such criticism. Plato believed that, since the divinity and his qualities have to be perfect, he is extremely unlikely to take on multiple forms in order to deceive, after the manner of an ordinary sorcerer:

'God and the things of God are in every way perfect. (...) Thus he can hardly be compelled by external influence to take on many forms'.¹²

Because of this, Plato believed it is completely impossible that a deity might want to transform himself into a human or any other being, as suggested by Homer. On the contrary, he must remain immutable, always conserving his own form:

'it is impossible that a god should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every god remains absolutely and forever in his own form'.¹³

11 Pl. *R.* 381d.

12 ὁ θεός γε καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πάντα ἄριστα ἔχει. (...) Ταύτη μὲν διήκιστα ἄν πολλὰς μορφὰς ἴσχοι ὁ θεός. Pl. *R.* 381b.

13 Ἀδύνατον ἄρα, ἔφη, καὶ θεῶ ἐθέλειν αὐτὸν ἀλλοιοῦν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔοικε, κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν ἕκαστος αὐτῶν μένει αἰεὶ ἀπλῶς ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ μορφῇ, Pl. *R.* 381c.

This is why Plato goes on to state that it should not be said that the marine divinities, Proteus and Thetis, continuously change their form when they are about to be trapped, or that Hera disguises herself as a begging priestess, because they are lies. Plato's opinion regarding this issue is radical: Gods cannot transform and manifest themselves in different ways, deceiving and enchanting, because in no case would a god, who by very definition must be good and perfect, "be willing to lie, whether in word or deed, or to put forth a phantom, φάντασμα, of himself"¹⁴.

This illuminating clarification from the *Republic* offers us a better understanding of Plato's true intentions when he alludes to the lines of the *Odyssey* cited in the introduction to the *Sophist*, which are to warn us about the negative character of changing one's form, which is improper for a god and for anyone trying to emulate divinity, such as the philosopher. Indeed, in the same *Republic* (at the beginning of Book VI), Plato attempts to justify why the philosopher is capable of governing the city by underscoring his immutability, by contrast with those who allow themselves to take on a multiplicity of forms:

'Inasmuch as philosophers only are able to grasp the eternal and unchangeable, and those who wander in the region of the many and variable are not philosophers, ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ παντοίως ἴσχουσιν πλανώμενοι οὐ φιλόσοφοι, I must ask you which of the two classes the rulers of our State should be?'¹⁵

So Plato has clarified how the feature of acquiring multiple forms, of being in Homer's words παντοῖοι, is the complete opposite of the traits that characterize both a deity and those, such as philosophers, who work strenuously to achieve knowledge of divine form and must govern the city. At this point in our presentation it is important to remember, with due onto-epistemological and ethical emphasis, that ideal Forms are immutable, that is to say, that they exist in and of themselves and are not subject to transformation, a fact which confers on them the condition of being true, divine, and eternal.¹⁶

It must likewise be noted that, from the standpoint of the technique of *diairesis*, it is possible to subsume within the specific and immutable genus and class corresponding to it only that which remains fixed in its form. Conversely, that which changes continuously is formally unclassifiable, and generates confusions that are very hard to cope with.

14 Pl. *R.* 382a 1–2.

15 Pl. *R.* 484b 3–7.

16 Cf. Pl. *Symp.* 210e–211a.

Furthermore, the Stranger decides to begin his remarks with the sophist in order to prevent the latter's transformational capacities from confusing him with other characters, such as the politician or the philosopher. Given the sophist's versatility, he is the most difficult of these to place within a genus or class. Plato is thus justified in beginning his project with the sophist, in order to expose him, and then following him with the politician, who could never be a sophist, but only an expert in, and connoisseur of political science. This explains why Plato intended to conclude his unfinished trilogy with the philosopher, the one who in fact possesses knowledge, and the one who, for that reason, should govern, as we learn from the *Republic*.

However, because of the sophist's changing and slippery character, as asserted in the *Statesman*, "removing him from those who really are in possession of the art of statesmanship and kingship is a very difficult thing to do".¹⁷ As the Stranger is forced to admit to Theaetetus at a certain point in the *Sophist*, when one is trying to identify the sophist it is even possible to find the philosopher first:

'By Zeus, have we unwittingly stumbled upon the science that belongs to free men and perhaps found the philosopher while we were looking for the sophist?'¹⁸

Given the need to clarify what hides behind the name "sophist" and what being a sophist is, the Stranger is willing to attempt the task of defining him, despite his conviction that the tribe of the sophist' is "difficult and hard to catch", χαλεπὸν καὶ δυσθήρευτον (...) τὸ τοῦ σοφιστοῦ γένος.¹⁹ In order to show where the difficulty lies, the Stranger himself offers up to seven different definitions of what could be regarded as a sophist. This leads a perplexed Theaetetus to admit that

'the sophist has by this time appeared to be so many things that I am at a loss to know what in the world to say he really is'.²⁰

It is worth noting that Theaetetus' sincerity is grounded in the realization that, as was suggested at the beginning of the dialogue, the sophist is characterized by his multiplicity of forms, an essential trait of his character which, as we have seen, places him, from the Platonic point of view, in clear opposition to the uniform condition of divinity and phi-

17 Pl. *Plt.* 291c. Cf. 303d.

18 Pl. *Sph.* 253c.

19 Pl. *Sph.* 218b–d.

20 Pl. *Sph.* 231b–c.

losophers. In fact, as we shall try to show, the framework established by reference to certain lines of Homer, and the corresponding critical commentary on them in the *Republic*, leads him to a negative view of the sophist. They also reveal that the difficulty of catching him is intrinsic to his nature.

The Stranger had himself told Theaetetus why it is so difficult to catch the sophist when he presented him as a creature which mutates:

‘Do you see the truth of the statement that this creature is many-sided, τὸ ποικίλον εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ θηρίον, and, as the saying is, not to be caught with one hand?’²¹

With his observation that the the sophist is δυσθήρευτον, “difficult to hunt”, the Stranger situates the sophist in his place within the framework of hunting which he has previously determined. Indeed, as an object to be hunted he is an animal, θηρίον, and the difficulty in catching him lies in his multiplicity of forms, ποικίλον.²² In the *Sophist* Plato had already defined the sophist’s technique as “multiform”, ποικίλης²³, an adjective the first meaning of which is “multicoloured”, and highlights this animal’s main trait – which makes it almost uncatchable – its capacity to continuously change its form and mimic its environment, as the chameleon and octopus do. Along the same lines, in a passage in the *Statesman*, in which the Stranger once again shows his discomfort at the difficulty of separating the sophist from the true statesman, he defines the class of the sophist in terms that complement the expression “multiform animal”, τὸ θηρίον ποικίλον, which we are discussing:

‘It’s a class mixed out of all sorts, πάμφυλόν τι γένος αὐτῶν, or so it seems to me as I look at it just now. For many of them resemble lions and centaurs and other such things, and very many resemble satyrs and those animals that are weak but versatile, τοῖς ἀσθενέσι καὶ πολυτρόποις θηρίοις; and they quickly exchange their shapes and capacity for action for each other’s, ταχὺ δὲ μεταλλάττουσι τὰς τε ἰδέας καὶ τὴν δύναμιν εἰς ἀλλήλους.’²⁴

21 Pl. *Sph.* 226a.

22 Plato repeats the expression θηρίου ποικίλου, “wild animal”, at *Republic* 588c to refer to such beasts as Chimera, Scylla or Cerberus, in a context in which he reproves as sophistic views such as those held by Callicles or Thrasymachus regarding the assumptions of Socratic ethics: that being unjust is beneficial for man, and that being just produces no benefit.

23 Pl. *Sph.* 223c.

24 Pl. *Plt.* 291a–b.

Note that this passage again refers to the sophist's capacity to change into all kinds of forms, including lions, centaurs, satyrs, and "weak and versatile animals", in their attempt to camouflage themselves, seeking to appear what they are not. The expression "versatile animals", πολυτρόποις θηρίοις, is a precise reflection of the one we find in the *Sophist*, τὸ θηρίον ποικίλον. Moreover, it is worth pointing out in this context that the adjective Plato uses to denote such wild animals, πολύτροπος, and which we translate as "versatile", is the same one that Homer uses in the first line of the *Odyssey* to highlight the experienced and varied astuteness of its main character, the shrewd Odysseus²⁵. The coincidence now takes on a remarkable new meaning, given how this Odyssean resonance, from the beginning of the *Sophist*, determines the difficulty of catching so changing a character.

This is because, in order to understand clearly what Plato is trying to express with a certain ambiguity, and to understand the difficulty involved in catching the sophist, there is no need to abandon the *Odyssey*, so rich, *avant la lettre*, in sophistic images. Furthermore, Plato himself suggested the lead to follow when, in the passage from the *Republic* we have been discussing, he mentioned Thetis and Proteus, the two most notorious multiform marine divinities, capable of taking on numerous forms when they felt harassed and were about to be captured. It is well known that Thetis avoided being trapped by Peleus by mutating into water, air, a bird, a tiger, a lion, and a snake, among other forms. As narrated by Homer, in attempting to avoid capture by Menelaus and his companions, the old man Proteus took refuge on the Egyptian island of Pharos, and took the form of numerous animals and other elements and beings:

'But the old man
did not forget his skilful tricks. At first,
he turned himself into a hairy lion,
and then into a serpent and a leopard,
then a huge wild boar. He changed himself
to flowing water and a towering tree.
We didn't flinch but kept our grip on him.'²⁶

In this context, it is very tempting to establish a nexus between the "skilful tricks", δολίης τέχνης, used by Proteus to get rid of his hunters and the definition of the sophist as someone who deceives us concern-

25 Cf. Pl. *Hp.Mi.* 364e.

26 *Od.* 4. 455–459.

ing his appearance, because he has the skill of deception: *περὶ τὸ φάντασμα αὐτὸν ἀπατᾶν φῶμεν καὶ τὴν τέχνην εἶναι τινα ἀπατητικὴν αὐτοῦ.*²⁷ The sophist's changing *τέχνην ἀπατητικὴν* seems, indeed, to be moulded on the deception skill, *δολίης τέχνης* of the changeable Proteus.

However this may be, there is no doubt that Plato has in mind the image of Proteus, hunted down in an ambush prepared by Menelaus, as his symbol of how difficult it is to hunt down the sophist. Indeed, he expresses the point explicitly in the *Euthydemus*, when explaining the difficulties Socrates encountered when faced with the ruses of two able foreign sophists, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus. Socrates tells Ctesippus about his experience with this graphic image:

‘Ctesippus, I must repeat what I said before to Cleinias – that you do not understand the ways of these philosophers from abroad. They are not serious, but, like the Egyptian sophist Proteus, they take different forms and deceive us by their enchantments: and let us, like Menelaus, refuse to let them go until they show themselves to us in earnest.’²⁸

The passage presents very straightforwardly something only suggested in the *Sophist*, and that is, what it is which makes the sophist truly “difficult and hard to catch”: He is uncatchable because of his changing character, one we can now properly call “protean”²⁹. Capturing him requires an effort characteristic of a hero like Menelaus. The passage from the *Euthydemus* contains, in addition, an expression which clearly shows that Plato equates the sophist's abilities with the techniques of deception practiced by Proteus, when he openly refers to him as “the Egyptian sophist”, *τὸν Αἰγύπτιον σοφιστήν*, capable of enchanting, *γοητεύοντε*, those who attempt to catch him by means of the trick of changing forms.

So it comes as no surprise that on two further occasions the figure of Proteus helps Plato illustrate the frustration Socrates feels towards two interlocutors who avoid offering a single definition of the subject of discussion. In the one case Ion, towards the end of the dialogue that carries his name, is reprimanded by Socrates for trying to avoid showing that, as a rhapsode, he got his true knowledge from Homer:

‘You have literally as many forms as Proteus; and now you go all manner of ways, twisting and turning, and, like Proteus, become all manner of people

27 Pl. *Sph.* 240d.

28 Pl. *Euthd.* 288b–c.

29 In the sense that it is “variable and takes many forms”; I draw the definition from the Oxford English Reference Dictionary.

at once, and at last slip away from me in the disguise of a general, in order that you may escape exhibiting your Homeric lore.³⁰

Analogously, Socrates also scolds Euthyphro for not telling him what piety is despite the questions he puts to him:

‘What is piety? (...) I entreat you not to scorn me, but to apply your mind to the utmost, and tell me the truth. For, if any man knows, you are he; and therefore I must detain you, like Proteus, until you tell.’³¹

The fact that Plato regards Proteus, “the Egyptian sophist”, as the mythical prototype and source of the class of all sophists, also explains another of the main features of these characters: their capacity to enchant, γοητεύειν,³² as highlighted in the lines from the *Euthydemus* we have just mentioned, and in which this capacity is compared with that possessed by the sophists Dionysodorus and Euthydemus. Thus, the sophist’s capacity to take the form of all kinds of figures is interpreted as the capacity to mislead and deceive possessed by wizards. And it is precisely this protean characteristic which is also associated in the *Sophist* with his ability to imitate, mimic, and adopt many different forms. Hence, after putting the following question to Theaetetus,

‘So answer this question about the sophist: Is this now clear, that he is a kind of sorcerer, an imitator of realities, or are we still uncertain whether he may not truly possess the knowledge of all the things about which he seems to be able to argue?’

the Stranger himself concludes unambiguously that we must consider the sophist a sorcerer and an imitator, γόητα μὲν δὴ καὶ μιμητήν.³³ And this, without a doubt, is the main difficulty in catching him, given that his enchanting, mimetic capacity, a natural consequence of his protean character, fills the track he leaves with obstacles, objections and difficulties. The Stranger warns Theaetetus of this when he says:

‘I think it is high time to consider what ought to be done about the sophist; for you see how easily and repeatedly he can raise objections and difficul-

30 Pl. *Ion* 54e.

31 Pl. *Euthyphr.* 15c–d.

32 The characteristic activity of a γόης, a wizard or sorcerer, was originally a specialization in rituals related with death, as suggested by the word’s etymology, from the verb *goao*, “cry”, “lament”.

33 Pl. *Sph.* 235a. At *Republic* 598c Plato also cautions against the man who appears to be knowledgeable in all crafts and things, whom he disparagingly refers to as a “know-it-all”, πάσσοφος, a feature he considers proper to the deceitful capacity of a “sorcerer or an imitator”, γόητί τινι καὶ μιμητῇ ἐξηπατήθη.

ties, if we conduct our search by placing him in the class of falsehood-creators and sorcerers.’

And Theaetetus answers without hesitating:

‘It would, apparently, be impossible to catch the sophist, if that is the case.’³⁴

What makes it so difficult to catch the sophist is his belonging to the “class of wonderworkers”, γένος θαυματοποιῶν,³⁵ a circumstance that requires the Stranger to use the technique of *diairesis* as a hunting instrument:

‘It is decided, then, that we will as quickly as possible divide the image-making art and go down into it, and if the sophist stands his ground against us at first, we will seize him by the orders of reason, our king, then deliver him up to the king and display his capture. But if he tries to take cover in any of the various sections of the imitative art, we must follow him, always dividing the section into which he has retreated, until he is caught. For assuredly neither he nor any other creature will ever boast of having escaped from pursuers who are able to follow up the pursuit in detail and everywhere in this methodical way.’³⁶

However, despite this methodological optimism, the sophist’s protean ability and capacity to enchant allows him to place obstacles in the way of all investigations. In fact, in the *Statesman*, the Stranger will encounter him again, during his effort to define the qualities that should be possessed by the expert who must govern the city. This is why the Stranger warns Theaetetus of the need to be on particular guard against the “chorus of those concerned with the affairs of cities”. Such a person he discredits as being

‘...the greatest magician of all sophists, and the most versed in this expertise, τὸν πάντων τῶν σοφιστῶν μέγιστον γόητα καὶ ταύτης τῆς τέχνης ἐμπειρότατον. Although removing him from those who really are in possession of the art of statesmanship is a very difficult thing to do, remove him we must, if we are going to see plainly what we are looking for.’³⁷

In short, it is clear for the Stranger that

‘...we must also remove those who participate in all these constitutions, except for the knowledgeable one, as not being statesmen but experts in fac-

34 Pl. *Sph.* 241b–c.

35 Pl. *Sph.* 235b2.

36 Pl. *Sph.* 235b–c.

37 Pl. *Plt.* 291c.

tion, and we must say that as presiding over insubstantial images, on the largest scale, they are themselves too of the same sort, and that as the greatest imitators and magicians they turn out to be the greatest sophists among sophists.³⁸

This almost obsessive insistence on identifying the sophist with the wizard, γόης,³⁹ forces Plato to equate certain magical practices performed by charlatans and swindlers with those of the sophists themselves.⁴⁰ Despite the interest raised by this issue, its analysis would require us to deal with the negative opinion Plato always had for those individuals, which would undoubtedly take us beyond the limits set for the present study.⁴¹

Suffice it, therefore, in conclusion to this presentation, to return to the passage from the *Republic* in which the lines of the *Odyssey* which begin the *Sophist* are commented on in negative terms, and to ask once again the question Socrates poses in justification of his criticism of the lines of Homer:

‘Shall I ask you whether God is a magician, and of a nature to appear insidiously now in one shape, and now in another...?’

In order to answer this question in the negative, Plato has to undertake the writing of the *Sophist*, in an attempt to expose one who, due to his protean and mimetic character, adopts all kinds of forms, even the most divine. Equipped with his philosophical hunting weapon, the dialectical method and *diáresis*, he attempts, like Menelaus, to catch the sophist. Nonetheless, the possibility of success remains in doubt, given Socrates’ disturbing observation that the hard-working hunter, the Stranger from Elea himself, could be yet another of the multiple and polymorphous manifestations of the Sophist ...

38 Pl. *Plt.* 303c.

39 Plato also equated love with a terrible enchanter, sorcerer, sophist “δεινὸς γόης καὶ φαρμακεὺς καὶ σοφιστῆς”, Pl. *Symp.* 203d.

40 Cf. Pl. *Leges* 908d; *R.* 364d.

41 For a broader and more detailed analysis of this issue see Casadesús (2002).

Plato's Enquiry concerning the Sophist as a Way towards 'Defining' Philosophy

Josep Monserrat Molas and Pablo Sandoval Villarroel

Among all of Plato's dialogues, the *Sophist* is one of the most philosophically dense. Indeed, tradition typically identifies and attributes such density to the discussion of "ontology", the tackling of the question of being. It is for this reason that from an early date the *Sophist* was given the following subtitle¹: ἡ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος, λογικός. These words, τὸ ὄν and λογικός, as an indication of the subject matter of the dialogue and the way in which it is approached, legitimise to a certain extent our consideration of the *Sophist* as an eminently "onto-logical" dialogue. However, as it is well known, the opening and closing stages of the dialogue address not so much the ontological problem as the question of the sophist, or more specifically, *what the sophist is as such and wherein lies the possibility of his being*. Thus, any interpretation of this dialogue has to seek to show, and in what measure, that the question concerning the sophist requires a discussion of the question of being. In other words, the interpretation needs to make clear the link between the question regarding the sophist and the question of being. In what follows, we try to demonstrate this link by taking a different route. So, while it cannot be denied that the express subject of the dialogue is

1 This subtitle, presumably attributable to Thrasyllus, shows with all clarity what the earliest tradition considered lay at the heart of the dialogue: the question of being. However, the mere antiquity of a tradition by no means guarantees the truth of what it conveys. So we need to distance ourselves from this subtitle, however clear and apt it might appear, and ask ourselves first: why, since antiquity, has the main theme of the *Sophist* been identified as that of "ontology"? Wherein lies the pre-eminence of "ontology" over other branches and disciplines of philosophical knowledge? Does an essential link perhaps hold sway between "ontology" and philosophy itself, whereby philosophical tradition, since its earliest beginnings, has considered the task of "ontology" as constituting in some way the essential task of philosophising? In this respect, see Aristotle's peremptory remark in Book VII of the *Metaphysics*: καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ πάλαι τε καὶ νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ ζητούμενον καὶ ἀεὶ ἀπορούμενον, τί τὸ ὄν, τοῦτό ἐστι τίς ἢ οὐσία [1028b2 ff.].

none other than that of the sophist, we wish to show that the question concerning the sophist is not raised solely in terms of providing a “definition” of sophistry, but first and foremost in order to experience and determine the dimension of philosophy itself, wherein the *philosopher*² resides. To achieve this, we first briefly consider the dialogue’s opening scene, in which it is made clear that the purpose of the *Sophist* is to reveal and define the essence of the *philosopher*.

The dialogue opens with the words of the geometrician, Theodorus, who, honouring an agreement made the previous day³, has come to talk with Socrates. But Theodorus does not come alone; he brings with him a stranger from Elea – the homeland of the great Parmenides – whom Theodorus introduces as being of a truly *philosophical* temperament, μάλα δὲ ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον [216a4]. It is this straightforward opening remark, which might be understood as a simple, harmless characterisation of a new character as he comes onstage, that nevertheless centres the dialogue on this basic question. Indeed, in reply to Socrates’ allusion to Homer, according to whom Theodorus might not have come accompanied by a stranger but rather by a god, the latter declares, not without a certain solemnity, that the man in question is no god, but is certainly divine, θεῖος [216b9], insofar as all humans genuinely dedicated to philosophy bear this epithet. Theodorus’ second remark does not refer to the fact that this or another man might be a philosopher, but rather notes a specific condition that must characterise *all philosophers as such*; that is, at this juncture he identifies in some way an *essential feature* of philosophy itself. In this way, the simple introduction of the character of the Eleatic Stranger focuses the attention of the dialogue from the outset on the question of the essence of philosophy. It is at this point

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- 2 Although the methodology we have followed in this communication differs from the one used by Professor Notomi in his book on the *Sophist* (Notomi 1999), we should like to emphasize the fundamental similarities between his interpretation and ours, similarities which we hope to discuss and work upon soon.
 - 3 See *Theaetetus* 210d3–4. Note, however, that this agreement does not include any decision regarding the matter to be discussed; though it is clear that both dialogues, the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*, at least share a basic concern, namely, the problem of τὸ ψεῦδος, what is “false”, or more accurately, the problem of concealment, distortion, deception and error, but not as a “theoretical” problem, but rather as the absolutely real problem of the possibility of opening up a place for philosophy within the heart of the πόλις, thereby clearing away all deceitful appearances that disguise and distort the philosopher – principally, the appearance of the sophist and the statesman.

that Socrates really starts the conversation, identifying the difficulty involved in discerning clearly, διακρίνειν [216c3], the actual stock⁴ to which the philosopher belongs, τὸ [τοῦ φιλοσόφου] γένος [216c3]. This difficulty and obscurity⁵ as regards the philosopher⁶ constitute, therefore, the starting point from which we broach the question of how to define the sophist.

But wherein exactly does the difficulty lie? Socrates demonstrates it in the following words: πάνυ γὰρ ἄνδρες οὗτοι παντοῖοι φανταζόμενοι διὰ τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἄγνοιαν [216c4–5], “for these men appear disguised in all sorts of shapes, thanks to the ignorance of the rest of mankind”. The difficulty lies, therefore, first, in the multiplicity and variety of appearances that the philosophers can adopt in the city. But this multitude of appearances rests in its turn, Socrates adds, on the “ignorance”, ἄγνοια, of the others, that is, on the ignorance of those who precisely *are not* philosophers: people of common understanding. Here, however, the Greek word ἄγνοια means not only the absence of properly formed knowledge; it refers also to inadvertence and misunderstanding, the not-knowing that leads to one thing's being mistaken for another, and, of course, for something which that thing *is not*. Why does this occur? Plato does not explicitly state why here, but in other dialogues⁷ he shows with clarity that that which most intimately characterises the presence of the philosopher in the πόλις is that he is *kept hidden as such*, λανθάνειν. Consequently, the root of the multiple appearances of the philosopher, as well as that of the ignorance of non-philosophers as regards the philosopher, ultimately lies in a certain *concealment* of the philosopher in that which is: λήθη. However, this does not mean that the philosopher conceals or disguises himself⁸ with the purpose of

4 Regarding this unusual translation, see nevertheless at a later juncture, in reference to the sophist, τὸ φύλον, “race, tribe”.

5 The philosopher is extremely difficult to see clearly, ἰδεῖν μὲν χαλεπὸν ἐναργῶς [253e8], but not so much because of the darkness of the dimension in which he resides, as because of the brilliant light of the place: διὰ τὸ λαμπρὸν αὖ τῆς χώρας οὐδαμῶς εὐπετῆς ὀφθῆναι [254a9–10].

6 In the terminology of the research group *EIDOS. Hermenèutica, Platonisme i Modèrmitat* (University of Barcelona), this is what is referred to as “el motiu possibilitador del diàleg”.

7 See, for example, *Phaedrus* 249d2–3 and *Phaedo* 64a–b.

8 We are left to ponder the distance that separates the kept-hidden (λανθάνειν) concept to which we allude here and that to which Descartes refers in the expression *larvatus prodeò*, and its extension in the Straussian concept of political

going unnoticed among the people; we should, rather, understand this concealment in the sense of the meaning of the Greek *λανθάνειν*: *keep hidden*, in neither an active nor a passive sense, but as the basic form of the *presence* of the philosopher among men. The concealment of the philosopher in the city, that is, the multitude of appearances that hide him and disguise him as what he is – *this* is the primordial “problem” with which the dialogue in the *Sophist* begins and which urgently calls for a *determination* of the essence of philosophy. Incidentally, we might well continue to think that we are dealing here with a merely “theoretical” question, namely, that of “defining” the nature of philosophy. However, the superficiality of such an opinion becomes obvious as soon as we consider that, for the philosopher, this concealment is anything but the “topic” of a theoretical and abstract discussion, but rather that it constitutes an extreme *danger*, a danger that was to cost no less a figure than Socrates, Plato’s master, his life. All these questions, then, serve to set the tone for the problems that are tackled in the *Sophist*⁹, questions that always have to be borne closely in mind if we are to have at least a sense of the *urgency* that the question regarding the very essence of the philosopher has for Plato.

Thus, the main problem raised in the opening scene of the dialogue derives from the obscurity and from the appearances which conceal the philosopher. Socrates gathers together this multitude of appearances under three main guises: philosophers appear, φαντάζονται [216d1], at times as statesmen, sometimes as sophists, and then again at times as men that are completely mad or out of themselves, ὡς παντάπασιν ἔχοντες μανικῶς [216d2]. So Socrates proposes questioning the Stranger about what is thought about these three forms in his country. However, in summing them up, Socrates transforms the question somewhat, and

philosophy as an active operation of the public disguising of philosophy so as to ensure its protection.

- 9 And also in the *Theaetetus* and *Statesman*. Basically, everything revolves around the problem of the trial and conviction of Socrates by the city of Athens, which is one of the main dramatic elements in the interpretations of both dialogues made by Ibáñez (2007) and Monserrat (1999) respectively. See also, in Monserrat (1999) 10–14, the consideration of a heptology of dialogues whose dramatic course when read together provides us with a complete picture of the trial and death of Socrates. These dialogues, ordered according to the unfolding of the drama, are: *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Apology of Socrates*, *Crito* and *Phaedo*.

simply says: σοφιστήν, πολιτικόν, φιλόσοφον¹⁰ [217a3]. The appearance of the madman, the μανικός, is now replaced by a simple reference to the philosopher himself. Why should this be?¹¹ That is, as the *Phaedrus* portrays it¹²: Why is it that μανία, “ecstasy”, does and does not constitute an appearance of the philosopher? In other words, the philosopher *is* essentially an “ecstatic” man, μανικός; only that, from men of common understanding, from the οἱ πολλοί, both the provenance and the orientation of this ecstasy is kept hidden. The dialogue between the Stranger and the young Theaetetus begins in this way because it is driven by the need to *define clearly the nature of each of these three figures*: καθ' ἕκαστον μὴν διορίσασθαι σαφῶς τί ποτ' ἔστιν [217b2–3]. But what is crucial here is that we do not lose sight of the fact that this essential definition, which in this dialogue is expressly undertaken in terms of defining the nature of the sophist, tends eminently to discern and delimit the nature of the *philosopher* from all which might conceal it and take its place in the heart of the πόλις. Consequently, the initial scene of the dialogue indicates to the reader that *the question concerning the sophist is, first and foremost, the question concerning the very essence of philosophy*.

However, the determination of the philosopher does not occur here in a formal or explicit way, in the sense of expressly raising the question: what is the philosopher? Rather, this determination occurs *philosophically*, that is, the essence of philosophy is delimited and comes to light through the *consummation* of a certain form of questioning. To begin to appreciate what it is like, we need first to focus our attention on the turning point in the dialogue, after which the conversation heads towards the heart of the matter. This turning point comes after the sixth “definition” of the sophist. The sole fact that following the sixth “definition” the Stranger recapitulates the definitions offered up to that point indicates that a *shift* is about to occur in the dialogue. Indeed, from the moment in which efforts are made to understand the sophist as an imitator and producer of mere illusions [234b], the Stranger understands that the sophist has taken refuge in highly inaccessible terrain, εἰς ἄπορον εἶδος¹³ [236d2]. The enquiry begins to broach a fundamental

10 Regarding the complex intricacy of these three terms see Monserrat (2002) 178.

11 Cf. Monserrat (1999) 49–50.

12 Cf. *Phaedrus* 265a9 ff., on the two types of μανία, the merely human and the divine.

13 Cf. 239c6–7: εἰς ἄπορον ὁ σοφιστῆς τόπον καταδέδυκεν.

question, one that is most arduous and difficult to answer: ἐν παντάπασσι χαλεπῇ σκέψει [236d9]. However, this difficulty in no way lies, as one might think, in its somewhat varied and confused complexity, but rather, as we shall see, precisely in the *simplicity* of the question. The Stranger offers an initial formulation of the problem in the following terms: τὸ γὰρ φαίνεσθαι τοῦτο καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν, εἶναι δὲ μὴ, καὶ τὸ λέγειν μὲν ἄττα, ἀληθῆ δὲ μὴ, πάντα ταῦτά ἐστι μεστὰ ἀπορίας ἀεὶ ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν χρόνῳ καὶ νῦν [236e1 sqq.], “for the matter of appearing and seeming, but not being, and of saying things, but not true ones – all this is now and always has been very perplexing”: a problem which is not dealt with as just one more philosophical problem among many, but rather as *the* primary and constant question of all philosophising, which is made evident in the insistence with which the Stranger emphasises, at the end of his speech, its difficulty: παντάπασιν, ὦ Θεαίτητε, χαλεπὸν [237a1].

Wherein, then, lies the difficulty of the question? The Stranger says that this speech dares suppose that not-being nevertheless *is*: τετόλμηκεν ὁ λόγος οὗτος ὑποθέσθαι τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι [237a3–4]. It is a matter, therefore, according to the language of tradition, of the problem of the “being of not-being”, or in other words, of the problem of “falsehood”, τὸ ψεῦδος [237a4]. Now, if we do not wish to reduce this question to a merely “logical” problem, we should try to understand it in its specific and original form, that is, when given its *Greek* meaning¹⁴. This problematic nature makes itself evident from the moment in which we consider that, for the Greeks, from the earliest times, being means above all φύσις, that is, emergence, opening up, coming to light, becoming manifest, in a word, *appearing*, φαίνεσθαι. Thus, all forms of appearing, even

14 The entire work of Martin Heidegger can, to some extent, be considered an attempt at presenting a Greek experience of being, an experience that reveals itself both in the word φύσις, as, for example, in Plato’s determination of being as εἶδος or ἰδέα (φῶς), and even, albeit in a more veiled manner, in the fundamental word ἀλήθεια. See, among others, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, GA, Band 40, V. Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1983. However, with regard to the reception of the Heideggerian interpretation of Greek philosophy, particularly the work of Plato, one cannot fail to mention the remarkable work already being done for years in this regard by Professor Francisco J. González, work which culminates in some manner in his recently published book (2009). In this rigorous, thorough, documented, consistent work, Professor González enters into controversy with Heidegger as an interpreter of Plato, criticizing the shortcomings of that interpretation and highlighting their successes. As a result, new light is shed on the complex relationship between both philosophers, with whom the thinking of Professor González himself engages in dialogue.

in the sense of mere appearance, φαντασία, δόξα, constitute in Greek a pre-eminent form of *being*. How then can something that appears, and which in appearing in this way can even lead us into error, nevertheless *not be*? How is it possible that things reveal themselves and appear precisely as *they are not*? Wherein, after all, does such *not-being* lie, which bears no "logical" form whatsoever, but rather constitutes an incessant threat to man's existence? Thus, all depends on the way in which we think of this μὴ ὄν, namely, not just as any "not-being" in an abstract or absolute sense, but rather in the sense of that which precisely *is not* what it seems to be at first sight and what it immediately manifests itself as. Plato refers to such an appearance which appears as it is not with the term φάντασμα, and also εἶδωλον. For this reason, all attempts at capturing the sophist in the φανταστική τέχνη [239c9], that is, as a producer of mere appearances, εἰδωλοποιόν [239d3], has to deal with the problem of the εἶδωλον itself and by itself¹⁵.

In light of its formal structure, an εἶδωλον is above all a "re-presentation"¹⁶, that is, something that is presented and which appears to be like something else and thus re-presents it, for example, a reflection in water or a mirror, or a painted or engraved image¹⁷. Thus, the key moment in the εἶδωλον is the reference to *something else*, to the "original", to what Plato calls τὸ ἀληθινόν [240a8], the "real and true", that is, the *thing itself*, αὐτό¹⁸, that which really *is*, ὄντως ὄν [240b3], from which the εἶδωλον receives the measure of its configuration. Now, since the εἶδωλον resembles, to a certain degree, something real, it can in turn be taken for something real and true; but this is no more than an appearance or illusion, since the mere re-presentation of a thing can never take the place of the *presence* of the thing itself. Thus, the εἶδωλον is in a certain measure something "unreal", something that *is not* what it appears to be at first sight, inasmuch as it does *not* satisfy the

15 Cf. 239d3–4: τί ποτε τὸ παράπαν εἶδωλον λέγομεν.

16 The word "representation" should not be understood here in its modern sense, namely, as the way in which man (the "subject") re-presents things mentally, but rather in the sense in which we say, for example, "this picture *represents* Socrates drinking hemlock", meaning, the painting in question makes Socrates present to us, but without Socrates presenting himself before us.

17 Cf. 239d6–8.

18 Cf. 266c6–7: δύο γὰρ οὖν ἔστι ταῦτα θείας ποιήσεως, αὐτό τε καὶ τὸ παρακολουθοῦν εἶδωλον ἐκάστω.

full and true essence of being¹⁹, the ὄντως or the ἀληθῶς εἶναι. Of course, however clear and lucid this reasoning appears to us, as the young Theaetetus says, we cannot fail to recognise that, in one way or another, the εἶδωλον also *is* in some sense: ἀλλ' ἔστι γε μήν πως [240b9]. In other words, however “unreal”, μὴ ὄν, we declare the εἶδωλον to be, it is not reducible to pure nothingness, but rather *is* something truly “effective”, something in fact so effective that it can even fool us, ἀπατᾶν. Theaetetus’ simple reply, that is, the recognition of the *being* of the εἶδωλον, slowly begins to centre the attention of the dialogue on the question of *being itself*, on the question of what we mean when we say it *is* pure and simple. So if we recognise that not only real things that present themselves “are”, but also their mere re-presentation, what does “is” mean in each case? In what sense can we say that both one and the other “are”? Now, to the extent that the dialogue concedes that the εἶδωλον, and therefore what is “unreal”, μὴ ὄν, also “is”, in a sense that remains to be determined, τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι πως [240c5], it goes forthrightly against the word of the great Parmenides. And in so doing the dialogue heads resolutely towards “parricide”, πατραλοίας [241d3]. This means that Plato’s thinking here turns *against* Parmenides as πατήρ [241d5], that is, *against* him who is for Plato the origin and provenance, in order to question the understanding of “is” and to undertake a reestablishment of the meaning of *being*. Thus, in the *Sophist*, the philosophy of Plato risks everything to think about and fully ponder the questionability of *being and non-being*. And, as we seek to show, it is here, in the enormous effort to determine afresh the meaning of being itself and, in so doing, the totality of that which is, that the true essence of philosophy itself comes to light: τολμητέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι τῷ πατρικῷ λόγῳ νῦν [242a1–2]. Here *urgency* finds words, the urgency that constrains thinking as it turns back against its origins and dares to re-establish a world through the pure and simple re-pondering of the meaning of “is”.

The first step in this approach involves questioning what appears to be clear and comprehensible about it, τὰ δοκοῦντα νῦν ἐναργῶς ἔχειν ἐπισκέψασθαι πρῶτον [242b10], that is, examining what we all agree upon as if it were something already perfectly determined and decided upon, ῥαδίως δ’ ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογῶμεν ὡς εὐκρινῶς ἔχοντες [242c1–2]. Indeed, all

19 But what exactly is a full and true being? In other words: to what extent is being a thing itself a higher and fuller meaning than its mere image or re-presentation?

who initially rush forward to complete the determination of being, τὸ ὄν [242e1], τὸ πᾶν [242e5], dealt with the question without suffering any great problems, εὐκόλως [242c4], that is, without noticing a fundamental problem, and sustaining theses such as: "being in its entirety *is* one", or "the whole *is* many", or "the whole *is* hot and cold". What does this fundamental problem therefore consist of? The answer is that each time early thinkers declared that the whole *is* one or many or whatever, they did so without raising any kind of problem about this "is" itself. Now, however evident and comprehensible this "is" might usually appear to us, we have to confess that what it actually designates is something just as non-evident as that which we designate when we say it "is not". Thus, the dialogue has run not only into an aporia as regards not-being, but also, and especially, into an aporia as regards *being* itself²⁰. So what do they mean by "is", those who declare that the whole *is* two things, for example, hot and cold? How should we ponder this "being" that applies equally to the hot and the cold? Perhaps as a third thing, in addition to the hot and the cold, so that, after all, the whole "is" not two but rather three things? In short: what happens to the "is" that we enunciate or presuppose each time we try to determine whatever it might "be"? Thus, the Stranger asks: τί τὸ εἶναι τοῦτο ὑπολάβωμεν ὑμῶν; [243e2]. This simple question is no longer an enquiry into whether the whole "is" one thing or the other, but rather points solely to this *is itself and by itself*, in other words, the pure and simple *being* of that which is. Thus, in the aporia regarding the being of that which is, in the question concerning the meaning of *is*, the dialogue reaches the heart of the matter: ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν ἡμεῖς ἠπορήκαμεν, ὑμεῖς αὐτὰ ἡμῖν ἐμφανίζετε ἱκανῶς, τί ποτε βούλεσθε σημαίνειν ὀπίσταν ὃν φθέγγεσθε. Δῆλον γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς μὲν ταῦτα πάλαι γιγνώσκετε, ἡμεῖς δὲ πρὸ τοῦ μὲν ᾧόμεθα, νῦν δ' ἠπορήκαμεν [244a4 ff.], "...since we are in perplexity, declare to us plainly what you wish to designate when you say 'being'. For it is clear that you have known this all along, whereas we formerly thought we knew, but are now perplexed".

What is revealed by these words of the Eleatic Stranger is the deepest surprise at the simplest and most understandable of things, at that which silently lays the foundations not only of all philosophical "definition", but also, in general, of all speech and all understanding and, by so doing, all human behaviour as regards that what is: the pure and simple "is", the *being* of that which is. Plato's thinking thus defies the extremes

20 Cf. 243c.

of questionability, the most worthy of questions and enquiries, that which we usually take as read and overlook, but which secretly supports every step of our existence. Thus, those who still seek expressly to deal with the question of “being”, οὐσία²¹, that is, those who – according to the Stranger – have given themselves over fully to the γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας [246a4–5], whether thinking of “being” in the sense of a sensible and changing corporality, or in the sense of intelligible and immutable “ideas”, when they find themselves having to recognise that being is said both of κίνησις and of στάσις, are forced to confess that stating what being itself exactly comprises is a difficult, arduous task: τὸ ὄν [...] οὐδὲν εὐπωρότερον εἰπεῖν ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν [246a1–2]. The dialogue has thus markedly shifted its focus of enquiry from the opposition between the εἶδωλον and the thing itself to the opposition between κίνησις and στάσις, motion and rest. But by such a move the whole of Plato’s thinking to some extent turns around on itself, in order to question what beforehand had appeared manifestly evident, namely, that being in the sense of stability constituted being in its highest and fullest sense²². This is why the Stranger exclaims at this point in the dialogue that they are plunged in the deepest darkness as regards their enquiries concerning “being”: νῦν ἔσμεν ἐν ἀγνοίᾳ τῇ πλείστην περὶ αὐτοῦ [249e2–3]. From the time it has recognised that both motion and rest equally *are*, εἶναι γε ὁμοίως [250a10], Plato sets forth the necessity, for a genuine understanding of being, of understanding being *beyond* the ultimate horizon, in other words, beyond the distinction between κίνησις and στάσις, which plunges our thinking into the deepest and most extreme ἀ-πορία. This is why the Stranger once more exclaims: ποῖ δὴ χρὴ τὴν διάνοιαν ἔτι τρέπειν τὸν βουλόμενον ἑναργές τι περὶ αὐτοῦ παρ’ ἑαυτῷ βεβαιώσασθαι ; [250c9–10], “What is there left, then, to which a man can still turn his mind who wishes to establish within himself anything clear about being?”.

The *Sophist* discloses the *urgency* of the question concerning being, and it is only *in pondering this question that the essence of philosophising*

21 This is, indeed, a decisive problem, namely, the way in which Plato understands the difference between preceding thinkers whom he characterises as οἱ διακριβολουμένοι ὄντος τε πέρι καὶ μὴ [245e6–7] and οἱ ἄλλως λέγοντες [245e8]. But we leave the question unanswered.

22 See, for example, in the *Phaedo*, the following words that Plato puts into the mouth of Simmias: οὐ γὰρ ἔχω ἔγωγε οὐδὲν οὕτω μοι ἑναργές ὄν ὡς τοῦτο· τὸ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτ’ εἶναι ὡς οἶόν τε μάλιστα, καλὸν τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ἃ σὺ νῦν δὴ ἔλεγες [77a2 ff.].

comes to light and is realised. In other words, the dialogue does not deal with the question of being simply because the problem of the sophist requires that it do so, but rather it deals and has to deal with the question concerning being in that its fundamental concern, its σκοπός, which consists in moving towards the essence of philosophy, not by way of a formal, abstract "definition", but rather *through the consummation of philosophising*. For this reason the Stranger of Elea later on poses the question: καὶ κινδυνεύομεν ζητοῦντες τὸν σοφιστὴν πρότερον ἀνηρηκέναι τὸν φιλόσοφον [253c8–9], "and have we unwittingly found the philosopher while we were looking for the sophist?"²³. Who, then, is the philosopher? He is that human being who has devoted himself fully, through thinking, to enquiring again and again into the essence of being: ὁ δέ γε φιλόσοφος, τῇ τοῦ ὄντος ἅει διὰ λογισμῶν προσκείμενος ιδέα [254a8–9].

23 Indeed, all studies of the essence of philosophising come up against this fundamental, and in many ways insurmountable difficulty, namely, that the enquiry itself is undertaken *in advance* in a *philosophical* way, that is, presupposing that which it should precisely be discovering. And herein lies the peculiar "circularity" of the question concerning the essence of philosophy, which requires that the way in which it is tackled can be no other than that of the consummation of philosophising itself. Perhaps this is what Plato means when he has the Stranger say: οὐκοῦν περὶ μὲν τούτου [sc. τοῦ φιλοσόφου] καὶ τάχα ἐπισκεψόμεθα σαφέστερον, ἂν ἔτι βουλομένοις ἡμῖν ἦ [254b3–4]. In other words: an explicit study of philosophy is eventually unnecessary, since the essence has already been reached and identified, and of course in the only way in which it allows itself to be reached and identified, namely, through *consummation*.

The Sixth Definition (*Sophist* 226a–231c): Transposition of Religious Language

Alberto Bernabé

1. Objective

Plato defines the sophist, in the sixth definition of the dialogue of the same name (226a–231c), as one who purifies the soul of wrong opinions through the technique of refutation. In so doing, however, he ends up in an awkward position: the result of applying the method of diairesis seems to result rather in a definition of the philosopher Socrates¹, or, what is worse, a definition valid for both the sophist and the philosopher, and likely to produce confusion between them. So the sixth definition looks a little bizarre, and is difficult to understand.

My aim is to make a contribution to the solution of the problem from the point of view of a philologist. I shall be looking at the use of certain words which in Plato's time were as pertinent to the religious sphere as they were to the philosophical. I shall pay particular attention to those that had been used by him in dialogues antecedent to the *Sophist*. This analysis will allow me to introduce a number of facts into the discussion from a point of view which is different from the usual, and to open up new possibilities for the understanding of this section of the dialogue.

It is clear that in the sixth definition Plato uses on occasion notions which belong to the religious sphere, and specifically to that of the Mysteries. It is also noticeable, both from the words and imagery he employs, that Plato is reshaping, with his new diaretic method of reasoning, old arguments that he had previously used to criticize the sophists, particularly in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *Cratylus* and *Republic*. I do not know whether to define this phenomenon as a case of intertextual-

1 Cf. N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's 'Sophist'*. *Between the Sophist and the Philosopher*, Cambridge 1999, 65 n. 72, for those who take it that it is Socrates who is represented here.

ity or of the persistence in Plato of ideas deeply embedded in his early dialogues and now re-surfacing. Whatever the case, we could describe the sixth definition as a sort of transposition of a transposition. In the dialogues I have quoted, Plato used religious vocabulary to “transpose” (in Diès’ words²) religious concepts into philosophical tenets, in which sophists are equated with false initiators into the Mysteries and philosophers with genuine ones³. In the *Sophist* Plato transposes the previously transposed, and religious language and concepts are now less evident but continue to anchor the whole argumentation; the difference between genuine and false purifiers and initiators still lies at the base of the sixth definition.

So let us examine these religious terms, used either by Plato himself in previous dialogues or by other authors to designate the ritual practices of initiators into the Mysteries or, metaphorically, the activities of sophists.

2. The beginning of the sixth definition

The sixth definition of a sophist begins at 226a, where the Visitor mentions several domestic tasks, focussing on those subject to division (226c), such as filtering, straining and winnowing, and he defines them as a whole as the art of ‘separation’ or ‘discrimination’ (διακριτική).

He distinguishes two forms of this art (226d): ‘separating of the worse from the better’ and ‘separating of like from like’⁴. Leaving the second one nameless (it clearly does not interest him), he calls the first ‘a kind of purification’ (καθαρός τις). The form of separation which retains the better and discards the worse could be designated in Greek by other, less specific words, but Plato chooses one which would probably not have been chosen by a Greek speaker as the more suitable or the more obvious; so translations like ‘cleansing’ (by

2 A. Diès, *Autour de Platon*, II, Paris 1927, 432 ff., P. Frutiger, *Les mythes de Platon*, Paris 1930; cf. also P. M. Schuhl, *Essai sur la formation de la pensée grecque. Introduction historique à une étude de la philosophie platonicienne*, Paris 1934, 205, n. 4, L. Paquet, *Platon. La médiation du regard*, Leiden 1973, A. Bernabé, *Platón y el orfismo, Diálogos entre religión y filosofía*, Madrid 2010, esp. Chapter 13.

3 A. Bernabé, *Platón...* (n. 2), chapter 1; M. A. Santamaría, “Sabiduría alternativa para la polis: órficos y sofistas en la Atenas de Sócrates y Platón”, read at the *Pre-Socratic Conference* of the International Association for Pre-Socratic Studies, held at Brigham Young University, Provo, June, 2008.

4 τὸ μὲν χεῖρον ἀπὸ βελτίονος ἀποχωρίζειν ἦν, τὸ δ’ ὁμοιον ἀπ’ ὁμοίου.

White) are less than accurate, since a καθαρμός is not just a cleansing. The Visitor has to tone down the word by the use of τις, a proof that καθαρμός is not an exact term for this activity but one that has been chosen almost metaphorically. It also seems clear that the choice of this term is not just a chance one; Plato has likely preferred the use of it because it has on the one hand clear religious and medical connotations which allow him to open up several investigative pathways as the dialogue develops, and on the other hand because it recalls the use of a term which he had himself employed in antecedent dialogues, one associated with a further set of interesting and evocative connotations. I shall return to this topic.

The Visitor then distinguishes the two basic senses of the word καθαρμός in common usage: purification of the body and purification of the soul. It is worth pointing out, however, that in the most ancient usage the word is applied to the activities of magicians or religious practitioners. So in a Hippocratic treatise as ancient as *De morbo sacro* the author considers καθαρμοί procedures that should be rejected, being as they are more appropriate for a magician than for a practitioner of scientific medicine⁵.

Plato's lack of interest in medical purification is clear from 227a–c, where he declines to give a name to purification procedures. He also makes a number of remarks with comical overtones (like the comparison between military strategy and the art of catching lice). At 227c the Visitor sums up the antecedent argumentation with the conclusion: 'all references to purification of the soul must be kept separate from that which purifies anything else'⁶. Theaetetus answers: 'I understand, and agree there are two forms of purification, the type that concerns the soul being distinct from the one that concerns the body'⁷.

5 *Morb. Sacr.* 18.6 (90 Grensemann) οὗτος καὶ ταύτην τὴν νοῦσον ἰώιτο ἄν, εἰ τοὺς καιροὺς διαγιγνώσκοι τῶν συμφερόντων, ἄνευ καθαρμῶν καὶ μαγίης καὶ πάσης τοιαύτης βαναυσίης, 'one may also cure this disease by making use of the right times for appropriate methods, without need for purifications or magic and charlatantry of this kind'; cf. A. Bernabé, *Poetae Epici Graeci Testimonia et fragmenta*, Pars. II, Orphicorum et Orphicis similibus testimonia et fragmenta, Monachii et Lipsiae 2004–2005, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2007 (hereinafter *OF*) 657 I, with bibliography.

6 μόνον ἐχέτω χωρὶς τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς καθάρσεων πάντα συνδησαν ὅσα ἄλλο τι καθαίρει.

7 ἀλλὰ μεμάθηκα, καὶ συγχωρῶ δύο μὲν εἶδη καθάρσεως, ἐν δὲ τὸ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν εἶδος εἶναι, τοῦ περὶ τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς ὄν. Though disregarding for the moment this type of καθαρμός, he exploits its double meaning, medical and ritualistic, to speak about soul, using parallels drawn from what happens in the case of body.

The point is important. Both the Visitor's and Theaetetus' statements induce the readers to accept that, from the previous arguments, the only possibility of 'separating of the inferior from the better' in the matter of soul can be through the activity expressed by the term καθαρός, that is, through purification, and also that soul's purification must be kept separate from a confused group of purifications of the body. Let us now focus our attention on this term.

3. καθαρός

According to Liddell-Scott-Jones, "medical" uses of the word referring to purification of the body appear in section II, while section I proffers the following meanings:

1. *cleansing, purification, from guilt* (S.OT 1228), hence, *purificatory offering, atonement, expiation* (Hdt.7.197), in the plural A.Ch.96, Pl.R.364, and
2. *purificatory rite of initiation into mysteries*, Pl.Ph.d.69c, Phdr.244e, hence, in the plural, as title of a poem by Empedocles, Ath.14.620d; and by Epimenides, Suid. s.h.v.
3. *purification by ordeal*, a later use, found in a Magical Papyrus.

In summary, one can see that καθαρός is, overall, a religious concept⁸, and this use is older, and wider in range than the medical one.

Plato used the word in a passage of the *Republic*⁹ in which he talks about various people easily identifiable as practitioners who are called Orpheotelestai in other sources:

'They adduce a hubbub of books by Musaeus and Orpheus ... in accordance with which they arrange their rites, convincing not only individuals but also cities that liberation and purification from injustice are possible, both during life and after death, by means of sacrifices and enjoyable games. These 'initiations', as they call them, free us from the evils of the Beyond, whereas something horrible awaits those who have not performed the rituals.'

8 Cf. M. Vöhler-B. Seidensticker (eds.), *Katharsiskonzeptionen vor Aristoteles. Zum kulturellen Hintergrund des Tragödiensatzes*, Berlin-New York 2007.

9 Pl. *Resp.* 364e (OF 573 I) βίβλων δὲ ὄμαδον παρέχονται Μουσαίου καὶ Ὀρφέως, ... καθ' ἃς θυηπολοῦσιν, πείθοντες οὐ μόνον ἰδιώτας ἀλλὰ καὶ πόλεις, ὡς ἄρα λύσεις τε καὶ **καθαρμοὶ** ἀδικημάτων διὰ θυσιῶν καὶ παιδιᾶς ἡδονῶν εἰσι μὲν ἔτι ζῶσιν, εἰσι δὲ καὶ τελευτήσασιν, ἃς δὴ τελετὰς καλοῦσιν, αἱ τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν ἀπολύουσιν ἡμᾶς, μὴ θύσαντας δὲ δεινὰ περιμένει.

At *Phaedrus* 244d the term is coupled with another one clearly belonging to religious language, i. e., *teletai* (καθαρμῶν τε καὶ τελετῶν), each of them referring to an activity which is able to liberate in both this life and in Hades, while at *Phaedo* 69c Plato uses the corresponding verb, καθαίρω, in the context of *teletai*¹⁰:

‘And it may well be that those¹¹ persons to whom we owe the institution of mystery-rites are not to be despised, inasmuch as they have in fact long ago hinted at the truth by declaring that all such as arrive in Hades uninitiated into the rites shall lie in mud, while he that comes there purified and initiated (κεκαθαρμένος καὶ τετελεσμένος) shall dwell with the gods. For truly, as their authorities tell us, there are

Many that carry the wand, but Bacchants few are amongst them¹²;

where by ‘Bacchants’ I understand them to mean simply those who have pursued philosophy aright.

Plato’s transposition of religious language here is clear. He claims that it is philosophers who are genuine βάκχοι, a term used in the Orphic gold tablet from Hipponion for designating those chosen ones who go, glorious, along a sacred way¹³. Plato, then, contrasts genuine purification, acquired only through the practice of philosophy, with the false one promised by Orphotelestai through their own καθαρμοί¹⁴.

Orpheus appears in numerous sources as the originator of *teletai* and καθαρμοί, and the author of religious poetry related to the Mysteries¹⁵.

10 The translation “initiation” is not accurate, given that initiation is merely one rite – the first one – of several other rites of the Mysteries. On τελετή cf. Sfameni Gasparro (1988); Jiménez San Cristóbal (2002a); (2002b); Schuddeboom (2009).

11 According to R. Hackforth, Plato’s *Phaedo*, Cambridge 1955, 55 n. 3, the force of οὔτοι is ‘these whom the mention of κάθαρσις and καθαρμός brings to my mind’.

12 Plato’s quotation has inverted the word order and is non-metrical. The original form of this verse was πολλοὶ μὲν νερθηκοφόροι, βάκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι. Cf. *OF* 576, with bibliography.

13 *OF* 474 15–16 καὶ δὴ καὶ σὺ πιδὼν ὁδὸν ἔρχεαι ἄν τε καὶ ἄλλοι / μύσται καὶ βάκχοι ἱερὰν στείχουσι κλεῖνοι.

14 Cf. *Phaed.* 67b, where Socrates considers that his mind has been made ready, as though purified (ὅς ἡγείται οἱ παρεσκευάσθαι τὴν διάνοιαν ὥσπερ κεκαθαρμένην).

15 Cf. for example *P. Berol.* 44 saec. II a. C. prim. ed. Buecheler-Schubart-Diels, *Berliner Klassikertexte* V 1, 1905, 1 ff. (*OF* 383) [Ὀρφεὺς υἱὸς ἦν Οἰάγ]ρου καὶ Καλλιόπης τῆς [Μούσης ...] ... παρέδωκεν δὲ [καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ ὄργι]α σέβεσθαι Ἑλλήσιν τε καὶ [βαρβάρους, καὶ κ]α[θ’] ἕκαστον σέβημα ἦν ἐπιμελέστατος περὶ τελετὰς καὶ μυστήρια καὶ [καθαρμοὺς καὶ] μαντεῖα [Orpheus was the son of Eagr]us and Cal-

On the other hand, in the Orphic Gold Tablets, in which initiates find instructions for their path through the Underworld, we read how the deceased or his soul, after death, addresses Persephone with the solemn declaration:

‘I come pure from among the pure, queen of the subterranean beings’¹⁶.

In this declaration, the word which gets repeated, and is clearly most important, is precisely καθαρός: the speaker defines himself/herself as belonging to a group characterized by solidarity, and by adherence to a similar ritual, but he/she also characterizes himself/herself as being personally pure.

So, in choosing the term καθαρός, Plato on the one hand evokes the Orphics criticized at *Republic* 364e as false purifiers, and now places sophists on a level with them (we shall be seeing other examples of the same practice). On the other hand, his choice evokes the claim made at *Phaedo* 69c, according to which only philosophers can perform genuine λύσεις τε καὶ καθαρμοί.

A passage of the *Cratylus*, put forward by Santamaría¹⁷, must be added to the uses of καθαρός by Plato. After Socrates’ explanation of the etymologies of the names Zeus, Chronos and Ouranos (395e–396c), Hermogenes tells him that he looks like a possessed man reciting oracles.¹⁸ Socrates proposes to purify himself the following day, looking for a priest or a sophist for that purpose.¹⁹ Ironically, Socrates suggests that Euthyphro’s love for the etymologies of divine names has seized him like a spell, and therefore he must be liberated from it through the intervention either of a priest, who would free his soul from the spell, or of a sophist, who would convince him that such a thing does not exist and is mere illusion. On the basis of *Soph.* 230be, Santamaría considers that Socrates is here playing upon the double sense of καθά-

liope, the [Muse.]... ‘He transmitted the veneration for [secret sacred rites] to Greeks and [Barbarians and with respect to] each act of worship, he to[ok extraordinary care] of the *teletai*, the mysteries, [the purifications] and the oracles’.

16 Gold Tablet from Thurii (4th cent. BC) *OF* 489–490 ἔρχομαι ἐκ καθαρῶν καθαρὰ, χθονίων βασιλεια. On the Gold Tablets cf. Bernabé-Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008) 100 ff., with further bibliography.

17 Santamaría, “Sabiduría” (n. 3).

18 ἀτεχνῶς γέ μοι δοκεῖς ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξαίφνης χρησμοδεῖν. The same idea is repeated several times: 399a, 409d, 428c.

19 καθαρούμεθα ἐξευρόντες ὅστις τὰ τοιαῦτα δεινὸς καθαίρειν, εἴτε τῶν ἱερέων τις εἴτε τῶν σοφιστῶν, 396e–397a.

πειν, which can refer either to a religious purification or to a refutation of a wrong idea, and deduces that the sophists had appropriated a certain religious vocabulary and applied it to themselves, in order to provide their activities with an aura of prestige. But it seems simpler to understand the comparison as something put forth not by sophists but by Plato, who, once again, places them on the level of purifiers so as to manifest the quackery of both.

4. A new division

Before starting a new division at 227d the Visitor must determine what it is that purifies soul, and he decides that, whenever we find the removal of evil from the soul, this must be called purification²⁰, and that there are two forms of evil in regard to soul: disease and discord, each a term that makes metaphorical reference to body. It looks as though he considers that presenting these as characteristics of the soul is too complicated, or thinks that Theaetetus will better understand his statements if he prefaces the parallel to bodily diseases with the particle οἷον: “one that is like bodily disease, and one like ugliness”²¹. But at this point Theaetetus loses the thread and admits: “I don’t understand”. So the Visitor continues on with his argumentation concerning the parallel with the body, in an attempt to make understandable what happens with the soul. His line of argument is, briefly, as follows:

- a) Disease of the body and discord (στάσις) are one and the same (228a). The meaning of στάσις here is similar to its political meaning ‘sedition’, ‘discord’; a sick body is like a city in which the citizens are in discord. It is hardly surprising that Plato uses a political parallel in referring to the condition of soul; a healthy polity and a healthy soul are likewise on a par in the *Republic*.
- b) As Theaetetus is still confused, the Visitor specifies that discord is the dissolution of the naturally related, thanks to some sort of corruption²². There is an echo here of a reference to the sophists in a previous dialogue, the *Meno*, when Anytus describes them as the perdi-

20 *Soph.* 227d καὶ ψυχῆς ἄρα, καθ’ ὅσον ἂν εὐρίσκωμεν κακίας ἀφαίρεσίν τινα, καθαρὸν αὐτὸν λέγοντες ἐν μέλει φθεγξόμεθα.

21 *Soph.* 228a τὸ μὲν οἷον νόσον ἐν σώματι, τὸ δ’ οἷον αἴσχος ἐγγιγνόμενον.

22 *Soph.* 228a πότερον ἄλλο τι στάσιν ἡγούμενος ἢ τὴν τοῦ φύσει συγγενοῦς ἐκ τίνος διαφθορᾶς διαφορᾶν;

tion of those that keep company with them²³. It is no accident that these words are spoken by Anytus, who was one of Socrates' prosecutors. In the accusation against Socrates, according to the *Apology*, the same verb διαφθείρω appears: "Socrates is a doer of evil, and a corrupter of the youth, and does not believe in the gods of the state, and has other new divinities of his own"²⁴. In light of this text, it seems clear that one of the reasons why Anytus, in the *Meno*, considers sophists to be the perdition of those that keep company with them could be that they do not believe in the gods of the state. Plato's use of διαφθορά allows him to place both sophists and Socrates in the same pigeon hole, or at any rate apparently the same, from the point of view of a myopic citizen like Anytus.

Later on, the Visitor makes a new and supposedly unquestionable assertion: that every soul's ignorance of anything is involuntary²⁵. He adds later that there are two kinds of evil in the soul: vice and ignorance²⁶.

5. ἀνόητος

It is very significant that the Visitor uses two different words when referring to soul's ignorance: ἀγνοοῦσαν ('ignorant') at 228c, echoed by the definition of vice of soul at 228d as ἄγνοια, and, immediately afterwards, ἀνόητος²⁷, a word which might seem to be a synonym of 'ignorant' but clearly is not.

According to LSJ ἀνόητος has a passive meaning *not thought on, unheeded of*, and another, active meaning *not understanding, unintelligent, senseless, silly* (so Plato uses τὸ ἀνόητον at *R.* 605b and *Ti.* 30b to characterize soul's *irrational* part). The philosopher then places ignorance on the same level as lack of understanding and senselessness. But it is more interesting for purposes of the present paper that he repeats a word used

23 *Meno* 91c διαφθορά τῶν συγγενομένων.

24 *Apol.* 24b Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς τε νέους διαφείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά.

25 *Soph.* 228c ἀλλὰ μὴν ψυχὴν γε ἴσμεν ἄκουσαν πᾶσαν πᾶν ἀγνοοῦσαν.

26 *Soph.* 228d ἔστι δὴ δύο ταῦτα, ὡς φαίνεται, κακῶν ἐν αὐτῇ γένη, τὸ μὲν πονηρία καλούμενον ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν, νόσος αὐτῆς σαφέστατα ὄν. ... τὸ δὲ γε ἄγνοια μὲν καλοῦσι, κακίαν δὲ αὐτὸ ἐν ψυχῇ μόνον γιγνόμενον οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν ὁμολογεῖν.

27 *Soph.* 228d ψυχὴν ἄρα ἀνόητον αἰσχροὺς καὶ ἄμετρον θετόν.

in a passage of the *Gorgias*, in an ambience very similar to that characterizing the passage of the *Sophist*.

In the *Gorgias* Socrates says that

‘the part of the soul in which we have desires is liable to be over-persuaded and to vacillate to and fro, and so some smart fellow, a Sicilian, I daresay, or Italian, made a fable in which – by a play on words – he named this part, being as it is so impressionable and persuadable (πιθανόν), a jar (πίθος), and the thoughtless (ἀνόητοι) he called uninitiate (ἀμύητοι), and suggested that in these uninitiates that part of the soul where the desires are is the licentious and fissured part, which in his allegory he named a leaky jar (πίθος) because it is so insatiate. ... these uninitiates will be most wretched, and will carry water into their leaky jar with a sieve, my story-teller said, by which he means the soul: and the souls of the thoughtless he likened to sieves, as being perforated, since they are unable to retain anything by reason of their unbelief and forgetfulness’²⁸.

I have analyzed the passage elsewhere²⁹, so I shall limit myself here to the essential. The Sicilian or Italian is a learned man, an interpreter of Orphic texts and an Orphic himself, but in the manner of the commentator of the *Derveni Papyrus*. He updates an old text, probably an Orphic poem, in which the uninitiated were forced to carry water with a sieve. The reference to a sieve appears also in the *Republic*:

‘But Musaeus and his son ... plunge the unrighteous and unjust into a kind of mud in Hades and make them carry water in a sieve’³⁰.

The reference to Musaeus and his son places the reference in an ambience of Orphism. The sieve is a reminder of the cause of punishment: the incapacity to separate from the soul the Titanic and evil elements inherent in it, and to retain the Dionysian and positive elements³¹. The Sicilian explains ἀμύητος etymologically as ἀνόητος, placing the thoughtless soul on the level of one that is uninitiated, and using the same word that the Visitor will use in the *Sophist*. It is noteworthy that the sixth definition of the *Sophist* begins with just such a consideration of καθαρός as one of the arts of separation, such as straining, sifting, and winnowing, where the instrument for sifting, the sieve, is in Orphic imagery a symbol of purification. This can hardly be accidental.

28 Pl.*Gorg.*493a, tr. after W. R. M. Lamb.

29 Bernabé, *Platón ...* (n. 2), 67–71.

30 Pl.*Resp.*363c. Translation by W. K. C. Guthrie (slightly adapted).

31 Bernabé (1998a): 76.

6. Soul's liberation

The Visitor, continuing to compare evil in the soul with evil in the body, concludes that the art of instruction deals with ignorance (229a). He distinguishes two types of education: the art of admonishment (230a νουθετητικὴν), which accomplishes little, and another, very similar to the Socratic method, which consists in the refutation of false opinions by showing that they contradict one another³².

At 230c the Visitor points out how

‘in this way they are released from the great and unbending opinions that encompass them, and the release is most pleasant to witness and most steadfast for one who endures it. For, dear boy, just as physicians think the body unable to benefit from food offered until internal obstructions have been eliminated, so, too, the purifiers of the soul reason that the soul will not obtain benefit from teachings until, by cross-questioning, it is brought to a state of modesty, removing the opinions which obstruct teaching, and the person is purified, believing he knows only those things which he does know, and not more’³³.

Once again Plato turns to religious vocabulary, or to terms used by himself or by other authors to refer to the activities of Orpheus' followers, and combines several very significant terms: καθαρός (and the verb καθαίρω), ἀπαλλαγή (and the verb ἀπαλλάττω), and ἐμπόδιος (and the verb ἐμποδίζω). I have dealt with καθαρμός, καθαίρω, and καθαρός, and will now say something about ἀπαλλαγή and ἐμπόδιος.

32 τιθέντες δὲ ἐπιδεικνύουσιν αὐτὰς αὐταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἑναντίας.

33 καὶ τούτῳ δὴ τῷ τρόπῳ τῶν περὶ αὐτοὺς μεγάλων καὶ σκληρῶν δοξῶν ἀπαλλάττονται πασῶν {τε} ἀπαλλαγῶν ἀκούειν τε ἡδίστην καὶ τῷ πάσχοντι βεβαιότατα γιγνομένην. νομίζοντες γάρ, ὡ παῖ φίλε, οἱ καθαίροντες αὐτούς, ὥσπερ οἱ περὶ τὰ σώματα ἰατροὶ νενομίκασι μὴ πρότερον ἂν τῆς προσφερομένης τροφῆς ἀπολαύειν δύνασθαι σώμα, πρὶν ἂν τὰ ἐμποδίζοντα ἐντός τις ἐκβάλῃ, ταῦτὸν καὶ περὶ ψυχῆς διενόηθησαν ἐκεῖνοι, μὴ πρότερον αὐτὴν ἔξειν τῶν προσφερομένων μαθημάτων 230.d.1 ὄνησιν, πρὶν ἂν ἐλέγχων τις τὸν ἐλεγχόμενον εἰς αἰσχύνην καταστήσας, τὰς τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐμποδίσους δόξας ἐξελῶν, καθαρὸν ἀποφήνην καὶ ταῦτα ἡγούμενον ἄπερ οἶδεν εἰδέναι μόνα, πλείω δὲ μὴ. Tr. D. Ambuel.

7. ἀπαλλαγή

ἀπαλλαγή, with the objective genitive, means ‘release’ (from). Plato uses this term in very significant contexts. In the *Seventh Letter* he bases himself on “ancient and sacred doctrine” (that is, on an ancient Orphic *hieros logos*) to uphold the idea that the soul is immortal, and suffers trials and terrible punishments upon separation from the body (ὅταν τις ἀπαλλαχθῆι τοῦ σώματος)³⁴. He also uses the verb in the *Phaedo* in reference to separation of soul from body³⁵. In the *Apology* the verb is applied to Socrates’ death, and specifically to liberation from false judges. Socrates declares himself happy because he will meet Orpheus, Musaeus and other illustrious poets in the Beyond³⁶. More significant undoubtedly is a passage of the *Phaedrus* in which Socrates asserts that

‘where plagues and mightiest woes have bred in certain families, owing to some ancient blood-guilt, there madness has entered with holy prayers and rites, and by inspired utterances found a way of deliverance for those who are in need; and he who has part in this gift, and is truly possessed and duly out of his mind, is by the use of purifications and mysteries made whole and exempt from evil, future as well as present, and is released from the calamity which was afflicting him’³⁷.

In this passage, as in that of the *Sophist*, ἀπαλλαγή is associated with τελετῶν and καθαρῶν.

34 Pl. *Ep.* 7.335a πείθεσθαι δὲ ὄντως αἰεὶ χρὴ τοῖς παλαιοῖς τε καὶ ἱεροῖς λόγοις, οἳ δὴ μνησοῦσιν ἡμῖν ἀθάνατον ψυχὴν εἶναι δικαστὰς τε ἴσχειν καὶ τίνειν τὰς μεγίστας τιμωρίας, ὅταν τις ἀπαλλαχθῆι τοῦ σώματος.

35 *Phaed.* 69e–70a ὁ Κέβης ἔφη· ‘ὦ Σώκρατες, ... τὰ δὲ περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς πολλὴν ἀπιστίαν παρέχει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ, ἐπειδὴν ἀπαλλαγῆι τοῦ σώματος, οὐδαμοῦ ἔτι ᾗ’.

36 *Apol.* 41a εἰ γὰρ τις ἀφικόμενος εἰς Ἄιδου, ἀπαλλαγείς τουτωνῶν τῶν φασκόντων δικαστῶν εἶναι, εὐρήσει τοὺς ὡς ἀληθῶς δικαστὰς, ... ἄρα φαύλη ἂν εἴη ἡ ἀποδημία; ἢ αὖ Ὀρφεὶ συγγενέσθαι καὶ Μουσαίωι καὶ Ἡσιόδωι καὶ Ὀμηρῶι ἐπὶ πόσω ἂν τις δέξαιτ’ ἂν ὑμῶν;

37 *Phaedr.* 244d (*OF* 575) ἀλλὰ μὴν νόσων γε καὶ πόνων τῶν μεγίστων, ἃ δὴ παλαιῶν ἐκ μνημάτων ποθὲν ἔν τισι τῶν γενῶν ἡ μανία ἐγγενομένη καὶ προφητεύσασα, οἷς ἔδει **ἀπαλλαγῆν** ἠὔρετο, καταφυγοῦσα πρὸς θεῶν εὐχὰς τε καὶ λατρείας, ὅθεν δὴ **καθαρμῶν** τε καὶ **τελετῶν** τυχοῦσα ἐξάντη ἐποίησε τὸν {ἐαυτῆς} ἔχοντα πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον, λύσιν τῶι ὀρθῶς μανέντι τε καὶ κατασχομένωι τῶν παρόντων κακῶν εὐρομένη

8. ἔμποδιους

ἔμπόδιος is not a religious term, but, as Santamaría³⁸ has pointed out, the use of this word in the *Sophist* in reference to the purificator's action as τὰς τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἔμποδιους δόξας ἐξελῶν recalls a ritual action by performers of the τελετή (that is, by μάγοι) in a passage of the sixth column of the *Derveni Papyrus*:

ἐπ[ωιδῆ δ]ἔ μάγων δύν[α]ται δαίμονας ἐμ[ποδῶν
 γε[γενημένο]υς μεθιστάναί· δαίμονες ἔμπο[δῶν] ὄντες εἰσὶ
 ψ[υχῶν] τιμῶ]ροί. τὴν θυσ[ία]ν τοῦτου ἔνεκε[μ] π[ροιοῦσ]ι[ν]
 οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὥσπερ εἰ ποινήν ἀποδιδόντες.

‘An incantation by *magoi* can dislodge *daimones* that have become a hindrance; *daimones* that are a hindrance are vengeful souls. This is why the *magoi* perform the sacrifice, as they are paying a blood-price’.

The author seems to be referring to vengeful beings that torture impure souls in the Netherworld and block their way to the place of the blessed. The purpose of the rite is to purify these souls (cf. col. VI 4–5: [τὴν θυσ[ία]ν τοῦτου ἔνεκε[μ] π[ροιοῦσ]ι[ν] / οἱ μά[γο]ι, ὥσπερ εἰ ποινήν ἀποδιδόντες), dislodging the *daimones* that are a hindrance to them, in the same way that in the *Sophist* the refuter purifies the soul, “removing the opinions which are a hindrance to teaching” (ἔμποδιους δόξας ἐξελῶν 230d).

9. A digression on money

Summing up at 231d, the Visitor makes a series of references to one characteristic feature of a sophist which had not been mentioned in the sixth definition – the making of money: the sophist is a mercenary hunter (ἔμμισθος θηρευτής), a merchant (ἔμπορός τις), a retailer (κάπηλος) and one who sells us learning of his own manufacture (αὐτοπώλης). But the sixth definition does not mention this feature of him, probably because the philosopher (who in this definition is clearly confused with the sophist) does not share this eagerness to make money. The topic of both the sophist's and the initiator's search for money is also well known from earlier dialogues of Plato. It will be enough to mention a passage of the *Protagoras* in which, using very similar language, Socrates defines the sophist as “a merchant or retailer of wares on which the soul lives” (ἔμπο-

38 Santamaría, “Sabiduría...” (n. 2).

ρός τις ἢ κάπηλος τῶν ἀγωγίμων, ἀφ' ὧν ψυχὴ τρέφεται); or a passage of the *Republic* on Orphic initiators, in which he mentions mendicant prophets who go to rich men's doors and persuade them that they possess power, bestowed on them by the gods, to make atonement for a man's own or his ancestors' sins, and promise to harm an enemy, whether just or unjust, at a small cost (μετὰ μικρῶν δαπανῶν); or a passage of the *Laws*, in which he talks about people who perform sacrifices or make spells to gain money (χρημάτων χάριν)³⁹. This criticism is as old as Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Theseus, considering his son some sort of *Tartuffe*, accuses him of being a follower of Orpheus, and exhorts him sarcastically to follow his food habits; the author of the *Derveni Papyrus*, too, censures in a veiled way the rapacity of a number of initiates: "it is not enough for them (those who have been present at the rites named τελεταί) to have paid the fee in advance"⁴⁰.

10. θαῦμα, φά(ντα)σμα

Another point of interest can be found at 233ab. The refutation of the empty belief in one's own wisdom is named as the art of a sophistry 'noble in descent' (τῆς δὲ παιδευτικῆς ὁ περὶ τὴν μάταιον δοξοσοφίαν γιγνόμενος ἔλεγχος ... λεγέσθω ... ἢ γένοι γενναία σοφιστική 231b), and the Visitor now introduces a new nuance (233a) when he speaks of 'wonderment' (θαῦμα) at the sophist's ability⁴¹ to get young people to believe that they are in every way the wisest of all men. Again these are echoes of things said in previous dialogues. In this case, the language evokes a scene in the *Protagoras* in which the sophist is presented as bewitching the listeners with his voice, like Orpheus:

39 Pl. *Pr.* 313c, *R.* 364c, *Lg.* 909a, cf. Bernabé, *Platón...* (n. 2), 58–59 and Santamaría, "Sabiduría..." (n. 3).

40 *E.Hipp.* 952 s. (ἤδη νυν αὔχει καὶ δι' ἀψύχου βορᾶς / σίτοις καπήλευ' Ὀρφέα τ' ἄνακτ' ἔχων κτλ.); *P.Derv.* col. XX.10 οὐκ ἄρκει σφιν τὴν δαπάνην προαναηλωσθαι.

41 233a [ΞΕ.] Τί ποτ' οὖν ἂν εἴη τὸ τῆς σοφιστικῆς δυνάμεως θαῦμα; ... καθ' ὄντινα τρόπον ποτὲ δυνατοὶ τοῖς νέοις δόξαν παρασκευάζειν ὡς εἰσι πάντα πάντων αὐτοὶ σοφώτατοι.

‘The greater part of them appeared to be foreigners, whom Protagoras had brought with him out of the various cities visited by him in his journeys, he, like Orpheus, attracting them his voice, and they following’⁴².

Protagoras himself assumes this similarity when he declares:

‘Now the art of the sophist is, as I believe, of great antiquity; but in ancient times those who practised it, fearing this odium, veiled and disguised themselves under various names, some under the names of poets, such as Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides, some under the names of hierophants and prophets, such as Orpheus and Musaeus’⁴³.

Segal⁴⁴ points out how Plato extends this topic in the speech of Phaedrus in the *Symposium*, when he offers a version of the Orpheus myth, according to which the gods show him a phantom (φάσμα) of the woman he came to find⁴⁵. For Plato, according to Segal, the magic of Orphic speech can persuade, but it cannot attain truth. As a precursor of the sophists, Orpheus belongs in the realm of *doxa*, based on the evidence of the senses, not in that of *epistēmē*. That it is a wraith or shadow figure (φάσμα) which he wins from the gods keeps his actions in the realm of illusion.

Underlying Plato’s statement that gods deceive those who attempt to deceive them is the implicit notion that man cannot attain a privileged situation in the Beyond by turning to the deceptive teaching of poets or to ritual or magic. Plato considers this no way to relate to the gods, given that we should not be trying to impose our will on them, but rather submitting ourselves to their authority.

Similar statements can be found at *Laws* 909ab:

‘But as to all those who have become like ravening beasts, and who, besides holding that the gods are negligent or open to bribes, despise men, charming the souls of many of the living, and claiming that they charm the souls

42 *Prot.* 315a (*OF* 949 I) πολὺ ξένοι ἐφαίνοντο – οὓς ἄγει ἐξ ἐκάστων τῶν πόλεων ὁ Πρωταγόρας, δι’ ὧν διεξέρχεται, κηλῶν τῆι φωνῆι ὡσπερ Ὀρφεύς, οἱ δὲ κατὰ τὴν φωνὴν ἔπονται κεκλημένοι – tr. Jowett.

43 *Protágoras* 316d (*OF* 549 I) ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν σοφιστικὴν τέχνην φημί μὲν εἶναι παλαιάν, τοὺς δὲ μεταχειριζομένους αὐτὴν τῶν παλαιῶν ἀνδρῶν, φοβουμένους τὸ ἐπαχθὲς αὐτῆς, πρόσχημα ποιεῖσθαι καὶ προκαλύπτεσθαι, τοὺς μὲν ποιήσιν, οἷον Ὀμηρόν τε καὶ Ἡσίοδον καὶ Σιμωνίδην, τοὺς δὲ αὐτὴν τελετάς τε καὶ χρησμοιδίας, τοὺς ἀμφὶ τε Ὀρφέα καὶ Μουσαῖον.

44 C. Segal, *Orpheus. The myth or the poet*, Baltimore-London, 1989, 16 f.

45 *Pl. Symp.* 179d (*OF* 983) [T 1]. Cf. E. R. Robbins, “Famous Orpheus”, in J. Warden (ed.), *Orpheus. The Metamorphosis of a Myth*, Toronto, 1982, 3–23, 17 f.; J. Heath, “The Failure of Orpheus”, *TAPhA* 124, 1994, 163–196: 180 f.

of the dead, and promising to persuade the gods by bewitching them, as it were, with sacrifices, prayers and incantations, and who try thus to wreck utterly not only individuals, but whole families and States for the sake of Money...⁴⁶.

The Visitor at *Soph.* 232a, echoing all this argumentation, adds that when someone appears to know many arts, but goes by the name of a single one of them, the appearance (φάντασμα) has something wrong with it. And at 233c the Visitor says that the sophist has been clearly shown to possess a kind of conjectural knowledge about everything, but not truth⁴⁷. The causes are once again the same: sophists and initiators inhabit the realm of δόξα; philosophers the realm of truth.

11. Conclusion

The sixth definition highlights a number of areas where sophists and philosophers show methodological points of contact, and this is why Plato feels the need to distinguish them. In so doing he makes explicit mention of such differences as true and false, apparent and real, but there are others which are not made explicit, but merely adverted to or suggested. The terminology Plato employs in this regard is either ambiguous in meaning or has been used by him in previous dialogues for the discussion of similar topics.

We have seen how at several points in the sixth definition Plato uses terms typical of a religious ambience, or used by himself to criticize Orphic initiates, or by commentators on Orphic texts like the Derveni author, or by the Sicilian mentioned in the *Gorgias*, who tries to update old religious ideas from a more philosophical point of view. The reason for using this terminology seems to be a subtle form of “three-cushion billiards”. Behind a rational construction of things, based on diairesis, we discover a background of recurrent Platonic ideas concerning the sophists: their activity, such as that exercised by Orphic *magoi* and purifiers, is a source of amazement (θαῦμα) based on an appearance, a phan-

46 *Leges* 909ab ὅσοι δ' ἂν θηριώδεις γένωνται πρὸς τῶι θεοῦς μὴ νομίζειν ἢ ἀμελεῖς ἢ παραιτητοὺς εἶναι, καταφρονοῦντες δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ψυχαγωγῶσι μὲν πολλοὺς τῶν ζώντων, τοὺς δὲ τεθνεώτας φάσκοντες ψυχαγωγεῖν καὶ θεοῦς ὑπισχνούμενοι πείθειν, ὡς θυσίας τε καὶ εὐχαῖς καὶ ἐπιδαῖς γοητεύοντες, ἰδιώτας τε καὶ ὄλας οἰκίας καὶ πόλεις χρημάτων χάριν ἐπιχειρῶσιν κατ' ἄκρας ἐξαιρεῖν.

47 *Pl. Soph.* 233c δοξαστικὴν ἄρα τινὰ περὶ πάντων ἐπιστήμην ὁ σοφιστὴς ἡμῖν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀλήθειαν ἔχων ἀναπέφανται.

tom (φά(ντα)σμα). Both *magoi* and sophists claim to offer souls purification (καθαρός) and liberation from impeding elements (ἀπαλλαγή, ἔμπόδιος), but can only convince unintelligent (ἄνοητος) souls. Sophists and initiators benefit financially from the needs of others, but the worst thing of all is that the sophist, like the *magos*, is a false prophet of a false religion who promises a false purification. Furthermore, since in the sixth definition the purification of the body is repeatedly compared with that of the soul, Plato implies that the sophist is also a false physician, who produces bogus healing and bogus liberation from disease. The art of the sophist, like the practices of Orpheus and his followers, is deceptive, false, and lies in the realm of δόξα. The philosopher alone is a true educator, physician and purifier, who effects a genuine liberation. And philosophy alone can be placed on the level of genuine religion.

Remarks on the First Five Definitions of the Sophist¹ (*Soph.* 221c–235a)

Michel Narcy

The *Sophist* is explicitly dedicated to the question of getting to know what constitutes a sophist. It is, however, far from being the only dialogue where one finds a definition of one. This is natural enough, given that, from the *Apology* to the *Theaetetus*, a good part of Plato's work is devoted to pointing out the difference between Socrates and the sophists who were his contemporaries, considered less for who they were as individuals or for the particular positions they adopted than as representatives of a manner of thinking which Plato himself calls 'sophistry'.² So it is normal that, as part of the enterprise, Plato would have been led to clarify just what the manner of thinking is which he condemns through the character Socrates. The question one ought rather to answer, however, is: Why, after so many repeated condemnations of sophistry, does Plato feel the need to devote a dialogue to it? After the *Theaetetus*, and the antithesis there – which takes up the central part of the dialogue – between the frequenter of the law courts and the philosopher,³ is it still necessary to ask the question whether the sophist and the philosopher are or are not the same thing?

One might object that the question with which the *Sophist* opens is not that one, but rather that of knowing whether the sophist, politician and philosopher, not just the sophist and the philosopher, are or are not the same thing (217a1–9). But the difference between sophist and politician can be just as much taken as established in the eyes of any reader of Plato as the difference between sophist and philosopher; one need only think of the *Gorgias*, where sophistry relates to the art of legislating

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- 1 I am grateful to Thomas M. Robinson for the translation of this paper into English.
 - 2 Cf. *Gorg.* 463b6, 465c2, 520b2; the *Protagoras* (316d3–4) talks of the σοφιστικὴ τέχνη. (I naturally leave aside from the calculation the occurrences of the word in the *Sophist*).
 - 3 *Theaetet.* 172c3–177b7.

(*nomothetike*) as rhetoric relates to justice (*dikaioisune*).⁴ Further on in the dialogue, Socrates will make use of the same analogy, this time aimed at Callicles, but, curiously, it works to the advantage of sophistry: sophistry, he will declare, wins out over rhetoric as the art of legislating over judicial practice (*dikastike*).⁵ In what way, one might ask, is the art of legislating superior to the profession of judge? The reply is evidently that the judge only applies a law which he himself does not define; it is the legislator who provides the judge with the principles in light of which to make his judgments.

It is worth pausing on this point. While sophistry and rhetoric are each one only forms of flattery, and on that score each worthy of contempt, they stand in the same relationship to each other as do the genuine arts of which they are the fraudulent imitations. Just as the judge is subordinate to the legislator, the rhetorician, one should plausibly suppose, is subordinate to the sophist, probably because he derives from him the sources or principles of his various arguments. The sophist is consequently to the rhetorician, in the order of imitation, what the legislator is to the judge in the order of authenticity: a theoretician. To conclude from this, as one might be tempted to do, to his affinity with the philosopher would be perhaps to extrapolate. What we do know is that Plato is explicit about the fact that not all imitations are of equal worth; if it is a finer thing to imitate the making of law than to imitate the administration of justice, it is because imitation has a share in the worth of its model. Sophistry consequently preserves a good deal of politics and even of politics' finest part, the fashioning of law.

Therefore there is a risk of confounding the two, and that is where we can see the sense of the question that Socrates asks the Eleatic Stranger.⁶ He does not in fact ask whether sophist, politician and philosopher are or are not the same thing – a topic he himself knows how to stay clear of – but what those *at Elea* thought about the matter. So the Stranger sees himself placed in a position from which Meno by contrast

4 *Gorg.* 465c2–3.

5 *Gorg.* 520b2–3.

6 The complexity of the question is noteworthy. It is not a question of alternatives ('Are sophist, politician and philosopher one and the same or not?'), but rather, 'Are they one, two or three?' The Stranger's reply, that they are held to be three distinct types (217b20), does not prejudge Socrates' position; in his eyes politician and philosopher possibly constitute only one, with the sophist imitating the one no less than the other.

was in fact dislodged at the beginning of the *Meno*. When Meno claims only to be reporting the teaching of Gorgias, Socrates obliges him to express his own views;⁷ the Eleatic Stranger, by contrast, is asked to express, not an opinion of his own but what “the people there thought” (217a1), that is, at Elea. And if, according to Theodorus, the Stranger is fully ready to satisfy this request, it is because what is at issue is a question he has heard talked about a good deal and the details of which he has a good memory of (διακηκοέναι γέ φησιν ἰκανῶς καὶ οὐκ ἀμνημονεῖν, 217b8–9). It is not a question here either of reminiscence or maieutic, which would imply that the Stranger was being invited to recover from within himself a truth which he does not know is there. Quite the contrary: the only thing being asked of him is to speak for a group of people whose geographical location seems enough to identify them philosophically.

Furthermore, the question which Socrates asks the Eleatic Stranger does not imply, on the former’s part, either a profession of ignorance or an engagement in a piece of communal investigation which characterize the so-called ‘Socratic’ dialogues. When he is wondering about what people at Elea thought about the resemblance or otherwise between the three types of person in question, Socrates in no way declares that he is asking himself that question. And in parallel fashion, when he gets the Stranger to agree to accept Theaetetus as interlocutor (217d5–7), he makes very clear that his own intention is to stand back from the matter. But in standing back he is not a mere spectator: given that he is the one who asked the question, he is also the one to whom the discussion it elicits will be directed – a discussion (another unique feature of this dialogue) in which it is he who decides who the partners will be and distributes their roles. In other words, Socrates acts like the authority figure before whom the Stranger is invited to set out his evidence; his position is that of judge, and the object of his judgment is the opinion held at Elea on the sophist, politician and philosopher. To the degree that, as we said earlier, there are a lot of reasons for thinking that Socrates already has an established opinion on the matter, there are strong grounds for believing that the typology which the Stranger will be presenting – starting with his definition of the sophist, since he will choose to begin with this – will be evaluated against Socrates’ opinion.

7 *Meno* 71d1.

As everyone knows, in defining the sophist the Stranger will in fact proffer five definitions (which will eventually finish up as six, given that Theaetetus will divide the third definition in two):⁸

- “hired hunter of rich young men, νέων καὶ πλουσίων ἔμμισθος θηρευτῆς” (231d2; cf. 223b4–5)
- “merchant of learning proper to the soul, ἔμπορός τις περὶ τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς μαθήματα” (231d4; cf. 224c–d, τὸ... ψυχεμπορικῆς περὶ λόγους καὶ μαθήματα ἀρετῆς πωλητικόν)
- “retailer or direct salesman of the same merchandise (i. e., learning), περὶ ταῦτὰ ταῦτα κάπηλος⁹... καὶ αὐτοπώλης περὶ τὰ μαθήματα” (231d8–11; cf. 224e1–3, τὸ... καπηλικόν εἶτε αὐτοπωλικόν, ἀμφοτέρως, ὅτιπερ ἂν ἦ περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα μαθηματοπωλικόν γένος)
- “an athlete skilled in argument, who has made a speciality of the art of eristic, τῆς ἀγωνιστικῆς περὶ λόγους τις ἀθλητῆς, τὴν ἐριστικὴν τέχνην ἀφωρισμένος” (231e1–2; cf. 225c7–226a4)
- “purifier of those opinions that form an obstacle to learning in the soul, δοξῶν ἐμποδίων μαθήμασιν περὶ ψυχὴν καθαρτῆς” (231e5–6; cf. 231b3–8).

8 At 231d8–11 Theaetetus introduces the term αὐτοπώλης (almost a *hapax* in Greek) to designate a species of sophist distinct from the third that the Stranger had listed, i. e., the κάπηλος. The Stranger himself will adopt this distinction as his own in the *Politicus* (260c8), explaining that the κάπηλος re-sells products which have already been marketed somewhere (*Polit.* 260d4–5), thus leading one to understand that an αὐτοπώλης is someone who sells his own products (a ‘vendeur de première main’, in Diès’ translation [1925]). But when he proffers the definition of sophist as κάπηλος (*Soph.* 224d–e), he clarifies that that latter sells either what he has bought or what he has himself produced (*Soph.* 224d5–6).

9 I derive this translation of κάπηλος from the explanation of the term given by the Stranger at *Polit.* 260c8 (see preceding note). This translation is equally valid for uses of the term in the *Sophist*; for what distinguishes the ἔμπορος from the κάπηλος is less the fact that the former buys knowledge in bulk to exchange it later for money (224b1–2: τὸν μαθήματα συνωνούμενον... νομίματος ἀμειβοντα) than his nomadic life (*ibid.* πόλιν τε ἐκ πόλεως) by contrast with the sedentary life of the κάπηλος (224d4–5: καθιδρυμένος ἐν πόλει), who is, moreover, in this first occurrence, indifferently either a re-seller or an original seller (224e2: καπηλικόν εἶτε αὐτοπωλικόν, ἀμφοτέρως; see preceding note).

Remarks on these definitions

With the exception of the last one, all these definitions are, to various degrees, familiar to Plato's readers.

That the teaching offered to young people is the source of the wealth the sophists accumulated is stated in the opening lines of the *Hippias Major*, in regard to Hippias himself, then Gorgias, then Prodicus and finally Protagoras.¹⁰ Whatever the degree of irony one can attribute to Socrates in this statement, Hippias for his part sees no malice in it, and does not hesitate to talk proudly of the considerable wealth which his teaching brings him. Elsewhere, Protagoras himself, in each of the dialogues in which Plato features him, is careful to justify the high cost of his teaching.¹¹ Which might lead one to think that the first definition of the sophist given by the Stranger does little more than recapture the manner in which the members of this group of professionals, which appeared in the fifth century, and made teaching their profession, presented itself.

We are always free to characterize any Socratic presentation of the sophists as ironic; in the definition given by the Stranger, and in particular in the use of the term 'hunter' and in the suggestion that the sophists are in the hunt for rich young men, must we see a similar critical judgment? This is unclear. Other than the fact that it is natural for any private educator to look for a sufficiently well-off client to whom he might offer his services, it is important to note that the way in which the Stranger arrives at his definition contrasts with that in which Socrates defines sophistry in the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias* sophistry is one of the forms under whose guise flattery (κολακεία) counterfeits the four genuine arts.¹² In the *Sophist* sophistry is only a neighbor of flattery without being confused with it, and in particular without being a species of it; both are a species of wage-earners (μισθαρηνητικόν, 222e5), but differ in that the one, flattery, seeks as its salary simple subsistence (τρόφην,

10 *Hipp. Ma.* 281b6–7, 282b7–8, c4–5, d4–5. In the first three cases, it is emphasized that we are talking about a private activity (ιδίᾳ) conducted by the interested parties as a sideline to their official mission as ambassadors, and that, public lectures possibly aside (ἐπιδείξεις, 282b7, c5), it is to young people that sophists direct their teaching: παρὰ τῶν νέων πολλὰ χρήματα λαμβάνων (281b7), συνὼν τοῖς νέοις χρήματα πολλὰ ἤργασατο (282b8), τοῖς νέοις συνὼν χρήματα ἔλαβεν θαυμαστὰ ὄσα (282c5–6).

11 *Prot.* 328b3–c2; *Theaet.* 167d1–2.

12 *Gorg.* 464c3–7.

222e7), using to this end its charm, and in general, as in the *Gorgias*,¹³ pleasure (διὰ χάριτος καὶ παντάπασι δι' ἡδονῆς, 222e5–6), while the other, professing to have its goal virtue (ἐπαγγελλόμενον ὡς ἀρετῆς ἕνεκα τὸς ὁμιλίας ποιούμενον, 223a4–5), gets money as its salary. To put it anachronistically, one could say that the flatterer seeks to become the client, in the Latin sense of the term, of some *amphitryon*, while the relationship of a sophist to his pupils limits itself to a commercial exchange. There is no indication from the language of the Stranger that he is calling into doubt the profession (*epangelma*) of the sophist, according to which he makes virtue the goal of his teaching, and the dichotomy introduced into the notion of salary has the effect of clearly exonerating the sophist of the suspicion of being a flatterer. At the end of this first application of the method of division to the definition of a sophist it appears that the Stranger does not share the negative opinion of Socrates, in whose eyes the final dichotomy between catering to a client and remuneration of service is probably not a real one.

From the fact that, with this definition, the sophist, by contrast with the flatterer, has the appearance of a tradesman, one notices also that it is already announcing the two definitions to come, in which the sophist is going to be successively described as an importing merchant (ἔμπορος) and retailer (κάπηλος). Now these two definitions are no less familiar to Plato's readers than is the preceding one. Ἐμπορος and κάπηλος are in fact the terms that Socrates uses in the *Protagoras*¹⁴ to characterize a sophist in the eyes of the young Hippocrates before introducing him to Protagoras. Differently however from the Stranger, Socrates does not keep separate ἔμπορος and κάπηλος but associates them; always appearing in conjunction,¹⁵ the two terms seem to constitute for him a hendiadys that is indispensable for the description of commercial activity, the genuine object of his diatribe. Because it is indeed a diatribe. Just like a merchant, explains Socrates to Hippocrates, the sophist produces an article for sale; it is not with the idea that it will be salutary to those who buy it but because, like any merchant, his goal is to make his business succeed, i. e., to sell things.¹⁶ It is an argument which

13 *Id.* 464d1–2: τοῦ μὲν βελτίστου οὐδὲν φροντίζει, τῷ δὲ αἰεὶ ἡδίστῳ θηρεύεται τὴν ἄνοιαν.

14 *Prot.* 313c4–7.

15 Cf. *Prot.* 313c5, d1, 314a4. At 313d6 we have a new hendiadys, but this time joining two verbal forms instead of two nouns. Perhaps because of the absence of a verb ἔμπορειν, the verb πωλεῖν replaces ἔμπορος.

16 *Plat. Prot.* 313c4–314b4.

amounts to saying that where you have business there will always be a suspicion of deception in the matter of what is on sale. There is, however, no trace of any such suspicion in what the Stranger is proposing. The reason why he defines the commercial activity of a sophist in two different ways seems to be simply his concern to cover the complete range of the professional category that the first definition has in its sights.

It is a common thing to set out its itinerant character as an intrinsic attribute of the sophistic profession, relying for this on the case of various historical sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus), of whom it is regularly said that they only spend intervals of time in Athens. Nicholas Denyer, for example, has underlined recently how the definition of the sophist as *ἐμπορος* in our dialogue makes Protagoras's travelling an essential part of his being a sophist, which implies, he adds, that Socrates was 'certainly no sophist', since he practically never left Athens.¹⁷ One can see in this representation of what a sophist was (confirmed by the dialogues of Plato himself) the reason for the care with which, contrary to Socrates, the Stranger itemizes the commercial activities of the sophist under two headings, that of importing merchant (*ἐμπορος*) or of retailer (*κάπηλος*). Contrary to the impression left by the majority of translations, the difference between the two that the Stranger establishes is in fact not so much that the former bulk-buys learning (224b1: τὸν μαθήματα συνωνούμενον) as that he subsequently sells it for money as he goes from town to town (224b1–2: πόλιν τε ἐκ πόλεως νομίσηματος ἀμείβοντα), by contrast with the *κάπηλος*, who is domiciled in the city where he buys, or himself produces, the learning that is his business (224d4–6: αὐτοῦ καθιδρυμένος ἐν πόλει, τὰ μὲν ὠνούμενος, τὰ δὲ καὶ τεκταινόμενος αὐτὸς μαθήματα περὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ταῦτα καὶ πωλῶν). Which is to say that there are sophists who are not travelers; to define them as essentially travelers would exclude certain ones from the definition. So the Stranger proceeds to the most exhaustive inventory possible of the professional category one can put together under the name 'sophistry'.¹⁸ At the same time he binds the definition to the essential, i. e., to the fact that for the sophists learning is the object of a commercial trans-

17 "In *Sph.* 224c–d and 231d, a sophist is defined as an *ἐμπορος* of knowledge – which makes Protagoras' travels essential to his being a sophist, and which also implies that Socrates was certainly no sophist, since he hardly ever travelled from Athens." (Denyer [2008] 77, *ad Prot.* 313c5–6).

18 It is possibly this concern for exhaustiveness that will push the Stranger into accepting the division between *kapelos* and *autopoles* introduced into the third division by Theaetetus.

action, everything else – whether they travel around or not, whether they are themselves the authors of what they teach or not – featuring as secondary to the fact that they sell it.

But the precision which the Stranger brings to the definition of the κάπηλος perhaps has another implication. If one takes the adverb αὐτοῦ literally (it does not normally get translated), we need to understand that the Stranger is talking of a merchant of learning who is ‘established in a domicile here in the city (αὐτοῦ καθιδρυμένος ἐν πόλει)’, where ‘here’ is where the dialogue is situated, Athens. In fact, according to Lewis Campbell, while the preceding definition had in view ‘all the greater Sophists’, this definition encompassed ‘some lesser lights’ such as Antiphon or Damon, and possibly Antisthenes;¹⁹ apart from the big travelling sophists, those of them which it is possible to name are Athenians. It is not unlikely that Antisthenes could figure among the latter, since Plato is unscrupulous about categorizing as a sophist²⁰ that one among his co-disciples and rivals who was probably the most hostile to him. The question is simply to discover up to what point, beyond such and such a Socratic, the inventory of those who fall within the denomination ‘sophist’ extends. And to this question the two final definitions offer an unexpected response.

The fourth and fifth definitions

In the fourth definition, the sophist as a specialist in eristic, one has no difficulty recognizing the *curriculum* of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as Socrates outlines it at the beginning of the *Euthydemus*. After adding to armed combat law-court rhetoric, which is simply a transposition of the art of conflict, “they have become formidable in word-fighting, and in refuting on every occasion whatever is said to them, be it true or false; δεινῶ γέγονατον ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μάχεσθαι τε καὶ ἐξελέγγειν τὸ ἀεὶ λεγόμενον, ὁμοίως ἔαντε ψεῦδος ἔαντε ἀληθὲς ἤ;” what is in question is an art which Socrates calls a few lines later ‘eristic’ and which he declares

19 Campbell (1867) 37, n. *ad Soph.* 224d4–5.

20 One can, for example, interpret in this sense the attribution to Protagoras (*Euthyd.* 285d7–286b7) of the paradoxes of the impossibility of false statement and of contradiction which Aristotle, by contrast, attributes to Antisthenes (*Met.* Lambda 29, 1024b26–1025a1).

that he wants to learn.²¹ The definition is already known, then, to readers of Plato. The problem is that what the definition in 231e encompasses, i. e., the passage 225c–226a4, is far from being applicable only to people like the two brothers of the *Euthydemus*. We need to be attentive to the manner in which the Stranger arrives at this definition.

In this new definition it is no longer a question of commerce but of conflict, a conflict in which there are exchanged not blows, but words: disputation. By one division after another we discover the class of ‘eristic’, and by a further division into two we are going to discover the sophist a further time. The point is worth underlining, since it seems to be forgotten at the moment of recapitulation at 231e; sophistry and eristic are no longer co-extensive, eristic is of two types, of which one merits the title of sophist, but there is another. The criterion for distinguishing the two types of eristic will be the following: anyone who practices the type of discussion which has come to be called eristic – what it involves I shall get back to – will be a sophist or not depending on whether he gains or loses money; the sophist, conclude the Stranger and Theaetetus, is “one who gains money from private disputations, ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδιωτικῶν ἐρίδων χρηματιζόμενον” (225c1–2).

Why private disputations? Let us go back a bit. Having isolated ‘disputation (ἀμφισβητητικόν)’ as a form of conflict, the Stranger has distinguished two types of it: the one, which takes place in public, and sets up one speech against another on questions of justice and injustice, is judicial disputation (δικανικόν); the other, which takes place in private, and which proceeds by question and answer, is antilogic (ἀντιλογικόν). Antilogic in its turn takes two forms, one “which deals with contracts, but proceeds haphazardly and untechnically (εἰκῆ δὲ καὶ ἀτέχνως)” and to which we do not give a name, the other, “which disputes about the just and the unjust in themselves and so forth, in general fashion, and within the rules of the art (τὸ δὲ γε ἔντεχνον, καὶ περὶ δικαίων αὐτῶν καὶ ἀδικῶν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅλως ἀμφισβητοῦν),” is eristic (225b13–c9). And it is only within the framework of this latter *eidos*, as I have said, that the distinction between sophist and non-sophist is going to operate (the only name the Stranger and Theaetetus can find for the latter being a chatterer); the sophist is someone who gains money from private disputations, the non-sophist someone who engages in disputations of the same kind and on the same subjects, i. e., the just and the unjust, but by contrast loses money.

21 Cf. *Euthyd.* 272a8–b1, b9–10.

This criterion of distinction – gaining or losing money – clearly has nothing to do with the nature and object of the discussions pursued by the sophist and the chatterer, which are private discussions that take place according to rules, where as a consequence (differently from rhetoric) not every means of persuasion is admissible, and which, instead of dealing with contracts (whether respected or not, one can suppose, or needing to be concluded), deal with general questions such as the just and unjust in themselves.

This latter distinction, between discussions about contracts and discussions about the just and the unjust in general, cannot fail to evoke the distinction Socrates makes in the central part of the *Theaetetus* between the person who engages in disputation about wrongs suffered or committed, about the question of knowing whether the king, or the man who possesses a lot of gold, is happy, and the person who engages in disputation about justice and injustice in themselves (αὐτῆς δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας), about royalty or human good fortune or ill fortune in general, about the way in which a man should possess the one and avoid the other.²² So one has the same distinction in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Sophist*, in the mouth of Socrates and in that of the Stranger. The difference between them – disconcerting at first glance – is that the person whom the Stranger calls an eristic Socrates in the *Theaetetus* calls a philosopher (ὄν δὴ φιλόσοφον καλεῖς).²³ So it is within the framework of what Socrates calls philosophy that the Stranger practices his division between sophistry and non-sophistry; both pursue the same types of discussion about the same subjects. In other words, if we hold to the description of them given by the Stranger, the one of them no less than the other corresponds to the definition that Socrates gives of a philosopher in the *Theaetetus*. If one takes the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* together, it seems that philosophy and eristic are one and the same thing.

Which does not necessarily mean that every philosopher is a sophist. Once again, at the core of the eristic genus the sophist is distinguished from one who is not by the fact that he, the sophist, gains money, whereas the other, while practicing the same activity, loses money. It is fair to see here an allusion to Socrates himself, who rejected the notion of his being a sophist precisely on the grounds that he never asked for a salary for submitting his interlocutors to the *elenchus* and thereby reminding them of the need to cultivate virtue. What will deter the ma-

22 Cf. *Theaetetus*. 175b8–c8.

23 *Id.* 175e1.

jority of readers from recognizing Socrates here, however, is that this chatterer, just like the sophist, belongs to the eristic class, something incompatible with the portrait of Socrates portrayed in the dialogues. But we should remember that, at the beginning of the *Euthydemus*, Socrates declares his desire to learn eristic. Nearly all commentators take this declaration to be ironic. To the eyes of the Stranger, by contrast, the declaration seems wholly natural, since it corresponds exactly to the place assigned to Socrates in his fourth division.

To the degree that, by contrast with the chatterer, the sophist earns money by the pursuit of eristic, sophistry so-defined takes its place, as in the previous definitions, among the arts of acquisition. But it is the last time. After a remark about the diversity of forms in which the sophist presents himself, the Stranger, without any transition, embarks on a new division, this time however no longer within the framework of the arts of acquisition but within those of domestic – perhaps even servile – operations (οἰκετικῶν ὀνοματῶν [καλουμένα], 226b3), soon categorized overall as the art of discriminating. One has a right to ask why: to the degree that it is the Stranger himself who, at the beginning, by his likening the sophist to a hunter from the very start, has oriented the enquiry towards the arts of acquisition, one might think that, now that all have been scrutinized and we have seen that the sophist is located in each one of them, the enquiry has been completed.

Let us remember, however, that the very first dichotomy that the Stranger proceeded to set out consisted of dividing the totality of the arts into the two categories of acquisition and production (219d1–2). Now that the totality of the arts of acquisition has been scrutinized, one might think that the same concern for exhaustiveness demands that we look for the sophist among the arts of production. But the Stranger does no such thing.²⁴ The art of discriminating is an art neither of production nor of acquisition; or to put it differently, it does not fall within the dichotomized division of the arts that was set forth at the beginning as being exhaustive. So it is an unclassifiable art, or an occupation which, despite the generic name attributed to it,²⁵ finds no place

24 It is only from 233c onwards, where the enterprise of defining the sophist as an illusionist begins, that the Stranger is going to orient his enquiry towards the arts of production.

25 Διακριτική, an adjective which seems to presuppose an understood noun τέχνη, like all adjectives of analogous formation.

within the arts. But in that case why does the Stranger make it part of his enquiry?

The reply is given in the form of another question. As we have seen, defined as an eristic the sophist is distinguishable from the ‘chatterer’ or from Socrates only by the fact that he gains money instead of losing it. That apart, the sophist and the chatterer have in common the same objective and the same method. The question one might consequently ask oneself is whether, setting aside the matter of money, one could find out in what way chattering or (Socratic) eristic is distinguishable from sophistic eristic. As it happens, it is to this question that the fifth division proffers a response, and one that the division is evidently unable to look for either in the arts of acquisition or of production: not only is chattering an activity in itself unproductive, but if sophistry is to be afterwards identified as the production of illusions, one cannot show as its counterpart a Socrates who is a producer of truths, since calling himself “sterile in the matter of knowing” is part of his *epangelma*.²⁶

It is well known that the purging of false opinions which Theaetetus and the Stranger will agree upon calling also sophistry (230b4–d4) looks just like the Socratic *elenchus*: a purely negative method, proceeding by interrogation to bring to light contradictions among the various responses provided by the interlocutor, who, seeing himself thus refuted, stops believing that he knows what he does not know, and by the same token finds himself rid of, ‘purified’ or ‘purged from’ opinions which form an obstacle to his achieving knowledge. “A remarkable short version,” writes L. Robin,²⁷ “of the critical method of examination which was set up in the dialogues of the first period, and then again in the *Theaetetus*.” Which is to say that the method described here by the Stranger while talking to Theaetetus was precisely the one used against Theaetetus himself the day before. So it is difficult to think that he has no knowledge of it, especially because, in an attempt to describe its benefits, the Stranger re-employs the same words that Socrates had used the day before when he had described his method as maieutic and had concluded the dialogue by talking of the benefit to Theaetetus of having been refuted. Those, says the Stranger, who see themselves confronted with their contradictions “get angry at themselves²⁸ and become calmer

26 *Theaetet.* 150c4: ἀγονός εἰμι σοφίας.

27 Robin (1942), 1456 (n.1 of p. 278).

28 Cf. *Theaetet.* 151c2–4: If, after having concluded that something you have said is inane, I reject it, “don’t get angry, μὴ ἀγρίαιε.”

toward others.”²⁹ So the passage is revelatory both of the judgment which the Stranger makes about the Socratic method and of the way this method has been perceived by the last mentioned of those to whom it has been applied: it is in fact Theaetetus who will insist that those who practice this last method described by the Stranger be called sophists.

It is a quite singular move, and clearly not unintended by Plato. By contrast with the three earlier occasions³⁰ when the Stranger left to Theaetetus the task of giving the name of sophist to the genus produced by one of his divisions, this time his question is no longer purely rhetorical: “Who are we going to say are the practitioners of this method? I myself am afraid to say that they are sophists (τοὺς ταύτη χρωμένους τῇ τέχνῃ τίνας φήσομεν; ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ φοβοῦμαι σοφιστὰς φάναι)” (230e6–231a1). “I am fearful,” he adds, in reply to Theaetetus’ astonished “Why?” “of conferring on them too much dignity (μὴ μείζον αὐτοῖς προσάπτωμεν γέρας)” (231a3).³¹ So that it is Theaetetus who this time has to argue “But what has just been said does look something like that (ἀλλὰ μὴν προσείοικέ γε τοιοῦτῳ τινὶ τὰ νῦν εἰρημένῳ)” (231a4–5). And at the cost of the nuance brought to the discussion by the analogy of the dog and the wolf, it is thus Theaetetus who is going to dispose the Stranger to decide to call the likes of Socrates sophists— even though in the Platonic corpus Socrates has no like, and he is the only one who uses the method in question. Within the plural number that the Stranger uses, Socrates is the only one whom Plato leaves us to recognize.

To the question that Socrates had posed, then – what people at Elea thought of the nature of the sophist – the reply of the Stranger is that at Elea they thought that this nature was such a diverse one that in their world he would have passed for a sophist. It is true that the Stranger can only call the Socratic method sophistry provided one see it as an instance of “sophistry faithful to its lineage (ἡ γένει γενναία σοφιστική)” (231b8). This is probably a way of reminding us that in “sophistry” there is *sophos*, and that the word “sophist” is not to be taken solely pejoratively. This reminder of the many senses of the term is clearly not insignificant on Plato’s part; together with the disappearance of the pe-

29 Compare *Theaetet.* 210c3, ἡμερώτερος and *Soph.* 230b9–10, πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἡμεροῦνται. The translation is that of Nicholas P. White in Cooper (1997).

30 Cf. 223a7, 224c5, 225e2.

31 I share Cornford’s analysis (1935), grammatically the only one possible, according to which αὐτοῖς designates τοὺς ταύτη χρωμένους τῇ τέχνῃ and not σοφιστὰς.

jorative connotations attached, in the *Protagoras*, to the commercial aspect of sophistry, one can see this reminder as a sign of a willingness to formulate a more gentle assessment of sophistry.

It remains true that the place of this fifth definition of the sophist in the overall economy of the dialogue poses a question that remains hanging. Let us recall that it lies outside the general dichotomy between the arts of production and acquisition which serves as a framework for the Stranger's enquiry. As we know, it is from the starting point of this dichotomy that the Stranger, at the end of the dialogue, will set out anew to try to define the 'real sophist' (τὸν ὄντως σοφιστήν, 268d3–4). What is the relationship, we might ask ourselves, between ὁ ὄντως σοφιστής and ὁ γένει γενναίος σοφιστής? It is a commonplace today that the definition of this ὄντως σοφιστής is particularly confused. It is however possible to discern at least two elements within it: the creation of illusions (τὸ θαυμαστοποικὸν μόριον, 268d2; cf. 224a3, 235b5) ties the "real sophist" to the arts of production, thus positioning him within the general classification of the arts established by the Stranger (production/acquisition), while the imitation of the art of producing contradictions (τὸν ἐναντιοποιολογικῆς... μιμητικόν, 268c8–9), an art characterized for the first time as being proper to the γένει γενναία σοφιστική, places it, as we have seen, outside of this classification. Does that mean that the 'real sophist' is merely an imitator of the sophist "faithful to his lineage"? This would certainly be one way of explaining and at the same time defusing the confusion between Socrates and the sophists of history. But it remains the case that, if at Elea they took sophist and philosopher to be two different genera, this would mean that they did not take Socrates to be a philosopher.

Socrates and ‘Noble’ Sophistry (*Sophist* 226b–231c)

José Solana

The sixth division of the *Sophist* has caused and continues to cause notable perplexity for several reasons.

1. It is introduced into the dialogue in an anomalous way. The Stranger speaks about two kinds of art: acquisitive (κτητική) and productive (ποιητική). However, later on he introduces a third kind¹: separative (διακριτική) art, whose relationship with the earlier types remains unexplained².
2. The role of this new art in relation to the overall objective of the dialogue, which is to reach a strict definition of the nature of the sophist, is also not explained³.
3. Apart from not contributing to the main objective, it creates great difficulties, since, on the one hand, the Stranger speaks of a “noble Sophistry” and, on the other hand, the sophist is defined as a negative figure: one who is in possession of a knowledge

1 Cornford argues that “a complete classification may exhibit more than two subordinate classes on the same level, and if these are to be subdivided, they must be described in positive terms” ([1935] 171). Cornford’s thesis, which offers no arguments, seems designed to justify the presence of the separative arts, along with the acquisitive and productive. In the *Sophist*, by contrast, Plato talks of dividing into two classes (διχῆ: 219d10, 219e5, 223c12, 227d1, 264d12, 266a11, 266d5).

2 We may assume that the separative art is a division within the productive art. So, for example, the activities proper to this art, such as sieving, straining or sifting, are part of well-recognized productive processes, whether in the treatment of cereals, wine or oil. Cornford ([1935] 178) states that “the separative arts are not productive either. Their function is negative.” Apelt, whose approach seems to me preferable, argues that the separative (διακριτική) is a part of the productive (ποιητική).

3 Cornford’s explanation seems an *ad hoc* one. He affirms that “the effect is to dissociate this division completely from the earlier ones, which were all derived from the art of acquisition. The forms of sophistry they defined were fundamentally arts of gain, acquiring influence over rich young men, or money by selling knowledge, or victory in argument instead of truth. All such motives are ruled out by going back to a distinct branch of art, not recognised at all where art was at first divided into acquisitive and productive” ([1935] 177–78).

which is merely apparent (233c10). Thus the paradox occurs that *noble Sophistry* is entrusted with the task of destroying the apparent knowledge (231b5) produced by *Sophistry*.

In view of these difficulties, it is relevant to question, with Cornford ([1935] 182), why in that case this division stands here⁴.

Cornford proposes to consider the problem not only in light of the *Sophist*, but of the trilogy comprised by the *Sophist*, the *Statesman* and the *Philosopher*⁵. Since the trilogy was never completed, certain passages, one could imagine, might have remained obscure, and lacking in sufficient explanation. Cornford suggests the hypothesis that “possibly the *Philosopher*, had it been written, would have completed the account of philosophic method by recognizing the synthetic or intuitive moment in dialectic, which the *Sophist* leaves in the background. If the Collection and Division of the separative arts had some intended relation to a larger design, its apparent irrelevance ceases to be a problem” ([1935] 183).

Within the general context of the trilogy, Plato could have pursued certain objectives, the meaning of which escapes us. One such objective could have been that of modifying the Socratic doctrine known as moral intellectualism. In this sense, Cornford ([1935] 179) states that “disease is regarded, not in the usual way as lack of balance that needs to be redressed, but as faction, sedition, or civil warfare (στάσις) among things naturally ‘akin’... This is Platonic, rather than Socratic. Vice is not identified here with ignorance (as it is by Socrates), but distinguished from it”. Cornford’s understanding ([1935] 182–83) is that the new political theory of the *Statesman* (308e) requires that the theory associated with moral intellectualism⁶ be modified. According to Cornford, “it is perhaps to prepare the way for this conception of statesmanship that Plato in our passage regards vice, not as ignorance, but as a po-

4 Giannopoulou ([2001] 119–124) addresses the problem of the “location of the sixth division”, and suggests that “this definition becomes a bridge that unites the first five definitions—which simply address the problem of teaching appearances—with the seventh—which provides a full fledged analysis of the incontestable nature of the sophist as someone “of the appearance-making kind of copy-making””.

5 Plato himself announces the trilogy at *Sophist* 217a4. At *Statesman* 257a4 and *Timaeus* 19e echoes of the same announcement can be found.

6 The question whether in this passage Plato corrects the moral intellectualism of Socrates, or even the very question whether moral intellectualism can be attributed to Socrates, are issues that cannot be addressed here; see Gooch (1971).

litical sedition in the soul, to be remedied by 'the justice that chastens', the analogue of medical purgation of disease".

Despite these explanations, Cornford argues that "the cathartic art of the sixth division was practised by Socrates alone...Division VI does not define any type of Sophist, but gives a serious and even eloquent analysis of the purifying *elenchus* as practised by Socrates himself" ([1935] 173). He later on insists on the same theory: "In the sixth division satire is dropped. The tone is serious and sympathetic; towards the close it becomes eloquent. The type defined is "the purifier of the soul from the conceits that stand in the way of knowledge" (231e)—a description that (as Jackson and others have seen) "applies to Socrates and to no one else" ([1935] 177).

Finally, when Cornford refers to the seventh and last definition of the sophist, he insists that "the third main branch of art, the separative (*διακριτική*), from which was derived the cathartic method of Socrates in Division VI, is here ignored. It gave us no glimpse of the Sophist" ([1935] 324 note). In fact, the last definition draws together a set of notes that were collected from the higher classification of the arts, the acquisitive and the productive, as stated at the beginning of the dialogue. It is said that "all arts are either acquisitive or creative" (*κτητικῆς καὶ ποιητικῆς*) (219d).

In accordance with this major division of the arts, the last definition of the sophist synthesizes some notes derived from both classes: from the acquisitive art, which has to do with knowledge and money (219c), it takes "the art of causing self-contradiction" (*ἐναντιολογική*). This concept, central to both tasks of the dialogue, the definition of the Sophist and the development of ontological inquiry, joins the dialogue from the perspective of the art of discussion (*ἀμφισβητητικόν*), which in turn is divided into forensic (*δικανικόν*) and contradictory disputation (*ἀντιλογικόν*), which is delivered in private and by means of questions and answers. When this skill is developed with art (*ἐντεχνον*), it is called 'eristic' (225c).

Thus, the feature of acquisitive art that is maintained in the final definition of the sophist is the ability to provoke contradiction. This feature has its origins in the fifth division. And at the beginning of the ontological debate, when it comes to recapitulating within the compass of a single feature what has been said in the first six divisions, where the sophist has been called many names (232a), the Stranger concludes that "there was one (characteristic) that struck me as particularly revelatory of his

character [...] he was a controversialist” (ἀντιλογικόν) (232b)⁷. The art of contradiction (ἀντιλογική τέχνη) is the ability to argue about any subject whatsoever (232e). However, since no one can be wise on all subjects (233c), we must conclude that the sophist “possesses a sort of apparent knowledge (δοξαστική ἐπιστήμη), but not the reality”⁸ (233c). “This is the most correct thing (ὀρθότατα) that can be said about them.”

The notion of apparent knowledge leads Plato to turn the miracle of sophistic capacity (τὸ τῆς σοφιστικῆς δυνάμεως θαῦμα) into a productive art, namely the imitative. Thus, the feature which unifies the capabilities of the sophist – his controversial character – is the element that synthesizes the features derived from two major arts, the acquisitive and the productive. In this way, the feature which expresses the essence of the sophist is also the entry into the whole ontological debate. The sophist will, therefore, ultimately be a merchant on the one hand, and a manufacturer of imitations on the other. Both traits will feature in the final definition.

The ontological discussion aims at identifying the logical conditions that make possible the sophist as controversialist⁹, and this aim requires the explanation of falsehood, and hence also of not-being, as conditions of the possibility of contradiction. However, we must insist that the theory that the sophists are controversialists and not really but only apparently wise, is in fact prior to this debate and recurs frequently in the works of Plato¹⁰.

So, according to Cornford, it can be stated that no data taken from the separative art (διακριτική) is part of the final definition. In this case, such a statement would allow us to assume that the passage devoted to refutation and catharsis (*Sophist* 226b–231e) could be removed from the dialogue without producing any inconsistency or inadequacy. This passage, therefore, constitutes an addition, and one that is as meaningless for the final definition of the sophist as it is for the ontological and logical issues addressed in the dialogue as a whole. Furthermore, the sixth point, which states that the sophist is “a purger of souls, who clears

7 A clear allusion to Protagoras’ antilogical method, to which Plato refers immediately afterward (232d).

8 See Cordero (1993) 225–226, note 93; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1004b19 “ἡ γὰρ σοφιστικὴ φαινόμενη μόνον σοφία”, 1004b26.

9 Hence his warning to be careful “not to be caught in a contradiction” (236e).

10 E. g., at *Sophist* 223b5 (δοξοπαιδευτικῆς) and 231b6 (δοξοσοφίαν). In turn *Phaedrus* 275a7–b2 refers to epistemic and moral aspects in parallel with *Sophist* 230b.

away notions obstructive to knowledge” (231e), could be eliminated in any summary of the earlier divisions.

On the other hand, however, in view of those who consider that the issue of *elenchos* refers only to Socrates and no one else, it is necessary to take into account that the new definition is presented, not as a change in the direction of the dialogue but as a new road or track (ἵχνος) to try to capture a “complicated animal” such as the sophist. Right from the beginning of the dialogue it is not acceptable to think that the sixth definition does not refer to the sophist. The hunting down of a many-sided animal requires that all resources be employed; it is not an animal captured with only one hand (226a7–9), that is to say, with fifty percent of our capabilities. What is going to appear is a new facet of the sophist, though later on we shall learn with surprise that it describes an activity that fits what we know about Socrates.

Why is it necessary to resort to the separative art in an attempt to capture the οἰκείαν φύσιν of the sophist (264e3)? Is it a matter of using the separative art to define the sophist, since it is presented as a new track for this purpose? Or is it rather a matter, on that pretext, of providing an exhibition of the separative art, and of the cathartic method, which Socrates uses? In this short passage (226b1–231c) Plato seems to offer us both things. It would be justifiable as a digression (πάρεργα) (in the sense of *Theaetetus* 177b8)¹¹ which a) has a value in itself as such a digression, but b) maintains a relationship, although not one in the strictly logical sequence of the dialogue, with the main theme. Let us discuss these two aspects.

a) The intrinsic value of the passage

The intrinsic value of the passage, regardless of the context of the dialogue, would be its presentation of the theory of purification. Purification has a notable presence in Platonic philosophy. This is demonstrated by the many instances of the word as a verb (καθαίρειν), noun (καθαρτής, κάθαρσις, καθαρμός) and adjective (καθαρός)¹². In general, Plato speaks of purification in three different contexts. The first is the religious one. Purification is understood as an activity which removes a stain produced by

11 Solana (2000) 42.

12 The term that designates the sophist (καθαρτήν) (231e6) is a *hapax* in Plato. In the classical period this term is found only at Aristophanes *Wasps* 1403.

the committing of a wrong action. This context is often associated with the Orphic tradition. As Cornford says ([1935] 178 n. 1), “the passive substantive κάθαρμα (offscouring, outcast) means the impurity removed, not the thing purified”. The second context is the legal-social one. Punishment for an unjust action is interpreted as the cleansing of a stain. In this case the penalty is imposed by a court. Plato explains important ideas in this area as part of his political proposals¹³.

Finally, the context which Plato emphasises in this passage is the epistemic one. It is a matter of discerning between what is true and what is believed to be true but is actually false. Plato places himself in a context common to any learning process, in which a given theory may, as an antecedent condition, need to refute (to show the falsehood of) a rival theory. A false belief or theory constitutes an obstacle preventing genuine knowledge. In the Socratic version, beliefs that prevent knowledge are viewed as stains that must be rooted out of the soul.

In this condition of soul, refutation, that is to say, the revealing of the falsehood of a belief, is the only way of opening up progress towards knowledge. The method has been described by Popper as a way of conjectures and refutations, in that order, since it is well known that there is no possibility of refutation if something is not previously stated.

It is usual in commentaries on these passages to identify these thoughts as Socratic ones when they might well fall under the general label of “critical rationalism” as practised in the Presocratic tradition of Xenophanes and Heraclitus, and which perhaps finds its first canonical formulation in Parmenides¹⁴ and its most complete development in the sophistic movement. In the text itself, Plato speaks of *elenchos* as the method that allows us “to eradicate this view” (230b1). In any case it would be prudent, in these matters, to keep in mind what Aristotle says, since it is well known that Aristotle is the Greek philosopher who discussed logical and methodological problems more thoroughly and rigorously than anyone else. In his works we repeatedly find the expression “σοφιστικὸς ἔλεγχος”, including a large study with that title, the *Topics*. Despite these considerations, it is usual to argue that everything

13 *Republic* 540e–541b and *Statesman* 293d5. The most significant text in this regard is *Laws* 735b–736c.

14 Κρίναι δὲ λόγῳ πολὺδὴρην ἔλεγχον, Parmenides B7.5–6. In opposition to what Dorion (2001) 50 defends, this verse of Parménides is a proof that the notion of ἔλεγχος has a logical character, and that it has already been liberated from the moral sense of shame. So Lesher (1984) 29.

about this division or definition “applies to Socrates and to no one else”¹⁵.

The platonic explanation of purification starts by establishing two types of distinction: the first distinguishes better from worse and the second like from like (226d). The first is called purification (καθαρμός, καθαρικὸν εἶδος), and it purifies bodies (animate or inanimate) or souls. For the second the stranger admits that he does not have a name.

Purifications of the soul consist of expelling all evil (κακία) within it. Such evil is in turn twofold: the first, which is similar to disease (νόσον) or sedition (στάσιν) in the body, the treatment of which involves medicine, is called vice (πονηρία), and its treatment lies in corrective art (κολαστική).

The second kind of evil of soul is deformity or ugliness (αἴσχος), the treatment of which is analogous to bodily gymnastics, and whose reality consists of a lack of measure (ἀμετρία). In summary, an ugly and disproportionate soul is an ignorant soul, and its ignorance is cured by education (διδασκαλική).

Plato establishes a similarity between bodily disease and ugliness of soul¹⁶. So, corrective art corresponds to medicine, and gymnastics to education. Education does not try to treat the sick soul, but the disproportionate and ugly soul, the way gymnastics does with the body.

In turn, the art of instruction can be divided into two types, depending on the nature of the ignorance: the ignorance of the handicraft arts, which is eliminated by the corresponding instruction, and the ignorance which comes about “when a person supposes that he knows, but does not know” (229c5). This kind of ignorance is called absence of knowledge (ἀμοθίαν), and is eliminated by education (παιδείαν).

παιδεία is defined implicitly as “education in reasoning”, and it too is divided into two types: the admonitory type (νουθητητικήν), which turns out to be a little profitable, and refutation (ἐλεγχον)¹⁷.

15 Cornford (1935) 177. So too Nancy (2007) 198. About this question it can be argued that what Plato presents us in this passage (*Sophist* 226b–231c) is the Socratic version of the *elenchos*, which differs from that of the sophists only in its moral dimension.

16 The relationship between medicine and gymnastics is also addressed in the *Gorgias* (“the part of politics corresponding to gymnastics is legislation, and the part corresponding to medicine is justice”) (464b).

17 Guthrie affirms that “the parallel between this passage and the closing words of *Theaetetus* is strikingly close” ([1978] 129), but the word used in the *Theaetetus* is ἐξέτασιν, not ἐλεγχον.

The fundamental importance of ἔλεγχος lies in the fact that ignorance, the evil that is to be purged, is involuntary (228c8, 230a). So¹⁸ when someone holds a particular view, this view will be maintained as true, and the person will think that he has knowledge. But if that view is false and the person is unaware of it, he will think that he is wise, that is to say, that he has knowledge. Hence, refutation is a common resource among teachers, and no one would deny the sophists the title of teachers.

The method described by Plato operates at two very different levels:

- I) The logical-critical moment.
 - a) The *refutator* (ἐλέγχων) asks what his opponent or student is claiming.
 - b) He examines the student's opinions (δόξας).
 - c) He shows how the student is offering opposing opinions (ἐναντίας).
 - d) Conclusion: the person refuted rejects the opinions that have been proven false and which were proving an obstacle to learning.
- II) The moral moment.
 - a) The person refuted (ἐλεγχόμενος) gets angry with himself (χαλεπαίνουσι).
 - b) He becomes more conciliatory with the other interlocutors.
 - c) He is ashamed (εἰς αἰσχύνην).
 - d) Finally, he is purged (καθαρόν) of his prejudices.

It is with reference to this second level that the Stranger states that “refutation is the greatest and chiefest of purifications” (μεγίστη καὶ κυριωτάτη τῶν καθάρσεων) (230d9). This second level constitutes a peculiar feature of Socrates's educational activity, as can be seen in a passage of Xenophon (*Memorabilia* IV.2.1–40), in which he describes Socrates' method of dealing with “those who thought they had received the best education, and prided themselves on wisdom”.

The method which Socrates applies consists of first gaining the pupil's confidence, even with false praise. After this first phase, Socrates begins to interrogate him, and this process continues until the pupil confesses: “Nay, Socrates, I have lost all confidence in my answers; for all the opinions that I expressed before seem now to have taken

18 Let us recall the beginning of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: “All men by nature desire to know”.

an entirely different form” (2.19). Socrates’ questions continue, and once again the pupil is ashamed: “But you can imagine my dismay when I realise that in spite of all my pains I am even incapable of answering a question about things that one is bound to know, and yet find no other way that will lead to my improvement” (2.23).

The cross-examination concludes with the act of surrender: “I am forced to agree once more, evidently by my stupidity. I am inclined to think I had better hold my tongue, or I shall know nothing at all presently” (2.39).

After the conversation, the pupil “went away very dejected, disgusted with himself and convinced that he was indeed a slave” (2.39).

The purification process has ended. Now, after the negative part, the positive part of the philosophical process can begin, so that Socrates, “seeing how it was with him, avoided worrying him, and began to expound very plainly and clearly the knowledge that he thought most needful and the practices that he held to be most excellent (2.40).

Both of Socrates’ pupils, Xenophon and Plato, agree in substance on the Socratic method, which operates on two different levels: the intellectual and the moral. It has to be assumed, obviously, that *ἔλεγχος* requires a discussion between two persons¹⁹.

The critical-intellectual level, best described by Plato, consists of three elements: questioning, examination of responses, and display of contradictions. From these three elements the falsehood of the theory that has been upheld from the beginning by the person refuted is deduced as a conclusion. With the conclusion the refutation comes to an end.

The unique feature of the Socratic method is that it adds a moral dimension to *ἔλεγχος* similar to the purgation provided by a doctor or the purification typical of religious rites. Only this moral aspect, marginal and secondary as it may be to the epistemic point of view, is exclusive to Socratic *ἔλεγχος*. In other words, Socrates makes use of a critical practice that is common among teachers (sophists) and subordinates it to a moral perspective. As can be seen in both texts, that of Plato and

19 Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1006a12) states that refutation will work “provided our opponent says something; if he says nothing, it is absurd to seek to give an account of our views to one who cannot give an account of anything, insofar as he cannot do so. For such a man, as such, is from the start no better than a vegetable” (ὁμοίως γὰρ φυτῶ).

more explicitly that of Xenophon, the moral dimension of ἔλεγχος has some likeness to μετάνοια (repentance and remorse).

In this regard, if ἔλεγχος has a moral-religious dimension along with an epistemic one, the method described by Plato in the *Sophist* is characteristic of Socrates and of no one else. It should be pointed out that the strictly Socratic feature of ἔλεγχος is its moral dimension, and that this dimension does not add any new structural element as far as its epistemological content is concerned.

Why was ἔλεγχος especially important for Plato? Apart from issues relating to the Orphic-Pythagorean aspect of Platonic philosophy, Plato needed to establish with precision a preliminary negative moment in his school for strictly epistemic and methodological reasons. It can be said that this negative activity, as I have pointed out, is a necessary moment in any process of development towards knowledge. For Plato there were especially strong reasons for this, given his clear awareness of being in the position of (re) founding philosophy, and this important task required a process of *reductio ad absurdum* of the Presocratic tradition, including, as seen in the *Sophist*, the thinking of father Parmenides.

b) The passage in the context of the dialogue

Why is this passage in this particular dialogue and in this location within the dialogue? The most serious problems arise when Plato asks who the purifier is (230e7). The Stranger is afraid to call them sophists, “lest we should assign them too high a prerogative”, but Theaetetus confirms that “the Sophist has a certain likeness to our minister of purification” (231a5). The Stranger warns that a cautious man should be on guard against resemblances, because this class is very slippery. Nevertheless, both speakers agree that the purifier is the Sophist and, therefore, there is “Sophistry of noble lineage.” The agreement seems to be provisional: “Nevertheless, let us assume that they are Sophists”. This tone of doubt continues on in the most explicit statement of the Stranger: “Let us grant, then, that from the discerning art comes purification, and from purification let there be separated off a part which is concerned with the soul; of this mental purification instruction is a portion, and of instruction education, and of education, that refutation of vain conceit which has been discovered in the present argument; and let this be called by you and me the nobly-descended art of Sophistry” (ἡ γένει γενναία σοφιστική).

In spite of the provisional character of this thesis, Plato insists on it in an explicit way, even admitting now that it is a disputed question: “The sixth point was doubtful (ἀμφισβητήσιμον), and yet we at last agreed that he was a purger of souls (περι ψυχὴν καθαρτήν), who cleared away notions obstructive to knowledge” (231e4–6).

Why does Plato admit this positive feature of the sophist, knowing that it is a disputed question, and that in the end Sophistry will be rejected as an art of producing a sort of conjectural or apparent knowledge?

This is the first time that Plato recognizes that Sophistry is a hybrid, and that it is necessary to separate two factors: the purification of beliefs that hinder understanding and the art of producing apparent knowledge. The sophist is both: he constructs and at the same time destroys opinions that prevent learning.

One way to avoid this paradox is to perform a dynamic reading of the *Sophist*, respecting the character of the text as a dialogue. Plato aims to investigate the nature of the sophist, and his starting point is set out as follows: “Meanwhile you and I will begin together and enquire into the nature of the sophist, first of the three: I should like you to make out what he is (τί ποτ' ἔστι) and bring him to light in a discussion; for at present we are only agreed on the name, but of the thing to which we both apply the name possibly you have one notion and I another; whereas we ought always to come to an understanding about the thing itself in terms of a definition, and not merely about the name minus the definition” (218b7–c6).

So the starting point is a name. However, bearing in mind that it is a word in the Greek language that is understood by all, we must assume that the starting point is the sociological meaning of the term, according to which the sophist would be a teacher dedicated to teaching certain contents in exchange for a fee.

From this first approximation, the dialogue begins the search-process that ends in the final definition. The goal of the dialogue is to grasp the reality of the sophist, not just the name. This goal, after the ontological digression, is recaptured in the following terms: “Let us, then, renew the attempt, and in dividing any class, always take the part to the right, holding fast to that which holds the Sophist, until we have stripped him of all his common properties, and reached his difference or peculiar feature. Then we may exhibit him in his true nature, first to ourselves and then to kindred dialectical spirits” (264d10–265a2). When the dialogue is close to the final definition, Theaetetus

and the Stranger are more precise in their expressions, such as “the true and genuine Sophist” (τὸν παντάπασιν ὄντως σοφιστήν) (268c4) or “the real Sophist” (τὸν ὄντως σοφιστήν) (268d3).

Between the point of departure and that of arrival there are a number of divisions that tend to separate off the properties which the sophist shares with other genera while preserving the nature of what the sophist in himself is.

The common notion of a sophist views him inaccurately. If there is no previous analysis, everyone can frame his own notion. The term “sophist” embraces diverse characteristics. The sophist, as he is conceived by ordinary people, is a hybrid. The function of division is to isolate the constitutive elements of a species. From this perspective, Divisions I–VI are intermediate steps towards the reaching of the final definition.

The feature of purifier of the soul can be applied to the sophist at the beginning of the dialogue, more specifically to the sophist of Division VI, but not to the sophist of the final definition.

In this way we avoid a bothersome paradox, but the question remains. Why does Plato admit that the ‘sociological’ sophist is a “purifier of the soul”? If the sophist and Sophistry at the end of the dialogue have a strictly negative nature; if, on the other hand, the purification of the soul (as defined in the sixth division) concerns no one but Socrates²⁰, we must conclude that according to Plato’s reasoning there is an implicit division within the art of Sophistry, such that we should speak of a “noble Sophistry” (which is the art of purification of the soul) and of Sophistry *tout court* or perhaps *ignoble* Sophistry (which would apply to the sophists). Both senses of the term have the use of ἔλεγχος in common. This would be the reason for maintaining the single term. And it is the reason why the method of Socrates was often confused with Sophistry. Consequently, when Plato speaks of “noble Sophistry” it is not because he has arrived at a hybrid of sophist and philosopher, this hybrid being the purifier of the soul²¹, but because he has discovered or is

20 This thesis is entirely clear from the moment that a moral value is assigned to the *elenchos* over and above the merely epistemic one. In other words, sophists would use the *elenchos* without attributing a moral purpose to it.

21 Rosen ([1983] 131) argues that we have arrived at a hybrid of sophist and philosopher. This fact would be a proof that there are breakdowns in *diairesis*. But the notion of Sophistry at which we have arrived in this part of the dialogue is not a hybrid of Sophistry and philosophy, but of *good* (γενναία) Sophistry and (*bad*) Sophistry (ὄντως σοφιστήν). If the *diairesis* fails, it is for other reasons.

forced for some reason to recognize, even in the context of the atypical sixth definition, the hybrid nature of the sophist and Sophistry.

The very reason for the division is based on the need to clarify concepts. This being so, Plato admits from the beginning that the sophist who is to be hunted is “a many-sided animal”. He is ‘many-coloured’, meaning that, like a many-coloured mural, he has many different qualities, one of which, the use of ἔλεγχος, is shared by the philosopher (Socrates-Plato) and the sophist. If, on the other hand, in this phase of the definition, the ἔλεγχος is a resource that is to be attributed primarily to the sophist, i. e., if the use of ἔλεγχος is associated with Sophistry and the art of contradicting (ἀντιλογικὴ τέχνη), the separation between the two becomes necessary, since otherwise we would end up building, against the very purpose of the division, a hybrid of half noble Sophistry and half (ignoble) Sophistry.

Before concluding, it should be noted that our passage is located precisely on the threshold of the ontological digression, as a result of which the sophist and his abilities will be reduced to mere appearance. This being so, before beginning this process, Plato delimits Socratic ἔλεγχος from that employed by the sophists, since otherwise, with the refutation of the sophist, the philosopher (Socrates) would also be refuted. The reason for this move by Plato is the fact that, as Trevaskis²² says, Socrates is often confused with the sophists. And the operation results in the famous expression “the noble Sophistry”.

Perhaps it would have been desirable to define the sophist as a *contradictor* (ἀντιλογικός)²³ and to describe Socrates as a *refutator* (ἐλεγκτικός), but Plato did not make this decision²⁴. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the difficulty or impossibility of separating the figure of the *refutator* from that of the *contradictor*.

22 Trevaskis (1955–56) 48.

23 In relation to this notion, Plato’s terminology in the *Sophist* varies in several ways. It is said that the feature that unifies all the definitions of the sophist is that of ἀντιλογικός and of ἀντιλέγειν (*Sophist* 232b–235a). But other terms are used in the dialogue which are very much *hapax legomena* in Plato’s work. This could be an indication that Plato’s position was in process of formation. The terms are ἐναντιολογία (236e5), ἐναντιολογεῖν (268b4) and ἐναντιοποιολογικῆς (268c8), the latter a *hapax* in the whole of Greek literature. Plato speaks about the ἀντιλογικὴ τέχνη thirteen times, of these six are found in the *Sophist*.

24 Only twice does Plato make use of the term ἐλεγκτικός: at *Theaetetus* 200a12, to refer to an opponent, and at *Sophist* 216b6, to refer to a cross-examining deity (θεὸς ὧν τις ἐλεγκτικός). If the figure of the ἐλεγκτικός has no terminological existence, the art of refutation (ἐλεγκτικὴ τέχνη) does not exist either.

The reasons that explain the placement of the sixth division where we find it can be summed up in the following three points:

- a) Plato could not leave a central element of his philosophy, epistemological catharsis, out of the dialogue. Something similar happens with divine creation (265c–d), the presentation of which is not strictly relevant to the objective of the dialogue. These are two examples of the introduction of issues of particular importance to Plato that relate collaterally to the theme of the dialogue. In the *Theaetetus* (172b–177c) there is a similar treatment of the contrast between rhetoric and philosophy (both of them paradigms), the difference in this case being that the dialogue itself qualifies the passage as a digression (πάρεργα). Maybe these issues might have found their most effective justification in the *Philosopher*. Or possibly the absence of such a dialogue, whether premeditated and non-accidental or not, would have required that these crucial issues not remain in the dark.
- b) As for the ἔλεγχος, I think it is important to recall the clue pointed out by Cornford²⁵: for Plato education begins with a purge. That means that Socratic-Platonic philosophy is the answer to the teaching of the sophists and the Presocratics. A purge is a stomach-wash and an ἔλεγχος a soul-wash. The need to refute, which is typical of any process of learning and accumulating knowledge, becomes for Plato a necessary preliminary condition deriving from his position in the history of Greek philosophy, as the re-founder of philosophy in the peculiarly Platonic sense of the term.
- c) Finally, Sophistry is divided into noble Sophistry and Sophistry in a negative sense, as defined at the close of the dialogue. This type of movement is not unusual in Plato's works. It is true that the art of rhetoric is portrayed by Plato as a negative activity, but we can talk to some extent of a good rhetoric (*Phaedrus* 273e). In the same dialogue, it is said that madness, besides being a disease, can also be something good (244b). So we cannot say that madness is an evil

25 Cornford ([1935] 179 note 3), recalls that “it was Socrates’ discovery that true moral education must begin with casting out popular beliefs about right and wrong, derived from parents and teachers”. Kahn insists on the same point: “So in the *Sophist* the Socratic *elenchus* is described as a noble cathartic art, the first stage of education, which must purify the mind of opinions that prevent learning, and in particular the opinion that one knows what one does not know (*Sophist* 230a–231b). In both dialogues [*Meno* and *Sophist*] Plato recognizes the negative *elenchus* as a necessary preliminary, preparing but not constituting the constructive search for knowledge” (Kahn [1998] 99).

in all cases. Writing itself, in the matter of its convenience or inconvenience, “may, according to the way it is done, be something that is good or bad” (274b). There is no absolute condemnation of writing. Even for the most exact sciences, like arithmetic, we must say that they are twofold, one properly “of the masses and another of those who are philosophers” (*Philebus* 56cd)²⁶. Something similar could be said about the sophist and the true sophist²⁷ or the statesman and the true and genuine statesman²⁸. The higher expression of this division can be found in the lie (ψεῦδος). In the *Republic* Plato admits that the ruler can make use of lies as a remedy (χρήσιμον) (389b). This kind of lie is described as noble (γενναῖον) (414c), and must be used as medicine (ἐν φαρμάκου εἶδει)²⁹ (459d). In the *Laws* (663d–e) Plato speaks of a lie (ψεῦδος) as something useful and effective (λυσιτελέστερον... καὶ δυνάμενον).

I want, finally, to adduce two very important passages on this way of reasoning to be found in Greek literature. The first is the celebrated passage of Hesiod in which he speaks of the division of *Erides* into two kinds (*Works and Days* 11). The second concerns the concept of *aidos* in Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Phaedra says that “the sense of shame is of two kinds, one good the other a scourge of houses, but if the dividing line [the usually translation, in this context, of *kairos*] between them were clear, two different concepts would not have the same letters” (*Hippolytus* 386). In both cases, there is a problem of division and separation.

So Plato would have faced two options: either to discard the ἀντιλογική τέχνη, which would have seriously affected the ἐλεγχος, or to preserve it in the form of γενναῖα σοφιστική. This second option, chosen by Plato in the *Sophist*, is proof that Plato's position against the sophists has to do with axiological and normative postulates rather than with theoretical questions and arguments.

26 Similarly, at *Republic* 525cd, the science of numbers is useful (χρήσιμον) if pursued in the spirit of a philosopher not of a shopkeeper.

27 *Sophist* 231c2 (ὄντως εἶναι τὸν σοφιστήν), 268c4 (τὸν παντάπασι δντως σοφιστήν).

28 *Statesman* 291c4 (τῶν ὄντως ὄντων πολιτῶν καὶ βασιλικῶν), 300c9 (τὸν ὄντως πολιτῶν), 301b5 (ἐπιστήμων ὄντως ὄν), 305a6 (τὴν ὄντως ὕοσαν βασιλικήν). *Phaedo* 64b9, 64e2 (οἱ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόσοφοι), 68b3 (ἐὰν τῷ ὄντι... φιλόσοφος), 82c (οἱ ὀρθῶς φιλόσοφοι), *Sophist* 216c6 (οἱ μὴ πλαστῶς ἀλλ' ὄντως φιλόσοφοι).

29 Rosen (1983) 171, note 1.

The Method of Division in the *Sophist*: Plato's Second *Deuteros Plous*

Kenneth Dorter

1

Plato's theory of forms has two major components. One is that reality is intelligible: the universal concepts of reason and language correspond to something fundamental in the nature of reality. Not that there is a single ontologically correct language, but only that universal concepts have a basis in reality, and are more than arbitrary confluents of unique ever-changing individuals. The other major component is that these stable features of reality are not accidental but are aspects of an intelligible order that exists necessarily because of its intrinsic value – they owe their being and essence (τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν) to the good (*Rep.* 509b). How can we know these forms, and by what ontological process does an individual have a form as its essence? Plato's answers are always metaphorical: we know them by something like a remembering of something like a seeing, and an individual has a form as its essence by participating in it or imitating it or striving after it or some other anthropological metaphor.

In the *Parmenides* Plato shows, against anyone who takes the theory of forms to be a dogma, that the attempt to replace the metaphors with rigorous concepts is problematic. “On the other hand,” *Parmenides* says afterward, “if anyone ... does not admit the existence of forms of things or mark off a form under which each individual thing is classed, he will not have anything on which to fix his thoughts ... and in this way he will utterly destroy the power of discourse” (135b–c).¹ In introducing the next stage of the dialogue he says, “not only must you examine what follows if what is hypothesized exists, but also if it does not exist” (135e–136a): before abandoning a problematic model we need to know whether abandoning it may not be even more problematic.

1 Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

I believe this is the task of the trilogy that follows.² The *Theaetetus* shows that if we admit only unique individuals as real we cannot distinguish knowledge from opinion; the *Sophist* resolves this by reintroducing natural kinds, but does not take the next step of recognizing the good. The Eleatic visitor says there that his method takes no interest in the relative goodness or badness of the kinds. “It aims at acquiring an understanding of what is akin and what is not akin in all the arts, and ... honors all of them equally” (227a–b).³ In places the limitations of this method show through. When the visitor’s penultimate attempt to identify the sophist leads instead to a type that resembles the Socratic philosopher, he remarks, “I’m afraid to say [these are] sophists ... lest we accord to them too great an honor” (231a), and he calls it “noble sophistry” but honor and nobility cannot be recognized by his value-free method. This limitation is redressed in the *Statesman*, in which honor and intrinsic value are front and center from the beginning: where the Eleatic visitor had insisted in the *Sophist* that his method honors all types equally, the *Statesman* begins with Socrates’ criticism of Theodorus for placing equal value [ἴσους ἄξιας] on the sophist, statesman, and philosopher, “who are further apart in honor [τίμῃ] than your art of proportions can express” (257a–b). And at the end the statesman is defined as the one who knows the best thing to do in any situation (304a–305d).⁴

In the *Phaedo* the method of hypothesis is introduced as a *deuteros plous* or secondary way to arrive by degrees at the elusive form of the

2 I have discussed this more fully in Dorter (1994).

3 Cf. Rosen (1983) 308.

4 The first half of the *Statesman* superficially resembles the *Sophist* with its elaborate bifurcations, and at 266d the visitor even repeats his injunction against recognizing differences of value. However the binary method becomes progressively more problematic until in the second half it is simply abandoned. Its final appearance is an attempt to define weaving. But where the divisions in the *Sophist* and at the beginning of the *Statesman* were rigorous and orderly, this one is so confused that it displays the unreliability of the method rather than its virtues, and the visitor himself afterward describes it as “going around in a circle and distinguishing very many things pointlessly” (283b). In step 11, for example, weaving is taken to be a species of clothes-making even though admittedly only “the greatest part of it” deals with making clothing (280a), which means the definition is too narrow. And in step 13 he says: “Of wool-working there are two divisions, and each of them is by nature a part of two arts” (282b). But if a species is part of *two* genera, on either line the definition will be too narrow.

good, and we see how the method conveys Socrates through three levels of understanding on the way to that goal: physical explanations, formal explanations, and explanations that combine the two: physical things that carry forms to whatever they come in contact with (96a–105c). The next step, explanations in accordance with the good, is only implied in the *Phaedo*⁵ and is not explicitly defended until the *Timaeus*. The Eleatic⁶ trilogy passes through corresponding stages: the empirical explanations of the *Theaetetus*, the formal but value-free explanations of the *Sophist*, and the reintroduction of value in the *Statesman*. Unlike the original *deuteros plous*, however, this one does not lead to the metaphysical good, the *form* beheld by the intellect; but to the practical good, the *mean* discerned in action.

The ascent in the *Phaedo* is driven by aporiae that arise at each level. The physicalist explanations were vulnerable to elenchus (100c), the purely formal explanations were safe from elenchus but simplistic, artless, foolish, and ignorant (100d, 105c), and were superseded by a synthesis that combined the sophistication and subtlety of the first with the safety of the second – “not safe and ignorant ... but [safe and] subtle” (105b). In the trilogy the empirical explanations of the *Theaetetus* led to aporia, and the purely formal definitions of the *Sophist* lead to an unsatisfactory result as well, a fatally flawed definition of the sophist, although this failing is no longer explicit.

The Eleatic visitor is dissatisfied with the results of the first six attempts to define the sophist since he goes on to give a very different kind of diaeresis in the seventh definition,⁷ but even that final definition is seriously problematic. It tells us that the sophist is someone who 1) makes inaccurate semblances rather than accurate likenesses (266d–e),

5 See Dorter (2001).

6 Although the *Theaetetus* is not explicitly Eleatic – it is conducted by Socrates and its subject matter is Heraclitean – Parmenides is mentioned at an important juncture as someone whose views ought to be considered as an alternative to the philosophy of becoming which Theaetetus unsuccessfully defends (180d–181a). The Eleatic philosopher is not discussed only because he is too important to be considered in the available time (183c–184a).

7 See Appendix. It is sometimes suggested that the final definition does not imply dissatisfaction with the previous ones, but instead identifies what the others have in common and unifies the dialogue by uniting the earlier definitions within itself. But that cannot be correct because the first five definitions all locate the sophist within the art of acquisition which excludes the art of production, while the final definition locates him within the art of production which excludes the art of acquisition.

2) by imitation rather than with tools (267a), 3) from opinion rather than knowledge (267b–e), 4) with self-doubt rather than confidence (268a), and 5) by contradiction in private rather than by speeches in public (268b). But why must we agree in step 3 that sophists necessarily operate from opinion rather than knowledge? When Prodicus makes his verbal distinctions must he always be without knowledge? When Protagoras correctly says that everyone perceives reality somewhat differently, why is that opinion rather than knowledge? Moreover, since the reason the sophist makes semblances rather than likenesses is that he is trying to manipulate his audience, if he is successful he is presumably acting from knowledge of how to influence people's perceptions.

Step 4 is equally problematic in its distinction between people who are self-doubting and people who are overconfident. The former "have a great suspicion and fear that they are ignorant of the things that they give themselves the appearance of knowing in front of others," while the latter believe they have knowledge when they only have opinion. In view of the way that the sophists are portrayed in the dialogues, it is surprising to see them classed here among the self-doubters rather than among the overconfident.⁸

Step 5 is problematic in two ways. First, given the way the sophists are portrayed in the *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and book one of the *Republic*, we would expect them to be classed as those who prefer to make speeches rather than those who prefer elenchus, but instead they are identified as practitioners of elenchus rather than makers of speeches.⁹ Second, in violation of the method of division, two steps are combined into one.¹⁰ The visitor makes Theaetetus choose between those who give long speeches in public, and those who practice elenchus in private. There is no provision for those who practice elenchus in public (like Socrates in the *Apology*), or those who make long speeches in private (as sophists do in the *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic*). The procedural error of collapsing the distinction between two pairs of differentia – long or short speeches and public or private venues – and thus overlooking two sig-

8 In fact, since the word for their self-doubt is "irony", the only difference between a sophist and Socrates is that Socrates' images are accurate while those of the sophist are inaccurate; for Socrates' self-assessment is that he too has opinion rather than knowledge.

9 Here, as later in the sixth definition, we get someone who resembles Socrates more than the sophists familiar to us from the dialogues.

10 For this point I am indebted to Jenkins (2009). She raises other difficulties about the final definition as well.

nificant species in its final step, adds an exclamation mark to the earlier missteps.

These issues are peripheral to what happens in what I called step 1 (step 4 of the diaeresis as a whole), where the sophist is said to make inaccurate rather than accurate images. Why does he make inaccurate images? According to the order of the diaeresis it cannot be because he lacks knowledge, since the distinction between knowledge and opinion is not established until two steps later and is thus subordinate to the accurate/inaccurate distinction. Moreover if lack of knowledge were the reason, the sophist would be no different from an unsuccessful philosopher: both would produce distorted images when they are ignorant. The reason sophists make distorted images is not because of ignorance but because they want to manipulate their audience. What they value is not truth but wealth and political influence. Since that is how they are portrayed throughout the dialogues, why does this feature not appear in the visitor's definition? Why is nothing said about their motivation?

We saw that one of the intrinsic features of the method of division in the *Sophist* is that it abstracts from differences of value. The visitor's method takes no interest in the relative goodness or badness of the kinds: "It aims at acquiring an understanding of what is akin and what is not akin in all the arts, and ... honors all of them equally" (227a–b). It is not surprising then that he does not use "what sophists value" as one of his criteria. But the visitor did not make that stipulation until the sixth definition. All definitions but the sixth begin with the Angler definition's division of power into art and non-art, and art into production and acquisition (219a–d). The first five definitions all locate the sophist within the genus of acquisition rather than production, either as spirited hunters (definition 1), appetitive salesmen (definition 2), or a combination of the two as aggressive money-makers (definitions 3–5). In these definitions their motivation is the starting point. But after the visitor introduces his value-free stipulation in the sixth definition, all question of motivation disappears and we are left with the sterile result of definition 7 which, significantly, begins not from the art of acquisition like the others, but from the art of production. Since acquisition is intended to fill a specific need, it reflects what we value. In the case of production, however, there is no explicit reference to the producer's motivation.

The reason there is no satisfying definition in the *Sophist* is that the visitor's initial dichotomy between acquisition and production allows us

to see only half the picture at a time. According to that dichotomy productive arts and acquisitive arts are mutually exclusive, so the sophist will be seen either as someone who is acquisitive but without producing anything, or someone who produces something but is not acquisitive. Neither alternative reveals the sophist as he is portrayed throughout the dialogues, as someone who *produces* speeches with the aim of *acquiring* pleasures or power. On one hand if we investigate the sophist in terms of his products without reference to his acquisitive motivation, his decision to make distorted rather than accurate images is incomprehensible, which is why the seventh definition is unsatisfying. But if on the other hand we portray him as an acquisitive hunter who does not produce anything, as in the first definition (219e–223a), sophistry will be no different in principle than any other predatory behavior. When we turn to the second definition and its variants, this defect appears to be averted: it too locates the art of sophistry within the acquisitive rather than productive arts (223c) but then proceeds to grant that the sophist may make products in order to attain his ends (223d, 224d).¹¹ However, this apparent synthesis of acquisition and production is achieved at the price of incoherence in the definition as a whole, which began with the premise that the art of making products and the art of acquisition are mutually exclusive (219a–d). Thus, given the opposition between productive and acquisitive arts, either we are limited to seeing the sophist in two incompatible half pictures, or the definition becomes incoherent.

The one division that did not presuppose an incompatibility between acquisition and production was the sixth definition, which is also where the value-free stipulation was introduced:

11 At 219b the term for making is ποιεῖν, while at 224d the visitor uses τεκταινόμενος, but the definition of ποιεῖν at 219b applies to both.

ART OF DISCRIMINATION

1 (226c–d)

/ \

like from like better from worse (purification)

2 (226e–227c)

/ \

of the body of the soul

3 (227d–229a)

/ \

chastisement (of vice) teaching (of ignorance)

4 (229b–d)

/ \

instruction (of ignorance) education (of stupidity)

5 (229e–231b)

/ \

by admonition BY REFUTATION

This definition fails, the visitor says, because “I’m afraid to say [these are] sophists ... lest we accord to them too great an honor” (231a), and he calls it “noble sophistry.” The art identified here, that of purifying the soul through instruction by means of refutation, is generally recognized to be the art of Socratic philosophy. The crucial step is the first, which opposes discrimination of like from like, to discrimination of better from worse. It is immediately after this that the visitor says that his own method “does not care ... whether one provides us with greater or smaller benefits than the other. It aims at acquiring an understanding of what is akin and what is not akin in all the arts, and, with this intention, it honors all of them equally” (227a–b). In other words, his method is the first kind of discrimination, that of like from like, rather than the Socratic discrimination of better from worse. And yet the visitor repeatedly shows that differences of value matter to him. Not only does he distinguish Socratic philosophy from sophistry because of its nobility, he later distinguishes what is beautiful and harmonious as better than its privations (259c–260a).

Why would the visitor insist on a value-free method at the same time that he praises Socratic philosophy as noble precisely because it distinguishes the better from the worse? The value-free method of division by bisection that he introduces in the *Sophist* is only the first stage of a method that is not given its complete form until the *Statesman*, at which point it will have much more in common with the Socratic conception

of philosophy. After all, it was Socrates who first introduced the method of division (*Phaedrus* 265d–e) and he employs it again in the *Philebus* (16d).

2

The way the method of division is employed in the *Sophist* is unique. In the *Phaedrus* (265e) and *Philebus* (16d–17a) we are told that the division should be made at the natural joints between species. There is no suggestion that we must always divide each class precisely in half. Moreover the *Sophist's* sequel, the *Statesman*, tells us near the beginning that of the two possible approaches – the longer way of dividing down the middle, and the shorter way of dividing immediately into all the natural species¹²

12 In his demonstration of the shorter way the visitor does indeed “distinguish what is sought from everything else immediately”, though that is not at first obvious. Step 7, the last before the parting of the ways, divides land animals into feathered (πτηνός) and walkers, after which step 8 distinguishes the featherless walkers into four-footed and two-footed. Why then does he proceed in step 9 to divide the two footed species into feather-growing (πτηροφυός) and featherless, when feathers had already been excluded in step 7 (even if we translate πτηνός as “winged” rather than “feathered” in step 7 it would exclude birds from what follows). The redundant step, and its comical definition of human beings as featherless bipeds, may have been appended lest the visitor seem to have cut off a small part the way young Socrates had done, and thus undermine his warning. However, as Socrates points out in the *Philebus* (17a), it is possible to go from the one to the many too slowly as well as too quickly. Once we set aside the redundant step 9 we can see that the shorter way is preferable: since the genus from which both ways began was “walking”, it is more natural to use “number of feet” as the differentia, rather than “presence of horns”. “Horns” and “interbreeding” are peripheral features. The definition of the shorter way was the model for Aristotle who commonly defines us as the “two footed animal” (*N.E.* I.7.1097b12). He also describes us as “by nature a political [i.e. herd] animal” (*Politics* I.1.1253a3). Skemp (1952) 70 points out that “Aristotle argues very thoroughly against any attempt to reach any of the *infimae species* of the animal world by a process of division by dichotomy [*De Partibus animalium*, I, 2–4; 642b5–644b20]”.

The main problem with young Socrates' immediate division of animals into human and non-human was not its asymmetry – nor even that by identifying one species simply as “humans” it fails to specify the differentia – but rather that “beasts” is no more a natural kind than is “barbarian” (262d). That is why the visitor says that although the shorter way of immediately identifying the essential difference is finer (κάλλιστον) than the longer way, the longer way is safer. It teaches us to think in terms of natural kinds by insisting on

– the second way is better (262b). Accordingly, the two diaereses in the second half of that dialogue both employ the second way, immediately identifying all the species instead of proceeding by bisection.¹³ Since every dialogue before and after the *Sophist* recommends dividing at the natural joints, rather than into arbitrary symmetrical halves, why does the *Sophist* pursue the inferior way?

In distinguishing the two ways, the visitor had said: “It’s finest to distinguish what is sought from everything else immediately, if that correctly reflects how the things really are, ... [but] safer (ἄσφαλλέστερον) to make one’s cuts by going down the middle, and one would more likely hit upon the boundaries between the forms” (262b). As in the *Phaedo*

the simplest model of genus-species relationship, that of symmetrical bisection. Once this disciplined way of thinking has become familiar from the *Sophist*, the visitor cautiously introduces the finer but riskier shorter way in the first half of the *Statesman*. And in the first diaeresis of the second half, when he divides the genus of possessions that are contributory causes of statesmanship, he dispenses with bisection altogether and immediately divides it into its seven species: tools, receptacles, supports, defenses, playthings, raw materials, and nourishment (287c–289c). He is now employing the shorter way – division without bisection – and continues to do so for the duration of the dialogue, now that the demonstrations of the longer way served their purpose of training us to think in terms of natural kinds. The search for the statesman was not “for the sake of this subject itself ... [but] for the sake of becoming better dialecticians about all subjects” (285d).

- 13 The genus of possessions is immediately divided into its seven species: tools, receptacles, supports, defenses, playthings, raw materials, and nourishment (287c–289c). And that of servants is immediately divided into fourteen species: slave, merchant, civil servant, diviner, priest, aristocrat, oligarch, monarch, tyrant, democrat, general, rhetorician, judge, and statesman (289d–305e). The ostensible reason for abandoning bifurcation here is that “we cannot [ἄδυνατοῦμεν] cut them into two” (287c). But in fact they could easily have done so both in this case and in the final division of “servants” into fourteen immediate species (see Dorter [1994] 212, 222). The visitor’s reason for avoiding bisection cannot be that these subjects in particular lend themselves more naturally to division into seven or fourteen, for even without the constraint of bifurcation the visitor mentions that certain classes have been left out and can only be included by force: Whatever we have left out, if we have forgotten anything not very important, can be fit into one of these. Thus with the class of coins, seals, and every other kind of engraved dies. These do not constitute among themselves a large genus with a common name, but some can be made to fit under ‘playthings’, and others under ‘instruments’, although the amalgamation is very forced. With regard to the possession of tame animals, except slaves, the previously partitioned art of herd-nurturing will show itself to include them all’. [289b–c]

(100d, 105b) safety is a feature of the *deuteros plous*. The safer way of bisection is employed in the *Sophist* as a stepping stone to the finer way of dividing at the natural joints. It achieves this not only by training us to think in terms of kinds rather than unique individuals, but also by training us to find the mean.¹⁴ The concept of the mean was first introduced in the *Republic*, where Socrates said that the person who can “distinguish the good from the bad life ... would know how to always choose the mean among such lives, and avoid each of the extremes” (618b–619b).¹⁵ But the mean is not introduced into the Eleatic visitor’s method until the *Statesman*, where the connection with goodness is again explicit: when the arts preserve the mean all of their works are good and fine (ἀγαθὰ καὶ καλὰ) (283d–284a).¹⁶ To divide a genus into exactly two species, as the visitor does in the *Sophist*, we must look for the point of equilibrium that results in a balanced dichotomy of species. As the visitor put it, the longer way means going down the middle (διὰ μέσων: *Statesman* 262b – cf. the *Republic’s* τὸ μέσον).

The ability to recognize the mean in dichotomous species differentiation is not the same as the ability to recognize the mean of excellence, but it can help develop that ability. Unlike mathematics where we recognize the mean by calculating the midpoint between the extremes,¹⁷ in morality the order is reversed and we know the extremes only by recognizing that they exceed or fall short of the mean. When it comes to finding the mean that divides a genus into polarized species, rather than

14 Training us to see the world in terms of a limited number of kinds rather than an unlimited number of individuals could have been accomplished by the method of collection alone. What the method of division offers, besides further practice in classification, is practice in seeking the mean.

15 The term used is τὸ μέσον (cf. Aristotle’s μεσότης) whereas the *Statesman* and *Laws* use τὸ μέτριον.

16 Cf. *Laws* 691c: ‘If one gives a greater degree of power to what is lesser, neglecting the mean ... then everything is upset... There does not exist, my friends, a mortal soul whose nature will ever be able to wield the greatest human ruling power when young and irresponsible, without becoming filled in its mind with the greatest disease, unreason, which makes it become hated by its closest friends. When this comes about it quickly destroys it and obliterates all its power. Guarding against this, then, by knowing the mean, is the task of great lawgivers’.

17 The mathematical mean appears in the *Timaeus*, for example, when we are told that plane and solid geometry are concerned in an essential way with the single and double mean respectively (32a–b, 36a). Robins ([1995] 359–91) argues that the mathematical mean is central to all the mathematical studies of *Republic* 7 (525a–531c).

knowing the extremes first as in mathematics, or knowing the mean first as in morality, we perceive the extremes of the contradictory species and differentia between them at the same time. When the visitor divided “art” into “productive” and “acquisitive” he could not have recognized the midpoint between them before recognizing each individually, nor recognize them individually before recognizing the contrast between them, since meaning is grasped by contrast. To understand what each of them is, is to understand the distinction between them and vice versa.

Although the ability to find the midpoint within a genus is not the same as the ability to recognize the mean of excellence, unlike the mathematical mean it cannot be arrived at mechanically, and training in recognizing the appropriate place to separate the genus at its center develops our ability to recognize the kind of mean that is no longer value-free.

3

I have suggested that the trilogy, like the *Phaedo*, approaches the good indirectly, by a *deuteros plous*. The reason the good cannot be presented directly is indicated in the final definition. The visitor concedes that it is difficult to know in which of the two species of images – distorted “semblances” or accurate “likenesses” – the sophist’s products belong (*Sophist* 236c–d). He goes on to locate that difficulty in the problem that to say what is false is to attribute existence to “what is not”, and although at first he raises this point with regard to semblances rather than likenesses (236e–239e), he proceeds to broaden the problem: since *any* image (εἶδωλον) differs from the true thing (ἀληθινόν) that it imitates, it must be not true (μὴ ἀληθινόν), which means it *really is not* (οὐκ ὄντως). When Theaetetus points out that it “*really is* a likeness (εἰκών),” the visitor replies, “Without *really being*, then, it *really is* what we call a likeness (εἰκόνα)?” (239d–240b). Although the passage began as if only semblances were problematic, the problem was eventually extended to images in general, and by the end even likenesses were expressly included.

Leaving aside the razzle-dazzle about “saying what is not”, the visitor’s point follows reasonably enough from the consideration that images can never be completely adequate to what they image. As Socrates says in the *Cratylus*, “do you not perceive how far likenesses are from having the same qualities as those things of which they are likenesses?”

(432b–d). Description can never do the work of acquaintance. In the *Republic*, when Glaucon asked for a clearer account of dialectic, Socrates replied it is not possible to capture it in images:

‘You will no longer be able, my dear Glaucon, to follow me, although for my part I would not willingly omit anything. But you would no longer see an image of what we are saying, but the truth itself... And the power of dialectic alone can reveal it to someone who is experienced in the things we just went through, and it is not possible in any other way’. (533a)

The alternative is explained in the *Phaedrus*:

‘The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up’ (276e–277a).

Words about justice can never adequately convey the nature of justice to someone ignorant of it because justice is too contextual to be captured in words (*Statesman* 294b).¹⁸ That is why we are told there that the statesman may rule without laws (294a–c),¹⁹ in accordance with the mean (301a), and all other forms of government are imitations of this that fall short of it in varying degrees (293d–e).

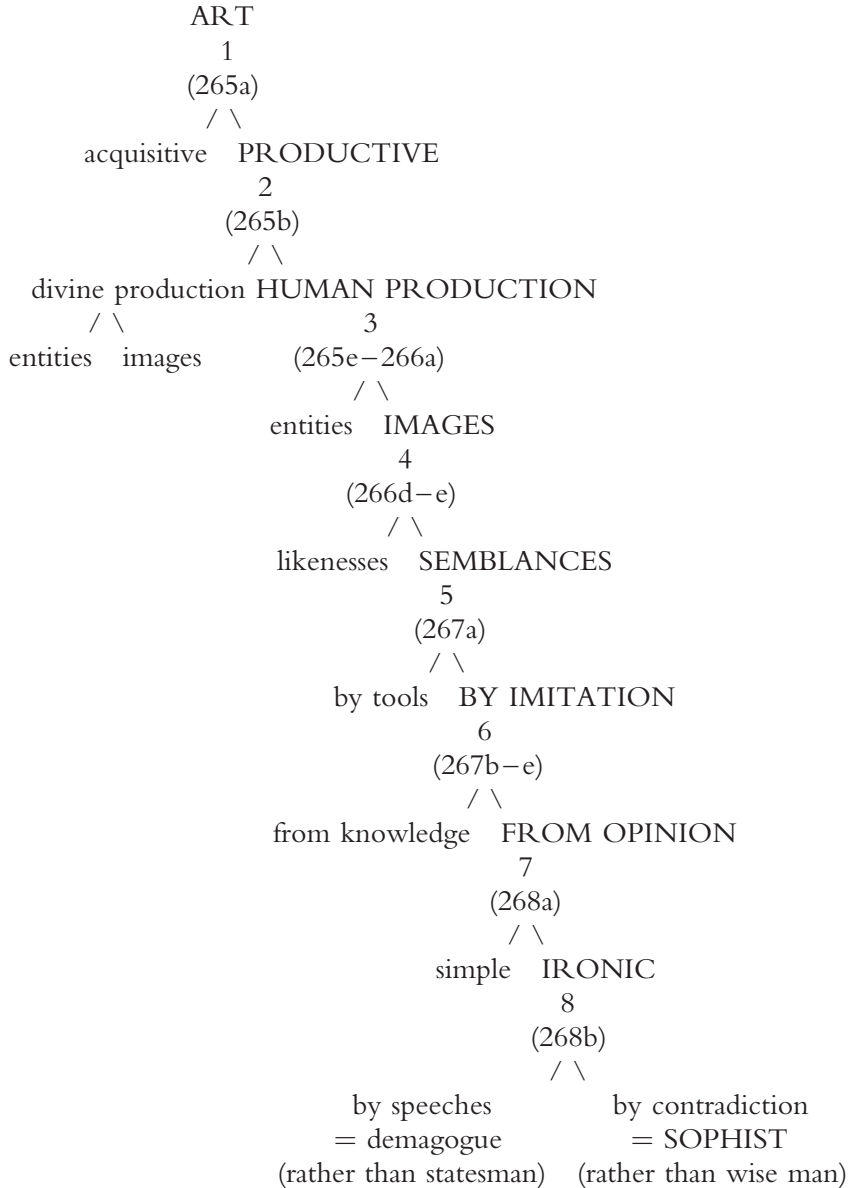
The introduction of the problem of images in the final division of the *Sophist* prepares us for the *Statesman*’s introduction of the kind of mean that can never be imaged, but only cultivated within.

18 Aristotle too acknowledges the difficulty of applying precise concepts to the world of action: ‘Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves as much clarity as the subject matter allows, for precision ought not to be sought for equally in all discussions, any more than in all the products of craftsmanship. Noble and just actions, which political philosophy investigates, contain much discrepancy and irregularity... And good actions too involve a similar irregularity... We must be content, then, when dealing with such subjects, and drawing inferences from such material, to indicate the truth in a general way and in outline ... for it is the mark of an educated person to seek the degree of precision in each class of things which the nature of the subject admits’. [*NE* I.3.1094b11–25]

Like Plato, he responds to the lack of precision in practical affairs by developing the concept of an imprecise mean that can be known only by a person of good character (II. 6–9.1106a14–1109b26; cf. III. 6–IV.9.1115a4–1128b35). Also like Plato he connects the doctrine of the mean with *techné*: see Welton and Polansky ([1996] 79–102). Their defence of the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean against certain ways that it has been misunderstood would apply as well to Plato’s formulation.

19 Mitchell Miller reminds me that later on the visitor speaks of the statesman as employing laws (309d–310a).

APPENDIX: *Sophist* 265a–268b



II. Parricide: Threat or Reality?

Plato's Ionian Muses: *Sophist* 242 d–e

Enrique Hülsz

The focus of this short paper will be a couple of very famous lines at *Sophist* 242d–e, which constitute one of the precious few certain references to Heraclitus within the Platonic corpus¹. It will be well to recall from the outset that there are virtually no full quotations of Heraclitus in Plato's works, with the possible exception of two consecutive passages in *Hippias Maior* (289a–b) usually counted as sources for Heraclitus fragments (DK22) B82 and (DK22) B83, which do not qualify as verbatim quotations but are at best mere paraphrases². What looks like the dominant trend³ in current scholarship concerning Plato's views on Heraclitus is largely based on the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, which seem to provide a basic sketch for the official image of the Ephesian as the main representative of the Universal flux theory (the famous but apocryphal *dictum*, πάντα ῥεῖ). In spite of the popularity of this view, surely also based on Aristotle's authority, if Universal flux is what allegedly defines Heracliteanism, Heraclitus was no Heraclitean.

A passage in the *Cratylus* attributes to Heraclitus the so-called “Universal flux” theory (“All things flow and nothing stays still”, most probably also not a genuine quotation) and the earliest version of (DK22)

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- 1 Although Heraclitus is not actually named in the *Sophist*, Plato's reference to him is immune from doubt, and can be solidly established internally (*Symp.* 187b). By “certain”, I mean containing an explicit mention of his name and/or partial quotation or paraphrase of his words. The other explicit mentions of Heraclitus' name are 7 instances in the *Cratylus*, 3 in the *Theaetetus*, 1 in the *Symposium*, 2 in *Hippias Maior*. There are, of course, more than a handful of passages in the dialogues where there are echoes or paraphrases of some authentic fragments. For a fuller list, cf. Mondolfo (1972) lxxxiv–clviii, and Mouraviev (1999), chap. 13, 60–96. For a quick overview of other places, especially in Plato's earlier works, see Hülsz (2012a), (2003a) and (2003b).
 - 2 See Marcovich (1967) and Mouraviev (2006a), (2006b) and (2006c), *ad loc.* Fragments of Heraclitus and other Presocratics are referred to in accordance with the DK numbering.
 - 3 The trend can be summarized as a literal reading of the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, and as Plato's true interpretation and appropriation of Heraclitus, best represented and articulated by Irwin (1977).

B91 (itself one of the three river-fragments): “You could not step into the same river twice”⁴. The transformation of the river image into the symbol of universal change and the defining mark of reality becomes explicit only in Plato’s text, in contrast with the concreteness and particularity of the Heraclitean image and the river statement itself (of which probably the most faithful version is B12: “On those who step in the same rivers, other and other waters flow”⁵). There is some other direct evidence from the crucial fragments themselves⁶ that Heraclitus’ metaphysical treatment of change did indeed present it as universal, but also as rationally structured and stable, and thus knowable on both counts. Rather than a single fixed “doctrine”, the core pattern structuring the Heraclitean fragments on change⁷ is unity in opposition, which recurs time and again as the ultimate rational structure of all becoming.

A deformed and oversimplified image of Heraclitus reappears in the *Theaetetus*, without any textual reference at all to any fragments, but quite in line with the surface take of the *Cratylus*, and is again associated with an extreme version of “ontological” flux (that all things are changing in all respects all the time, now presented as the implicit ontological background of Protagoras’ “Man-the-measure” doctrine, 152a ff.). Plato seems to credit Heraclitus here with a denial of permanent “being” and “substance” (which is at best anachronistic) and a theoretical commitment to an unstable and formless “becoming”, devoid of all unity (which is refuted by the relevant authentic texts). Aside from this, a further and troubling implication is that on such flimsy ontological grounds (i. e., that sensible things are all things, and that they are always changing) no knowledge can be possible. So the alleged Heraclitean ontological relativism (his “rheontology”) leads to self-contradiction and

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- 4 *Crat.* 402a8–10: λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει, καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς “δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης”. (“Heraclitus says, I believe, that all things flow and nothing stays still, and comparing existing things to the stream of a river, he says that you could not step twice into the same river.”) It’s worth noticing that it is Socrates, not Cratylus, who speaks here. My personal conjecture concerning the δις statement (= (DK22) B91) is that it was probably originally coined by Plato.
- 5 DK22 B12: ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ. See Graham (2005), Tarán (2002), and Vlastos (1955).
- 6 Not any of the river fragments but (DK22) B1, γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε and (DK22) B80, γινόμενα πάντα κατ’ ἕριν καὶ χρεῶν.
- 7 (DK22) B1, B6, B12, B30, B31, B36, B51, B60, B62, B67, B80, B84a, B88, B90, B94, B100, B125, B126.

complete epistemic annihilation. Clearly, however, an important aspect of Heraclitus' thought has been left out from the big picture: in the extant fragments, objective rationality, unity, identity, and regularity of all changing things are expressly stated and insistently associated with λόγος, itself essentially linked to language, knowledge, truth and human reasoning. It is perhaps revealing that in the final act of the *Theaetetus* there are three attempts to define the notion of λόγος, presented as the basic condition for the possibility of knowledge, and this looks enticing as a possible route back to the true Heraclitus, even if all the proposed definitions fail in the end to straighten things out.

A hardened and openly hostile version of Heraclitus as a “rheontologist” became the basis for the standard interpretation found in Aristotle, who, in his account of the origin of Plato's theory of Forms, says:

‘After the philosophies already mentioned [*sc.* the Pythagorean] came Plato's theory. This in many aspects follows them but also has characteristics of its own besides Italic philosophy. For, *having been acquainted first from his youth with Cratylus and Heraclitean doctrines – that all sensible things are always flowing and there is no knowledge of them —, he later kept thinking this way about these things.* And from Socrates, who dealt with moral matters but not with nature as a whole, and searched for the universal in them, being the first who fixed his thought on definitions, Plato accepted this [*i.e.*, that universals exist and that they are the objects of definition], and so supposed this is what happens, but relatively to other things and not to the sensible. For it is impossible that there is a common definition of any of *the sensible things, which are always changing.* Plato called these entities “Ideas” [or “Forms”], and [held that] there are sensible things beside these, and [that] all [sensible] things are named according to these [Ideas]. For the many things that have the same names are according to participation in the Forms. But regarding participation, he only changed the name, for the Pythagoreans say that things are by imitation of numbers, while Plato [says] that [they are] by participation, changing the word’.⁸

8 *Met.* A, 987a29–b13: Μετὰ δὲ τὰς εἰρημένας φιλοσοφίας ἡ Πλάτωνος ἐπεγένετο πραγματεία, τὰ μὲν πολλὰ τούτοις ἀκολουθοῦσα, τὰ δὲ καὶ ἴδια παρὰ τὴν τῶν Ἰταλικῶν ἔχουσα φιλοσοφίαν. ἐκ νέου τε γὰρ συνήθης γενόμενος πρῶτον Κρατύλῳ καὶ ταῖς Ἡρακλειτείοις δόξαις, ὡς ἀπάντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν αἰεὶ βεόντων καὶ ἐπιστήμης περὶ αὐτῶν οὐκ οὔσης, ταῦτα μὲν καὶ ὕστερον οὕτως ὑπέλαβεν Σωκράτους δὲ περὶ μὲν τὰ ἠθικὰ πραγματευομένου περὶ δὲ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως οὐθέν, ἐν μέντοι τούτοις τὸ καθόλου ζητοῦντος καὶ περὶ ὀρισμῶν ἐπιστήσαντος πρῶτου τὴν διάνοιαν, ἐκείνους ἀποδεξάμενος διὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ὑπέλαβεν ὡς περὶ ἐτέρων τοῦτο γιγνόμενον καὶ οὐ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀδύνατον γὰρ εἶναι τὸν κοινὸν ὅρον τῶν αἰσθητῶν τινός, αἰεὶ γε μεταβαλλόντων. οὗτος οὖν τὰ μὲν τοιαῦτα τῶν ὄντων ἰδέας προσηγόρευσε, τὰ δ' αἰσθητὰ παρὰ ταῦτα καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα λέγεσθαι πάντα· κατὰ μέθεξιν γὰρ εἶναι τὰ πολλὰ ὁμώνυμα τοῖς εἶδεσιν. τὴν δὲ μέθεξιν τοῦνομα μόνον μετέβαλεν· οἱ μὲν

It is noteworthy that Aristotle's synthetic formulation of Plato's Heracliteanism ("that all sensible things are always flowing and there isn't any knowledge of them") is not grounded in the text of the fragments themselves, and that the denial of knowledge is an even more unlikely Heraclitean tenet than Universal Flux. The basic premise in Aristotle's historic tale, though implicit, is that for Heraclitus sensible things are all things there are (some room for non-sensible entities, forerunners of Plato's Forms, seems allowable for Pythagoreans and for Socrates). As far as Plato himself is concerned, Aristotle seems to credit him with an ontologically dualistic model that accepts sensible things as real, and the permanent belief that all sensible reality is always changing, which makes it refractory to knowledge. To ground the possibility of knowledge, Plato had to expand the ontological realm so that it included, besides becoming, some unchanging and non-sensible entities that could be the stable objects of cognition. So, according to Aristotle, Platonic sensible particulars are unknowable as such, owing to the all-pervasive change they are always subjected to, and all knowledge would be of Forms. So Plato's Heraclitean heritage would be the rheontological model, whose application is restricted to changing sensible things, the realm of Becoming. The consequence of Aristotle's influential account is twofold: in the case of Heraclitus, the attribution of Universal Flux as a genuine doctrine, and, in the case of Plato, a view of sensible things and the whole realm of Becoming as unknowable and irrational, because of their unceasing movement and change. Could this really be Plato's true interpretation of Heraclitus, as well as his own conception of sensible things, as suggested by Aristotle?

Based on a different line of interpretation of the Platonic treatment of the image of Heraclitus in the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*⁹, I suggest that the better answer to this question is negative: in spite of everything Plato makes Socrates say about Heraclitus and the mysterious Heracliteans (or Homeric), the humor and the dramatic interplay among the characters and the ironical depths of Socrates' dialectic leave more than ample room for doubt about this really being Plato's true view of Heraclitus' philosophy. Even at the level of mere content, the core-doctrine of Universal Flux is credited not to Heraclitus alone but also to Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, Epicharmus, Empedocles and

γὰρ Πυθαγόρειοι μιμήσει τὰ ὄντα φασὶν εἶναι τῶν ἀριθμῶν, Πλάτων δὲ μεθέξει, τοῦνομα μεταβαλῶν. Cf. 1078b7–1079a5 and 1086a21–1087b13.

9 See Hülsz (2009).

Protagoras (in fact, to everyone but Parmenides, *Th.* 152e). As Kahn acutely observed, Plato's use of this rather distorted image of Heraclitus is not so much a philosophical question as a literary and historical one¹⁰. The brief, but crucial passage on Heraclitus in the *Sophist* reinforces this point of view, as I hope to succinctly show.

Our passage comes at the very centre of the dialogue. As has often been recognized, it contains one of the earliest documented accounts of the historical development of Greek philosophical thought. The “dangerous argument” (παρρακινδυνευτικός λόγος) to which the Eleatic For-eigner refers is, of course, the criticism of Father Parmenides' thesis about not-being and being itself, or “what is not” and “what is” – culminating in nothing less than a full philosophical rehabilitation of what is not¹¹. I quote the passage in full:

[242b6] FOR. – ‘Come, then. From which starting point could one begin such a dangerous argument? But I think, o young one, this is the road we are forced to follow.

TH. – Which one?

FOR. – In the first place, to examine those appearances that now are taken for granted, [242c] so we aren't completely baffled about them and too easily agree with one another, as if we understood them well indeed.

TH. – Say more clearly what you mean.

FOR. – Parmenides, and indeed everyone who ever yet has set out towards defining how many and which the existing things are, they all seem to me to have talked to us rather carelessly.

TH. – How do you mean?

10 Cf. C. H. Kahn (1977), “Plato and Heraclitus”, in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1, especially pp. 255–257.

11 Cf. the quotation of Parmenides (DK28) B7, 1–2 at 237a, and the apt description of the task at hand as ὀρθολογία περὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν at 239b4. A minimal characterization of what this task is, and how it is gradually developed in the main argument of the *Sophist*, requires more justification and interpretation than I can afford to attempt here. I assume that Plato's criticism of Parmenides is coordinated with his criticism of himself, and that the focus of the task is the un-Parmenidean differentiation of the absolute and the relative senses of what is not (or not-being); thus, while agreeing with Parmenides on the first point, he distances himself from Parmenides and opposes him on the second, by granting being (in a qualified sense) to not-being (in a relative sense, as difference), so that not-being can be truly said to be, and even to be a part, or better still, a *form* of, being.

FOR. – Each one appears to tell us some mythical tale, as if we were children. This one says that there are three existing things, at war with one another [242d] sometimes, while they become friends too at other times and make marriages, and beget children and nurture them. That one declares that there are two, the wet and the dry, or the hot and the cold, which he makes live together and joins in marriage. Our Eleatic tribe, starting with Xenophanes, and even earlier, explains through mythical accounts that what we call “all things” is a single entity. Certain Ionian, and later, some Sicilian Muses understood that the soundest way is to combine [242e] both things, and say that what is, is many and one, and that it is kept together by hatred and by friendship. For, “being at variance, [it] always agrees”, say the stricter Muses. The softer ones have loosened [the need] that these things should be forever thus, and they say that, by turns, at some time, the all is one and friend [of itself] [243a] under Aphrodite, and at another time it is many and its own enemy, by a certain hatred. But if any one of them has spoken truly or not, it’s difficult and wrongful to rebuke such great men, so renowned and so venerable. Something, however, can be said without offence

TH. – What?

FOR. – That they have had very little esteem, looking towards us, the many, because none of them cares if we can follow closely what they say [243b] or if we are left behind, and each one pursues their own thesis to the end.

TH. – How do you mean?

FOR. – Whenever some one of them says in their discourses that there is [something], or that there was [something], or that [something] is born, whether a plurality, or one thing, or two, that the hot is mixed with the cold, assuming besides other combinations and separations, tell me, Theaetetus, by the gods, if you have ever understood what they mean by these things. For, when I was younger, and anybody spoke of this, that which makes us now so perplexed – ‘what is not’ – I thought I understood perfectly. But now you see the difficulty we’re in.

[243c] TH. – I do’.¹²

12 242b6–243c1: [ΞΕ.] Φέρε δὴ, τίνα ἀρχὴν τις ἂν ἄρξαιτο παρακινδυνευτικοῦ λόγου; δοκῶ μὲν γὰρ τήνδ’, ὧ παῖ, τὴν ὁδὸν ἀναγκαιοτάτην ἡμῖν εἶναι τρέπεσθαι. [ΘΕΑΙ.] Ποῖαν δὴ; [ΞΕ.] Τὰ δοκοῦντα νῦν ἐναργῶς ἔχειν ἐπισκέψασθαι [242c] πρῶτον μὴ πη τεταραγμένοι μὲν ὦμεν περὶ ταῦτα, βραδίως δ’ ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογῶμεν ὡς εὐκρινῶς ἔχοντες. [ΘΕΑΙ.] Λέγε σαφέστερον ὃ λέγεις. [ΞΕ.] Εὐκόλως μοι δοκεῖ Παρμενίδης ἡμῖν διειλέχθαι καὶ πᾶς ὅστις πρόποτε ἐπὶ κρίσιν ὠρμησε τοῦ τὰ ὄντα διορίσασθαι πόσα τε καὶ ποῖά ἐστιν. [ΘΕΑΙ.] Πῆ; [ΞΕ.] Μῦθόν τινα ἕκαστος φαίνεται μοι διηγέσθαι παισιν ὡς οὔσιν ἡμῖν, ὁ μὲν ὡς τρία τὰ ὄντα, πολεμεῖ δὲ ἀλλήλοις [242d] ἐνίοτε αὐτῶν ἄττα πη, τοτὲ δὲ καὶ φίλα γιγνώμενα γάμους τε καὶ τόκους καὶ τροφὰς τῶν ἐγγόνων παρέχεται· δύο δὲ ἕτερος εἰπῶν, ὑγρὸν καὶ ξηρὸν ἢ θερμὸν καὶ ψυχρὸν, συνοικίζει τε αὐτὰ καὶ ἐκδίδωσι· τὸ δὲ παρ’ ἡμῖν Ἑλεατικὸν ἔθνος, ἀπὸ Ξενοφάνους τε καὶ ἐπι πρόσθεν ἀρξάμενον, ὡς ἐνὸς ὄντος τῶν πάντων καλουμένων οὕτω διεξέρ-

These lines purport to be a starting point from which the dangerous or audacious argument for the being of ‘what is not’ can proceed. In fact, here we find only the outline of the One–Many contrast as a historical framework for classification, entailing three distinct groups: 1) pluralists (exemplified in two- and three-*ὄντα* theories); 2) monists (restricted to the Eleatics) and 3) the two “Muses”. Later in the dialogue, two more alternative and cumulative frameworks will shape the main argument’s development (the gigantomachy between the Earth-born Giants and the Friends of the Forms, and the mobilists versus the staticists¹³). Recalling Parmenides’ language and imagery, the Foreigner points to the right “road” (*δόδος*) for them to follow, emphasizing the need not to take “appearances” (*τὰ δοκοῦντα*) for granted¹⁴. “Appearances” possibly

χεται τοῖς μύθοις. Ἰάδες δὲ καὶ Σικελαὶ τινες ὕστερον Μοῦσαι συνενόησαν ὅτι [242e] συμπλέκειν ἀσφαλέστατον ἀμφότερα καὶ λέγειν ὡς τὸ ὄν πολλά τε καὶ ἓν ἔστιν, ἔχθρα δὲ καὶ φίλια συνέχεται. διαφερόμενον γὰρ αἰεὶ συμφέρεται, φασὶν αἰεὶ συντονώτεροι τῶν Μουσῶν· αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακώτεροι τὸ μὲν αἰεὶ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχειν ἐχάλασαν, ἐν μέρει δὲ τότε μὲν ἓν εἶναι φασὶν τὸ πᾶν καὶ φίλον ὑπ’ [243a] Ἀφροδίτης, τότε δὲ πολλά καὶ πολέμιον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ διὰ νεϊκός τι. ταῦτα δὲ πάντα εἰ μὲν ἀληθῶς τις ἢ μὴ τούτων εἴρηκε, χαλεπὸν καὶ πλημμελὲς οὕτω μεγάλα κλεινοῖς καὶ παλαιοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐπιτιμᾶν· ἐκεῖνο δὲ ἀνεπίφθονον ἀποφήνασθαι [ΘΕΑΙ.] Τὸ ποῖον; [ΞΕ.] Ὅτι λίαν τῶν πολλῶν ἡμῶν ὑπεριδόντες ὀλιγώρησαν· οὐδὲν γὰρ φροντίσαντες εἶτ’ ἐπακολουθοῦμεν αὐτοῖς λέγουσιν [243b] εἶτε ἀπολειπόμεθα, περαίνουσι τὸ σφέτερον αὐτῶν ἕκαστοι. [ΘΕΑΙ.] Πῶς λέγεις; [ΞΕ.] Ὅταν τις αὐτῶν φθέγγηται λέγων ὡς ἔστιν ἢ γέγονεν ἢ γίγνεται πολλά ἢ ἓν ἢ δύο, καὶ θερμὸν αὐτῶν ψυχρῶς συγκεραννύμενον, ἄλλοθι πη διακρίσεις καὶ συγκρίσεις ὑποτιθεῖς, τούτων, ὦ Θεαίτητε, ἕκαστοτε σύ τι πρὸς θεῶν συνίης ὅτι λέγουσιν; ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὅτε μὲν ἦν νεώτερος, τοῦτό τε τὸ νῦν ἀπορούμενον ὅπότε τις εἴποι, τὸ μὴ ὄν, ἀκριβῶς ὤμην συσιέναι. νῦν δὲ ὄρας ἴν’ ἐσμὲν αὐτοῦ πέρι τῆς ἀπορίας. [243c] [ΘΕΑΙ.] Ὅρῶ.

- 13 Cf. 245e–246e. See 246a4–5: *ἔοικε γε ἐν αὐτοῖς οἷον γιγαντομαχία τις εἶναι διὰ τὴν ἀμφισβήτησιν περὶ τῆς οὐσίας πρὸς ἀλλήλους*. The “earth-born” (σπαρτοὶ τε καὶ αὐτόχθονες, 247c5; τοὺς γηγενεῖς, 248c1–2) Giants are identified as radical ontological corporealists, who bring down to earth all things from heaven and the invisible [realm] (246a). The other side (later on called “the friends of forms” (τοὺς τῶν εἰδῶν φίλους, 248a4) is represented as “contending vehemently that some intelligible and incorporeal forms are the true reality” (νοητὰ ἄττα καὶ ἀσώματα εἶδη βιαζόμενοι τὴν ἀληθινὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι, 246b6–7). The contrast mobilism *versus* staticism appears at 249b–250a, and the apparent conclusion is that “what is and the all consist both in everything that is immobile and everything that is moved” (ὅσα ἀκίνητα καὶ κεινημένα, τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν συναμφότερα, 249d3–4).
- 14 There is a noteworthy recurrence of these two words in the texts both of Parmenides – for *δόδος* cf. (DK28) B1, 2, 27; B2, 2; B6, 3; B7, 3, B8, 1 and 18; for *τὰ δοκοῦντα*, B1, 31 – and Heraclitus – for *δόδος* cf. (DK22) B60, B45, B59, B103; for *δοκέοντα*, B28a.

refer here to opinions and judgments that might turn out to be without rational foundation, rather than simply to empirical cognition, and probably (and ironically) allude in this context to Parmenides' absolute proscription of "what is not". The whole philosophical tradition is presented as being ontologically-oriented: the common object of all the different views is definition of "the real" or "what is" (τὸ ὄν), or, alternatively, "how many and which existing things there are"¹⁵. It's noteworthy that ontological 'monism' is attributed exclusively to the Eleatics, while all others are presented as adherents of some type of 'pluralism'. A second common trait is the carelessness with which all the particular thinkers, or schools, are said to treat their public, each one developing his thesis to its conclusion, without worrying about anything else (243a–b). On the one hand, they all expound their theories as if they were myths¹⁶ (hence, as if we, their hearers or readers, were children). On the other hand, the abundant diversity of the proposals and the lack of clarity of the expositions in which they are embedded make it very hard for plain folk to understand them.

The identity of the upholders of the different theses is mostly left in the dark. It has been conjectured that proponents of the duality of the real might include Alcmaeon and the Milesians, especially Anaximander and Anaximenes, as well as Archelaus; the thesis of three ὄντα might refer to Pherecides and/or Ion of Chios, and maybe even to Hesiod. The reference to the Eleatic ἔθνος is particularly interesting, not only because of the roles of Xenophanes, Zeno, and Melissus of Samos, but also because of the way in which their alleged common basic tenet is worded: "that what is called 'all things' is a single entity" (ὡς ἑνὸς ὄντος τῶν πάντων καλουμένων). Although this way of putting it is superficially consistent with the Socratic characterization (in the *Parmenides*) of Eleatic monism, in which Parmenides himself appears as the proponent of

15 The theme of Plato's account of the ideas of previous thinkers as a pioneering history of philosophy would require a more detailed treatment of other relevant passages in the corpus, such as *Phaedo* 96a ff. and *Theaetetus* 152a ff.

16 The reference to μῦθοι as a generic characteristic in the style of the different pre-Socratic discourses is not far off the mark, in some way or another. It certainly has a basis in the case of Parmenides himself (it is especially evident, but not exclusively present, in the Proem; in fact, μῦθος is the very word the nameless Goddess uses for her own take on Truth at (DK28) B2, 1 and (DK28) B8, 1), as well as in the instances of Empedocles and Heraclitus. Μῦθόν is the object of διηγείσθαι at 242c8, which recalls διηγέεσθαι in Heraclitus' Proem, at (DK22) B1.

the One (τὸ ἓν), while Zeno is the denier of plurality¹⁷, the Foreigner's formulation lends itself naturally to different interpretations. One must note the potential difficulties concerning the ontological status of πάντα, since the expression “all things” is the object of the action of naming, and not really on a par with being a “single entity” (ἐν ὄν). This combination of unity and total plurality does not look like what we do find directly in the preserved fragments of any and all of the four alleged members of the Eleatic “school”¹⁸ (and it can be doubted whether such a way of putting it would be consistent with the kind of monism that is usually said to define Eleaticism). Instead, the joining of ‘unity’ and ‘all things’ strongly recalls some of Heraclitus' fragments¹⁹, which are also recurrently echoed by Empedocles²⁰. In any case, this Heraclitean characterization of a generic Eleatic doctrine, however problematic, serves well its immediate contextual purpose of offering a unified view of the internal diversity of pre-Platonic philosophy. The upshot seems to be that no one has provided adequate philosophical grounding for granting some reality to what is not.

When he contrasts the Ionian and the Sicilian Muses with one another, the Foreigner also implicitly sets them apart as a pair from the rest, and puts them into a class by themselves. This suggests that neither Heraclitus nor Empedocles is viewed from the same standpoint as the others,

17 *Parm.* 128a8–b1: ἐν φῆς [*sc.* Parmenides] εἶναι τὸ πᾶν, 128b2: οὐ πολλὰ φησιν [*sc.* Zeno] εἶναι. 128b3–4: τὸ οὖν τὸν μὲν ἐν φάναι, τὸν δὲ μὴ πολλὰ.

18 *Cf.* Xenophanes (DK21) B24: εἷς θεός, ἐν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος and B25: νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει; taken together, these fragments seem to imply difference, not identity, between the one supreme god and all things. Parmenides (DK28) B8, 5–6: ὁμοῦ πᾶν, ἐν, συνεχές is the only instance of unity as a predicate of τὸ ἓν, in which it is coupled with the phrase “all together” (or “all at once”; notice that πᾶν is in the neuter singular and without article); Parmenides nowhere connects the unity (oneness, uniqueness) of ‘what is’ with ‘all things’, πάντα, in the plural form, in the fragments of Truth (excluding here the three uses in B1, vv. 3, 28 and 32, and B6, 9, where I take πάντων as masculine), but uses πάντα recurrently in the fragments of Doxa (DK28 B8, 60; B9, B10, B12 [*bis*], B13). Zeno (DK29) B2 excludes all possibility of interpreting πολλά as even remotely compatible (let alone as ‘the same’) with ἐν. Melissus' One at (DK30) B8, 1, ἐν μόνον ἔστιν, and at B8, 2, οἷόν περ ἐγὼ φημι τὸ ἐν εἶναι, is explicitly exclusive of πολλά.

19 *E.g.* (DK22) B50: ἐν πάντα, (DK22) B10: ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἐνός πάντα. *Cf.* (DK22) B41; and also (DK22) B1, where λόγος takes the role of ἐν, which remains implicit there but gradually comes out in (DK22) B114+B2, and is brought fully into view in the notion of the ξυνῶ πάντων.

20 *E.g.*, (DK31) B17.7. *Cf.* (DK31) B20, 2; (DK31) B35, 5.

as mere variants within pluralistic or monistic schemes. Instead, they are both said to have learned better, and to have chosen to combine unity and plurality as complementary predicates of the real. Just as the core doctrine of the Eleatics was put into Heraclitean language, Heraclitus' thesis is then also blended with the Eleatic $\delta\upsilon\nu$. It is a nice touch that, after making the Eleatic Foreigner complain about the mythic form in which philosophical theories about reality are couched, Plato has him indulge in some mythological image-making of his own when he symbolically alludes to both thinkers as literally muses themselves.

The stricter view, which is undoubtedly Heraclitus', is credited with a simultaneous and permanent opposition between the one and the many, which are thus integrated or harmonized into a unity of their own. The milder, more relaxed stance of Empedocles makes the unity of the one and the many happen "by turns", that is, successively or diachronically, under the influence of the cosmic forces of Friendship and Hate. In the case of Empedocles, the focus seems to be on the dynamic identity and unity of the cosmic cycle.

With regard to Heraclitus, the Foreigner yields what looks like a possible quotation: "being at variance, [it] always agrees" ($\delta\iota\alpha\phi\epsilon\rho\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota\ \sigma\upsilon\mu\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$). That this is a genuine fragment is the opinion of Serge Mouraviev, who includes it as Fragment 83B in his edition²¹. But about this some legitimate questions can be raised. First and foremost, Plato's literary practice does not make such a verbatim quotation likely, and it is not impossible that Plato himself coined this peculiar polar formula, closely imitating Heraclitus' language and style. Also, the grammatical subject seems to be "the real" ($\tau\acute{o}\ \delta\upsilon\nu$), which would be very hard to pin on Heraclitus. And, on the face of the Heraclitean $\sigma\upsilon\mu\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu\ \delta\iota\alpha\phi\epsilon\rho\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$ of (DK) B10, and the whole text of (DK22) B51, there is nothing in the Foreigner's quotation that we do not find elsewhere in the Heraclitean fragments, including the third word, $\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota$, the Heraclitean usage of which is documented in several other frag-

21 Cf. Mouraviev (2006a), (2006b) and (2006c), *ad loc.* Mouraviev argues that "Il suffit de comparer F 83B avec F 51 pour constater que, malgré une ressemblance de sens certaine, ces textes ne sont ni identiques ni réductibles l'un à l'autre: deux des trois mots de F 83B sont absents de F 51; seul un mot de F 51 apparaît dans F 83B. Il est donc plus prudent d'y voir deux citations différentes relevant d'un même contexte original que des versions d'un même fragment." (Mouraviev [2006c] 100)

ments²². In the best doxographical version, that of Hippolytus, (DK22) B51 reads²³:

οὐ ξυνιαῖσιν ὄκως διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῶι ὁμολογέει
παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη ὄκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης.

‘They don’t understand how, being at variance, it agrees with itself:
A back-turning harmony, like that of the bow and the lyre.’

Interpretive problems have been raised in Heraclitean scholarship about the meaning of both words in the formula παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη and about the way in which the bow and the lyre are supposed to be an illustration or an example of the “back-turning harmony” (which, in turn, is meant to make clearer how the divergent agrees with itself). Most interpretations oscillate between a static and a more dynamic reading of the last clause, usually taking for granted that the bodily structure of both instruments is the common reference of the two separate images that would reiterate the same phenomenon. A better reading, yielding a more unified sense of the unity of the pair, could start by pointing out that bow and lyre are traditionally emblematic of Apollo, who would appear to be alluded to as a symbol for the hidden harmony of warfare and music, which is just one step away from the Heraclitean theme of the unity of death and life.

Now, whether *Sophist* 242e2–3 is an independent fragment, or merely a reminiscence or a free paraphrase of Heraclitus’ (DK22) B51

22 *I. e.* (DK22) B1, used probably of the λόγος ‘being *always* this’ (τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ); (DK22) B30, used of the uncreated, eternal κόσμος which “*ever* was and is and will be *ever*-living fire” (ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰεζῶων) and, I believe, also B6, of the “*always* new” (ἀεὶ νέος) sun. On this last fragment, see Hülsz (2012b).

23 For a different perspective (and a different text), see Mouraviev’s (2006a), (2006b), (2006c) notes *ad* (DK22) B51. He argues for a reconstruction inserting <πολλοὶ> after ξυνιαῖσιν (to supply a likely grammatical subject and for metrical reasons) and <ἐν> before διαφερόμενον (relying heavily on the *Symposium* passage and proposing a more complex interpretation involving the text of B50, which also contains ἐν), and he corrects ὁμολογέει to ὁμολογεῖ (2006c, 62). Another interesting possibility would be to read ὁμολογεῖ ἐν, which would yield the same sense. I find his reasons interesting, but insufficient to change the received text. Even if hard to prove, Mouraviev’s reading certainly makes clearer the ontological focus of Heraclitus: “*Many* don’t understand how *the one*, being at variance, agrees with itself: a back-turning harmony, like that of the bow and the lyre” (my translation). If anything, it might be objected that this reading brings a little too much Platonic clarity to the original text’s deliberate ambiguity and lack of precise reference.

and (DK22) B10 (among other fragments), it is significant that Plato picks up again the same point that he had touched upon at *Symposium* 187a4–5, where Eryximachus is made to quote the fragment as follows:

... ‘the one... by differing from itself is brought together with itself, as the harmony of the bow and the lyre’...

...τὸ ἐν...διαφερόμενον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρεσθαι, ὥσπερ ἄρμονίαν τόξου τε καὶ λύρας...

He then goes on to denounce Heraclitus of being guilty of ἀλογία. It should be noted that the quotation is not verbatim, and that Eryximachus’ version is both incomplete and probably also supplemented at crucial points. But, regardless of these shortcomings, it still brings out one of Heraclitus genuine and basic tenets, the harmony (or unity, or identity) of opposites. It is also revealing that Eryximachus’ main point, in his criticism of the incorrectness of Heraclitean language, is the absurdity of harmonizing *simultaneous* opposites, which, in his view, can only be integrated successively or diachronically. Plato makes him overlook, of course, the fact that simultaneous opposition can be rationally defensible as long as contrary predicates are attributed to the object in different relations or in different senses. So the Platonic joke is on Eryximachus: the good doctor, pretending to know better than Heraclitus himself what he meant, inadvertently becomes an illustrative example of those ἀξύνετοι²⁴ to whom the omitted part of (DK22) B51 refers: he certainly does not understand *how* that which diverges from itself in fact agrees with itself. Plato, on the other hand, may make Eryximachus openly criticize Heraclitus, but he surely knows better. We need not go far, for within the *Symposium* itself deeper philosophical affinities with Heraclitus are revealed through Socrates’ voicing of Diotima’s teachings²⁵.

24 The reference to “the many” or simply to “men” as lacking in understanding is also immediately apparent at (DK 22) B1 and B34 where this very word recurs.

25 At 206d ff., the so-called ‘lesser mysteries’, where “generation” (ἡ γέννησις, ‘engendering’, 206e8, cf. 208e3, παιδογονία) is said to be the only way that mortals can “live forever and be immortal” (ἀεὶ τε εἶναι καὶ ἀθάνατος, 207d2). “Mortal nature” (θνητὴ φύσις) achieves immortality by reproduction, ὅτι αἰεὶ καταλείπει ἕτερον νέον ἀντὶ τοῦ παλαιοῦ, “because it always leaves behind a different new being instead of the old one” (207d3). The living mortal creature “is called the same, but is forever becoming new” (ὁ αὐτὸς καλεῖται, ἀλλὰ νέος αἰεὶ γιγνώμενος, 207d7). This doesn’t look like Platonic immortality in the *Phaedo*, since it admits of somatic and psychic modes and even of degrees (cf. ἀθανατωτέρων at 209c7). The language and the dynamic framework of the passage, centered in ἡ θνητὴ φύσις, suggest the opposed notion, that of a φύσις ἀθάνατος, and recall sev-

Both Platonic passages, then, agree with one another, and with Heraclitus himself. It can now be seen that this way of characterizing Heraclitus' position (in both cases: τὸ ἐν διαφερόμενον αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρεσθαι and τὸ ὄν διαφερόμενον ἄει συμφέρεται) does not attribute to him anything that remotely recalls the relativistic model of Universal Flux, or at any rate, a radical version of it. It will be easily perceived here that these formulations of his thesis not only imply, but explicitly affirm, being, unity and self-identity, which in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* were openly and insistently said to be lacking in the allegedly Heraclitean 'rheontological' model. In the *Sophist* passage Heraclitus' main thesis is presented faithfully as an ontological one: the real is an eternal and dynamic unity that consists in its own permanent and internal opposition. Unity and identity of opposites turn out to be the metaphysical backbone that gives rational structure and stability to Becoming and all sensible things.

In spite of the critical purpose of Eryximachus' invocation of Heraclitus' central thesis, the *Symposium* passage shows that Plato was well aware (at a relatively early stage of his development) of Heraclitus' ontological views on rationality, identity, and reality. The *Sophist* passage shows he had not forgotten this (and, perhaps more crucially, it suggests that Heraclitus' image in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* should not be taken at face value). The brief allusion to Heraclitus anticipates the euporetic outcome of the argument of the dialogue as a whole, and is a testimony of Plato's awareness of the sources that influenced his own thought. Plato's revolutionary ontological proposal in the *Sophist* appears to be inspired by the Heraclitean Ionian Muses, in particular by a non-Eleatic concept of unity or oneness, as synthetic, dynamic and complex sameness rather than as a rigid self-identity.

eral fragments of Heraclitus. Possibly relevant are (DK22) B6, B12, B20, B27, B29, B36, B62, B88, and B123. On φύσις ἀθάνατος see Euripides fr. 910, ἀθανάτου . . . φύσεως κόσμον ἀγήρων. In context, this passage finds its culmination in the description of the sudden vision of "something wonderfully beautiful in its nature" (...ἐξαίφνης κατόψεταί τι θαυμαστόν τὴν φύσιν καλόν, 210e5), a nature immediately described as ἄει ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον (211a1).

Does Plato refute Parmenides?

Denis O'Brien

*One thing I learned from Wittgenstein,
in part from the Tractatus but still more
from personal contact, is that philosophical
mistakes are often not refutable falsehoods
but confusions.¹*

I have a couple of times ventured to suggest that in the *Sophist* Plato does not refute Parmenides.² The reaction has been, to say the least, hostile.³ Hostile, with more than a touch of disapproval. You might have thought I had suggested that the Queen of England was a man. The suggestion was not only false, but foolish. A mere eye-catcher. Absurd, and unseemly.

I

I can of course see why. If Plato hasn't refuted Parmenides, then who has? And if Parmenides hasn't been refuted, then we are living in a very strange world indeed. The persons you see around you, the light coming in from the windows, the very words you hear, are all an illusion. They are nothing but a 'name'. For that is what Parmenides claims to show.

τῷ πάντ' ὄνομ' ἔσται
ὅσσα βροτοὶ κατέθεντο, πεποιθότες εἶναι ἀληθῆ,
γίγνεσθαι τε καὶ ἄλλυσθαι, εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί,
καὶ τόπον ἀλλάσσειν διὰ τε χροῶν φανὸν ἀμείβειν.

'They will therefore be no more than a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing

1 Geach (1991) 13.

2 O'Brien (1995) 87–88, (2000) 94–98.

3 Dixsaut (2000) 269 n. 2. Notomi (2007) 167–187.

away, as being and not being, and as changing place and as altering their bright colour'.⁴

'No more than a name...' The claim is, on the face of it, so outrageous that there is an obvious temptation to try and give the words a different and less radical meaning. The things that mortals see and believe in, 'convinced they are true', are 'a name for the whole'. With this reading, we have to understand πάντι, a dative, instead of πάντα, a nominative, while τῷ has to be taken, not as an independent use of the pronoun ('therefore'), the meaning it frequently has in Homer, but as tied to the word that follows (τῷ πάντι, 'for the whole'). But there is no good parallel for an elision of the final vowel of the dative, the relative pronoun that follows (ὅσσα) calls out for a plural antecedent, and the sentence as a whole reads very oddly if it has no syntactical connection with the words that precede.

No: I am afraid that Parmenides really does say that everything we see around us, convinced it is true, is but a 'name'. With the result that Plato had every reason for wanting to refute Parmenides, and that we have every reason for hoping that he succeeded.⁵

4 Fr. 8.38–41. The text and translation of Parmenides' verses quoted here and below are taken from O'Brien (1987). Disputed details are dealt with at more length in O'Brien (2000). In adding 'no more than' (cf. fr. 8.38), I translate *ad sensum*. See the Additional Note at the end of this article.

5 To return, however briefly, to the translation. The very expression τὸ πᾶν ('the all', 'the universe') I believe would be an anachronism in the verses of Parmenides, despite Young Socrates' use of the expression in words addressed to Parmenides in Plato's dialogue of that name (128a8–b1: ἐν φῆς εἶναι τὸ πᾶν, 'the all you say is one'). Luc Brisson is merely kicking against the goad when he persists in taking the two words as a direct quotation from some otherwise unrecorded part of the poem. See his 'reply', (2005), to O'Brien (2005). An alternative to the syntax adopted above would be to take the dative (v. 38: τῷ) as a repetition of the demonstrative pronoun in the verse preceding (v. 37: τὸ γέ), both words referring to 'what is', with the meaning therefore 'all things are a name *for it* (τῷ)'. Such a construction is not impossible, and the meaning that results is perhaps not too far a cry from the Stranger's summary of the Eleatic thesis in the *Sophist* (242d5–6: ἐνὸς ὄντος τῶν πάντων καλουμένων, 'what we call all things are one'). A consecutive use of the pronoun, here as earlier in the same fragment (v. 25: τῷ, 'therefore'), nonetheless seems to me fit the context better. The four verses (vv. 38–41) mark the consequence to be drawn from the long stretch of argument that precedes (vv. 6–38), while the verses that follow (vv. 42–49) conclude the goddess' account of the first Way by spelling out what it is that is not a mere 'name', and therefore the description of 'what is' as a homogeneous sphere.

II

Not only is it obvious why Plato should want to refute Parmenides; it also seems clear enough, to many readers of Plato's *Sophist*, that he no less obviously claims to do so. When the Stranger of Plato's dialogue introduces Parmenides (237a3–b3), he quotes a pair of verses giving voice to what are called elsewhere in the poem the 'opinions of mortals' (fr. 1.30 and 8.51–52), summarised in the pithy sentence 'things that are not, are' (237a8 = fr. 7.1: εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα). Those words are explained by the words quoted above. Mortals believe that the things they see around them both 'are' and 'are not' (fr. 8.40: εἶναι τε καὶ οὐχί), since they see them 'coming into being', emerging therefore from *non-being* into *being*, and 'passing away', disappearing therefore from *being* into *non-being*. It is that (false) belief, so Parmenides claims, that leads them to say, of 'things that are not', that they 'are'.

Parmenides himself condemns such an obvious contradiction. The verses the Stranger has quoted (fr. 7.1–2: 'things that are not, are') are therefore introduced to illustrate Parmenides' firm *repudiation* of the so-called 'opinions of mortals'. Parmenides, so the Stranger tells us, in introducing his quotation, 'bore witness *against*' the claim that 'things that are not, are' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο).

If I italicise the preposition, it is to emphasise that the prefix of the verb (ἀπο-) has here a negative meaning (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο, 'bore witness *against*'). Current dictionaries give Plato's use of the prefix, in our text, a positive meaning, 'maintained stoutly'.⁶ But that cannot be the meaning here. The verb, in the *Sophist*, is preceded by, and governs, a demonstrative pronoun (237a6: τοῦτο), which both looks back to the words 'what is not, is' in the sentence but one preceding (237a3–4: τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι), and looks forward to those same words, cast as a plural, in the first of the two verses quoted from Parmenides, 'things that are not, are' (237a8 = fr. 7.1: εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα).⁷ With such words 'understood' as the object of the verb that introduces the quotation, the meaning can-

6 LSJ, *s.v.* (p. 209). There has been no correction in either the *Supplement* (1968) or the *Revised Supplement* (1996). See also Adrados (1991), *s.v.*, 'mantener firmemente'.

7 For this 'double' use of the pronoun (summarising what goes before, anticipating what follows), see Riddell (1877) 126–127 (§18), with a close parallel in *Theaetetus* 189e6–190a2.

not but be the meaning adopted here (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο, 'bore witness *against*').

After a long and complex argument, the Stranger of Plato's dialogue quotes the same pair of verses a second time (258d2–3), but now to flaunt his disagreement with Parmenides (258d5–e3). The Stranger now thoroughly approves of the form of words quoted as illustrating the 'opinions of mortals'. Rightly understood, so he tells us, the words 'things that are not, are', far from stating a contradiction, express a necessary and universal truth (258e6–259b6). The Stranger therefore *disagrees* with Parmenides' *repudiation* of the words 'things that are not, are'.

In this context, so I shall be told, disagreement cannot but imply refutation. If one and the same form of words ('things that are not, are') is *false* for Parmenides and held to be *true* by Plato, then this can imply only that Plato claims to have refuted Parmenides. *Quod erat demonstrandum*.

III

The case against me begins to look black. It can easily be made to look even blacker. Not only, so my adversaries will insist, does Plato claim to refute Parmenides; he tells us in advance that this is what he plans to do. Such is the clear implication, so I shall be told, when the Stranger warns of the crime of 'parricide'.⁸ He will be constrained, so he tells Theaetetus, to lay violent hands on the paternal *logos* (241d1–6; cf. 242a1–3), in order to show (241d6–7) that 'what *is not*' (τὸ μὴ ὄν) 'is, to a certain extent' (ἔστι κατά τι), and that 'what *is*' (τὸ ὄν), conversely, 'is *not*, in a way' (οὐκ ἔστι πῃ).

Parmenides' opening declaration of two 'Ways of enquiry', not quoted by Plato, but recorded by both Simplicius and Proclus (fr. 2), excludes either qualification. The first Way states both 'is' and 'cannot not be' (cf. v. 3: ἡ μὲν [*sc.* ὁδός] ὅπως ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἔστι μὴ εἶναι), and therefore excludes the possibility that what *is* might *not be*. The second Way states that 'is not' and 'it is necessary not to be' (v. 5: ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεὼν ἔστι μὴ εἶναι), and therefore excludes the possibility that what *is* might *be*.

By showing that, on the contrary, being and non-being are not mutually exclusive—that what *is*, is *not* 'in a way' and that what *is not*, is 'to a

8 'Parricide' (241d3: πατρολοῖαν) or, as I am reminded, any lesser act of violence against one's parent. See LSJ, *s.v.*, 'one who slays or strikes his father' (p. 1348).

certain extent’—the Stranger will adopt a position diametrically opposed to that of Parmenides. That is why he warns Theaetetus that he will have to ‘lay violent hands’ on the paternal *logos* (242a1–3), and that is what, in effect, he claims to have done when, in the later passage, he repeats, with approval, the verses summarising the ‘opinions of mortals’ (258d1–e3).

If it is true that ‘things that are not, are’, so he explains at some length, following his second quotation (258e6–259b6), it is because what is ‘other than being’, is at one and the same time ‘being’ (ὄν), since it participates in being, ‘non-being’ (μὴ ὄν), since it is other than being (cf. 259a6–b1), whereas ‘being’ itself, since it is other than all the other forms, is not any one of them, and therefore ‘time and again is not’ (259b1–5: *μυρία ἐπὶ μυρίοις οὐκ ἔστί*).

‘Plain enough for a blind man to see’, as the Stranger remarked when he initially warned of the possibility of parricide (241d9–e1). In the lines that follow his warning, the words ‘refute’ and ‘refutation’ are thick on the ground (241d9–242b5: no less than five occurrences of noun or verb in no more than twenty-three lines of text). In this context, so I will be sharply told, ‘parricide’ cannot but imply ‘refutation’. Again therefore, *Quod erat demonstrandum*. The Stranger, so I shall be told, warns of a parricide, and commits a parricide. Plato says he will refute Parmenides, and he does so.

IV

So far, there is just one fly in the ointment. The words ‘refute’ and ‘refutation’ crop up a couple of pages before the allusion to parricide (238d4–7 and 239b1–5). Presumably—so at least it is devoutly to be hoped by those who like a simple life—the person who does the refuting, here too, is Plato, and the person who gets refuted, here too, is Parmenides. That is indeed the firm conviction of my most recent and most vociferous critic, Noburu Notomi. Plato’s Stranger, so he concludes, has already ‘refuted’ Parmenides, even before the famous passage where Plato warns of parricide.⁹ But that is not quite how things work out.¹⁰

9 Notomi (2007) 180–181.

10 A more detailed examination of the textual basis claimed for Notomi’s thesis is included in a separate and longer piece (as yet unpublished). In the present article, I attempt to isolate the conceptual issue at stake, the purpose of Plato’s criticism in relation to what Parmenides says, and implies, of the ‘opinions of

Immediately following his first quotation from Parmenides, the Stranger asks Theaetetus: 'We do, I suppose, dare give utterance to what is not in any way at all?' (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν τολμῶμεν πρὸς φθέγγεσθαι;) Theaetetus instinctively replies: 'Why on earth not?' (237b9: πῶς γὰρ οὐ;) But he is soon forced to change his tune (237b10–e7). The Stranger soon brings home to him that, if we really think about what we mean, when we speak of 'what is not in any way at all', then we have to admit that we don't, and can't, speak of it, if only because, in speaking of it, we have to choose between singular and dual or plural (cf. 237d9–10), despite the fact that, since there isn't any of it (since 'what is not' is here specifically said to be 'not in any way at all'), it can't be any one of the three.

The argument is then given an extra twist (238a1–239c3). If your interlocutor can't speak of 'what is not, in and by itself' (238c9: τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό), then you yourself can't speak of it either, not even in order to say you can't speak of it. If 'what is not, in and by itself' is 'unutterable', then you contradict yourself as soon as you attempt to 'utter' what you have argued to be 'unutterable' (238c8–10: φθέγγεσθαι, ἀφθεγκτον).

So it is that non-being has the last laugh. It reduces the person who seeks to 'refute' it (τὸν ἐλέγχοντα) to *aporia*, because, whenever somebody tries to 'refute' it (ἐλέγχειν), he is forced to contradict himself, even as he does so (238d4–7). Instead of you reducing your opponent to contradiction, which is what you naturally try to do when you set out to refute someone, you are reduced to contradiction yourself. Hoist with your own petard. *L'arroseur arrosé*. The would-be refuter self-refuted.

All great fun. We (the readers) are obviously intended to share the author's glee at such a pretty paradox, and to revel (however discreetly) in Theaetetus' bewilderment, until the Stranger provisionally lets him off the hook by a change of tack (239c4–8). But where has all this

mortals', in the words that are twice quoted from his poem (fr. 7.1–2, quoted at 237a8–9 and 258d2–3). The place of the Stranger's criticism of Parmenides in the structure of the dialogue as a whole (how it is that Parmenides comes to be quoted in defence of the Sophist, the relation of the 'opinions of mortals' to the false *logos*, and the Stranger's own analysis of falsity in thought and speech) is not part of my present project. For a detailed study, see the two publications quoted in n. 2 above. (A word of encouragement for those who may need it: the work in French has a fifteen-page summary in English, *Le Non-Être, Deux études sur le 'Sophiste' de Platon*, 167–181.)

left us with regard to Plato and Parmenides and the ‘opinions of mortals’? With such fun and games, it is all too easy to lose track of the context, and to forget who is doing the refuting and who is being refuted.

V

When Theaetetus started off, so glibly and so naïvely, by agreeing that of course we ‘dare’ speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’ (237b9: ‘Why on earth not?’), he was answering as the ‘mortals’ of Parmenides’ poem would have been expected to answer, in so far as it was they who had said, of ‘things that are not’, that they ‘are’, and who may therefore be supposed to have no objection to ‘daring’ to speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’.

For that is what, by implication, they ‘dare’ to do in Parmenides’ poem. Taking no account of the modal incompatibility of the two Ways (fr. 2.3 and 5: ‘...cannot not be’, ‘...must not be’), ‘two-headed’ mortals (fr. 6.5) add the ‘being’ of the first Way to the ‘non-being’ of the second Way, when they speak of all the many things that they see and feel around them as so many ‘things that are not’, and yet continue to assert, of those same ‘things that are not’, that they ‘are’ (fr. 7.1–2).¹¹ When Theaetetus is brought up short by the Stranger, on the following pages of the dialogue (237b10–239c3), and is forced to admit that no, you can’t speak, nor even think, of ‘what is not in any way at all’, it is therefore the mortals of Parmenides’ poem who are refuted, and it is the Stranger, on Parmenides’ behalf, who does the refuting.

That conclusion will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the fragments of Parmenides’ poem. When Parmenides introduces the second Way, he follows this at once with: ‘You could hardly come to know what is not, nor could you tell it to others’ (fr. 2.7–8: οὐτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἔόν [...] οὐτε φράσαις). That too is exactly the point he insists on in his refutation of mortals, who are tempted to look for an origin of ‘what is’ and who may think to find it in ‘what is not’ (fr. 8.6–7). To which the sharp rejoinder is (fr. 8.7–9):

οὐτ’ ἐκ μὴ ἔόντος ἑάσω
φάσθαι σ’ οὐδὲ νοεῖν· οὐ γὰρ φατὸν οὐδὲ νοητὸν
ἔστιν ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι.

11 See the opening paragraph of §II above.

'I shall not let you say nor think that it comes out of not-being; for it cannot be said, nor thought, that "is not"'.¹²

When Theaetetus is brought to his knees and forced to admit that you can't 'think' or 'speak' of 'what is not in any way at all' (cf. 237b7–239c3), he is therefore *confirming* what Parmenides had said of the non-being of the second Way, and *repudiating*, as Parmenides himself had done, the claim made by mortals to speak of 'things that are not' and to say, of those same 'things that are not', that they 'are'.

The 'refutation' that is in question here (238d4–7), the 'refutation' that the Stranger speaks of as a gleeful turning-of-the-tables by non-being itself, rejoicing in the discomfiture of those who claim to speak of 'what is not in any way at all' (237b7–8), is therefore, in the context, at one and the same time, a 'refutation' by Parmenides of the mortals of Parmenides' poem and a 'refutation' by the Stranger of Theaetetus. A refutation by the Stranger, repeating and reinforcing Parmenides' own argument that the non-being of the second Way is both unspeakable and unthinkable. A refutation of the youthful Theaetetus when he answers, all unthinkingly, so obviously unaware of the deep and dangerous

12 The words quoted, here as earlier, are of course, in Parmenides' poem, given as the words of a goddess living beyond the portals of Night and Day (fr. 1.11), and the 'you' she is talking to is Parmenides, who speaks of himself in the first person in the opening verses of the Proem (fr. 1.1–23) and whom the goddess addresses as a 'young man' (α κούρος, fr. 1.24). In attributing to the author of the poem the words of the goddess, I am merely repeating Plato's own assumption, when he has the Stranger of the *Sophist* treat the words of the goddess (fr. 7.1–2) as Parmenides' personal 'testimony' (237b1). At the same time, I maintain the fiction that, within the poem, the youthful Parmenides, addressed by the goddess as 'you', is assigned the role of an as yet unconverted 'mortal', and therefore as someone who has to be firmly reminded of the initial statement of the two Ways, voiced at the beginning of the argument (fr. 2). The reader moved to complain that this is playing fast-and-loose with the text of the poem may also like to complain of my speaking, as I do occasionally, of 'Plato' when strictly I should refer to the Stranger of Plato's dialogue. As the author of the *Seventh letter* reminds his contemporaries, with not a little acerbity, no-one can claim to know what Plato himself thought (cf. 341b7–d2), if only because Plato never appears as a speaker in one of his own dialogues. In either case, in looking through the fiction of Parmenides' poem (and therefore taking Parmenides' goddess to be a spokeswoman for Parmenides) as in looking through the fiction of Plato's dialogue (and therefore taking Plato's Stranger to be a spokesman for Plato), my only aim is to make the argument less cumbersome for my reader.

waters lying ahead, that yes, of course we ‘dare utter’ the words ‘what is not in any way at all’. Why on earth not? We have just done so.

Such is the complexity of Plato’s dialogue. When the word ‘refute’ first appears in the text, following the initial quotation from the poem (238d4–7), the ‘refutation’ in question is not the Stranger’s refutation of Parmenides, as an all too simplistic reading of the text may lead a careless reader to suppose. No, not at all. The ‘refutation’ is a repetition, by the Stranger, of Parmenides’ refutation of the ‘opinions of mortals’. It is a refutation of their thoughtless assumption, shared at this point in the dialogue by Theaetetus, that we can think and speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’.

VI

It is true that in the *Sophist*, in the second part of the argument designed to refute the ‘opinions of mortals’ (238a1–239c3), the refuter is reduced to *aporia* and to self-contradiction (238d4–7), and is in that sense, so we may like to say, himself refuted. Does that mean that Parmenides is refuted—refuted because he cannot but contradict himself in attempting to refute those who would ‘dare’ speak of the unspeakable?

If you like. But Plato’s Stranger is in the same fix. The Stranger goes out of his way to emphasise that he is himself caught in the snares of self-contradiction and self-refutation. ‘It’s no use looking to me’, he says, ‘for the right way to talk about “what is not”’ (cf. 239b3–5). ‘I gave up the struggle long ago when faced with the refutation of what is not’ (cf. 239b1–3: ...περὶ τὸν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἔλεγχον).

That admission of helplessness is of course all part of the fun and games. The person—young Theaetetus—who starts off by claiming, all unthinkingly, that you can speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’ is easily refuted, but then the refuter himself is necessarily refuted by the same argument. If the person you are trying to refute can’t utter the words ‘what is not in any way at all’ without contradiction (since he has to speak of it as a singular, a dual or a plural, when the whole point is that there isn’t any of it, so that it can’t be any one of the three), then you, in attempting to refute him, can’t do so either—you can’t speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’, not even to convince of his error the person who claims that you can do so. With all the exhilarating tangles that ensue. To prove your adversary wrong, you have to

prove him right, since in saying that he can't do what he claims to do (speak of 'what is not in any way at all'), you have to do it yourself...

But before you—the reader and the critic of Plato's dialogue—lose yourself in that intoxicating tangle, please pause to note that, however much you entangle the tangle, it can hardly count as Plato's refutation of Parmenides. For Parmenides and Plato's Stranger are in the same boat. Both are out to persuade an uncomprehending interlocutor—the mortals of Parmenides' poem, the Theaetetus of the dialogue—that you cannot think or speak of what simply 'is not', of 'what is not in any way at all'. When Plato's Stranger revels in the point that to deny that you can think or speak of 'what is not' is already a confession of failure, since, by the very denial that you can speak of what is not, you have already spoken of what is not... he is no more than repeating, with baroque curlicues, Parmenides' own condemnation, in his poem, of the 'opinions' of mortals, who assume, as Theaetetus will do, that you can speak of what 'is not', construed as 'what is not in any way at all'.

VII

That is the minimal context for understanding the second reference to 'refutation' in the text of the *Sophist*, the Stranger's admission, as quoted above (239b1–5, looking back to 238d4–7), that he 'gave up the struggle long ago when faced with the refutation of what is not'. The Stranger's confession of impotence leaves Notomi's thesis in the doldrums.¹³ Even at this point in the dialogue, the 'refutation' in question, so Notomi claims, is Plato's refutation of Parmenides... Such a reading of the dialogue is hopelessly simplistic. Yes, Parmenides may have been 'refuted'. But no, not by Plato. For Plato's Stranger, no less than Parmenides, is a victim of the paradox that you cannot refute what is not, without refuting yourself as you do so. That is the whole point of the argument.

At this point my critic hurries forward, a little flushed and out of breath (at least I would be, if I were in his shoes). The difference between Plato and Parmenides, so he tells us, is a difference of self-awareness. Both Plato and Parmenides contradict themselves in uttering the unutterable. But at least Plato's Stranger is aware that he is contradicting himself. Parmenides contradicts himself, but without realising that he is

13 'Notomi's thesis': see above §IV, and the footnote at the end of this section.

doing so. Therefore (a little gulp) the ‘refutation of non-being’ (cf. 239b2–3) is to be read as a refutation of Parmenides. Plato’s Stranger knows that he is contradicting himself. Parmenides doesn’t. By drawing that distinction, Plato has therefore refuted Parmenides. Once again (perhaps a little less confidently), *Quod erat demonstrandum...*¹⁴

VIII

But is that so? Is it true that Parmenides has no knowledge of self-contradiction and self-refutation? When he first introduces the two Ways, of ‘being’ and ‘non-being’, he says (fr. 2.1–2):

εἰ δ’ ἄγ’ ἐγὼν ἐρέω, κόμισσαι δὲ σὺ μῦθον ἀκούσσας,
αἴπτερ ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός εἰσι νοῆσαι.

If, unlike many a recent commentator, you give his words the meaning they would obviously have for anyone who reads Parmenides, as he should, with the metre and the syntax of Homer ringing in his ears (and therefore with the adjective, μοῦναι, followed by the pause of the caesura, governing the infinitive, νοῆσαι, placed at the end of the verse), then the meaning will be:

‘Come now, I shall tell—and do you listen to my tale and take it well to heart—just what ways of enquiry there are, the only ones that can be thought of.’

‘The only ones that can be thought of’ (νοῆσαι). Clear enough. But later on Parmenides says, of the second Way (‘is not’), that it can’t be thought of, that it is ‘unthinkable’ (fr. 8.17: ἀνόητον). The play on words, the seeming contradiction, is surely deliberate. There are only two Ways you can ‘think of’ (fr. 2.2: νοῆσαι), and one of the two proves to be ‘unthinkable’ (fr. 8.17: ἀνόητον). You start off by ‘thinking’ of two ways, because you start off with ‘is’ (fr. 2.3), and then add a negation: ‘is not’ (fr. 2.5). But you are soon brought to realise that there is only one ‘real’ Way (fr. 8.18: ἐτήτυμον), the Way that says ‘is’ (fr. 8.16–

14 See again Notomi (2007) 180–181. If I present Notomi’s thesis in this semi-fictional (and, I fear, slightly disrespectful) form, it is because, even after reading Notomi’s pages several times, I am not at all sure that I have grasped quite what it is that the author thinks he is saying. The argument outlined above is the best I have been able to do by way of extracting from Notomi’s jumbled sentences the clear statement of a rational argument, however fallible.

18), because the second of the two Ways, 'the only ones that can be *thought of*' (fr. 2.2), is '*unthinkable*' (fr. 8.17), not a 'true' Way at all (fr. 8.17–18: ἀληθής).

Νοῆσαι (fr. 2.2), ἀνόητον (fr. 8.17). A deliberately contrived contradiction. You start off by 'thinking' of two Ways, only to be brought to realise that one of the two can't be thought of, is 'unthinkable'. That may not be quite what the Stranger of Plato's dialogue has said, but it comes dangerously close to it. Far too close, surely, for 'self-contradiction' or 'self-refutation' to count as Plato's 'refutation' of Parmenides. Parmenides recognises that non-being, construed as 'what is necessarily not' (cf. fr. 2.5–8), although it may start off as one of the only two Ways that can be 'thought of' (fr. 2.2), nonetheless, taken in isolation from the first, is not in fact 'thinkable' (fr. 8.17). Plato's Stranger does, if you like, go one better (238a1–239c3), in saying that, since what you claim to speak of can't even be spoken of, therefore, even in denying that you can speak of it, you contradict yourself in the very act of attempting to put your denial into words.

But if Parmenides has perhaps been upstaged, he has hardly been refuted. Parmenides never said that you could speak of 'what is not'. He does of course speak of it, as does Plato. But, like Plato, he does so, only to say that you can't speak of it, that it is 'unspeakable' (fr. 8.7–9: οὐ γὰρ φατόν...).¹⁵

IX

The distinction, if there is one, is surely far too finely drawn to count as Plato's much vaunted 'refutation' of Parmenides. Far from seeing Plato as 'refuting' Parmenides on this point, I can hardly see them as even disagreeing. For even if we allow that the Stranger, with his paradox of self-refutation, has gone one better than Parmenides, what difference does that make to the substantive issue? If your opponent says, of 'is not' or 'what is not', as Parmenides so clearly does (fr. 8.7–9), that you can't think of it or speak of it, have you 'refuted' him by insisting that no, you can't even utter the words without contradicting yourself?

Both Plato and Parmenides agree that you cannot speak of what is not, construed as what 'necessarily' is not (Parmenides), as 'what is not in any way at all' (Plato's Stranger). Plato adds the rider that you

15 For the quotation, see §V above.

can't even speak of 'what is not', construed as 'what is not, in and by itself', without contradiction. But what is the conclusion of either argument? Parmenides claims that you can't think or speak of 'what is not' (cf. fr. 2.5–7), simply because there is nothing there to 'know' (fr. 2.7–8), nothing therefore to 'speak' of or to 'think' of (fr. 8.7–9). When Plato says that you can't even utter the expression without contradiction, is the conclusion that he draws any different?

Does Plato possibly intend that, although you can't think of it, speak of it, or even utter the expression without contradiction, nonetheless 'what is not in any way at all' might, even so, exist? Surely not. But in that case Parmenides and Plato are in agreement. 'What is not in any way at all' (Plato), what 'necessarily' is not (Parmenides), is a mere *flatus vocis*, a *vox nihili*, hardly even a sheer blank, just nothing.

X

But if self-contradiction is not how Plato 'refutes' Parmenides, then how does he do it? It is at this point, I would dare to suggest, that the modern critic has to think the unthinkable. In the pages of the dialogue following the first quotation from Parmenides (237b10–239c3), the Stranger does not 'refute' Parmenides at all. The repeated allusions to 'refuting' and to 'refutation' in these pages of the dialogue (238d4–7: ἐλέγχοντα, ἐλέγχειν, 239b3: ἐλεγχον), following the first quotation from Parmenides (237a8–9, fr. 7.1–2), are not for one moment to be heard as the Stranger's 'refutation' of Parmenides.

Plato entirely agrees with Parmenides that 'what is not', if taken to mean 'what is necessarily not', 'what is not in any way at all', can't be thought of and can't be spoken of. If, as Plato's Stranger claims, the very expression can't be uttered without contradiction, then that is all to the good. Self-contradiction is all grist to a Parmenidean mill. What is not, construed either as what is necessarily not (the implication of Parmenides' statement of the second Way) or as 'what is not in any way at all' (the form of words with which the Stranger challenges Theaetetus), is just that. You can't think of it and you can't speak of it, simply because there is nothing there to think of or to speak of. The non-being of Parmenides' second Way is... except that now, of course, I can't complete the sentence. Because all it 'is'—*sit venia verbo!*—is sheer nothingness. There isn't any of it.

Where Plato's Stranger differs from Parmenides is in his analysis of the consequences that such a conclusion must entail. Plato's Stranger does not try to show that the non-being of the second Way, the non-being that Parmenides himself insists is 'unthinkable' and 'unspeakable', is anything other than... unthinkable and unspeakable, and even unutterable. What Plato—what Plato's Stranger—will aim to show is that the non-being that is unthinkable and unspeakable is not the non-being that is part of our daily discourse when, like the mortals of Parmenides' poem, we talk quite gaily and glibly, as we commonly do, of things that 'change their place and alter their bright colour', and indeed 'come into being and pass away, are and are not' (cf. fr. 8.40–41). That non-being, the non-being of our daily lives and our everyday discourse, Plato will define as the form of non-being, a form that, like any other, is instantiated in the world of becoming.

XI

The form of non-being, so the Stranger will argue, is that part of otherness that is opposed both to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3) and to 'the being of each thing' (258d7–e3).¹⁶ It is therefore, so the Stranger tells us, a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (cf. 258d6–7). A form that 'there turns out to *be*' because, like otherness and all the parts of otherness, it participates in being, and a form of 'what *is not*' because it is that one and only part of otherness that stands in opposition to being, both to being as form ('the nature of being') and to being as participated ('the being of each thing').

The part of otherness that is opposed to beauty or to justice is 'non-beautiful' or 'non-just'. The part of otherness that is opposed to being is therefore, likewise, 'non-being'. But with the inevitable difference that the part of otherness that is opposed to beauty, and that is therefore the 'non-beautiful' (one of an endless number of negative forms), does not participate in beauty, whereas the same cannot be said of the part of otherness opposed to being. Like all the parts of otherness, the very part of otherness that is opposed to being has, nonetheless, to participate in being, with the paradoxical consequence, essential to the Stranger's

16 'The being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου). For the reading, see §XV below.

whole concept of negation, that it is a form of ‘what is not’, but a form that ‘is’ (see again 258d6–7).

Negation, for Plato’s Stranger, is the result of participation in otherness, in whatever ‘part’ of otherness is specified by the quality or thing negated (non-just, non-beautiful...), including the very ‘part’ of otherness that is opposed to being, and that is therefore ‘non-being’. But otherness, like all the forms, participates in being, and therefore ‘is’. The part of otherness that is opposed to being cannot therefore not participate in being. Hence the paradox: the very part of otherness that is ‘other’ than being, and therefore ‘non-being’, participates in being, and therefore, like any and every other ‘part’ of otherness, ‘is’.¹⁷

XII

Like everything else, the form of non-being has to ‘be’. Like everything else, with, of course, the one exception of ‘what is not in any way at all’. Except of course that that one exception is not an exception, because... it isn’t anything at all. ‘What is not in any way at all’, if *per impossibile* there were any of it, would obviously not participate in being. Which is just why there isn’t any of it. What is not in any way at all is not... in any way at all. Therefore it isn’t the part of otherness that is non-being in so far as it is opposed to being. For the non-being that is opposed to being participates in being. What is not at all doesn’t participate in being, because, if it did, it wouldn’t be what it was, or rather what it isn’t, which is... well, just nothing at all.

I hope that (deliberate) little tangle will remind you of something. Self-contradiction. When Plato defines non-being as a ‘form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*’ (258d6–7), he is not out to prove that we can, after all, think and speak of ‘what is not in any

17 ‘Otherness’ (255d9–e1), and all the ‘parts’ of otherness (258a7–9), participate in being, including the very ‘part’ of otherness that is opposed to being (258a11–b7) and that is therefore ‘the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*’ (cf. 258d6: τὸ εἶδος ὃ τυγχάνει ὄν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος). For the general theory of ‘the parts of otherness’, summarised all too briefly in the preceding paragraphs, see 257c5–258c5. The underlying principle, introduced in the course of the Stranger’s analysis of the five ‘very great kinds’ (255e4–6), is that: ‘Each single thing is different from the rest, not in virtue of its own nature, but by reason of its participating in the form of otherness (τῆς ἰδέας τῆς θατέρου).’

way at all'. 'What is not in any way at all' is just that—what is not in any way at all. But the Stranger has now a new term and a new explanation of why we cannot think of it or speak of it: 'what is not in any way at all' would be, impossibly and inconceivably, a 'contrary' of being.

No form and no particular can participate in its contrary (cf. 257b1–c4). Take 'ugly' and 'beautiful' (my example). If what is not beautiful is ugly, then it participates in otherness in relation to beauty, both by not being identical to beauty and by not participating in beauty. Take 'small' and 'large' (the Stranger's example). If the small is the contrary of large, then it participates in otherness in relation to largeness, both by not being identical to largeness and by not participating in largeness.

It does not follow that lack of participation is a sufficient condition of contrariety. The equal (again the Stranger's example) does not participate in largeness, any more than does the small. But the equal, unlike the small, is not therefore the contrary of large. Although not a sufficient condition, lack of participation is nonetheless a necessary condition of contrariety. The small would not be the contrary of large were it to participate in largeness.

But the non-being that is the form of non-being does participate in being (see above). It cannot therefore be the contrary of being. The form of non-being is other than being, and is in that sense a negation of being, but we are specifically told that it is not therefore a contrary of being (258b2–3). There is no contrary of being, precisely because the contrary of being would have to 'be', impossibly, what did not participate in being—and there isn't anything that doesn't participate in being.¹⁸

18 The Stranger's emphatic denial that the part of otherness that is opposed to being is the contrary of being (258b2–3) will be repeated no less emphatically (see §XVII below) when he bids 'farewell' to the contrary of being (258e6–259a1), following his triumphant discovery of 'the form that there turns out to be, of what is *not*' (258d5–e3). For lack of participation as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of contrariety, see O'Brien (1995) 57–59. This is how I understand the implication of the Stranger's detailed descriptions of 'movement' and 'rest' (see esp. 250a8–10 coupled with 254d7–8, and the long account that runs from 255a4 to 256e4), together with his remarks on 'the large', 'the small' and 'the equal' (257b1–c4).

XIII

If I so labour the distinction between negation and contrariety, between the negation of being that is the ‘form of non-being’ and an impossible and inconceivable ‘contrary’ of being, it is because Plato’s theory of ‘the parts of otherness’ (257c5–258c5), and the account of contrariety that precedes it (257b1–c4), have so often and for so long been misunderstood. I pause to take account, very briefly, of only two examples, Owen’s misunderstanding of contrariety and Frede’s misunderstanding of negation.

Owen’s error is plain enough. In the preliminaries to his account of the ‘parts of otherness’ (257b1–c4), the Stranger speaks of both ‘equal’ and ‘small’ as a *negation* of large, since neither of the two participates in largeness, although only one of the two (the ‘small’) is the *contrary* of large. He does so, in order to prepare the way for the form of non-being which, like the ‘equal’, will prove to be a *negation* that is not a *contrary*.

Commenting on the passage, Owen totally subverts the Stranger’s purpose by writing of what is equal as ‘having in it something, in a broad sense some proportion, of both large and small’.¹⁹ Owen’s curious conception of ‘what is equal’ has no foundation in the text, and makes nonsense of Plato’s theory. Plato’s point is that what is equal does not participate at all in largeness (nor, for that matter, in smallness).

Two equal terms may, of course, be larger or smaller than some third thing; neither can be larger or smaller than the other. But although neither one of two equal terms participates in largeness (in relation to its pair), ‘the equal’ is not therefore the contrary of large, as distinct from what is small, which likewise does not participate in largeness, but differs from what is equal in being the contrary of large. The equal (as distinct from what is small) therefore provides an analogue for the form of non-being, in so far as, for non-being as for non-large (when exemplified by equality), negation does not imply contrariety.

There is, of course, the difference that the negation, for what is ‘equal’, excludes participation, whereas the negation for the form of non-being cannot exclude participation in the form that is negated (the form of being). But that is simply because any analogy has its limits. The Stranger’s immediate purpose, in introducing ‘large’, ‘small’ and ‘equal’, is simply to establish the general principle, that negation is not

19 Owen (1971) 235–236. Reprinted in Owen (1986) 112–113.

necessarily a contrariety, so preparing the way for his definition of the 'form of non-being'. The 'form of non-being' is a *negation* of being. It is not an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being.²⁰

XIV

Frede's misconception is a trifle more complex. Frede wrongly supposes that the non-beautiful is so in virtue of its opposition to whatever participates in beauty, and not in virtue of its opposition to the form of beauty.²¹ The text is against him. 'Non-beautiful' is the part of otherness opposed to 'the nature of the beautiful' (257d10–11: τῆς τοῦ καλοῦ φύσεως). 'Non-being' is the part of otherness opposed to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3: τῆς τοῦ ὄντος [*sc.* φύσεως]). In either case, the reference can hardly be other than to a form, respectively the form of beauty and the form of being.

So much is clear enough when, in the lines following the definition of 'non-beautiful' (257d4–e11), and immediately preceding his definition of 'non-being' (258a11–b3), the Stranger speaks of 'the nature of otherness' (ἡ θατέρου φύσις) as having already 'made its appearance' (cf. ἐφάνη) among 'things that are' (258a7–8). The Stranger is here looking back to the passage where the same 'nature of otherness' (τῆν θατέρου φύσιν) was included among the five major forms (255d9–e1) and where it is specifically referred to, in the sentence following, as 'the form of otherness' (255e5–6: τῆς ιδέας τῆς θατέρου).

20 To illustrate his point (257b1–c4), the Stranger deliberately chooses something that is 'not large' in an everyday sense. 'The equal' is by common consent 'not large', in so far as neither one of the two equal terms can be larger than the other. The implication, *pace* Owen, is that the equal (*qua* equal) does not therefore participate in largeness. It is true that even whatever is 'large' because it participates in largeness is at the same time 'not large' in so far as it is not identical to largeness. But that is not the everyday meaning of 'not large'. The difference between two things neither of which participates in largeness ('small' and 'equal') brings out more clearly the difference between negation and contrariety. Neither the small nor the equal participates in largeness. Both are therefore 'not large' in an everyday sense. But only one of the two is the contrary of large. For the emphatic denial that the form of non-being, although it designates a negation of being, is a contrary of being, see 248b2–3 (§XII above) and 258e6–259a1 (the Stranger's 'farewell', §XVII below).

21 Frede (1967) 85–89 (§C.II.4.b)).

The same expression ('the nature of...') is hardly likely to change its meaning within the space of a continuous, tightly worded stretch of argument. The successive references, by the Stranger and by Theaetetus, to 'the nature of the beautiful', 'the nature of otherness' and 'the nature of being', all three expressions relating to the new theory of the 'parts' of otherness (257c5–258c5), will be, in all three instances, a reference to the form.²²

It is true that, when Theaetetus is asked to find a 'name' for the part of otherness opposed to the beautiful, he appeals to what we call not beautiful 'in an everyday sense' (cf. 257d10: ἐκάστοτε), and therefore, so we may suppose, to what does not participate in beauty. But how could he do otherwise? The 'name' given to any form, positive or negative, can only ever be an extrapolation from the way we speak of all the many things around us. Theaetetus' appeal to our 'everyday' use of words is no indication at all, as Frede would appear to think it is, that the negative form now covers only lack of participation, and that what is 'non-beautiful' is therefore now restricted to whatever does not participate in beauty.

On the contrary, it will presumably be as true for 'beauty' as it was for 'sameness' (256a10–b4) and for 'otherness' itself (256c8–10) that even what participates in beauty, and is therefore beautiful, is nonetheless not identical to beauty, and therefore participates in otherness in relation to the form of beauty.

XV

Frede is not only mistaken in his reading of the text. He compounds his error by starting from a false premiss, by supposing that we have to choose between opposition to the form and opposition to the form as predicated of whatever it is that participates in the form. Does the one opposition exclude the other? Surely not. The Stranger initially describes the form of non-being as an opposition between a part of otherness and 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3). But when he returns to the definition of his newly discovered 'form that there turns out to *be*, of

22 'The nature of the beautiful': 257d11. 'The nature of otherness': 258a7–8. 'The nature of being': 258b1. The expression 'the nature of otherness' is used twice in the opening moves to the Stranger's account of 'parts' of otherness (257c7 and d4), and is repeated in his summary of the theory (258d7).

what *is not*', he speaks of the part of otherness that is opposed to 'the being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου).

Admittedly, that form of words is not to be found in modern editions of the dialogue. It is nonetheless the unanimous reading of the manuscripts, and it is also the reading recorded by Simplicius when he first quotes this passage from the *Sophist* in his commentary on the *Physics*.²³ In a later passage of the same commentary, Simplicius writes, not 'the being of each thing', but 'each being', and it is this reading that is adopted in successive Oxford editions of the dialogue.²⁴ The variant recorded by Simplicius, in the later passage of his commentary, is however nothing more than a Neoplatonic adaptation of the text, designed to bring Plato's theory of non-being into line with Plotinus' theory of the 'non-being' that is matter.²⁵

If, as we obviously should do, we keep to the unanimous reading of the manuscripts and to the text of Simplicius' first quotation, the form of non-being will be the part of otherness opposed both to 'the nature of being' (258a11–b3: τῆς τοῦ ὄντος [sc. φύσεως]) and to 'the being of each thing' (258e2: τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου). Is the same 'double' opposition true of other negative forms? If it is, then Frede's interpretation no longer has point or purpose. The 'non-beautiful' will be a part of otherness opposed both to beauty as form (257d10–11: 'the nature of the beautiful') and to beauty as participated ('the beauty of each thing'), in the same way that 'non-being' is a part of otherness opposed both to being as form (258a11–b3: 'the nature of being') and to being as participated (258e2: 'the being of each thing').²⁶

23 Simplicius, *Phys.* 135.26, repeats the unanimous reading of the manuscripts, 258e2: τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου.

24 Simplicius, *Phys.* 238.26, writes τὸ ὄν ἐκάστων. This is the reading adopted for Plato's *Sophist* by Burnet (1900) and (1905), and by E. A. Duke *et alii* (1995). This is also the reading adopted by the editor of the Aldine edition (1526) for the earlier passage of Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics* (135.26).

25 Plotinus, *Enn.* ii 4 [12] 16.1–3. For the Neoplatonic variant, see O'Brien (1991), and (1995) 67–71.

26 Frede, in the continuation of his study, (1967), 90–92 (§C.II.4.d]), does not even pause to take account of the unanimous reading of the manuscripts (258d7: τὸ ὄν ἐκάστου). He also misunderstands, as so many others have done, the definition of non-being in relation to the form of being (258a11–b3): the opposition lies between 'the nature of a part of otherness' and 'the nature of being', not 'the nature of a part of being', nor 'a part of the nature of being'. For the syntax of the sentence, see O'Brien (2009), esp. 64–67. If Frede had deciphered correctly the double definition of non-

XVI

But there the resemblance ends. The ‘non-beautiful’, in being opposed to the form of beauty, does not therefore participate in the form to which it is opposed, whereas ‘non-being’ cannot but participate in the form to which it is opposed, for the simple and incontrovertible reason that the form in question (‘being’) is universally participated.

That is presumably not so for the form of the beautiful. If it were so, if ‘beauty’ were participated universally, then there would be no contrary to beauty, nothing therefore that is ugly (assuming that what is ugly is the contrary of what is beautiful). For if the part of otherness that is opposed to beauty were itself to participate in beauty, then presumably whatever participated in the negative form ‘non-beautiful’ would also participate, albeit vicariously, in beauty and would therefore be unable to fulfil the necessary condition of contrariety, which is precisely lack of participation.²⁷

Hence the difference, the radical difference, between ‘non-being’ and ‘non-beautiful’. ‘Non-beautiful’, since it does not participate in beauty, may include the contrary of ‘beauty’ (what is ugly). ‘Non-being’, since it participates in being, cannot include a contrary to ‘being’. Owen, Frede and so many others have failed to follow the Stranger’s argument at this point (257b1–c4), and have therefore failed to grasp his distinction between negation as lack of identity (whatever participates in being or in beauty, participates also in otherness in rela-

being (256a11–b3 and 258e2–3), his analysis of the dialogue would have to have been very different. But by this point in his argument Frede has already been led hopelessly astray by his wholly impossible attempt, (1967) 55–59, to assimilate the Stranger’s use of $\xi\sigma\tau\iota$ at 256a1 to a copulative use of the verb. When Theaetetus agrees (256a2), without hesitation, to the Stranger’s assertion that movement ‘is’ because of its participation in ‘being’ (256a1), the meaning is, as plainly as ever it could be, existential. The Stranger asserts of movement, in virtue of its participating in being, nothing more than that it ‘is’. However, all that concerns us for the moment is the more particular point that, for being as for beauty, the structure of the negative form should be determined by the opposition between a part of otherness and the appropriate positive form, whether the form of being or the form of beauty.

27 The reader who scruples to follow my example of contrariety in relation to beauty may like to rest content with the Stranger’s own example of ‘large’, ‘small’ and ‘equal’ (cf. 257b1–c4). If the part of otherness that is opposed to largeness were to participate in largeness, then there could be nothing that was contrary to the large, and therefore nothing that would count as ‘small’.

tion to either form, and is, in that sense, 'non-being' and 'non-beautiful') and negation not only as lack of identity, but as lack of participation, with its crucial corollary, lack of participation as a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition of contrariety.

XVII

This is the distinction that the Stranger strives to bring out in the lines following his triumphant announcement of the discovery of a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*' (258e6–259a1).

'Do not let anyone tell us therefore that we declare that *what is not* is the *contrary* of being, and that we dare say of that, that it is. So far as any *contrary* of being goes, we have long ago said good-bye to any question of its being or of its not being, of its having a *logos* or indeed of its being altogether without a *logos*...

When the Stranger speaks of contrariety, he does of course still have in mind what had been said of contrariety only a few moments previously (257b1–c4: 'non-being' and the distinction between negation and contrariety; 258b2–3: the denial that the form of non-being is a 'contrary' of being). But that is not the passage that his 'farewell' alludes to. When the Stranger says, of the contrary of being, 'we have long ago said good-bye to any question of its being or of its not being' (259a1: εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μῆ), 'of its having a *logos* or indeed of its being altogether without a *logos*' (λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον), he is looking back to those troubled times when Theaetetus did seriously try to work out whether we could 'speak' (237e5: λέγειν) of 'what is not in any way at all', or whether it was 'unspeakable', 'without a *logos*' (238c10, e6, 239a5: ἄλογον), whether, even in trying to speak of it, we were condemned to inconsistency, in speaking of it as a 'something' (τι), a something therefore that 'is' (cf. 237d1–5), when all we were trying to say of it was that it 'isn't' (237d6–e6).

Those troubles are now long past, thanks to the Stranger's brilliant new discovery of a 'form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*', which allows us to speak of 'things that are not', meaning by that expression, not things that do not exist at all, but things that participate in being, and therefore 'are', but that also participate in otherness in relation to being ('the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*') and are therefore not identical to being.

That is the new and different meaning now given to the words ‘things that are not, are’. It is a necessary and universal truth that all the things that participate in being (and there is nothing, other of course than the form of being itself, that does not participate in being) and therefore ‘are’, should be at the same time ‘things that are not’, in so far as, although they participate in being, they also necessarily participate in otherness in relation to being, and are therefore not identical to being.

What is excluded from that analysis, the non-being that the Stranger and Theaetetus have ‘long ago said good-bye to’ (perhaps, in colloquial English, have ‘long ago seen off’), is the non-being that Theaetetus had been forced to admit was ‘unspeakable’ and ‘unthinkable’ (237b7–239c3), ‘what is not in any way at all’ (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν), ‘non-being, in and by itself’ (238c9: τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό), now dismissed as a ‘contrary’ of being, precisely because a ‘contrary’ of being, in order to be a ‘contrary’, would have to ‘be’, impossibly and inconceivably, what did not participate in being, and could not therefore even ‘be’... a contrary of being.

XVIII

But alas and alack, the Stranger’s little joke about saying ‘good-bye’ has badly misfired. The ‘farewell’ to a ‘contrary’ of being, to the question whether it ‘is’ or whether it ‘isn’t’, has been taken to mean that the Stranger—that Plato—seriously ‘leaves open’ the question of whether it ‘is’ or whether it ‘is not’. That egregious error is to be found in Plato’s latest commentator, Noburu Notomi, who solemnly informs his reader that, in referring to a ‘contrary’ of being (258e6–259a1), Plato ‘deliberately leaves open the question about the *being of what in no way is*’.²⁸

The words ‘what in no way is’ (given in italics in the original) are Notomi’s word-for-word rendering of τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν (237b7–8), translated in this article as ‘what is not in any way at all’. The Stranger therefore, with this impossibly club-footed reading of the text, ‘leaves open’, the possibility that ‘what is not in any way at all’ might, nonetheless, just possibly, somehow, ‘be’.

The whole dialogue collapses in a heap of ruins. We are back in the impossible conundrum from which the Stranger’s careful account of

28 Notomi (2007) 184.

'otherness' and 'non-being' was designed to deliver us. With Notomi's understanding of the 'farewell' scene (258e6–259b6), 'being' has to be reconciled, not with the Stranger's *negation* of being (a part of otherness that is opposed to being, and yet nonetheless participates in being), but with an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being. We are asked to suppose that Plato has left open the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might 'be', the possibility therefore that what does not exist, does exist.

That is the price, the impossible price, that Plato's most recent commentator is prepared to pay in order to maintain his conclusion that Plato 'refutes' Parmenides. It is true enough that, if the Stranger of Plato's dialogue had indeed maintained that 'what is not in any way at all' might nonetheless, just possibly, 'be', then his thesis would indeed have been (or could have been claimed as) a 'refutation' of Parmenides. But it would have been a 'refutation' won only at the cost of foregoing the principle of contradiction. For that is the position, the impossible position, that the Stranger would find himself in were he to 'leave open' the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all' might, nonetheless, 'be'.

Rest assured, dear reader, that Plato's Stranger does not contradict what Aristotle calls 'the very firmest of all principles'.²⁹ The non-being that 'combines' with being (cf. 259a4: συμμείγνυται) and that 'is', is the non-being constituted by a 'part' of otherness, the form of non-being. The whole point and purpose of the Stranger's analysis is to distinguish the form of non-being, 'the form that there turns out to be, of what is not' (cf. 258d6: τὸ εἶδος ὃ τυγχάνει ὄν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος), from what had earlier been spoken of as 'what is not in any way at all' (237b7–8: τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν).

'What is not in any way at all', for Plato as for Parmenides, is... what is not in any way at all. The Stranger's innovation does not lie in his attempting to prove, or even to 'leave open' the possibility, that 'what is not in any way at all' might nevertheless, somehow, just possibly, 'be'. His innovation is at once more robust, and more subtle.

The Stranger has drawn a distinction, between an impossible and inconceivable *contrary* of being and a *negation* of being. A *contrary* of being would 'be'—*sit venia verbo!*—what does not participate in being, and therefore 'what is not in any way at all', sheer nothingness. A *negation* of being is 'non-being' only in so far as it is 'other than being'; it is the 'non-being' by which everything that participates in being, includ-

29 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Γ 3, 1005b17–18.

ing the form of non-being itself, although participating in being, is not identical to being.³⁰

XIX

The Stranger's new form of non-being, non-being as lack of identity with being, does allow us, indeed requires us, to say, of all the things that we see, hear and feel around us, that they 'are not', not however in the sense that they have no participation in being, but only in so far as they are not identical to being. In the light of that distinction, the Stranger does therefore assert the right to speak of all the things that we see and feel around us as so many 'things that are not', even while asserting, of those same things, that they 'are'.

Parmenides had seen, in the conjunction of 'being' and 'non-being', a contradiction. How could he not have done? 'Non-being', for Parmenides, had been defined as 'what is not' in the sense of what is 'necessarily' not (cf. fr. 2.5–8). For Parmenides to say, of things that 'are not', that they 'are', was therefore as contradictory as it would be to say, of 'what is not in any way at all', that it 'is' (or even that it 'may be'). That is why Parmenides 'bore witness *against*' the 'opinions of

30 Please note that I am again (see n. 10 above) limiting myself, in this article, to the Stranger's criticism of Parmenides and to his 'rehabilitation' of the verses quoted from the poem (at 237a8–9 and 258d2–3). When, in his initial puzzles, the Stranger turns more specifically to criticism of the Sophist, and to the question of falsity in thought and speech (239c9–241a2), the talk is of 'contraries' (240d6 and 8: τάναντία) and of the seemingly impossible conundrum of how we come to suppose that 'things that are not in any way at all' (240e1–2: τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα) should nonetheless 'somehow be' (πῶς εἶναι). The solution to these puzzles will be found in the Stranger's analysis of the *logos* that is false (260a5–263d5). The Stranger will maintain a contrariety of truth and falsity, but no longer as dependent upon a contrariety of being and non-being. In this context, the context of the false *logos* ('Theaetetus flies'), the meaning that will ultimately be given to our speaking of 'things that are not as things that are' (263d2: μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα) will be significantly different from the meaning given to the verses taken from Parmenides' poem, earlier in the dialogue (258c6–259b6), where the point is to establish that what 'is' (by participation in being) also 'is not' (by participating in the form of non-being), independently of the part that such a thing, whatever it may be, has to play in the formation of a *logos*, true or false. But it would be hopeless to attempt to summarise that difference here. I have been into the point at some length in the publications already referred to.

mortals' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο). Their claim that 'things that are not, are', if those words are heard within the context of the poem, was simply contradictory.

However, what Plato asserts is not what Parmenides denies. When Plato's Stranger asserts that 'things that are not, are', he does not assert that things that do not exist, do exist. He may utter, he does utter, the same form of words (fr. 7.1: 'things that are not, are'). But the meaning attaching to those words is no longer the same. When Parmenides 'bore witness *against*' the 'opinions of mortals' (237a6: ἀπεμαρτύρατο), he refused to endorse a contradiction. Plato's Stranger is not led to assert that same contradiction in a desperate attempt to consummate his alleged 'refutation' of Parmenides.

Plato does not, as it were, ask Parmenides to turn tail and to assert, of things that do not exist, that they do exist. The meaning he has given to the words that, for Parmenides, encapsulated the 'opinions of mortals' is no longer the meaning that Parmenides had given them. The negation is no longer a denial of existence, but a denial of identity, a denial that whatever participates in being is identical to being. In denying that whatever participates in being is identical to being, the Stranger is not asserting, of things that do not exist, that they do (nor even that they may) exist.

XX

The Stranger's 'good-bye' to a contrary of being (258e6–259a1) is therefore also a good-bye to Parmenides. But a 'good-bye' is not quite the same—indeed it is not at all the same—as a 'refutation'. The opposition between the 'being' and the 'non-being' of the two Ways, as voiced by Parmenides himself in his poem (fr. 2), takes no account of the distinction between a 'what is not' that cannot be 'thought of' and cannot be 'spoken of' (the Stranger's impossible and inconceivable contrary of being), and a non-being that is 'other' than being only in the sense that it is not identical to being (the Stranger's form of non-being).

Is your point then, I may be asked a trifle frostily, that Plato has not 'refuted' Parmenides, simply because he agrees with Parmenides that we cannot think or speak of a contrary of being, even though he then sets out to demonstrate, against Parmenides, that there can nonetheless 'be' a

negation of being, provided that negation is defined as an expression of otherness?

Plato and Parmenides, so my hostile questioner may perhaps allow, have agreed that we cannot think, or speak, of 'what is not in any way at all' (Plato's form of words), of what is 'necessarily' not (an implication of Parmenides' statement of the second Way), so that they have agreed on at least one arm of Plato's distinction. Is your point, I may be asked, that such partial agreement excludes 'refutation'?

Not quite. 'Partial agreement' is admittedly something of an improvement on 'refutation'. But no, my purpose here is not merely to apportion 'agreement' and 'disagreement' (or 'partial agreement'), in order to see whether or not there is, as it were, enough room left for 'refutation'. My aim is not to conclude, in the light of the Stranger's distinction, that Plato half agrees with Parmenides, still less that Parmenides half agrees with Plato. For Parmenides can hardly be said to have 'agreed' with Plato in denying (as 'unthinkable' and 'unspeakable') one arm of a distinction, when he shows no awareness of the other arm.

XXI

The language of 'agreement' and 'disagreement' is no doubt inevitable as a *façon de parler* when attempting to bring out some philosophical point; I have myself used the words in that way in the course of this essay, and no doubt often enough elsewhere. But the words 'agreement' and 'disagreement' may all too easily be bandied about in a way that is false to the facts of history, in so far as such talk may all too easily be taken to suggest a conscious choice.

In a debate between contemporaries, whoever agrees, or disagrees, knows, or may be supposed to know, what it is that he is agreeing, or disagreeing, with, and in the light of that knowledge chooses... to agree or to disagree. But Plato and Parmenides were not contemporaries, and it is pointless to pretend that they were. Plato's reader cannot force upon Parmenides, retrospectively, a choice that Parmenides himself never knew. Parmenides cannot be made to choose one sense of non-being (Plato's contrariety), and not choose the other (a simple negation of being), denying the one (contrariety) and deliberately leaving the other (a simple negation) in abeyance, when it is that very choice that is not open to him. It is that very distinction that is absent from Parmenides' account of 'what is' and of 'what is not'.

'The same' and 'not the same' do, as it happens, appear in the poem, but only as part of what the goddess calls 'the deceitful ordering of my words' (fr. 8.52), when she takes upon herself to spell out the consequences of the 'opinions of mortals' by constructing a cosmology, and does so by introducing two 'forms', one of which is 'the same as itself' and 'not the same as the other' (fr. 8.57–58: ἐωυτῷ πάντοσε τωῦτόν, at the end of one verse, matching τῷ δ' ἑτέρῳ μὴ τωῦτόν, at the beginning of the next).

Parmenides' use of 'the same' and 'not the same', in these two verses, may well be seen as an anticipation of the distinction that will prove essential to the Stranger's account of 'the very great kinds'. 'That movement is both "the same" and "not the same";' so the Stranger tells us in his analysis of 'the very great kinds', 'is something we have to come to terms with, not something to screw up our noses at' (256a10–11: τὴν κίνησιν δὴ ταῦτόν τ' εἶναι καὶ μὴ ταῦτόν ὁμολογητέον καὶ οὐ δυσχεραντέον). But the distinction that will prove to be an essential feature of the analysis of *gene* in the *Sophist*, and that may well owe something to Parmenides' description of the two 'forms' of 'fire' and 'night', finds no foothold in Parmenides' account of the two Ways (fr. 2).

It is because that distinction has no part to play in Parmenides' account of the opposition between 'is' and 'is not' that he thinks as he does. To insist that that same distinction, as formulated by Plato's Stranger, is therefore a 'refutation' of Parmenides is to attempt to rewrite the course of history, to insist that Parmenides should, as it were, be made conscious of Plato's distinction, and at the same time continue thinking as he does, and therefore 'refuse' the distinction that, by the reader's reversal of the arrow of time, he has somehow been made aware of, but that in truth he never knew.³¹

31 The distinction between 'the same' and 'not the same' (fr. 8.52) is absent from Parmenides' account of the two Ways precisely because it is a distinction that comes into play only when there is more than one item in question: fire is 'the same as itself' and 'not the same' as night. In the first part of the poem, there is nothing other than being, and nothing therefore that could give meaning to the second term of a negation ('not the same as...'). In suggesting that Parmenides' distinction may be seen as an anticipation of the Stranger's use of the same form of words ('the same' and 'not the same'), I do not therefore mean that Plato simply repeats Parmenides' distinction. Parmenides' 'not the same' marks the reciprocal lack of identity between two items, consequent upon each item being 'the same as itself': fire is 'not the same as' night, night is 'not the same as' fire. The Stranger's 'not the same' marks the lack of identity accompanying participation in 'sameness'. The repetition of the

XXII

When Theaetetus answers the question, ‘We do, I suppose, dare give utterance to what is not in any way at all?’ (237b7–8), with a guileless, ‘Why on earth not?’ (237b9), he answers as the mortals of Parmenides’ poem would no doubt have answered. When he is brought to realise that no, you can’t think or speak of ‘what is not in any way at all’, he shares in Parmenides’ condemnation of ‘the opinions of mortals’ (237b7–239c3). When at last he is brought to recognise the Stranger’s distinction between negation and contrariety, will he think that Parmenides’ mortals were right all along, and that Parmenides has therefore been ‘refuted’?

Or will he appreciate that the choice was a false one, that, if the ‘opinions of mortals’ were presented as a contradiction, it was because Parmenides’ ‘two-headed’ mortals were made to share the presupposition that governed Parmenides’ own statement of the two Ways, in so far as they supposedly take up and repeat (cf. fr. 8.40) an unqualified opposition of ‘is’ and ‘is not’, even while failing to recognise the modal incompatibility that Parmenides’ own statement of the two Ways was intended to establish?

When Parmenides’ mortals are made to assert, of ‘things that are not’, that they ‘are’, they do not recognise the modal opposition underlying the negation in Parmenides’ own statement of the two Ways, with the result that the expression of their belief, as formulated by Parmenides (‘things that are not, are’), and from Parmenides’ point of view, is a contradiction, and cannot be other than a contradiction so long as the opposition between ‘is’ and ‘is not’, as stated by Parmenides, goes unchallenged. Once that opposition no longer goes unquestioned, once we take account of the Stranger’s distinction between negation and contrariety, we see that we no longer have to acquiesce, as it were, in Parmenides’ condemnation of ‘the opinions of mortals’.

But the conclusion does not therefore have to be that the mortals of Parmenides’ poem were ‘right’ and that Parmenides was ‘wrong’. The choice itself, ‘for’ or ‘against’ the opinions of mortals, is seen to be a

same form of words (‘the same’ and ‘not the same’) is still striking enough to suggest influence. But, if so, Plato has taken over only the positive use (fire is ‘the same as itself’), as an expression of self-identity. The matching negation (‘and not the same as the other’) has been adapted to the needs of the *Sophist* (the relation between form and the instantiation of a form).

false one, once we distinguish negation and contrariety. The question 'Is it true that things that are not, are?', once we have been made aware of the Stranger's distinction, cannot be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

If 'things that are not' are things that do not participate in being, and are therefore 'not in any way at all', then it is obviously *false*, indeed contradictory, to assert of such things that they 'are', and therefore that they participate in being. If 'things that are not' are things that, although they participate in being, are not therefore identical to being, then it is no less obviously *true* that 'things that are not', in so far as they are not identical to being, nonetheless 'are', in so far as they participate in being.

Now try answering the question 'Is it true that things that *things that are not, are?*', if your questioner has no knowledge of the Stranger's distinction, and without yourself appealing to that distinction. Will you answer 'yes' or 'no'?

XXIII

'Have you stopped beating your wife?' I know that you started beating your wife some time ago. What I want to know is: 'Have you stopped?' The presupposition to my question (my assumption that you started beating your wife some time ago) does not allow you to protest that you haven't stopped because you never even started. You have to answer with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. 'Yes, I have stopped.' 'No, I haven't.' You can't say both 'Yes, I have' (because, after all, you are not, and never have been, given to beating her), and at the same time 'No, I haven't' (because, if you never even started, you can't now 'stop').³²

Mutatis mutandis, the same is true of Parmenides' opposition between being and non-being. Parmenides has a seemingly incontrovertible opposition between being and non-being, between what *is* and *cannot not be* and what *is not* and *necessarily is not*. If you say 'is', you have to say 'and cannot not be'. If you say 'is not', you have to say 'and is necessary not to be'. Therefore, in Parmenides' eyes, you merely contra-

32 'Wife-beating': I let out, for the briefest of brief airings, the tired old joke, conventionally given to illustrate Geach's point about multiple questions, taken over from Frege, and used by way of criticism of Russell's theory of descriptions. Geach's own example is 'Have you been happier since your wife died?', a question which presupposes both that you had a wife and that she is now dead. See Geach (1949–1950).

dict yourself if you say, of 'things that are not', that they 'are', since, whatever else those words may imply, they will have to mean that what necessarily is not (cf. fr. 2.5), cannot not be (cf. fr. 2.3).

Once you are caught in that form of words, there is no point in trying to circumvent the contradiction by 'leaving open' the possibility that what is necessarily not might, after all, just possibly be... If your interlocutor persists in asking whether or not you have stopped beating your wife, there is no point in protesting, weakly, that you have to leave the question open, that you really can't say whether, every now and then, you do perhaps after all, well never for very long, you know, and only now and then, she doesn't really mind all that much... give your wife just a bit of a beating. If that is what you say, you will confirm your questioner in his presupposition, just as much as if you answer boldly (but in either case, falsely), 'Yes, I have' or 'No, I haven't'.

Matters are made only worse if, as well he may, the questioner takes your refusal to come out with a straightforward 'yes' or 'no' as a sign of hesitation. You hesitate, so he may think, to tell the truth ('I haven't stopped, but I don't like to own up...'), or because you are not quite sure what a truthful answer would be ('I did promise I would stop, but if I ask her nicely, she may perhaps let me, just once or twice more, if only for old times' sake...'). It may take some while for your obdurate questioner to realise that the seeming hesitation on your part stems only from your wondering quite how best to get him (or her) to see the point, and to acknowledge the extent of his (or her) misconception.

When at last you get your questioner to see that you cannot say whether you have stopped, or not stopped, doing what you never even started doing (perhaps even that you don't have a wife...), will he think that you have 'refuted' him? You will certainly have made him change his way of thinking. You will certainly have made him see how wrong he was. But is that because you have 'refuted' him?³³

33 If I call up the tired old joke (see above), it is because it still illustrates the insidious power of an unrecognised presupposition. Although Notomi maintains *mordicus* that Plato has 'refuted' Parmenides, he is in fact still himself a victim of the presupposition underlying Parmenides' statement of the two Ways, in so far as he thinks that, in order to 'refute' Parmenides, the Stranger is drawn into denying the principle of contradiction. (See again Notomi [2007] 184: the Stranger 'leaves open' the possibility that 'what is not in any way at all might, nonetheless, 'be'.)

XXIV

Why not? Why not allow that your questioner has been 'refuted' when at last you get him to see that you cannot say either that you have stopped or that you haven't stopped beating your wife? Why not tell him that he has been 'refuted', when at last he realises that he cannot insist on being told that you have, or that you haven't, stopped beating your wife, simply because you don't have a wife?

Why not allow that someone is 'refuted' when he is led to see that he is no longer bound by a distinction that had, until then, seemed inviolable? Why not allow that Parmenides has been 'refuted' when Theaetetus is brought to see that, in the light of the Stranger's distinction, the meaning given to the words 'things that are not, are' need no longer be what it had been for Parmenides, when he is therefore brought to see that, in speaking of 'things that are' and of 'things that are not', you do not have to choose between 'is' and 'is not' as 'impossible not to be' and 'necessary not to be' (any more than you have to choose between 'I have' and 'I haven't' stopped beating my wife)?

Why be so picky over the use of a word? Plato's world, the Stranger's world, is no longer the world of Parmenides, and excludes that world. Is not this a form of 'refutation', the more so as Plato has spattered the passage on 'parricide' with talk of 'refutation' and 'refuting', and has repeated the same word at the very moment (cf. 259a2–4) when the Stranger says 'goodbye' to an impossible contrary of being?

XXV

But how does Plato use the word? Not to describe the outcome of the Stranger's relation to Parmenides. When the Stranger uses the word in the concluding lines of his account of self-contradiction and self-refutation, it is to say that he himself has long ago had to admit defeat in the struggle with 'the refutation of what is not' (239b1–3: τὸν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἔλεγχον).³⁴

Following the warning of parricide, he very deliberately reminds Theaetetus of that defeat and of that avowal.

34 See §VI above.

‘I did say, you know, just now, in so many words, that, so far as I am concerned, I always find myself ending up with nothing to say when faced with the question of refutation in such matters, and so it is too, today’ (242a7–8: εἶπόν που νυνδὴ λέγων ὡς πρὸς τὸν περὶ ταῦτ’ ἐλεγχον αἰεὶ τε ἀπειρηκῶς ἐγὼ τυγχάνω καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ νῦν).³⁵

This is followed by:

‘You see it’s really for your sake that we are going to have a go at refuting the *logos*, if refute it we can’ (242b1–2: σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν ἐλέγχειν τὸν λόγον ἐπιθησόμεθα, ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν).³⁶

The *logos* in question (242b1) is the ‘paternal *logos*’ (cf. 242a1–2), namely Parmenides’ condemnation of the formula encapsulating the ‘opinions of mortals’ (cf. fr. 7.1: ‘things that are not, are’). This is the closest that Plato comes to having the Stranger speak of ‘refuting’ Parmenides. But is the closest close enough? Surely not. The precise meaning of the

35 ‘I did say, you know’: the emphatic form of the verb (‘I did’), coupled with ‘you know’, if given the right intonation in English, conveys the quietly deprecatory insistence of the particle (που). For the acquisition of this secondary meaning by a particle that otherwise tends to tone down the assertive force of the sentence, see Denniston (1966) 491 (‘used ironically, with assumed diffidence, by a speaker who is quite sure of his ground’). ‘In so many words’: the addition is an attempt at translating the duplication of εἶπον followed by λέγων. For the apparent pleonasm, see LSJ, *s.v.* λέγω, III, 7 (p. 1034). ‘So far as I am concerned’ translates ἐγὼ. The addition of the personal pronoun is not needed for the syntax of the sentence in Greek; its presence therefore gives deliberate emphasis to the personal attribution of the action of the verb. ‘I always find myself...’: for the use of τυγχάνω with the participle of another verb (here ἀπειρηκῶς), see LSJ, *s.v.*, A, II, 1 (p. 1833). ‘Ending up with nothing to say’: the perfect tense (ἀπειρηκῶς, from ἀπείρηκα), here as regularly, indicates a present state resulting from a past action, hence the state that one ‘ends up in’. The compound verb (ἀπ-είρηκα from ἀπ-εἶπον), conventionally translated as ‘*renounce, disown, give up on*’ (LSJ, *s.v.*, IV [p. 183]), here repeats the uncompound verb at the beginning of the sentence (εἶπον). Hence the repetition in the translation: ‘I did say’ (εἶπον) followed by ‘ending up with nothing to say’ (ἀπειρηκῶς). The paradox is presumably deliberate. ‘Saying’ that one ‘has nothing to say’ harks back to the impossible paradox of ‘uttering’ the ‘unutterable’.

36 ‘You see’ translates γὰρ. ‘Really’ translates δὴ. The explanatory particle (γάρ) links the sentence to the words preceding (242a10–b1). Socrates is afraid he may seem ‘out of his mind’, ‘obsessed’ (μυκικός), pursuing the argument at such length and in such detail. If he risks making a fool of himself, it is only because (cf. γὰρ) he wants to do Theaetetus a favour (σὴν χάριν, for the use of the accusative singular in this adverbial sense, see LSJ, *s.v.* χάρις, VI, 1 [p. 1979]). For the meaning of the main verb (ἐπιθησόμεθα) and for the translation of the protasis (ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν), see the footnotes following.

sentence is all-important. The 'refutation' is no more than an 'attempted' refutation. The Stranger says only that 'we are going to have a go at' (ἐπιθησόμεθα, more colloquially: 'we are going to have a bash at') 'refuting' the paternal *logos*.³⁷

Whether, and in what way, the attempt succeeds will not be apparent until much later in the dialogue, when the very notion of 'what is not' has been cast in a wholly new perspective by the Stranger's momentous discovery of 'a form of non-being' (258d5–e3). For the moment (242b1–2), the Stranger's 'favour' (cf. 242b1: σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν, 'it's really for your sake', 'to do you a favour') lies solely in his agreeing to make an 'attempt' at a refutation; how the 'attempt' will turn out is left wholly in abeyance.

So much is made abundantly clear by the addition, at the end of the sentence, of an emphatic protasis ('if refute it we can', ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν), marking 'distinctly and vividly' that the verbs in the sentence refer exclusively to a time in the future.³⁸ In such a context, and with such a form of expression, the outcome of the attempted refutation is anything but a foregone conclusion.³⁹

It is true that Theaetetus waives aside the Stranger's hesitations by encouraging him to forge ahead with his 'refutation' and his 'demonstration' (τὸν ἐλεγχον τοῦτον καὶ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν, 242b3–5). But it is

37 For this use of the middle voice, see LSJ, *s.v.* ἐπιτίθημι, B, III, 1 (p. 666): 'cum infinitivo *attempt to*.'

38 'A supposed future case is stated distinctly and vividly.' This is Goodwin's definition of the force given to a conditional sentence by a future tense of the indicative of the apodosis (ἐπιθησόμεθα), coupled with the modal particle (ἄν) and a subjunctive mood for the verb in the protasis (ἐλέγχωμεν). See Goodwin (1897), §444 (p. 163–164). The modal particle is here fused with the conditional conjunction (ἐάνπερ is made up from εἰ, ἄν and -περ), the addition of the suffix (-περ) giving added emphasis to the hypothetical character of the dependent verb of the apodosis (ἐλέγχειν) when it is repeated as the leading verb in the protasis (ἐλέγχωμεν). For the difficulty of translating a future conditional sentence into English, see the footnote following.

39 Colloquial English cannot tolerate, easily or at all, a future tense in the protasis ('if we shall refute...'), and any attempt at matching the use of a dependent mood (ἐλέγχωμεν, 'if refutation there be...'), besides being awkwardly archaic, strikes a note of hesitant unreality, absent from the Greek. An impersonal construction would be possible: 'if there is to be a refutation.' The inversion and the use of an auxiliary verb, as in the translation adopted above ('if refute it we can'), maintain the personal construction and convey something of the warning tone given in Greek by the future conditional.

Theaetetus, not the Stranger, and a Theaetetus unaware of the complexities that lie ahead, who proffers those two words as virtual synonyms.

It is his own counter-thesis, at least as much as Parmenides' thesis, that is in question when the Stranger says that in general the problem of falsity can never be resolved 'for so long as such matters are neither refuted nor agreed to' (241e1: τούτων γὰρ μήτ' ἐλεγχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων...). And it is indubitably his own thesis that is in question when, having established, against Parmenides, that 'being' and 'non-being', as now defined, are not incompatible, he says that he is going stick to his new thesis unless someone comes along who is able to 'refute' (ἐλέγξας) what he and Theaetetus have now so happily agreed upon (259a2–4).⁴⁰

XXVI

Pinned down to their context, the places where the Stranger supposedly speaks of successfully 'refuting' Parmenides vanish like the morning dew on a summer's day. But if the Stranger doesn't claim to have 'refuted' Parmenides, does he then leave it to be understood that he therefore agrees with him?

Not at all. But at the crucial moment when he prepares to trumpet his discovery of 'the form that there turns out to *be*, of what *is not*', the language he uses is not the language of 'refutation'.

40 For simplicity's sake, I give the same translation for the verb in both passages (241e1: ἐλεγχθέντων, 259a3: ἐλέγξας), although one might possibly wonder whether, given the composite form of words in the earlier passage (241e1: τούτων γὰρ μήτ' ἐλεγχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων), the meaning was not perhaps rather 'neither put to the test nor agreed to'. The word easily shifts from one meaning to the other. What is 'put to the test' may either *pass* or *fail*. It is only in the latter case that the 'test' turns out to be a 'refutation'. See LSJ, *s.v.* ἐλέγχω (B), I (p. 531): 'argument of disproof or refutation', II: 'generally cross-examining, testing, scrutiny, esp. for the purposes of refutation.' Rather confusingly, the two meanings are put the other way round for the verb, *ibid.*, *s.v.* ἐλέγχω, II, 1: 'cross-examine, question', II, 4: 'refute, confute' (p. 531). The two meanings are not always easy to keep apart. So it is that, in our text (241e1–2), the meaning is probably that of a straightforward opposition: things have to be either rejected, because 'refuted', or 'agreed to'. But the implication could possibly be that, among things have been 'put to the test', some are 'accepted', and not others.

The Stranger: 'So do you think we've been unfaithful to Parmenides, in taking up a position too far removed from his prohibition?' (258c6–7: οἷσθ' οὖν ὅτι Παρμενίδη μακροτέρως τῆς ἀπορρήσεως ἠπιστήκαμεν;)

Theaetetus: 'What do you mean?' (258c8: τί δή;)

The Stranger: 'By pushing on ahead with the search, what we've shown him goes beyond the point where he told us to stop looking' (cf. 258c9–10: πλεῖον ἢ κείνος ἀπέιπε σκοπεῖν, ἡμεῖς εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν ἔτι ζητήσαντες ἀπεδείξαμεν αὐτῷ).

Just so. The metaphor of distance, of uncharted and forbidden territories, hits off the situation very neatly. The Stranger and Theaetetus have entered a new world, far removed from the world of Parmenides, and have survived to tell the tale. But that does not mean that they claim to have 'refuted' him in any simple sense. How could they have done? Refutation implies contradiction. No-one in his right mind would think to contradict Parmenides' denial that 'things that are not, are', in so far as those words are taken as meaning, or even as implying, that 'things that do not exist, do exist'.⁴¹

41 I return therefore, if only very briefly, to the two critics named in my opening sentences (see n. 3 above). Dixsaut (2000) 269 seeks to show how absurd it is to suppose that Plato has not 'refuted' Parmenides by appealing to the obvious difference between Plato and Parmenides on the question of *being*. A blatant *ignotio elenchi*, since my thesis is entirely given over to the difference between Plato and Parmenides on the question of *non-being* (a question, moreover, which largely determines how either philosopher conceives of *being*). Noburu Notomi is in an even worse state. Before coming out with his own impossible conflation of 'being' and 'non-being' (his claim, [2007], 184, that Plato 'deliberately leaves open the question about the *being of what in no way is*'), he launches into a full-scale critique of an Aunt Sally that he graces with my name, but credits with statements that are nowhere to be found in anything I have written and that do not represent anything that I have ever said or even thought. I nowhere translate ὑποθέσθαι (237a3) as 'claim' or 'declare', as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 172 n. 14). I nowhere identify 'non-being' with falsehood, as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 172 n. 15). I nowhere take the simple utterance 'things that are not' (μὴ ἔόντα) as a sufficient indication of the opinions of mortals, as Notomi wrongly claims I do (p. 173 n. 16). Notomi has yet to learn the first lesson of a fledgling controversialist: never attribute to your chosen adversary things that he has not said. You can hardly expect your criticisms to be taken seriously if you do.

Additional Note

Gregory Vlastos on the “Names” of Being in Parmenides’

In the opening pages of an article that has only recently found its way into print, nearly two decades after its author’s death (in 1991), Gregory Vlastos calls into question the depreciative connotation commonly attached to the mention of a ‘name’ or ‘naming’ in verses drawn from the exploration of the first Way (fr. 8.38–40).⁴²

The verses in question are quoted at the beginning of this essay (§I), where they are followed by a translation that unashamedly perpetuates the depreciative connotation that Vlastos seeks to set aside.

‘They will therefore be *no more than* a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing away, as being and not being...’⁴³

If, braving Vlastos’ posthumous disapproval, I persist in keeping to a depreciative connotation, it is in part because a no less depreciative attitude to ‘names’ or ‘naming’ is to be found in the fragments of Empedocles’ *Peri physeos*.

In a short sequence of four verses (fr. 8), recorded by a number of authors including Plutarch (*Adversus Colotem* 10, 1111F), Empedocles explains birth and death as a result of mixture and separation (*sc.* of the four ‘roots’ or elements, earth, air, fire and water). This standard piece of Empedoclean doctrine is preceded by the emphatic insistence that ‘there is no *physis* of any single one of all things that are mortal’ (fr. 8.1–2: φύσις οὐδενός ἐστιν ἀπάντων/θηητῶν), and is followed by the no less emphatic statement that ‘*physis* is the name that has been given them by people’ or perhaps, more idiomatically, ‘*physis* is the name that people have put on them’ (fr. 8.4: φύσις δ’ ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνομάζεται ἀνθρώποισιν). The depreciative connotation is indubitable. ‘Nam-

42 Vlastos (2008).

43 The words adding a depreciative tone to the mention of a ‘name’ are here printed in italics. In the volume from which the translation is taken (O’Brien [1987] 42), these words are enclosed in angular brackets, to indicate ‘des mots ou des phrases qui n’ont aucune équivalence directe dans le texte grec, mais que nous jugeons nécessaires à l’intelligence du passage en question’ (see the *Avertissement* to the volume, p. xvii). Vlastos singles out as the target of his criticism ‘leerer Schall’ (Diels), ‘blosser Name’ (Kranz), ‘a mere word’ (Cornford).

ing' does not correspond to the way things really are. There is no *physis* ('birth', 'growth', 'coming-to-be'...). What people call *physis*, what they think to indicate by the 'name', is nothing other than the mixing, and subsequent separation, of pre-existing elements.

Empedocles' attitude to 'naming' in the fragment quoted (fr. 8) is all of a piece with what we hear in a second set of verses (fr. 9), quoted by Plutarch in the same context (*Adversus Colotem* 11, 1113A–B) and very likely taken from the same part of the poem. Mixture and separation are here again given as the explanation of coming-into-being and dissolution (vv. 1–4), followed by the words (fr. 9.5): ἡ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, νόμῳ δ' ἐπίφημι καὶ αὐτός. 'They have no right to call things as they do, but I, too, follow in my speech the call of convention.'⁴⁴

Empedocles does not share Parmenides' belief that the world we see and feel around us is illusory. While Parmenides warns that his account of the world we see and feel is 'deceptive' (fr. 8.52: ἀπατηλόν), Empedocles goes out of his way to declare that the account he will give is 'not deceptive' (fr. 17.26: οὐκ ἀπατηλόν). The contradiction is clearly deliberate. But the disparagement of 'names' survives the contradiction. Empedocles believes that 'people' (fr. 8.4: ἀνθρώποισιν) are under a misapprehension in 'naming' (cf. ὀνομάζεται) a *physis* when in fact there is none. Contrary to what Vlastos would have us suppose, there

44 I quote the first half of the verse as printed by Diels, beginning with the Homeric formula ἡ θέμις, taken here as implying an ellipse of the verb and therefore with a possessive use of the dative (so Diels): ἡ θέμις οὐκ ἔστι τοῖς καλοῦσι. Literally: 'Rightness does not belong to...' More idiomatically, as above: 'They have no right...' For the accentuation of the so-called 'substantival' article (ἡ θέμις), see Allen's critical edition of the *Iliad*, (1931), 229–230. The negative particle (οὐ), absent from the manuscripts both in *Adversus Colotem* 11, 1111F, and when the same verse is quoted in *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 28, 820F, was added by Bachet de Méziriac, in the margin of a copy of Stephanus' edition of the *Moralia*, now held in the library of the University of Leiden. The manuscripts of Homer commonly have both ἡ θέμις and ἦ θέμις (e.g. *Iliad* ii 73). The latter reading, with Méziriac's correction, yields ἦ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, a form of words which led Wilamowitz to abandon the Homeric parallel (whether read as ἡ θέμις or as ἦ θέμις) in favour of a supposedly more forthright version: οὐ θέμις ἦ καλέουσι. The general meaning is much the same whether we place the adverbial conjunction (ἦ) before θέμις (ἦ θέμις οὐ καλέουσι, 'they do not call things in the way that is right') or, as Wilamowitz preferred, before καλέουσι (οὐ θέμις ἦ καλέουσι, 'there is no rightness in the way that they call things). Attempts by more recent editors (Gallavotti, Van der Ben) to give a plausible meaning to the fragment without Méziriac's correction serve only to confirm the need for a negation.

is therefore nothing at all intrinsically untoward in thinking to find an equivalently depreciative connotation when Parmenides speaks of ‘mortals’ (βροτοί) and of a ‘name’ (ὄνομα) or ‘naming’ (ὀνόμασται, an alternative reading, preferred by Vlastos), in the verses quoted at the beginning of this article.⁴⁵

Just as, for Empedocles (fr. 8.4), the connotation implied is that ‘*physis* is *merely* the name that has been given them by people’ (or even ‘*physis* is *merely* the name that has been *put on them* by people’), so too, for Parmenides (fr. 8.38–40), the connotation implied may perfectly properly be taken to be that ‘they will therefore be *no more than* a name, all things soever that mortals, convinced they were true, laid down as coming into being and passing away, as being and not being...’

Both Empedocles and Parmenides are understandably chary, though for different reasons, of the ‘names’ commonly applied to the phenomena of the visible world by those who know no better. Names commonly in use do not at all match what Empedocles believes to be the true explanation of such phenomena, the explanation inspired by his ‘white-armed Muse’ (cf. fr. 3.3). Still less do they match the message of Parmenides’ goddess, dwelling beyond the Gates of Night and Day (fr. 1.11) and claiming to disprove the very possibility of anything whatever coming-into-being or passing-away (fr. 8.26–28). All the many things that we mortals think to see, ‘coming into being and passing away, being and not being, changing place and altering their bright colour’, so Parmenides would have us believe, are ‘no more than a name’ (cf. fr. 8.38–41).⁴⁶

45 The multiple variant readings recorded in ancient authors for the concluding words of the verse (fr. 8.38) are listed in O’Brien (1987) 42.

46 *Acknowledgment.* I am most grateful to the organisers of our meeting in Benasque for the opportunity to study the text of the *Sophist* afresh in ideal surroundings. I learnt a great deal from the papers and the discussions. My warmest thanks are due to Beatriz Bossi for a critical reading of the written text of my own contribution.

Back to the Point: Plato and Parmenides – Genuine Parricide?

Beatriz Bossi

I. Setting the Common Frame

Famous scholars in the XXth century¹ understood that Plato really does refute Parmenides' absolute condemnation of not-being as unthinkable and inutterable by his demonstration that 'not-being' 'is' in the sense of 'is different from'. Though this goal is made explicit and is almost claimed to have been achieved by the Stranger in the *Sophist*, Plato offers certain clues that show there is enough evidence for a different reading that admits of some nuances. The Stranger begs Theaetetus *not* to suppose that he is turning into some kind of parricide (241d3). Yet Plato does toy with a potential parricide, which the Stranger claims he will never commit. The attitude might be regarded as a literary trope inserted for dramatic purposes, but in the context it could be merely rhetorical. In my view, the person the Stranger really fights and kills is, not Parmenides himself but the ghost of a ridiculous Parmenides character dreamed up by the sophist, who will shelter his own 'relativistic' view beneath his cloak by denying the possibility of falsehood.

For Plato does take care to inform the reader that his Stranger is *not in fact* trespassing Parmenides' limits with regard to the two pillars of his ontology: on the one hand, that there should not be not-being is out of the question; on the other hand, being lies in the domain of Ideas, Natures or *Gene* (by contrast with the world of 'mixed' being, Forms being eternal, definite, and self-identical). If Plato was regarded as a Parmenidean before the *Sophist*, I understand that he can, to this extent, still be called a Parmenidean after it. Even beyond Plato's awareness of it, the fact is that Parmenides and Plato share important points, such as:

1 Guthrie (1978) 151; Diès (1909) 7; Taylor (1960) 389; Ross (1966) 115; Cornford (1970) 289–294 quoted by O'Brien (1995) 43 n.1. Also Notomi: 'The two extreme philosophical positions of Parmenides and Protagoras converge on the denial of the possibility of falsehood' (1999) 182.

1. Mind's commitment to reality (Parmenides' fr.3; fr. 8 v.34);
2. The impossibility of assigning an ontological status to necessary not-being, which Plato calls 'the contrary of being' (Parmenides' 'way of non-being');

However, Plato wants to put some distance between himself and not only his Father but also the old 'Friends of the Forms'.

He turns out to be a Parmenidean *with qualifications*, for the *multiplicity* of Ideas was a first step away from Parmenides, and now his new *dynamic* view of the real seems to take him yet another step away from Father's steady Home. Plato's new doctrine stands in opposition to Parmenides' monistic, changeless being², and seems to look forward to the future, likely giving rise to Aristotle's concept of being as something that can be 'said in many different ways'. As a consequence of the combination of Forms, the description of change as a 'mixture of being and not-being' is, not the result of a 'wandering mind which does not know' as Parmenides put it, but of Plato's own approach to the world of change, which can be characterized as being *in a sense*. The Stranger shows his distrust of Father Parmenides, by his claim that, being 'is not' and not-being 'is' in the realm of nature but, above all, by his making difference an explicit Idea, Nature or Genus.

At an ontological level, Plato makes all Ideas a combination of both being and difference. As a consequence, sensible objects can be generated, for they partake in being and difference. At the level of knowledge, this combination seems to *justify*, somehow, the distinctions made by mortals.

II. The knowing mind's commitment to reality: The *Republic*

On the one hand, Plato agrees with Parmenides on the relation between being and knowledge:

'What is completely, is completely knowable, and what is-not in any way is completely unknowable?' (477a3–4)³.

On the other hand, it is remarkable that, in the *Republic*, Plato refers to the speech of the many using a jargon about the *wandering* intermediate

2 For a view of how Parmenides connects the way of truth and the way of doxa, see Bossi (2010).

3 ὅτι τὸ μὲν παντελῶς ὄν παντελῶς γνωστόν, μὴ ὄν δὲ μηδαμῆ πάντῃ ἄγνωστον;

realm and the *conventional* uses of those who opine but do not know, which reminds us of Parmenides' approach, as he claims:

'We have now discovered, it seems, that according to the many *conventions* of the *majority of people* about beauty and the others, they are *rolling around* as intermediates between *what is not and what purely is*. [...] And we agreed earlier that anything of that kind would have to be called the *opinable, not the knowable* – the *wandering* intermediate grasped by the intermediate power' (479d3–5; 7–9).⁴

One might wonder what is wrong with mortals' claims. The problem is not that people make distinctions, but that they take their relative, opinable, conventional distinctions to be absolute knowledge or science, as if they were experts who have proper access to the real. On the contrary, the philosopher, who has contemplated the real, knows that the distinctions made about the changeable world are never to be taken as definite, for everything in the changeable world always participates in both opposites:

'Is each of the manys what someone says it is, then anymore than it is not what he says it is?' (*Rep.* 479b9–10)⁵.

Analogously, in Parmenides' Poem the goddess warns the young boy that the order of her words concerning doxa is 'deceitful' (fr. 8 v.52). Words cannot be simultaneous, but have to follow an order to make sense. It is the order of the words that turns out to be deceitful because, whenever they say something about an object, that object has already changed, and the difference between the time of the speech and time in the realm of multiplicity can never disappear. As Mourelatos comments⁶:

'What makes these types of judgment "mortal", in the pejorative sense is not so much that they conjoin contradictory ideas; rather each of the conjuncts is objectionable by itself. [...] Parmenides is telling us: No matter what it is that mortals say, they must say it with reference to what-is.'

What can be said of what-is has already been said by the goddess, so nothing else, as it seems, can be added without contradiction.

4 ηύρηκαμεν ἄρα, ὡς ἕοικεν, ὅτι τὰ τῶν πολλῶν πολλὰ νόμιμα καλοῦ τε πέρι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μεταξύ που κυλινδεῖται τοῦ τε μὴ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ὄντος εἰλικρινῶς [...] προωμολογήσαμεν δέ γε, εἴ τι τοιοῦτον φανεῖη, δοξαστὸν αὐτὸ ἀλλ' οὐ γνωστὸν δεῖν λέγεσθαι, τῇ μεταξύ δυνάμει τὸ μεταξύ πλανητὸν ἀλίσκόμενον.

5 πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἂν τις φῆ αὐτὸ εἶναι;

6 Mourelatos (2008) 185.

In conclusion, in the *Republic* Plato understands that the opinable owes its confusing character to its wandering, intermediate status between what is not and what purely is. However, in the *Sophist*, even the opinable will be revealed as being, rather than as an intermediate between not-being and being, due to the new description of relative ‘what is not’ as ‘being in a sense’. And though this admission has been taken as running counter to Parmenides, in fact it does follow from his principles. For what necessarily is not cannot produce any intermediate effect or be intermingled with anything at all.

III. Every mind’s commitment to reality: the *Sophist*

The possibility and reality of false speech (i. e., saying what *is not*) raises a big difficulty for Plato in the *Sophist* only because, in principle, he totally sticks to the Parmenidean thesis of mind’s commitment to reality (i. e., language can only say what *is*).

The Stranger thinks that it is extremely hard to determine what form of speech should be used to say that ‘things that are false truly are’ without being caught in a verbal conflict or contradiction, for the audacity of false speech lies in its implication that *that which is not* is (cf. 236d–237a), which runs counter to Parmenides’ dictum:

‘But when we were boys, my boy, the great Parmenides testified to us from start to finish, speaking in both prose and poetic rhythms, that:

Never shall this be tamed, that things that are not are;
But do you turn away your thought from this road of enquiry’
(fr. 7 vv.1–2) (237a4–9)⁷

Language is interpreted as the ‘road’ to follow, and Theaetetus wants to be taken along it by the Stranger (237b4–6), which reminds the reader of Parmenides’ image of the ways.

The Stranger looks for a referent for the expression ‘what is not’ and concludes:

7 Παρμενίδης δὲ ὁ μέγας, ὦ παῖ, παισὶν ἡμῖν οὖσιν ἀρχόμενός τε καὶ διὰ τέλους τοῦτο ἀπεμαρτύρατο, πεζῇ τε ὧδε ἐκάστοτε λέγων καὶ μετὰ μέτρων—“οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ, φησὶν, εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα: ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ’ ἀφ’ ὁδοῦ διζήμενος εἶργε νόημα. οὐ γὰρ μήποτε τοῦτο δαμῆ, φησὶν, εἶναι μὴ ἔόντα: ἀλλὰ σὺ τῆσδ’ ἀφ’ ὁδοῦ διζήμενος εἶργε νόημα.

S: ‘But anyway this much is obvious to us, that *that which is not* can’t be applied to any of those which are.

T: Of course not.

S: So if you cannot apply it to that which is, it would not be right to apply it to something.

T: Why not?

S.: It is obvious to us that we always apply something to a being, since it is impossible to say it by itself, as if it were naked and isolated from all beings. Is not that right?’ (237c7–d4)⁸.

The Stranger declares that they should deny that anyone who tries to utter *that which is not* is even speaking (237e), for speech is either about *one* or about a *multiplicity*, so it cannot be about nothing. They conclude that *what is not* is unthinkable, unutterable and impossible to formulate in speech (238d)⁹.

In so doing, the Stranger accepts Parmenides’ thesis concerning mind’s commitment to reality (fr. 3):

‘For there is the same thing for being thought and for being’.

This basic correspondence between apprehending and being means that being is what can and must be apprehended, as Parmenides declares:

‘It is the same to think and our thinking that ‘is’. For you will not find thinking without being thanks to which it is expressed¹⁰; For there neither is, nor will there be, anything else apart from being’ (fr. 8, vv. 34–37).

So speech must exhibit being. Of course ‘being’ has a different meaning for Parmenides and for Plato, but the link between our intellectual capacities and whatever being might be is a necessary one.

8 ἀλλ’ οὖν τοῦτο γε δῆλον, ὅτι τῶν ὄντων ἐπὶ τι τὸ μὴ ὄν οὐκ οἰστέον. πῶς γὰρ ἂν; οὐκοῦν ἐπεὶ περ οὐκ ἐπὶ τὸ ὄν, οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τὸ τι φέρων ὀρθῶς ἂν τις φέροι. πῶς δῆ; καὶ τοῦτο ἡμῖν που φανερόν, ὡς καὶ τὸ ‘τι’ τοῦτο ῥῆμα ἐπ’ ὄντι λέγομεν ἐκάστοτε: μόνον γὰρ αὐτὸ λέγειν, ὥσπερ γυμνὸν καὶ ἀπηρημασμένον ἀπὸ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων, ἀδύνατον: ἢ γάρ; In most quotations, I follow White’s translation of Plato’s text, *Plato Complete Works*, J. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (eds.) (1997), though I have slightly changed some expressions.

9 However, Ambuel (2007) 84 concludes that it is impossible to affirm intelligibly the unintelligibility of not-being.

10 ‘on which it depends’; ‘upon which it relies’; ‘under whose authority it is’ (Mourelatos, 2008).

Vlastos claims that, in Parmenides' view, as being is changeless, the names that ascertain change can only be necessarily false¹¹. Parmenides does not explicitly admit that naming on the part of mortals is necessarily false, but he rejects 'unjustified' naming when referring to one of the forms, presumably that one which is assumed to be 'what is not'. If Parmenides admits deceitful language, Plato should not need to refute him to demonstrate, in order to catch the sophist, that falsity exists. It might seem that the sophist would be one particular case to be included among the hordes who have agreed to use 'unjustified' names to refer to phenomena, believing that they are true names. However, the case of the sophist is different; he does not use deceitful language unwittingly, but makes up false speeches on purpose to deceive others.

There is a better approach to considering the relation between Plato and Parmenides on this matter. Mourelatos¹² claims that the phrase 'you shall not find thinking without what-is' (fr. 8 35–36) should be understood precisely in the light of this passage of the *Sophist*, which he translates:

'we speak the word 'it' at each instance with reference to something-that-is; for it is impossible to speak it all by itself, naked and deserted by what-is' (237d1–2).

He comments that, instead of translating *en hoi pephatisménon estín* as 'in which it is expressed' we should translate: 'to which it refers or is addressed' (fr. 8 v. 35). If this is so, he claims, Plato serves as a sound interpreter of Parmenides who can help us understand his Father.

IV. The mind's commitment to reality: an (apparent) objection

A striking paradox is evident in the Stranger's view, since he realizes that, in spite of the fact that *that which is not* cannot admit of being, they are in fact talking about *that which is not* in attributing a subject to it, namely, '*that which*'. The refutation of *that which is not* has been *defeating* the Stranger, as if it were alive and working on its own. So he concludes that it is impossible to say something correct about *that which is not* without attaching to it either *being*, *oneness*, or numerical *plurality*.

11 Vlastos (2008) 382–383.

12 Mourelatos (2008) 170–171.

The sophist produces likenesses. ‘That which is like’ is *not* really that which *is*, but *is* ‘in a way’:

‘Anyway you can see that the many-headed sophist is still using this interweaving <of being and not being> to force us to agree, unwillingly, that *that which is not* ‘in a way’ is’ (240c4–6)¹³.

The passage strikingly reminds us of Parmenides’ ‘two-headed mortals’: *brotoi díkranoi* (fr. 6 vv. 4–5) ‘by whom the fact of being and not to be are reckoned as the same and not the same’ (fr. 6 vv. 8–9).

Sophists would deny that there is such a thing as false speech (240e10–241a1), but the interlocutors agree that there can be falsity ‘in beliefs’, and that words contain falsity. They find that what they are saying now is contrary to what they had said just before, for they are forced to attach *that which is* to *that which is not*, even though they had agreed that this was completely impossible (241a3–b3).

Let us observe in advance that, surprising as it might be, there is no contradiction here. In the first place they agreed with Parmenides’ that ‘the way of not-being’ is impossible, and now they seem to agree with him that the way many-headed people follow is possible. There is no contradiction at all, for though they say they are forced to attach *that which is* to *that which is not*, the first *that which is not* is necessarily so, while this second one is partial, inasmuch as it *is in a way*. Due to the fact that speech *has to be about something that is*, even false speech about *what is not* the case must be about something that is.

V. The (apparent) objection requires the (apparent) parricide

At this point, however, the Stranger makes a bizarre request: he asks Theaetetus not to think that he is turning into some sort of parricide (241d3)¹⁴. The Stranger does not dare to attack Parmenides, and has given up whenever he has tried to do so, but now he feels he has to go ahead: they will have to subject Parmenides’ saying to further examination in order to avoid making themselves ‘ridiculous’ by saying ‘con-

13 ὄρξς γοῦν ὄτι καὶ νῦν διὰ τῆς ἐπαλλάξεως ταύτης ὁ πολυκέφαλος σοφιστῆς ἠνάγκακεν ἡμᾶς τὸ μὴ ὄν οὐχ ἐκόντας ὁμολογεῖν εἶναι πως.

14 μή με οἶον πατραλοῖαν ὑπολάβης γίγνεσθαι τινα. Ambuel (2007) 90 finds this remark ambiguous, for it “could indicate that the upcoming refutation of Eleaticism is a refutation in appearance only. Alternatively, it could indicate that Eleaticism contains a core of truth. Or it could indicate both”.

flicting' things when talking about false statements (241d5–e6)¹⁵. He also asks Theaetetus not to believe that he is insane because he is always shifting his position back and forth, and adds that they will try to 'refute' the argument, for Theaetetus' sake, if they can (242a10–b2)¹⁶.

Setting aside the dramatic attraction this challenge raises for the reader, for the Stranger admits fear and doubt in face of a dangerous argument (242b6–8), he also claims that they should be cautious with regard to potential 'confusion and over-haste'¹⁷ (242b10–c2). As Migliori¹⁸ has remarked, this as a clue being sent to the reader that Plato is not fully convinced about the feasibility of their procedure. In my view, Plato knows he is creating apparent contradictions on purpose.

VI. On parts and wholes: Parmenides mistaken

When it comes to the examination of the *myth* Parmenides had told them, the Stranger finds that a contradiction is implied between the claim that being is the One and the thesis that it is spherical, which implies that being must have parts. If it had parts, it would not be the One, for, properly speaking (κατὰ τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον : 245a8–9), the One should have no parts. Alternatively, if it were *one* only 'somehow' it would not be 'the One' (τὸ ὄν ἐν εἶναί πως οὐ ταύτῃ ὄν τῶ ἐνὶ φανεῖται: 245b7–8) and hence the totality will be more than one.

15 τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς Παρμενίδου λόγον ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν ἀμυνομένοις ἔσται βασανίζειν, καὶ βιάζεσθαι τό τε μὴ ὄν ὡς ἔστι κατὰ τι καὶ τὸ ὄν αὐτὸ πάλιν ὡς οὐκ ἔστι πη. φαίνεται τὸ τοιοῦτον διαμαχετέον ἐν τοῖς λόγοις. πῶς γὰρ οὐ φαίνεται καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον δὴ τοῦτο τυφλῶ; τοῦτων γὰρ μήτ' ἐλεγχθέντων μήτε ὁμολογηθέντων σχολῆ ποτέ τις οἶός τε ἔσται περὶ λόγων ψευδῶν λέγων ἢ δόξης, εἴτε εἰδῶλων εἴτε εἰκόνων εἴτε μιμημάτων εἴτε φαντασμάτων αὐτῶν, ἢ καὶ περὶ τεχνῶν τῶν ὅσαι περὶ ταῦτά εἰσι, μὴ καταγέλαστος εἶναι τὰ γ' ἐναντία ἀναγκαζόμενος αὐτῶ λέγειν.

16 φοβοῦμαι δὴ τὰ εἰρημένα, μὴ ποτε διὰ ταῦτά σοι μανικὸς εἶναι δόξω παρὰ πόδα μεταβαλὼν ἑμαυτὸν ἄνω καὶ κάτω. σὴν γὰρ δὴ χάριν ἐλέγχειν τὸν λόγον ἐπιτησόμεθα, ἐάνπερ ἐλέγχωμεν.

17 'We have to reconsider whether we may not be somehow confused about things that now seem to be clear, and whether over-hasty judgment may make us agree too easily': τὰ δοκοῦντα νῦν ἐναργῶς ἔχειν ἐπισκέψασθαι πρῶτον μὴ πη τεταραγμένοι μὲν ὤμεν περὶ ταῦτα, ῥαδίως δ' ἀλλήλοις ὁμολογῶμεν ὡς εὐκρινῶς ἔχοντες.

18 Migliori (2007) 78. He thinks that "this 'parricide' is one of the ugliest misrepresentations of Platonic thought. It is, rather, a question of how to save philosophy and being, in other words, Parmenides himself.

VII. Being pervades everything

Plato is using this criticism in order to adumbrate his own new realm of combinable Forms. Only if the Form of being and the Form of difference extend throughout the Forms and combine with each other will multiplicity be possible, both in the intelligible realm and in the sensible world. Plato seems to be adumbrating the fact that ‘being’ is said in many ways.

VIII. Movement as being

The Stranger and Theaetetus agree that being does not always stay the same and remain in the same state, as the Defenders of the Forms would say, but that movement, life, soul and intelligence are present in *that which wholly is* (τῷ παντελῶς ὄντι). Plato insists that it does not stay in a state of rest, solemn and holy, and devoid of understanding (248e7–249a2); it has understanding and life (νοῦν μὲν ἔχειν, ζωὴν δὲ μὴ φῶμεν: 249a4) and both of these it has in its soul (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἀμφοτέρα ἐνόησεν αὐτῷ λέγομεν, οὐ μὴν ἐν ψυχῇ γε φήσομεν αὐτὸ ἔχειν αὐτά 249a6–7). So, having soul, it cannot be immobile. Furthermore, that which is moved and also movement itself have to be admitted as being (καὶ τὸ κινούμενον δὴ καὶ κίνησιν συγχωρητέον ὡς ὄντα: 249b2–3). However, rest is necessary for things to be the same, in the same state, and in the same respect in order to be known (cf. 249b5–10). So the philosopher has to refuse to accept the claim that everything is at rest, either from the Defenders of the One or from the Friends of the Forms (for without movement there would be no understanding), just as he also has to refuse to listen to those who say that *that which is* is subject to every type of change (for without rest nothing would be knowable), but, like children who want it all, he should say that whatever is immobile and whatever is mobile are both *that which is* and also the whole (cf. 249c10–d4). At this stage it should be noticed that Plato’s new account does not really stem from an authentic ‘refutation’ of Parmenides; he simply takes a different route, leaving his Father aside.

Dynamism and rest are said to be present in the whole. But are they present in the same way in both orders of the whole? The phenomena of change and (apparent) rest seem to be present only in the sensible world, while the Forms *as such* (even the Form of Change) need to

be at rest if they are ‘to be known’ by the new, active understanding which has been introduced into the whole, an understanding whose activity implies progress and dynamic combination. This difficulty might have led Aristotle to formulate the distinction between movement (assigned to becoming) and activity or actuality (assigned to intelligence).

Only when Plato uses δύναμις as a defining mark or principle of specification of the things that are (247d8–e4)¹⁹, he manages to integrate into a single order the visible and the intelligible, because the common denominator is precisely the ‘capacity of acting and suffering’ or, to put it in another way, the being of a thing is manifest in its relations with *other* things. Thus, at this stage, being is no longer identified with rest, and becoming with movement, but Plato seems to toy with the idea that *both* rest and movement belong to the whole.

VIII. Sliding from names to non-conventional meanings: kinds, forms, natures

The picture of the whole painted above remains provisional, since a new difficulty arises. It is necessary for *that which is*, by its own nature, not to rest or move (250c6–7²⁰), in order to allow both contraries to be. And yet it is impossible to conceive *that which is* neither at rest nor in movement (250c–d). Therefore being turns out to be as difficult to grasp as not-being. However, the Stranger finds there is some hope for clarifying them both by appealing to language; as he observes, though people take a thing *to be one*, at the same time they *speak of it as many*, by using *many names*. Here he seems to be saying that even when something is *one* in itself, speech can refer to it in *many* ways, considering it from different aspects and in various *senses*. The philosopher, expert in dialectic, will be capable of discriminating the way some kinds (*gene*) mix with each other, exclude each other, or pervade all of them (253b–c).

The Stranger appears to speak of kinds and ideas synonymously (cf. 253d–e; 254c–d). Plato seems to slide from a linguistic level that

19 λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιανοῦν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἶτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὀτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἶτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κὰν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι: τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις.

20 κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἄρα τὸ ὄν οὔτε ἔστηκεν οὔτε κινεῖται.

deals with *names* to an ontological one, since they refer to *non-conventional meanings*, namely, *kinds* and *forms*.

There is a difference between the philosopher and the sophist with regard to their respective homes: while the first one always uses reasoning to stay close to the Form *being* in a ‘bright divine’ area, the sophist runs off into the darkness of *that which is not* (254a–b). To my knowledge, Plato’s differentiating here is evidence of the effect of a certain Parmenidean legacy upon him. Parmenides distinguished between the goddess’ description of *being* and the mortals’ confusing naming; Plato between the philosopher who remains close to being and the sophist whose speech leads nowhere.

IX. Unqualified, unrestricted not-being and relative not-being

The next step is to consider whether they can get away with saying that *that which is not* really is that which is not (254c8–d2). The different is always said ‘in relation to another’ (255d1), and pervades all the Forms (255e3–6). For instance, change or movement is said to be ‘the same in relation to itself’, and not the same <as all the others>, because of its association with the different (256a10–b4). By being different from *that which is*, change is something that is not, but also a thing that is, since it partakes in *that which is* (cf. 256d5–9). Nothing is said here about the status of change which is different from what is found in the *Republic*. The Stranger concludes:

‘So it is necessary for *that which is not* to be, in the case of change and also as applied to all the kinds. That is because, as applied to all of them, the nature of *the different* makes each of them not-be by making it different from *that which is*. And we are going to be right if we say that all of them are *not* in this same way. On the other hand we are also going to be right if we call them beings, because they have a share in *that which is*’ (256d11–e4)²¹.

The Stranger claims that *that which is not* is, because all the kinds are different from each other. And yet, it is one, namely itself. This way the Stranger has apparently affirmed *literally* what Parmenides denied. However, the Stranger admits that:

21 ἔστιν ἄρα ἐξ ἀνάγκης τὸ μὴ ὄν ἐπὶ τε κινήσεως εἶναι καὶ κατὰ πάντα τὰ γένη: κατὰ πάντα γὰρ ἢ θατέρου φύσις ἕτερον ἀπεργαζομένη τοῦ ὄντος ἕκαστον οὐκ ὄν ποιεῖ, καὶ σύμπαντα δὴ κατὰ ταῦτα οὕτως οὐκ ὄντα ὁρθῶς ἐροῦμεν, καὶ πάλιν, ὅτι μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος, εἶναι τε καὶ ὄντα.

'it seems that when we say *that which is not*, we do not say something contrary to *that which is*, but only something different from it' (257b3–4)²².

The nature of the different appears to be chopped up into different parts, such as 'the not-beautiful', 'the not-large', 'the not-just', and even 'the not-being' (257c–258a):

'So it seems that the setting against each other of the nature of a part of the different and the nature of *that which is* is no less being – if we are allowed to say such a thing – than *that which is* itself. And it does not signify something contrary to *that which is* but only something different from it' (258a11–b4)²³.

From their admitting that the different is not the contrary of being (and so not to be identified with unqualified not-being), one expects them to conclude that they have not in fact refuted Parmenides with regard to his theses concerning mind's commitment to reality and its converse, the non-viability of the second way of enquiry.

On the contrary, after quoting Parmenides for the second time, the Stranger thinks that their disbelief has gone even further than Parmenides' prohibition, because they have pushed their investigation ahead and shown not only that *those which are not* are, but caused the form of *that which is not* to appear as a part of the nature of the different, chopped up among all beings in relation to one other (258d5–e3)²⁴. And again, in spite of this triumph, the Stranger admits, for the *third* time, that *that which is not* is not the contrary of *that which is* (258e6–7)²⁵.

The Stranger takes care to insist on the point that they had said good-bye long ago to any contrary of *that which is*, and to whether it is or is not, and also to whether or not an account can be given of it (258e7–259a)²⁶. In my view, this insistence turns out to be significant.

22 ὁπόταν τὸ μὴ ὄν λέγωμεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, οὐκ ἑναντίον τι λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος ἀλλ' ἕτερον μόνον.

23 οὐκοῦν, ὡς 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 ἑναντίον ἐκείνῳ σημαίνουσα ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον μόνον, ἕτερον ἐκείνου.

24 ἡμεῖς δέ γε οὐ μόνον τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν ἀπεδείξαμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶδος ὃ τυγχάνει ὄν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἀπεφηνάμεθα: τῆν γὰρ θατέρου φύσιν ἀποδείξαντες οὐσάν τε καὶ κατακεκερματισμένην ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ὄντα πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὸ πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἕκαστον μόριον αὐτῆς ἀντιτιθέμενον ἐτολμήσαμεν εἰπεῖν ὡς αὐτὸ τοῦτ' ὄντος τὸ μὴ ὄν.

25 μὴ τοῖνυν ἡμᾶς εἶπη τις ὅτι τοῦναντίον τοῦ ὄντος τὸ μὴ ὄν ἀποφαινόμενοι τολμῶμεν λέγειν ὡς ἔστιν.

26 ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἑναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν, εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μὴ, λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασις ἄλογον.

Plato is sending a double message to the reader: on the one hand, his Stranger is not fighting Parmenides over naming ‘*that which is not*’, because, being relative to being, it is something that is; on the other hand, due to the fact that it is a special, differentiated *part* of being, Parmenides’ monistic, static being needs to be abandoned²⁷.

Again, when it comes to speech, Plato seems to agree completely with Parmenides when he declares that:

‘Whenever there is speech it has to be about something. It is impossible for it not to be about something’ (262e6–7)²⁸ [...] ‘if it were not about anything it would not be speech at all, since we showed that it was impossible for genuine speech to be speech about nothing’ (263c9–11).²⁹

X. The way of mortals and the sophist

One of the main goals of the *Sophist* is to demonstrate that false speech is possible, in order to catch the sophist red-handed, doing his job without caring for truth. Though the sophist is said to have found shelter at Parmenides’ house,³⁰ it is difficult to suppose that the many-headed maker of images could be seriously hidden in a monistic, static universe. On the other hand, as was observed above, he cannot simply be included in the class of the wandering minds who confuse being and not-being when they make their ‘conventional’ distinctions, for he does not

27 Dorter comments: ‘This conclusion, ‘that not-being exists *qua* difference, formally contradicts Parmenides’ prohibition against saying or thinking that not-being exists (258d). But it does not contradict the spirit of that prohibition [...]. To say that not-being exists *qua* difference is not to say that it exists *qua* the opposite of *existence*’ (1994) 159.

28 λόγον ἀναγκαῖον, ὅταν περ ἤ, τινὸς εἶναι λόγον, μὴ δὲ τινὸς ἀδύνατον.

29 μηδενὸς δὲ γε ὦν οὐδ’ ἂν λόγος εἴη τὸ παράπαν: ἀπεφήναμεν γὰρ ὅτι τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἦν λόγον ὄντα μηδενὸς εἶναι λόγον. The way which tells us that ‘is not’ is a road of which we can learn nothing, for one can hardly come to know what is not, since it is neither accessible nor can be told to others (fr. 2, vv. 5–8), because it is not possible for <what is> nothing <to be> (fr. 6, v. 2).

30 As is well known, Parmenides’ Goddess wants to protect the young boy from exercising a mind astray, incapable of discernment, which reckons being and not-being as the same and not the same (fr. 6, vv. 5–9). She wishes that this shall never be forced: that things that are not, are. So he should turn his thought away from this way of enquiry (fr.7, vv.1–2) and not let habit drag him along it, but judge by reason the controversial refutation she has uttered (fr. 7, v. 3–fr 8, v.1), for the only tale (*mythos*) still left is <that> of the way <which tells us> that ‘is’.

take *any* distinctions to be real or true; properly speaking, he places himself beyond the distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’, since to him any judgement is necessarily true.

Alternatively, one might wonder whether Plato himself could be included in the class of the mortal hordes who confuse the apparent and the real, given his admitting not-being to be ‘somehow’, from a Parmenidean perspective. Obviously, the answer is negative. His ‘not being’ is not unqualified but partial (it is only a part of difference) and relative to what is; so in this respect he obeys Parmenides³¹.

On the other hand, ‘wandering speech’ in the *Poem* cannot be identified with ‘false speech’ in the *Sophist*. Wandering speech, which (like the slaves in Plato’s cave) is proud of establishing differences, is not necessarily always false, but might be true at times (though nobody could say so with certainty). Otherwise, why should the Goddess teach the way of Doxa, if it were absolutely false? Moreover, might one not assume that, were it absolutely false from the start, it would not be either utterable or teachable at all, according to Parmenides’ second way?

One should not forget that, in a controversial passage, she seems to declare that:

‘the things that appear would have to have *real* existence’, as ‘passing the whole way through all things’ (fr. 1, vv. 31–32).

O’Brien³² suggests that that the two “forms” (day and night) fill up the whole, and that, due to the fact that appearances pass the whole way through things, mortals have supposed they are real. Being has no parts in Parmenides, so it cannot be the implicit subject of fr. 8. 51–52, and hence cannot be responsible for appearances looking real. However, there is in the lines a kind of relation between totality and apparent reality: what makes appearances look real is their apparent continuity. In any case, the boy should learn the opinions of mortals by listening to the deceitful ordering of the Goddess’s words (*ibid.*).

There are so many ‘signs’ that Plato has the *Poem* in mind that I find echoes of fr. 8. 31–32 when he claims that the genus or Form of Being extends to all the Forms to make them real (and then, in a derivative sense, because of that, they make the world appear real). Plato must

31 Plato’s ‘not-being’ turns out to be ‘relative’ in two different ways: as a part of difference, it is always *with regard to* something else (not-beautiful, not-just, etc.), and as ‘not-being’, it *depends on* being to be.

32 O’Brien (1987) 14–15.

have thought, unlike Parmenides, that it must be Being which is finally responsible for appearances. Appearance is somehow supported by Being, since it takes its ‘relative reality’ from it. According to Plato, a unique Form supports multiplicity; according to Parmenides, Being remains one.

Though Parmenides did not consider ‘relative not-being’ in Platonic terms as such, he certainly *used* ‘difference’ in his *Poem* in order to present his thoughts, as anybody else would do to be able to speak. He even refers explicitly to ‘difference’ when he states that mortals have set their minds on naming two opposite forms that remain ‘not the same as the other’, and by so doing have strayed from the truth (fr. 8, vv. 53–58). What one notices above all is that ‘difference’ is the essential conceptual tool that allowed Parmenides to make his famous exclusive distinction between being and not-being³³ as well.

Conclusion

Plato and Parmenides agree on what is and about what necessarily is not. The main question that remains is: could Plato and Parmenides have agreed on the ontological status of ‘relative not-being’ or ‘difference’?

It is well known that Cornford³⁴ thinks that the Stranger takes the prohibited way, and Parmenides is challenged for denying an intermediate world between the perfectly real and the completely non-existent³⁵. In his view Parmenides acknowledged only one sense of it ‘is not’, namely, ‘does not exist at all’. Since the Stranger has adumbrated another sense which allows us to claim that things which are not (i. e., are different from others) nevertheless are (exist), he has refuted Parmenides’ dogma³⁶.

However, on the one hand both philosophers seem to reject the assignment of complete reality to the visible world. Not only before the *Sophist* but also after it, for according to the evidence presented in the *Philebus* Plato makes generation the result of a mixture of opposite prin-

33 Difference is what we could call the noble ‘not-being’, since it is the creative father of all possible speech and thought.

34 Cornford (1970) 201.

35 Cornford (1970) 199.

36 Cornford (1970) 294.

ciples (Limit and Unlimited), and according to the *Timaeus* this world is described as the one that never *is*, but always *becomes*.

On the other hand, both of them regard 'difference' as *relative to human naming*. Parmenides uses 'the same' and 'the different' to express the way mortals define Fire and Night (fr. 8, 56–59)³⁷.

They seem to disagree over its ontological status: while Parmenides' Goddess straightforwardly rejects it (for *only* homogeneous *being is*), Plato, in the *Sophist*, gives it a 'new' ontological status as a part of the Form of difference. Is this step to be interpreted as becoming more or less Parmenidean?

If his 'new' form were only a *genus* that belonged to speech, he could be thought of as becoming both more Aristotelian and also more Parmenidean, for 'not-being' would belong only to 'wandering' human speech and understanding. But Plato remains neither Parmenidean nor Aristotelian. Difference is a Form, i. e., a unity that makes ontological differentiation and knowledge possible.

What is in fact refuted is a kind of caricature of Parmenides' thought made up by the sophist who pretends to annihilate falsity within the black hole of unqualified not-being. However, to preserve the possibility of false speech there is no need to 'invent' a new type of not-being, for Parmenides himself had already used this relative not-being which is mixed up with relative being, long before Plato, as Cordero³⁸ has indicated.

On the other hand, as Mourelatos³⁹ has suggested, that it is not negative predication in general which is being rejected but the view that an unqualified proposition of the form 'is really not-F' can ever feature as the last statement in cosmological inquiry. What is being rejected is constitutive negation in the world. He claims that the fundamental error in dualistic systems is that only one of the opposites counts as real; the other is no more than indefiniteness, and that is why 'mortals who made up their minds to name two perceptible forms had no right to do so'.

Nevertheless, Plato rejects Parmenides' view, for he wants to justify the so-called 'wandering' procedure as the only one possible to humans,

37 See Frère (1991).

38 Cordero (1991) 122.

39 Mourelatos (2008) 79–81.

by admitting difference and mixture in both realms, the sensible and the intelligible⁴⁰.

Does Plato know that the Stranger, despite his distance, does not refute Parmenides? Plato loves dramatic effects and making his characters take on a big challenge that deserves their courage and intellectual effort. In any case, there is enough evidence that Plato does take care to show that his position is completely consistent with Parmenides' heritage with regard to the mind's commitment to reality and the status of necessary not-being. In my view, the Stranger is, in these respects, not a stranger, but one who remains at home.

40 O'Brien understands that the definition of a form of not-being which is opposed to being (258a7–e5) and yet not the contrary of being “acts as both a refutation and an acceptance of Parmenides. A refutation, because we do think of ‘what is not’. An acceptance, because what we think of ‘is’. Parmenides is neither accepted nor refuted. The Stranger has created a universe where Parmenides' undifferentiated conception of non-being no longer has meaning” (1995, p. 181 in his English summary). In my view, it never had or could possibly have meaning. The author thinks that the terms used to present Parmenides' theory are understood in a totally different way; the account of the five *gene* and of the nature of the other as well as the doctrine of its parts provokes such a change that it could be taken as a refutation, unless it is understood at the same time as an answer to and an explanation of his theory. Finally, O'Brien concludes that the systems are not comparable, and that Plato does not expect to refute Parmenides but rather to replace him. I agree (see pp. 87–88). Plato toys with the idea of making war on Parmenides, because he must be aware of the fact that, on his journey of exploration, the Stranger meets his unwilling Father at the entrance to his ‘third’ road.

Plato's Eleaticism in the *Sophist*: The Doctrine of Non-Being

Antonio Pedro Mesquita

In order to be able to draw a limit
to thought, we should have to
find both sides of the limit thinkable
(i. e. we should have to be
able to think what cannot be thought).
WITTGENSTEIN, Preface to the *Tractatus*

This paper, which owes its origins to a long friendship with our colleague Beatriz Bossi, should be seen as a daring incursion by an Aristotelian into a subject which its author has for some time now left uninvestigated. Let this admission serve as a pre-emptive apology for the many errors which he will undoubtedly fall into.

I shall leave two issues unaddressed: the chronology of the dialogues; and the meanings of the verb 'to be'.

I accept as sound the established division of Plato's works into three periods, according to which the theory of forms is distinctive of the middle dialogues and the *Sophist* is one of the late dialogues. I also unreservedly accept the basic distinction between complete and incomplete uses of the verb 'to be', while noting that it is at least doubtful whether Plato himself would have made such a distinction, even in the *Sophist* – not, of course, because of logical incompetence, but simply because he had no philosophical interest in such a distinction.

And now, to the issue at hand.

The aporia experienced by the interlocutors in the *Sophist* on the notion of non-being is, essentially, the following:

1. That which absolutely *is not* cannot be thought of or spoken of (238c).
2. However, every assertion concerning that which is not, even if negative in content, requires the mediation of an "is" in order to be expressed.

3. In effect, when we say that non-being is not thinkable or utterable, we are, in actual fact, uttering it and, necessarily, uttering it as being, namely, as *being* unutterable (239a).
4. Therefore, due not to linguistic ambiguity but to ontological requirement, to say that non-being is not utterable is the same as asserting that it *is* unutterable and, in general, to say that non-being *is not* is to say that non-being *is* non-being, which certainly collides with what those assertions were intended to demonstrate in the first place, that is, the absolute unutterability and the absolute non-being of non-being.
5. In fact, each of those assertions tacitly affirms the opposite of what it declares, namely, that non-being is utterable (precisely as being unutterable) and, therefore, that non-being is (precisely as being non-being).

The most immediate interpretation of this section would be as follows: the Eleatic notion of non-being, here patently challenged, must be superseded; and the Platonic notion of “other” (ἕτερον), introduced through the novel doctrine of the κοινωνία τῶν εἰδῶν, is exactly what supersedes it.

Such an interpretation has, however, the disadvantage of being external to the argument, replacing analysis of its internal progress with the abstract assumption of the two extreme moments that structure it, namely, the two different notions of non-being. As an act of supersession, it excludes the Eleatic notion of non-being to the benefit of the Platonic one, without realizing that every act of supersession is never simply one of negation, but also one of incorporation.

Now, this is precisely what happens with the question of non-being in the *Sophist*.

The Eleatic notion is not dissolved; it is, rather, interpreted in the light of another conception of non-being which, in absorbing it, refashions it into a different shape.

The peremptory interdiction of Parmenides, according to which non-being is not,¹ is never actually refuted: it is taken as possessing its own truth, although such truth is understood as limited, and confined within new boundaries.

1 In summary form, for the exact statement never appears as such. See DK B 2. 5–8, B 6. 2, B 7. 1, etc.

These limits are clearly manifest in the way the Stranger from Elea deals with the issue in the dialogue.

To him, the truth of the proposition “non-being is not” is undisputable if one takes non-being in absolute terms (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν, 237b), “in and by itself” (τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό, 238c), or, as he also says, “in its exact sense” (εἴπερ ὀρθῶς τις λέξει, 239a).

In fact, the text will only state, in unequivocal terms, that non-being *is* after this notion is re-interpreted as *other*, that is, as other-than-a-certain-being, and hence as not-being-something-that-is, as non-being *relative* to some being. And this is why the Stranger will underline the exclusively relational character of this other notion of non-being (255c–e).

So, far from facing an alternative between two conflicting notions of non-being, we are in fact facing a new interpretation of this concept, namely, one that attempts to widen and reframe it by showing that non-being can be said in two different ways: absolutely and “in itself”, or relatively and “in relation to something other”. In the former, the Eleatic lesson preserves all its authority; in the latter, it is modulated to accommodate the new challenge. In this fashion, the Platonic re-interpretation does not in any way imply disposing of the Eleatic notion, or ignoring its value.²

Yet the essential aspect of Plato's argument is that the Eleatic notion of non-being and the acknowledgment of its validity within certain limits is precisely that which *makes it possible to postulate Plato's notion*. In other words, it is only through the acknowledgment of the Eleatic position that the Platonic one may come to be established. And that is why any interpretation that extricates the two notions from the movement that articulates them will always be partial and insufficient.

Let us look closely at this argument.

At 236e ff. we are confronted with the paradox of a non-being that, because it cannot, in absolute terms, be thought of, must be thought of as such, and that, because it cannot, in absolute terms, be spoken of, must be spoken of as such. Furthermore, we are confronted with the aporetic nature of “something” whose non-being implies a multiplicity of “being” – *being* unutterable, *being* unthinkable, etc.

2 This is further reinforced by the Stranger's final outline, where “that contrary of being” – Eleatic non-being – is not refuted, but instead placed between brackets (258e).

However – and here we face the implicit and possibly ironic drift of the argument –, the fact that we are forced to *utter* that non-being is unutterable *is the greatest proof that non-being cannot be spoken of*: for no statement is able to respect non-being's true nature as – precisely – non-being.

Thus, the very truth of the proposition “non-being is not, in absolute terms, utterable” is attested by the necessity of uttering it as *being* unutterable. For the general requirement of speech, displayed in this utterance, illustrates how non-being is excluded and barred from presence in language. Indeed, in its stead, some other thing is invariably summoned, some other thing which is never non-being as such, but, rather, non-being thought of as a being, or, more to the point, as an abstract contrary to being – that is, as something projected from *within being* as its symmetrical counterpart.

The outrageous affirmative conversion “non-being *is* unutterable”, far from stating a contradiction in terms, exhibits *ipso facto* the very unutterability of non-being, presenting it as something so extreme that it is impossible even to summon it in order to declare it unutterable. In effect, when we declare that “non-being is unutterable” we are not uttering non-being itself (as we might initially have feared we were), but merely uttering its unutterability.

This way the truth of the Eleatic statement “non-being is not” is reinforced and justified. At this juncture of Plato's *Sophist* “is” rediscovers, *following Parmenides' path*, its true ontological status – that of being the limit of all that can be thought of and spoken of. So if “some contrary of being” (ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ) is, at a later point, placed between brackets (258e), this is not done in opposition to Parmenides, but following a track he laid down.

In truth, if non-being is not, then there is nothing else to say or think about it.³

Yet – and this is where specifically Platonic mediation intervenes – the acknowledgement of this truth leads to a necessary and correlative relativization of non-being.

We noted earlier that the mere fact that we cannot avoid saying “non-being is” is the greatest proof that non-being cannot be spoken of and the most immediate consequence of the non-being of non-being. Non-being can only be spoken of as an entity; so the non-

3 In this sense, the Stranger fulfils the true command of the Parmenidean goddess: see DK B 7, 1–5, and DK B 8, 15–18.

being referred to by speech can never be non-being as such, αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ ὄν. Indeed, non-being as such (i. e., absolute non-being) cannot be spoken of. However, if the non-being stated in speech never is non-being proper, this is due to the fact that absolute non-being is absolutely not. This is what makes it unutterable: because it is not, there is nowhere to retrieve it from, nor a means to determine it. Just as being is, non-being is not – and that is all.

Still, if absolute non-being cannot be spoken of, it is always spoken of relatively and as something *that is*, namely, other than something else. This non-being is no longer contrary to being; rather, it is “other” than (a certain) being. And only of the latter can one properly say that it *is* non-being.

Plato's analysis of non-being in the *Sophist* imperceptibly leads from a first non-being – that which *is not* properly (being) – to a second non-being – that which *is* properly (non-being). But this shift is mediated through the realization of the inadequacy of attributing “is” to the former. Through this mediation, that which might be called “the language of being”, facing its limit, acknowledges the reach of its attributive power and the rules governing its legitimate use, and is now able to rightfully claim both “is” and “is not” for entities as such.

Thus, to say, for instance, “the table is brown” or “the table is not green” is always to say “that which it is”, for it always involves speaking, either affirmatively or negatively, of something that is. In light of this, we can say that the outcome of the *Sophist* is the discovery of negation as a fundamental determination of being itself.

It is precisely because the second non-being is always relative to an entity from which it is being differentiated, that its traits become better recognizable before particular examples.

We can see this at three levels.

On a first level: when we say of a brown table that it is a green table, we are saying “that which is not”, i. e., we are saying something other than what it is. In reality though, the table which our assertion is about (viz., the green table) actually is not: it is not the table that our assertion intended to describe and failed to, and it is not any of the tables that exist, any of the tables that “are”; it is a mere fiction inadvertently generated *ad hoc* by our error.

On the other hand, that green table we speak of is not an absolute non-being; it is simply not the table we intended to speak of. Its non-being is not, therefore, an absolute non-being, but merely not being *that* table.

For the green table generated by error to be an absolute non-being, the “thing” generated would have to not be green and would have to not be a table; in a word, it would have to not be *absolutely*. And this is why no error could ever generate it.

Now – and here we ascend to the second level –, the illusory green table’s non-being (which is, in fact, all the being that it has) lies solely in the fact that it is not the brown table; it is but a non-being *relative to* the brown table, which is in turn, in the example given, the only one of those two tables that actually is. Its negativity is not absolute, without qualification; it is a relative negativity, that is, an *alterity*.

However, if our initial proposition stated “that which is not” (*viz.*, that the brown table is green), such is due, at a more radical level – no longer linguistic, but ontological –, to the fact that the brown table is not green. And thus, beneath the non-being one might infer from the proposition (which states that which is not), we uncover a real foundation: the non-being formed from that which the table *that is* (i. e., the brown table) *is not* (i. e., green).

Plainly, this non-being is not an absolute non-being: the table simply is not as the proposition states it to be (i. e., green); it is *other* than that which is stated by the mistaken proposition. For it to be an absolute non-being, it would have to not only not be green, but also not be brown and not a table; it would have thus have to not be absolutely, in which case it could not have caused any mistake at all. Now, if it is the case that the actual brown table, precisely as that brown table, can be spoken of as *non-being*, such non-being (which is, from a formal point of view, as negative as absolute non-being), expresses simply a relative negativity, an alterity, and specifically an alterity in relation to green.

Once again, the relativization of non-being takes on reality through the mediation of being, more precisely, of *being other* – in the case in point, of being other in relation to green. At this point, though (and here lies the essential contrast with the first level), the being in relation to which alterity operates as mediator is not another entity, except in a specific sense, in a specifically Platonic sense, if you will, which in the case at hand is Green Itself. The brown table *is not* in the sense that it is not *green*; or in more technical language, it is not because it “participates in the Other in relation to the Green”.

This formulation already suggests that the shift from first to second level is immediately reflected, as far as the explanation is concerned, in a twofold and transitive difference.

In the abstract, we can say either that the green table referred to in the proposition *is not*, or that the actual brown table *is not*. However, whereas the former *is not* because it is not the actual table (that is, because it does not correspond to what this entity really is, hence affecting its whole being with negativity), the latter *is not* because it is not as the proposition describes it (thus, merely revealing it as not being *what it is not*). So while the green table's non-being is radical, destructive and entirely negative, that of the brown table is contingent and, in a way, positive, for it is simply the negation of its own negation.

A further difference also emerges in the matter of the foundation of negation itself: the green table *is not* because it does not match the table that the proposition intended to describe, i. e., because it is not the actual table. The brown table, which is real relative to the green table, *is not* only to the extent that the falsity of the proposition shows it to be so, that is, that it is not green, not, of course, in relation to the green table referred to in the proposition (which is merely the occasion for negativity to be shown), but in relation to *Green Itself*. And this is what it means to say that it "participates in the Other in relation to the Green".

The shift from one level to the other shows a further step in terms of argument: the green table *is not* because it is not the actual table, that is, because it is other in relation to it; the brown table *is not* because it is not green, that is, because it is other (it participates in the Other) in relation to Green Itself.

This further step shows that the negation of the actual table, which seemed at first merely contingent, is in fact constitutive and, in a way, essential: the brown table is not green precisely because it *is* brown, which means not only that its non-being (green) follows from its being (brown), but mostly that its non-being *is constitutive of its being*. Technically speaking, the table participates in the Other in relation to the Green *because it participates in the Brown*. And thus, the brown table necessarily participates in the form of Other, which is the same as saying that the actual brown table (as radically as the illusory green table) *is not*.

Such a conclusion brings us to the third level.

The constitutive non-being which we have just detected does not affect exclusively brown tables or, more broadly, sensible objects; it also affects Brown Itself and Green Itself – it affects *forms* themselves.

In fact, if the brown table, by being brown, is not, constitutively and necessarily, green, this is due to the fact that Brown is not Green; in other words, to the fact that Brown is Other in relation to Green. So,

when we say that the table is not green because it is brown, this means, in deeper ontological terms, that the table does not participate in the Green *because* it participates in the Brown, that is, because it participates in *other than the Green* – an explanation that assumes, and at the same time displays, the reciprocal alterity of Green and Brown as such.

This third level is thus more radical than the second one.

Whereas the table's non-being is sustained by a more fundamental non-being (the not being Green of Brown Itself, i. e., the reciprocal alterity of these two forms), this non-being (the alterity of Green and Brown) is not anchored in anything else; it is, one might say, an irreducible ontological datum.

The ultimate foundation of non-being is thus the reciprocal alterity of genera, which, in turn, and by virtue of its ultimate character, is a constitutive alterity that immediately accompanies the very being of each form.

Now, the difference between those two levels brings about a decisive consequence for sensible objects that is in no way transferable to forms, namely, its radical ontological dependence. The brown table is brown only to the extent that it participates in the Brown; there is nothing in itself (a notion immediately misleading in the case of sensible objects) that prevents it from becoming green. Accordingly, in the constitutive duplicity of its nature, the brown table is and is not what it is. Its being is mere participation; it can never *be*, in the strong sense of the term, its being.

Behind the brown table's non-being lies thus the most radical *not being brown of the brown table*, for its being does not stem from itself and is, on the contrary, mere participation.

In general, the non-being of sensible objects is essentially defined by the fact that each one of them not only is not what it is not, but also, and more radically, is not *what it is*.

Obviously, that does not happen with the forms: the Green is neither brown nor the Brown, precisely because it is (the) Green. Given that it does not derive from its participation in something, but from itself, this fact is the foundation of its being and of its non-being, according to an ontological ordering such that the only reason why it *is not what it is not* is precisely the fact that it *is what it is*.

In light of this, the outcome of the doctrine of non-being in the *Sophist* shows not only no sign of actual betrayal of Eleatic teachings, but also nothing significant enough to suggest a change in the canonical theory of forms.

In fact, the two fundamental aspects of this doctrine, viz. the constitutive alterity of the form as not being *what it is not* and the constitutive alterity of the particular as not being *what it is*, are both already present in the classical account of the theory of forms and belong to its theoretical heritage. In the case of the former, the alterity of the forms is thought of as a constitutive alterity – one that does not contradict, but rather follows from and reinforces its ontologically absolute nature (and is indeed already present in the theory as a necessary correlate of that very nature). In the case of the latter, through clearer and safer articulations, it limits itself to confirming the radical alterity of the sensible as that which constitutes its own mode of being.

Can the same be said of the very notion of non-being which Plato develops in the *Sophist*?

Is this notion, too, sufficiently and clearly outlined in any of the previous dialogues where this subject is referred to?

If we re-examine the most pertinent texts, particularly those where the canonical development of the theory of forms is put forward, we can see that none of those two senses of non-being which we find in the *Sophist* constitutes an element novel to this dialogue.

On the contrary, both are present throughout all of Plato's thought, and their articulation forms what might be called Plato's doctrine of non-being. The strong, or absolute, sense of the term "non-being" represents, in fact, a central theoretical element of Plato's ontology, one that runs through the entirety of Plato's work. It is addressed in particular in the *Euthydemus* (284bc, where the theme is introduced by the eponymous sophist in a polemic context), in *Republic V* (476e–478d, where it has already been philosophically retrieved by Socrates) and in the *Theaetetus* (187d–190a, this time in the middle of an aporia concerning the possibility of false opinion). That is, it is addressed in all three periods of Plato's writing, and up to a time quite close to that of the composition of the *Sophist*.

In all these instances, its enunciation follows closely the Eleatic model: non-being is that which absolutely is not; it is impossible to have knowledge, opinion or discourse concerning it.

This is the first, untouched notion of non-being, such as it reappears in the *Sophist* (237b ff).⁴

4 To our knowledge, apart from a marginal reference in Lynch ([1959] 206), this is expressly acknowledged only by Shorey ([1933] 298–300; cf. [1980] 56), and immediately seconded by Cornford in his translation of the dialogue

But it would be hasty to conclude from this circumstance that it is precisely this notion that is under suspicion in the *Sophist*, such that the entire dialogue would be directed to its refutation (or reformulation), on the grounds of its being a unilateral interpretation of τὸ μὴ ὄν so exclusive in sense as to inevitably result in a philosophical “dead end”.

It is true that, in the works that precede the *Sophist*, such a sense appears to dominate as the constant expression for non-being.

However, this apparent prevalence, far from denoting univocity, is above all due to then-current terminology, in which “that which is not” was understood in the literal sense of that which “(actually) is not”.

Prior to being a doctrine proper, the principle according to which non-being is not, and cannot therefore be spoken of or thought of, expresses a self-evident and irrefutable proposition that any doctrine must accommodate – even if simply in the form of the “taken for granted”.

That Plato is not content with the mere “taken for granted” is something that confirms the depth of his project, which attempts to address “everything” (that is, all that can be thought of) and, to do so, must begin by thinking that which constitutes the limit of all thought. As Wittgenstein would have put it, philosophy “must set limits to what can be thought and, in doing so, what cannot be thought”; but “it must set limits to what cannot be thought by working outwards through what can be thought”.⁵

This is not to admit that this is the only sense of αὐτὸ τὸ μὴ ὄν in Plato’s philosophy. Nor is it to say that its persistent interpretation in that sense in dialogues prior to the *Sophist* derives from lack of acknowledgment of the “new” notion of it – a “discovery” which is usually attributed to this work.

In fact, by looking once again at that same place in the *Republic* where the notion of absolute non-being is enunciated, and expressly as-

([1935] 202–209). Both authors refer to the persistence of this sense of non-being in the *Sophist*, specifically comparing it with *Republic* V. On the section devoted to Plato in his essay “On Ancient and Mediaeval Semantics and Metaphysics”, De Rijk also recognises a place for “that which absolutely is not” in this dialogue, and he formulates a good analysis of it ([198] 14–22). Swindler (1979–80: p. 742) proffers a similar revalidation of Parmenides’ non-being, considering it to be an inherent consequence of the Platonic teaching. For an opposite view, see Owen, “The Place of the *Timaeus*” ([1986a] 77) and “Plato on Non-Being” ([1986b] 110–126, 136).

5 *Tractatus*, 4. 114. The sentence quoted as an epigraph should also be borne in mind.

simulated to absolute ignorance, we note that the characterisation of becoming as the domain of that which *is and is not* already entails a relative notion of non-being – a notion lacking merely its technical designation as “other”.

To say that, in becoming, everything that *is* simultaneously *is not* assumes a concept of non-being that is necessarily different from absolute non-being. It is a non-being that consists in not being what it (the thing which is not) is, that is, it consists in an intrinsic alterity relative to its own being.

However, if this non-being is not absolute non-being (which would not only be contradictory, but would also disallow the μηδ'αμῶς ὄν just defined in the same passage), it also is not a non-existence, as shown by Vlastos, in a fittingly celebrated essay, against a persistent interpretation, sometimes built into the translation.⁶

Such non-being consists in not being what the-thing-which-is-not precisely is, a conception which already contains, quite clearly, the two fundamental traits that we reencounter in the relative notion of non-being presented in the *Sophist*, namely its relativity and the understanding of that relativity as alterity.

Plato's concept of ‘becoming’ in the middle dialogues carries within it the relative notion of non-being in all its defining traits. Furthermore, one may reasonably add that the canonical concept of becoming not only carries within it the relative notion of non-being, but *properly constitutes that notion*.⁷

The difference between those dialogues and the *Sophist* lies merely in the fact that the former confined non-being exclusively to the dimension of becoming.

However, in view of the doctrine expressed in the *Sophist*, such a confining constitutes in fact a twofold omission. On the one hand, there is the omission of that positive dimension of non-being by virtue of which each entity affirms itself by negation of negation (e.g., “the [brown] table is not green”). On the other hand, considering that this positive dimension is primarily founded upon the reciprocal alterity of

6 “Degrees of Reality in Plato” ([1965] 1–19).

7 Guthrie, in his collated reading of *Republic V* and the *Sophist*, seems to share this view of an anticipation of the notion of “relative” non-being. He shows that both dialogues generically agree with each other, and further suggests that there is continuity between the intermediate status of δόξα in the former and the notion of ἔτερον in the latter (cf. [1978] 162).

forms themselves (“the [brown] table is not green, because Brown Itself is other in relation to Green”), what the middle dialogues essentially omit is an express analysis of forms’ own non-being (in the sense noted).

We can thus draw a quadruple lesson from the *Sophist’s* doctrine of non-being:

1. Non-being cannot, as such, be thought of or expressed.
2. The fact that it is necessary to utter it as being is, in itself, evidence that it is so.
3. This necessity at the same time opens up a new sphere of possibility for thought and speech, namely, the sphere which being determines from within itself as its negation, as its “other”.
4. This relative non-being has its foundation in the negation of forms themselves, which makes each one of them constitutively “other”, that is, other than a set of others and, in general, other than all the others.

The origin and guiding motive of this quadruple doctrine is the Eleatic prohibition of thought and speech concerning non-being, taken to its ultimate consequences.⁸

That said, in light of the fourth conclusion above, these consequences cannot be the only ones that can be reached. These will result from an extension of the thematisation of the forms concerning the problem of non-being, a design that can only be carried out by analysing the effect on the theory of forms caused by the introduction of the notion of a “community of genera” in the *Sophist*, and, through it, by a more general consideration of this notion’s reach and meaning within Plato’s thought.

But this would be a subject for another study.

8 The final, positive aspect, so to speak, of alterity as principle of delimitation and exclusivity is very well thematized in Lee’s “Plato on Negation and Not-Being in the *Sophist*” ([1972], particularly 286–297, 303–304) and in Pippin’s “Negation and Not-Being in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and Plato’s *Sophist*” ([1979] 189–195; cf. his conclusion: “if otherness in this sense is just a further constituent of what it means to *be*, it is hard to appreciate how any dangerous parricide of Parmenides has taken place”). Recall, too, the acute comment made by Diès on this text, when he notes that being’s self-limitation expresses “l’altérité essentielle de l’être, et de tout être, par rapport à tout le reste” – the correlate of an “absolue irréductibilité de l’être”, according to which “l’être n’est définissable par aucun terme autre que lui” ([1985] 288).

The relativization of “separation” (*chorismos*) in the *Sophist*

Néstor-Luis Cordero

It is a commonplace among historians of ancient thought to refer to the “separation” (*chorismos*) which characterizes Platonic philosophy, and which Aristotle criticized severely. It is true that, like any commonplace, this separation, which is at base a type of dualism, can be the subject of very different understandings, including that of being minimized. But it is difficult to deny that, in the dialogues written before the philosopher’s second trip to Sicily around 367–365, whether in regard to what concerns being human or on the topic of knowledge and its object “reality”, one notices in Plato a distinction – which on occasion becomes an opposition – between two different domains. The classical formulation, of an eminently didactic nature, presented in the *Republic* is extremely useful, since it also allows us to clarify earlier passages which had offered less explicit formulations. We are referring to the distinction established in the *Republic* between the philosopher and the *philodoxos*, who dedicate themselves to the study of “separate” domains, and to the three paradigms that illustrate this separation: the analogy between the sun and the good, the image of the divided line and the allegory of the cave.

Both the opposition between body and psyche enunciated in the *Phaedo* and the dialectical ascent from individual to universal in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* receive a rigorous, clear and distinct systematization in the distinction between “sensible” and “intelligible” which the three paradigms of the *Republic* illustrate; the “sensible”, whose second-hand reality is a mixture of being and non-being, is condemned to merely “becoming” and to being the object of opinions, while the “intelligible”, which enjoys absolute being (*pantelos on*), is, in consequence, totally knowable (*pantelos gnoston*).

In referring to realities in themselves, which are autonomous and unchangeable, Plato invariably uses the adverbs *pantelos*, *ontos*, and *alethos*, since these realities are independent of particular instances and of every type of materiality, while the multiplicity of sense objects is relative, changing and ephemeral. When we make reference to separation

or Platonic dualism we are referring to this schema, which, as we have said, either overtly or covertly appears in all the dialogues written before Plato attained (as far as we can make out) the age of seventy or so, i. e., before his second trip to Sicily, somewhere around 367–365.

As is well known, the peaceful panorama of a philosophy in which, directly or indirectly, a super-Socrates always has the last word, even when he decides to break off a discussion, comes to an end when the Academy celebrates twenty years of existence (if it is the case, that is, that it was founded around 387), and Plato returns from Sicily, evidently disillusioned by his failure to ‘philosophize’ the tyrant Dionysius II, who had in principle shown interest in Plato’s project. If we talk of a “peaceful panorama” it is because we suppose that after twenty years of teaching, during which the example of the Director undoubtedly aroused not just the interest but the critical faculties of his most assiduous students, among them a number of colleagues, it is very probable that at that moment Plato decided to undertake a “second voyage”, mirroring the one he had spoken of years earlier, through the mouth of Socrates, in the *Phaedo*. In this case however it did not involve a change of direction, as it did in the pseudo-biography of Socrates just mentioned, but rather a consolidation of his own ideas, to enable them to cope with the criticisms which, as we have suggested, he clearly had to confront after a year’s absence in Sicily and after twenty years of “proselytization” in the Academy.

According to our interpretation, the three dialogues which Plato wrote in sequence, the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, are an illustration of this second voyage. I have just said “according to our interpretation”, since there are a number of scholars who do not share the view that this is the sequence in which the three dialogues should be read (which corresponds very probably to the order of writing). Since it seems obvious to us that before offering a solution a philosopher needs to be aware of a problem (including being alarmed by it, as Plato will say in the *Theaetetus*, 155d3), we have no doubt that the *Parmenides* is the first in the trilogy, in the first part of which the venerable Parmenides sets out before the young Socrates the objections which can be made to his theories, and whose second part is a piece of philosophical gymnastics the objective of which is to “de-dogmatize” any proposed theory which is incapable of criticizing itself.

In the *Theaetetus*, which comes next in order, Socrates shows that he has learnt the lesson, since even several years afterwards (the action of the dialogue takes place when the accusation against him has already

been set in motion) he tries again to answer a question which he had already discussed in several antecedent dialogues: “What constitutes rigorous knowledge (*episteme*)?”, but without recourse to the essential role played by the Forms; and he fails. At which point he recollects that when he was young, Parmenides had said to him that “if somebody does not admit that there are Forms of everything that exists...he will have no way of orienting his thinking...and as a consequence, will completely destroy the power of dialectic” (*Parmenides*, 135b–c). The solution then is to return to the Forms, reinforcing their ontological status, giving them renewed vigor, and dynamizing them. This will be Plato’s task in the *Sophist*, the fictive action of which takes place on the day after the encounter mentioned in the *Theaetetus* (the “tomorrow” to which the dialogue alludes at the end is the “today” found at the beginning of the *Sophist*). The task undertaken by the *Sophist* will culminate, among other findings, in the relativization of the virus which had poisoned the roots of Platonic theory – separation.

It is the same Plato who diagnoses the existence of the virus, which is at the same time the source of various dangerous secondary consequences. Let us return to the *Parmenides*, where, as we have said, he will present the problems that will be resolved in the *Sophist*. The magisterial mise-en-scène imagined by Plato allows him to engage in dialogue with himself. In fact, the pseudo-dialogue between Socrates and Parmenides is in reality a conversation between the present Plato, who hides behind the mask of Parmenides, and the Plato of yesterday, represented by Socrates. The same procedure will be utilized in the “historiographical” passages of the *Sophist*, i. e., when Plato refers to previous philosophers; in this case Plato II will hide behind the figure of the Stranger, who will interrogate Plato I, the “friend of the Forms”, whose porte-parole in the passage in question will be Theaetetus.

In the *Parmenides*, Plato II, with admirable intellectual honesty, goes directly to the heart of the problem which contaminates the philosophy of Plato I. After a picturesque introduction, Plato presents a young Socrates who boasts about possessing the definitive solution to the problems posed by Zeno: his (Zeno’s) difficulty (*aporia*) had to do with all that was visible (*tois horomenois*), but it does not exist if one admits the existence of the Forms (*tois eidesi*) (*Parmenides* 129e–130a). Given the forceful nature of the remark, Parmenides asks Socrates (after interchanging a glance of complicity with Zeno), if he himself (*autos sy*) practices the division (*dieiresthai*) which he has just elaborated and places in separate do-

mains (*khoris*) the Forms in themselves and that which participates in them (130b).

The insistence on the repetition of the adverb *khoris* as the point of departure for the interrogation to which Plato I will be subjected by Plato II is more than significant, but we have presented only a very small part of our argumentation, in that the adverb *khoris* appears eight times in less than one page, between 130b and 131a. This flood of uses is unusual in Plato. In addition to the two examples already mentioned, to be found at 130b2 and 3, Parmenides asks in the next line whether likeness in itself is separate, *khoris*, from the likeness we encounter among ourselves; at c1 he asks whether the Form of man is also separate, *khoris*, from ourselves, men; at d1 he asks again whether each form, *eidos*, is separate, *khoris*, from that which participates in it; at 131b1 Parmenides deduces that the Form, which is one, is separate, *khoris*, from other things, which are also separate, *khoris*, from it; and finally, at b5 Socrates puts forward the example of daylight, which is separate, *khoris*, from things, but illuminates them. Eight times in less than a page. And then the word appears nine times more in the second part, during the game of hypotheses, but those examples are not of present interest.

Let us say finally that this privileging of separation as the prime characteristic of Platonism reappears in the first sentence of the description of the philosophy of the “friends of the Forms” which the Stanger professes: “You separate (*dielomenoi*) existing reality (*ousia*), [placing it] separately (*khoris*) from becoming (*genesis*), isn’t that true?” (248a7).

The time has come to ask ourselves: Why this insistence on privileging separation? The answer is simple: because it divides two different types of reality, each characterized by a different manner of being, the one real and absolute (*ontos pantelos*), the other of a second order, ephemeral, and as something relative condemned to co-existence with non-being. But it happens that the entire philosophy of Plato is based on the relation that exists between Forms and the multiplicity of sense objects, a relation which is sometimes called participation, at other times presence and at other times communication, but it turns out that the more different the entities to be communicated, the more problematic the communication. And that is the reason why the axiom of separation is the source of all the problems.

The first problem is the difficulty of finding an intermediate point between extremes, in that Plato sees with great clarity, even before Aristotle, that a particular intermediary point is going to necessitate further

intermediaries, which will go on multiplying ad infinitum. The third man argument is going to get in the way of the Forms completing their mission, that of being present in the individual, given that they will vanish like smoke into an infinite number of intermediaries before they can ever arrive at the individual sense object. But there is another problem which also has its origins in separation: how, given the Form’s absolute nature, the unity of the intelligible can be sustained in face of the multiplicity of the sensible. If the Form is one, it has no parts, and hence cannot participate; or, if it has parts and participates, it is not one. All *aporiai* stem from separation. So, one has to try to suppress it, or at any rate relativize it, and that is going to be the task the *Sophist* sets itself.

Why the *Sophist*? Because, as we saw, *khorismos* separated two modes of being, and the *Sophist* is a dialogue about being. Steering clear of interpretation, the dialogue’s subtitle is *peri tou ontos*. And it is normal, if he is going to undertake an in-depth analysis of the figure of the sophist, that he should see himself as obliged, for the first time on his philosophical voyage, now that he is over seventy, to confront his father Parmenides, the venerable and fearsome monopolizer of being, and the confrontation concerns sophistry. This is not the time to expatiate on the “amitiés particulières” that Plato establishes between Parmenides and sophistry. In criticizing the great master all things are allowed, including taking literally images in the poem which are didactic, such as the sphere, and in particular characterizing him as a fellow-traveller of sophistry, which is, all in all, a joke in poor taste. But it is undeniable that his changing of *porte-parole*, in which he replaces Socrates with the Stranger, allows Plato to take certain liberties, and to face problems that his Socrates had never faced, among them precisely the necessity of refuting Parmenides.

In fact, if we look at the dialogues antecedent to the *Sophist*, although there are anecdotal references here and there to Parmenides, it seems that Plato philosophized as if the great Eleatic has never existed. Just a couple of examples. For Plato, *doxa* can be true, while for Parmenides the fundamental disjunction had been either *doxa* or truth. But Plato takes no position on this alternative; he simply ignores it. Furthermore, given the absolute and necessary character of Parmenides’s being, levels of being within it are non-existent: either it is or it is not. For Plato, by contrast, the sensible individual, which from the point of view of knowledge is the *doxaston*, is a combination of being and non-being. When Plato wrote that sentence in the *Republic*, did he think that for a combination to be real the elements composing it

each had to exist, or that his sentence supposed that non-being exists? Were the contrary the case, the *doxaston* would be a combination of being with itself. But Parmenides had written a Poem to demonstrate that *ouk esti me einai*, a theory which Gorgias undertook to destroy and Antisthenes (without mentioning it) to endorse, and which Plato himself seems to ignore.

Plato II, along with his new *porte-parole*, see with acuteness that, if everything Socrates (or Plato I) had said is to be valid, i. e., that the sense particular is an imitation, an image, of an absolute being – which is a commonplace in all the dialogues antecedent to the *Parmenides* – one has to justify the possibility of there being images, imitations, and copies, i. e. that the result of the sophist's work, his “product”, really exists. Otherwise, it makes no sense to criticize him, if there is no difference between sophistic and philosophical theses. If, by contrast, one is able to finally demonstrate that the sophist is one who manipulates notions that are false and misleading – a thing which supposes that non-being exists (cf. *Sophist* 237a3, *to me on einai*) – everything Plato I has said up to this point continues to be valid, but for the same to be true in his own case Plato II has to demonstrate that non-being, or a certain type of non-being, exists. As one can appreciate, the task which Plato II places in the hands of the Stranger is monumental but decisive, and every path leads to an analysis of the notion of being, given that non-being constitutes the other side of the coin. In light of the response given to the question “What is ‘being’”? one will be able to elaborate a theory which either annihilates or justifies non-being.

Let us turn now to the central section of our analysis. We have to admit that anyone expecting to find in earlier philosophers a treatment of the question of the fact of being, the sort of core that makes a reality a reality, i. e., something like what Aristotle will call being *qua* being, is in for a disappointment. The only exception is Parmenides. However, if the great Eleatic did indeed set forth a magisterial analysis of the *semata* of being, he says nothing in the fragments of his Poem that have come down to us about the relationship between that absolute, necessary being and other realities. Plato, like his predecessors, at any rate up to the time of the *Sophist*, never concerned himself with the question of “being”, other than his “limiting” himself – an expression which one need not take literally – to assimilating being to the Forms, and finally considering, in a single passage of a single dialogue, the *Republic*, one particular Form, that of the Good, as being endowed with “*einai te*

kai ousia”. A Form is, according to the formula found at *Phaedrus* 247c7, a “reality that really exists”, *ousia ontos ousa*.

But the assimilation of being to the Forms perforce obliged him to come up with a justification for the manner of being proper to those things which are not Forms but their imitations – the multiplicity of sense particulars, and that is where his problems began. For this type of being, different as it is from the Forms, is by that token not absolute in itself, and possibly without realizing that the ghost of Parmenides had taken over him, he had no doubts about asserting that this being which was different from absolute being was perforce non-being. However, he did not follow this assimilation through to its final consequences, as his teacher would have done, since he had no problem asserting, without demonstration, that non-being exists, given that it intermingles with being for becoming to originate. But he never had it in mind to demonstrate that a being different from being in itself was able to exist. In this last stage of his writing life, the necessity of overcoming separation – the consequence of his assimilating being to the Forms – will lead him in the *Sophist* to postulate the Form of Difference, which will justify the real existence of non-being, or of a certain type of non-being.

But let us take this one step at a time. Plato sees with great perspicacity that the assimilation of being in itself to a principle (in his case, the Forms) makes it problematic and maybe impossible to justify the existence of a type of being that is different. He demonstrates that impossibility in a way that is eminently didactic – and at times he uses some doubtful rhetorical touches – in his analysis of the position of the “sons of the earth” in the *Sophist*. By assimilating existent reality (*ousia*) to that which offers resistance to touch, i. e., to the corporeal, these people are incapable of admitting the existence of incorporeal realities (which might include values, 246a–b). Only a conception of being which cannot be assimilated to a principle, but which, by being “outside” of that principle, allows both it and the contrary principle to exist, will be the key to the solution that Plato will propose. But that solution presupposes that he will have to abandon the assimilation of being to the Forms, and to reply, not to the question ‘What is that which is?’ (the response to which is obvious: the Forms) but rather to the question “What is being?” (*ti to on?*).

Plato concludes that he must reply to that question after analyzing the position of previous philosophers (among whom will be...Plato I!) in the passionate passage that begins on p. 242d. All of them had formulated questions about *poia kai posa ta onta*, a phrase we can translate as

“the quality and quantity of realities” (at issue are realities which will be considered principles; he is not counting up how many things there are in the universe). Monists and pluralists were interested in quantity; in respect of quality, Plato discovers that, as a common denominator among those who offered a response to this question, they could be summed up as either corporealists (or more precisely materialists) or conceptualists, formalists, or, as he says at a time when he has to indicate who they are as individuals, “friends of the Forms”. Despite the obvious references to his own system, much has been written in an attempt to deny that Plato was referring to himself. Now is not the time to launch into the controversy, but pages 246b and 247a offer us a veritable indenkitt of the Platonists, whom the Stranger (in reality Plato II) knows “through the habitual contact, *dia syntheian*, he has with them” (248b).

Though the philosophical position of the friends of the Forms is opposed to (and more “civilized” than, *hemeroterioi*, 246c10) that of the Sons of the Earth, its congenital defect is the same: in establishing a separation between Forms and becoming, they deny that the latter possess the same “quality” of being as existent reality (*ousia*) (just as the corporealists had denied all reality to the non-corporeal). Nonetheless, even if the Sons of the Earth are presented as people of little intellect, or (possibly because of this) at any rate the most docile amongst them (says Plato at 246e2), they had to admit the genuine reality of incorporeal realities, in opposition to what had been considered hitherto the only realities, bodies. The Friends of the Forms have to follow this example, and must not be afraid to admit the genuine reality of opposites, and instead of choosing between the intelligible (the non-sensible) and the sensible (the non-intelligible), they have to lay claim to the real, simultaneous existence of both, the way children do with their choices, and affirm, for example, “that being and the whole (*to on kai to pan*) are simultaneously in repose (*akineta*) and changing (*kekinemena*)” (249d3).

For this it is enough not to assimilate the fact of being with one of the opposites, given that if one did so the other would not exist. Plato will follow this advice, but, faithful to the method set out by the Stranger in the *Sophist*, which consists in not proposing solutions dogmatically (the way Socrates had done on a number of occasions in previous dialogues), but rather in scrutinizing them and then justifying them, he will conduct a review of “ancient” thought and find therein the origins of nothing less than a new conception of being.

There has been a lot of discussion about the nuances of the verb “to be” in the *Sophist*. The bibliography on the topic is huge, but rarely (I

think never) has it been noticed that it is the justification of a certain type of non-being which will force Plato to elaborate a new type of being as well. If the Forms constitute being, it is impossible to justify the existence of non-being. But as the Forms are the source of both the existence and the specific characteristics of the individual, the solution that Plato discovers (as we shall see later) consists in separating both “ways of being”: something is, and at the same time is x. Or to put it differently, “to be” has at the same time an existential, absolute sense and a predicative sense. Both senses are united in the role of Forms as providers of essence and existence in Plato I. But when Plato turns his attention to earlier philosophers he is studying systems which had maintained the existence of pairs of opposing principles, and he sees with great lucidity that in order to justify such opposition they had to consider, implicitly, that the fact of being was a “third” (*triton*) something which provided existence to the pair of opposites (243d–e), even if they never managed to pose the question, “What is this ‘being’?”

Plato fills this void. He puts himself in the place of these philosophers and asks himself “*ti to ‘einai’ touto?*” “What is this ‘being’?” He is clearly dealing with the verb “to be”, since he is not Aristotle and is unaware for the moment of the formula “*ti to on?*”, but the passage takes on an unusual relevance, in that for the first time we encounter in a philosophical text the difference – if only terminological – between being and realities (since the Platonic example deals with “conferring” being on the hot and the cold), a difference which Plato will make his own and, in a paraphrase which recalls the passage we have been studying, will say further on in the *Sophist* that “being (which has now become a Form, as we shall see, and for that reason utilizes the formula *to on*) constitutes a third (*triton*) something when we affirm that repose and movement exist (*einai*) (250c1).

This “existential” being, which is the giver of existence, in very short order becomes a Form. Once he has reached this point, Plato II reassumes the terminology of Plato I, with all that this implies. What is present in the sense individual and is the guarantor of that which is, is, for Plato, the Form. Examples of this are too numerous to cite. Faithful to this commitment, which needs no embellishment, Plato adds a new Form to those already existing, the Form of Being (*idea tou ontos*, 254a8–9; *to on auto*, 254d4), a form of universal participation, in that all that exists has to participate in it, and primarily all the other Forms (it will be remembered that the most commented-upon innovation in the *Sophist* – though in reality it is no such thing – is the famous

“*symploke ton eidon*”). It is enough to recall the passage 254d10: “being intermingles with both (sc., repose and movement), since both undoubtedly exist (*eston*).”

If Plato’s innovation had culminated with this discovery, philosophical investigation would have advanced a giant step, but the problem of justifying a certain type of non-being and the relativizing of *chorismos* would remain unanswered. Clearly, the existence conferred by the Form of Being has no nuances; there is either communication with it, in which case the individual exists, or there is no communication, in which case no individual thing exists. But as is well known, in addition to existing, each individual thing possesses certain properties, whose guarantee is once again the Forms. Each Form has its own *physis*, its own content, which it transmits to any thing that participates in it, and the totality of all that belongs to each thing will be called its essence. In a schema previous to the one which we are discovering in the *Sophist*, Plato had already affirmed (at *Republic* 509 b) that a privileged Form, that of the Good, provided “*einai te kai ousia*” to all other Forms, and by transference, to everything. Now the Form of Being occupies itself with *einai* and the other Forms with *ousia*.

But insofar as it is an essence or existent reality, *ousia* is in a close relationship with existence. A tree, for example, exists because it participates in the Form of Being, and is an oak because it participates in “oakness”, something which confers certain appropriate characteristics which belong solely to it and which differentiate it not only from other trees but also from other oaks. This schema is valid for all the dialogues of Plato, but an innovation introduced in the *Sophist* compels the philosopher to clarify what he means by “individuality”, i. e., that it is which guarantees that an individual, as being an individual thing, beyond simply existing, is that which it is. The innovation to which we are referring, once again decisive, is the type of existence which the Form of Being confers on all that participates in it. The Form of Being is not void; it too has a *physis* – the possibility of communicating. To exist is to possess the capacity to communicate, *dynamis koinonias*. This is the *physis* of the Form of Being, which transmits the power which is synonymous with existing. That which makes no communication, including a Form, does not exist. Everything is in a reciprocal relationship, since every thing is affected by another, or acts upon another, and everything that possesses this “power” exists. In Plato’s words: “What really exists (*ontos einai*) is everything that possesses the capacity (*dynamis*) to activate or to be activated” (247e).

Continuing on with a certain solemnity of tone (and without fear of falling into repetition), Plato defines the nature of the "object" whose possession "makes" each thing to really be: "I maintain this definition, then, in order to define (*horon horizein*) existents; they are nothing other than capacity (*dynamis*)."¹ Everything which possesses this capacity to do something or have something done to it (which, it seems, will later be replaced by the notion of "communicate", *koinonein*, since to activate and to be activated is to place oneself in a relationship with something, hence to communicate) exists *ontos*. And to ensure that there will be no doubt that what is at issue is a definition the Stranger asks Theaetetus, a few lines later, "Did we establish an adequate definition when we said that entities are that in which the capacity to do or have something done to it is present (*parei*)?" (248c4). Faithful to Plato I, Plato II utilizes the verb "to be present", which is the classic function of the Form, its presence in the sensible.

We shall return to this definition, but, given that the communication which it proposes has universal validity (since all that possesses it exists *ontos*), on the one hand the frontier between the sensible and the intelligible begins to grow cloudy, and on the other hand individual things are perforce in a reciprocal relationship. Nothing is in isolation, on pain of not existing if it were. To guarantee the individuality of each individual thing, then, Plato introduces two new Forms from page 254e on, those of Same and Other, each of them too of universal participation, since everything (including the other Forms) participates in them, and it is thanks to this last innovation that the question of non-being will be justified. Just as the Form of Being guarantees the existence of each thing, these two Forms guarantee their essence, i. e., guarantee that, in spite of their reciprocal communication, they mark out the clear line that separates one thing from another. Each thing is that which it is since it participates in the Same with respect to itself (put differently, it is self-identical), but its identity is reinforced because, in participating also in the Other, it is different from (or, other than) every other thing which it is not. Identity and difference (a pair which will never be dislodged, from this point on, from the domain of philosophy and the sciences) define every individual existent.

But it happens that everything which something is not does not cease for that reason to exist. We could say that every thing remains locked within the limits of a circle (to "de-fine" is precisely to draw limits), but everything outside of the circumference of the circle exists as well, and is, says Plato, non-being in respect of the term which was

taken as a reference point. In one of the most contested passages of the *Sophist* Plato proposes his solution to the problem of “non-being”: the “non” in the formula does not signify the contrary of being, which would be nothingness (and Parmenides would agree), but rather something “different”, “other”, with respect to the term in question. But a combination of this finding with the definition of being as power of communication has a number of unexpected secondary consequences. As every thing now necessarily communicates with that which it is not, in a new relationship of otherness guaranteed by the Form of the Other, each thing exists *ontos*, since it possesses that potency, on pain of not existing if it did not.

Once this finding has been applied to the separation between sensible and intelligible, Plato now has to have recourse to the debatable intermingling of being and non-being to justify the multiplicity of individuals that are in a constant state of becoming. This multiplicity is now really (*ontos*) real because its manner of being is simply different from the manner of being of the intelligible. With respect to the intelligible, the sensible is really “a” non-being; it possesses, as a real property, that of “not being” intelligible. One could say its non-being is relative; all that is of import is that “part” of the Other which is opposed to it, that of intelligibility. But its pertinence to that “part” is real. And, in its turn, its Identity defines its essence: it is “the sensible”, which, as such, communicates with bodies, etc. When Plato’s exposition of the assimilation of non-being to the Different is finally complete, an unusual adverb consecrates the discovery in a striking way: we say that “that which is not is really, *ontos*, that which is not (251d1), and further on he concludes that “this same thing is really, *ontos*, non-being” (258e2).

This same adverb *ontos* is also applied to the image, a classic example from the domain of becoming, in one of the most discussed (and tortuous) passages of the *Sophist*, 240a–b. Let us look rapidly at the passage, which should be read in the way Plato wrote it and not as 19th and 20th century German philologists took it, which finds an echo in the Burnet text of 1900. With the objective of reaching a rigorous definition of an image (*eidolon*), so as to be able either to condemn or to amnesty the sophists for the work they engage in, Theaetetus proposes the following definition: an image is “something elaborated in such a way as to be similar to the true, but different from it” (240a7–8). The image is “different” since, differently from its model, it is not true, but like the true it is that which really (*ontos*) is; and, as a consequence, because that which is not true does not really exist, the image too does not really exist: it is a

non-being. But that does not stop it from really existing *qua* image (*eikon ontos*) (240b).

If one analyzes the earlier work of Plato, it is the first time that the adverb *ontos* is applied to an entity which is not a Form. The fact that it is distinct from the Form (and, as we shall see, of its not being “true”) is no obstacle to the image’s really existing. The justification for its real existence is found several pages later, when Plato propounds the definition of the fact of being. Effectively, the image has been elaborated as similar to its model. This presupposes that the image has been the object of an action (the verb “elaborate as similar”, *aphomoiomenon*, is in the passive voice; the image was passively acted upon by the model). One might say it possessed the power of communicating with the model, since the model has been “active” in regard to it, all of which makes the image to be something really (*ontos*) real. But at the same time, since it participates in the Same, it is “really”, *ontos*, an image, and, since it participates in the Different, it really is different from the model, or, put differently, it “really” is not the model. We need not be surprised then (as Theaetetus is, who finds this *symploke* of being and non-being *atopos*, 240c11) that as his conclusion to this passage Plato affirms that “what we say is really an image does not really exist (*ouk ontos estin*)” (240b12). The non-being which Plato will discover seventeen pages later will be “really” non-being, though truth to tell it is only the Different from something – in the case of an image, from the model.

Given everything we have propounded, has the difference between the sensible and the intelligible, between Forms and individual realities, been abolished, since they would now no longer be “separate” one from another? It is unclear, and for that reason we have always prudently used the formula “the relativization of separation”. We have just seen in the case of the image that it respects the definition of being proposed by the Stranger, since it is “something” which possesses the capacity to communicate, in this case with the model. Even so, the case of the image, which is fundamental to the Platonic conception of reality, leads us to relativize separation, but not to suppress it. In order to be faithful to Plato, we propose that from now on we call “difference” that which was classically “separation”. We are thus at one with Plato, in that the “sensible” is “different” from the Forms. But the case of the image allows us to see (indistinctly) that an essential difference continues to exist: the Form (the model, in the case of an image) is autonomous, while the copy, imitation or whatever one calls it, is dependent and relative. The type of being of the image, even if it guarantees it gen-

uine reality, does not do away with the fact that, had it not had a model it would not exist. But however that may be, an image is “really” an image, because it participates in the Same, or, in different terms, in its essence, and it “really” exists, since it has been the object of an action, the result of a communication with the model.

In the passage we are examining (240a ff.) Plato stresses this difference with the help of the notion of truth; the model truly exists, the image does not truly exist (*ouk alethos*, 240b10). It is true that we are in a section of the dialogue which precedes the later findings, in which only the *alethinon* is *ontos on* (240b3), but there is no sure indication that this identification has been either preserved or suppressed further on. In any case, an affirmation made almost at the end of the dialogue offers us something to reflect on: it is on the basis of combination that “false discourse is really (*ontos*) and truly (*alethos*) produced” (263d3).

We cannot end this paper without formulating a question: Do the dialogues subsequent to the *Sophist* assume the new positions which we have encountered in this dialogue? The reply will depend on a global interpretation of Plato’s philosophy. Our own interpretation is as follows: each dialogue of Plato is autonomous. The problems they address reflect the state of discussion in the Academy, or ideas expressed by philosophers of the time, or Plato’s solitary reflections. They are pathways which propose problems and at times find solutions, i. e., they are authentic philosophical texts. Some responses are taken up again, some forgotten. As far as the theme we have emphasized in the *Sophist* is concerned, the *Timaeus* (which he apparently wrote afterwards) appears to ignore the innovations, in that the classical passage 29a talks of “that which is always in the same state and that which is always becomes”. But other passages presuppose certain innovations of the *Sophist* that have not occupied our attention. For example, if the “thing in itself” (31a), which belongs to the universe of Forms, already contains within itself all that it is going to encounter in our world, it is because the Forms are already combined within it, a *symploke* which the *Sophist* had already proposed. And furthermore, when at *Timaeus* 30b Timaeus says that it is impossible for intellect not to be found in a soul, all he is doing is repeat a sentence from the *Sophist* (249a).

However that may be, the *Sophist* is a dialogue which invites and encourages us to think, i. e., to set in play the intellectual gymnastics which the venerable Parmenides had encouraged the young Socrates

to engage in. Let us follow his example, which is a manner of rejuvenating ourselves¹.

1 I am grateful to Thomas M. Robinson for the translation of this paper into English.

III. Mimesis, Image and Logos

Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies.
Ontology, predication and truth in Plato's *Sophist*
(263a–d)

Francesco Fronterotta

After solving the problem of “what is not” (259a–b) by elucidating the relations between the γένη that give rise to their reciprocal κοινωνία (259d–e), the next step, before getting back to hunting the sophist, is to clarify whether this also helps disentangle the difficulty connected with the possibility of falsehood in λόγοι, as the examination of what is not was introduced for precisely this purpose: once the logical *aporia* of falsehood has emerged from the ontological paradox of what is not, solving the latter would also solve the former. So, if what is not, whose form the Stranger has succeeded in identifying, “blends with thinking and discourse” (δόξη και λόγῳ μίγνυται), there will be no contradiction in allowing falsehood in λόγοι, thus making approachable the dark place of images and appearances that are only similar to the truth, where the sophist has taken refuge; but if this were not the case, any λόγος would always have to be considered necessarily true and the inaccessibility of falsehood would make the sophist's refuge safe from any threat (260d–261b). The section of the dialogue that opens in this way contains some of the fundamental premises of what can fairly be seen as Plato's philosophy of language (259e–264b).

Λόγος, true and false

First of all the Stranger claims that the λόγος depends on the συμπλοκή of the ideal forms, as it reproduces it (259e); in fact, an absolute separation of all things (τὸ πᾶν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀποχωρίζειν) would be fatal for thought and discourse, and so contrary to philosophy (ἀφιλόσοφον), but the combination of names in the λόγος, which reproduces the interweaving of forms, must also follow certain criteria, because, as is made clear shortly after (261d–e), only some names can fit together with each other (τὰ μὲν ἐθέλει, τὰ δ'οὐ) so as to produce λόγοι that mean something; otherwise,

without any real connection, the succession of names means nothing (τὰ μὲν ἐφεξῆς λεγόμενα δηλοῦντά τι συναρμόττει, τὰ δὲ τῇ συνέχειᾳ μηδὲν σημαίνοντα ἀναρμωστῆ). But what are the criteria for making this connection between names in which the λόγος σημαίνων consists – or, more precisely and explicitly, what does the λόγος σημαίνων actually consist of? Answering this question introduces the second fundamental assumption governing Plato’s philosophy of language (262a–e). Names (ὀνόματα), in the general sense of component elements of the λόγος, or “linguistic terms”, can be divided into two kinds of “vocal signs” (δηλώματα τῆ φωνῆ) – two types of emissions of sound that indicate something in relation to the being (περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν) of a certain object: these are “names” (ὀνόματα), this time in the specific sense of agents or subjects of an action (τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἐκείνας πράττουσι σημεῖον), and “verbs” (ῥήματα), which signify “actions” (τὸ ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσιν δηλωμα) performed by a subject or agent. ὄνομα and ῥήμα are a σημεῖον τῆς φωνῆς, a sign or, in a wider sense, an instrument that, through the voice, signifies something, reflecting it or reproducing its image, so that in a sense language can be conceived as a mirror in which the various linguistic terms take shape as the individual images that reveal or indicate the various things that exist. Now, to the extent that names indicate “agents” and verbs “actions”, the λόγος that *signifies* and *says*, in genuinely revealing (δηλοῖ) something, necessarily consists of a name-verb sequence (συνέχεια) that connects them (συμπλέκων) with each other, this connection (πλέγμα) coinciding with the συμπλοκή that makes up the λόγος. The λόγος, then, (1) links a name to a verb, and in this way connects an agent to an action, while sequences of only names or verbs separated from each other produce no significant connection; (2) necessarily describes something or, more precisely, is “of” something (τινὸς εἶναι) or “about” something, in the sense that, without exception, it refers to something that is, i. e. to “beings” placed in the position of name or verb, agent or action – in other words, of subject and predicate. A similar conception of language and names was already present in the *Cratylus*, especially at 430a–434b – a much-debated section of that dialogue¹ that we shall make use of here merely for some basic elements. In the somewhat negative context of an extended critical examination of the theories defended by the other speakers, Socrates ends up defining the ὄνομα as a μίμημα τοῦ πράγματος, because it seems to depict the thing of which it is the name in the way a painting

1 See on this point Aronadio (2002) 125–169.

does, on the basis of a conception that is gradually made clearer, starting from the idea that the name is an εἰκὼν of what is named. Avoiding the paradox of making the name an exact copy of what is named, which would make it an impossible duplicate of it, he ends up considering it as a δῆλωμα – an image that “shows” or “reveals” (δηλώω) what is named so that this image reflects what it is the image of, but without being necessarily similar to it in all respects. There is no “stipulative” interpretation or intentional perspective of language in general or the linguistic tool as such, by which language is merely the vehicle of the speaker’s semantic intentions, but a “hermeneutic” conception, by which the λόγος reports and displays certain contents, which are in turn related to the things said: this formulation also echoes the explicit claim at *Tim.* 29b that the λόγοι are generally ἐξηγηταί of what they speak of².

Once the relations between language and reality have been clarified and the criteria for language significance defined, the picture is completed with a statement of the conditions of the truth and falsehood of the λόγοι (263b). In the first place, since the λόγος is “of” or “about” something, as it consists of names and verbs that are δηλώματα περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν and whose combination reflects the συμπλοκή of things that are, in no case can it concern absolute non-being, the unfeasible nothing that remains unthinkable and unspeakable. If it really “signifies” (σημαίνει), discourse talks “of” something, saying things that are – or in other words, saying things that are “of” or “about” something that also is (λέγει τὰ ὄντα ... περὶ τίνος ὄντος). If this is true, and if the horizon of λόγος is necessarily limited to things that are, both the real λόγος and the false λόγος say things that are, “of” or “about” something that also is; but if they do not differ in the nature of the terms they connect, all of which without distinction “are”, or as regards the object they speak of, which also “is”, the true and the false λόγος can differ in the end only as regards the

2 The question of eponymy is part of this perspective. Plato illustrates it by explaining that sensible things get their name from ideal forms (τούτων <τῶν εἰδῶν> τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἴσχειν), so that the former temporarily have the name that belongs eternally (εἰς τὸν αἰὶ χρόνον) to the latter, by virtue of the relation established between them and for the whole duration of this relation (see *Phaed.* 78d–e, 102a–d, 103b–e; *Parm.* 130e–131a). In effect, on the basis of what emerges from the passages examined in the *Sophist*, it is language in itself and in the relations between its parts – λόγος, ὄνομα and ῥῆμα – that reproduces the ideas and their κοινωνία and so takes on a hermeneutic function that makes clear that it depends on things that are and that it is, we might say, *eponymic*.

structure of the connection they establish between the terms making them up: so the λόγος that λέγει τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περί τινος will be true, establishing a connection between its components which correctly reproduces the actual συμπλοκή of things that are, while the λόγος that λέγει ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων, that is to say, τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα περί τινος, will be false, establishing a connection between its components which links terms that refer to things that are, but *is different* from the actual συμπλοκή of things that are, and so *is not* the actual συμπλοκή of things that are. The λόγος, true or false, always and necessarily says what is, but, when it is true, says it *as it is*, while, when it is false, says it *differently* from how it is, that is, *how it is not*, introducing a “non-being” that, without any contradiction, “is”, in that it consists merely in “being different” from what “is”³. It is worth mentioning once again the similarity of

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- 3 Note that at 263e the Stranger claims that thought and discourse are equivalent (διάνοια καὶ λόγος ταῦτόν) as regards their truth or falsehood; now, if they actually exhaust the forms of knowledge and intellectual activity, we must conclude that the only possible error in rational and scientific activity is the one outlined here, which depends on the expression in thought and discourse of the correct or incorrect συμπλοκή of ideal kinds; in theory, then, the dialectical philosopher who had examined all the relations between kinds, supposing that were possible, would be free of error. But the situation changes if we allow a higher level of knowledge, which we find traces of in some dialogues (not to mention the most explicit examples, in the *Symposium*, in *Republic* VI–VII and in the *Phaedrus*), which makes knowledge of ideas consist in immediate noetic contact, visual or tactile, which is clearly not open to error, at least insofar as it does not seem possible to grasp the false because it corresponds to nothing at all: in this case, if truth and knowledge consist in acquiring the highest step of the cognitive process, error becomes the incapacity to fully carry out this process, by for example halting at an intermediate stage; in short, it is, so to speak, an error of perspective, due to the failure to acquire the highest point of view, which is that of the totality of ideas. On this plane, once again, the true philosopher may not have completed the whole journey (and may never complete it), but, strictly speaking, he is not exposed to error. One might ask if the conception of falsehood set out in the *Sophist* as a wrong reproduction of the interweaving of forms in thought and the λόγος does not depend in turn on the failure to rise to immediate knowledge of ideas, but, if that may be true as regards the thought and discourse that exclusively concern ideal kinds and their mutual relations, it certainly is not for the thought and discourse that connect specific sensible things to ideal kinds, because evaluating whether a certain sensible thing actually partakes of an idea may prove true or false quite apart from any greater or lesser knowledge that has been acquired of the relations between ideas: so in this area the philosopher can be no more than better placed than the ordinary man thanks to his greater experience and dialectical subtlety, but he too certainly remains exposed to the possibility of error.

this definition of true and false discourse with that already given in the *Cratylus*, which several times (see 385b–c and 431b) establishes the criterion of the truth of the λόγος in its correspondence to things that are, but without going so far as to declare the impossibility of falsehood inasmuch as it coincides with what is not, or, in consequence, to recognise, explicitly or implicitly, the need to acknowledge some form of non-being in the λόγος, as, in effect, the *Cratylus* seems quite interested in the aim of transferring the distinction between true and false from the λόγος to the ὀνόματα that make it up, which is a very different perspective from that assumed in the *Sophist*; the *Euthydemus* too refers to this conception of the false λόγος, but from an essentially negative point of view, to expose the sophistical paradox of the impossibility of saying the false (283e–284d)⁴.

Having established this theoretical framework, let us dwell briefly on this philosophy of language and its criterion of truth, to give a general evaluation of it. There clearly emerges a realist conception of language, on the basis of which linguistic terms can be considered as “images” of the things they speak of, at least in the most immediate sense, by which, as “signs” (δηλώματα), they refer to the things they speak of, expressing certain meanings (that is, τι σημαίνουντα) that are themselves, or prove in turn to be associated with, certain abstract objects independent of the mind of the speaker, in a perspective that can be described as “semantic realism”⁵; of course, inasmuch as it implies the autonomous existence of the meanings expressed in propositions, this realism necessarily supposes their equally autonomous truth or falsehood, following a semantic principle of bivalence that establishes that every proposition, whether verifiable or not, is always either true or false. This perspective introduces some important additional consequences: truth (or falsehood) is stable and independent, both of the verification that a subject

4 On the relation between the conception expounded in the *Euthydemus* and the analysis of the *Sophist*, see Marcos de Pinotti (2000) 144–153.

5 It is a form of semantic “Platonism”, traces of which can be found, for example, in Frege’s *Logische Untersuchungen* (cf. Frege [1988] 60–61 and 68–69), which opposes both (1) the theory (defended by Quine, for example) that denies the autonomous existence of meanings, noting that the identity conditions of a meaning are closely connected with the linguistic norms and uses of the speaker, and (2) theories that admit the existence of meanings, but only in relation to the mental contents of the speaker and his “semantic” intentions. For an overall picture of these philosophical tendencies and the many variants of them that have been proposed, see Picardi (1999) 27–32.

may make of it and of the assent a subject can give it, and so is, in this sense, objective. This means that we must recognize in Plato's philosophy of language, alongside a form of semantic realism, a particularly strong version of a "correspondentist" conception of the truth of the λόγος, by which it *corresponds* to something in the world, to the extent that its statements "describe ... states of affairs", and are therefore true or false according to whether their descriptions or reference are correct or not⁶. This conception, which is absolutely and fundamentally extraneous to any epistemic and coherentist doctrine of truth – which makes truth part of a theory of the world, and so related to a certain epistemological position of the subject – has not failed to meet with objections⁷.

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- 6 In formal terms: X is true if and only if p, where "X" indicates the position of the descriptive name of a statement, and "p" the position occupied by the same statement, for example claiming that "the statement 'snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white". In this context one must inevitably refer to Tarski (1944), a nimble and clear exposition of which can be found in Sainsbury (2002) 132–141 (even though, for the origins and denomination of this conception of truth, Tarski referred to Aristotle rather than Plato's *Sophist*). One of the most probing critiques of Tarski is Putnam (1987) 91–106; while a decidedly sympathetic examination of Tarski's theory, with an extensive review of criticism, a detailed discussion and an attempt to sketch an original proposal, can be found in Davidson (2006), particularly 9–68.
- 7 Two general objections have been raised, particularly in analytical circles, to correspondentist theories of truth, including the version defended by Plato. (1) The difficulty of defining what (i. e. what things or portions of things in the world) true statements actually *correspond* to (see Lewis (1946) 50–55, and Strawson (1971) 194–195): as we have seen, Plato has a reply to this question, which may be dubious, but is well structured in constructing an ontology that supplies thought and λόγος with objects *to think* and *to say*. But (1) is formulated in a much more radical form (2) in the so-called "slingshot" argument (expressed in slightly different ways by Church [1943], who attributes it to Frege, and by Gödel [1946], who claims it can be found in Russell; for this reconstruction see Neale [1995]), who implies that, if statements refer to and depend on facts or things in the world, then they depend on and refer to the same single thing, because, being logically equivalent as regards the truth of their meaning, they depend on and refer to a single value of truth common to all the facts or things in the world: any truth-maker will be single and identical for any verified statement, if the truth of all and of each is one and the same. Plato seems aware of this apparently inescapable argument, at least to a certain extent, "at source", so to speak: in his view it is the well-known difficulty connected with Parmenides' theory of the unity of being and of everything, and it is precisely on the attempt to escape from a rigorously monistic perspective of this kind, on the ontological, epistemological and logico-linguistic plane, that he concentrates his attention, with greater or lesser success, in the *Sophist*.

In any case, it is not hard to ascertain how semantic realism and a correspondentist theory of truth are, in Plato's view, closely connected, so that language describes things that are, the "subjects" and "predicates" of a λόγος standing for "substances" and "properties" that really exist, just as the truth of propositions depends on things, so that, in a λόγος that is true, an interweaving of "subject" and "predicate" reproduces a corresponding relation between a real "substance" and a real "property". But this combination also leads to a strongly realist conception in the *querelle* over universals: for on the basis of a realist doctrine of language and a correspondentist doctrine of truth, the general properties that are predicates of individual subjects in a λόγος coincide with the existing realities of which the individual substances that possess the property in question partake, thus determining a form of onto-predication by which predication proves true or false by virtue of its correspondence with a similar relation between things that are. Quite apart from the traditional difficulties of a realist conception of universals⁸, Plato seems fairly fixed in defending this position, whether it was suggested to him by recognizing the force of necessity in logical connections, by a certain vision of mathematics and the nature of mathematical objects, or, more generally, by an epistemology that implies a peculiar physiology of knowledge, by which the sense organs or the intellectual faculty of the soul start their action from an object which is present to them and which they simply reproduce: all this, as is easily seen, proves incompatible with any nominalist or particularist conception of universals⁹.

8 Since Aristotle, "realists" have been accused of creating confusion over the entities really existing in which universals should consist and over their identity and status, and also over certain universals, for example those indicating relations, whose ontological status is not very clear: to what being will "resemblance", "difference" and perhaps "non-being" correspond? See on this point Varzi (2002) 182–191, and Varzi (2005) 52–66. Chapters IX and X of Russell (1912) remain exemplary for clarity and linearity.

9 On Plato's epistemology see Fronterotta (2001), 45–79. As emerges clearly from the studies cited in the previous note, the nominalist generally considers universals as being "common names" that register linguistic conventions or that actually grasp resemblances between specific things, while the particularist assigns universal terms certain corresponding entities that really exist, but that are specific, not universal, and so immanent in the thing of which they are predicated.

Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies

The following section puts into effect the perspective outlined above by examining a true λόγος and a false λόγος, to bring out clearly its form and criterion of truth (263a–d). These are the λόγοι proposed by the Stranger: “Theaetetus sits” (Θεαίτητος κάθηται), cited as an example of a true λόγος; “Theaetetus (whom I am talking to at this moment) flies” (Θεαίτητος [ᾧ νῦν διαλέγομαι] πέτεται), cited as an example of a false λόγος. Both λόγοι, as one would expect, consist of a name, referring to an agent, and a verb, evoking an action; both speak of Theaetetus and so are “about” him. The true λόγος, as we already know, “says things that are as they are” (λέγει τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν) about Theaetetus, while the false λόγος “says things different from the things that are ... and states things that are not as if they were” (λέγει ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων ... τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα) about Theaetetus. Let us examine the two λόγοι more closely.

First of all, the true λόγος, which λέγει τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ, its truth emerging from the complete correspondence between the λόγος that is said about a subject and the being of what it says about that subject: the λόγος “Theaetetus sits”, is therefore true because it establishes a relation between a predicate, being seated, and a subject, Theaetetus, which corresponds to an objective, actual condition, to the extent that “Theaetetus” really does partake of “being seated”¹⁰. The main problem, however, appears to be with regard to the further question of defining the content of the expressions τὰ ὄντα and περὶ σοῦ: what “things that are” does the true λόγος say, and “of whom” does it say them? In more explicit terms: does it concern and involve (1) only ideal kinds or (2) sensible things too? If we accept (1), for example, on the basis of the Stranger’s theory by which the λόγος depends on the συμπλοκή of kinds and not on their relations with sensible things, the λόγος “Theaetetus sits” will always be true, since the kind “man”, of which Theaetetus is a specific instance, actually partakes of the kind “being seated”, and it is irrelevant whether the specific individual “Theaetetus” is sitting or standing, because the λόγος expresses a condition of truth independent of any contingent and particular eventuality; but it will follow that the truth of this λόγος, like the knowledge it pro-

10 This is certainly the simplest, and also the most natural, explanation of the Stranger’s statement and of the logical consistency of the criterion of truth for the λόγος he introduces, following the classic interpretation of Cornford (1935) 310–311.

duces, will be confined to the *a priori* sciences (like mathematics), and be quite useless for the natural sciences (like physics), since it is not applicable to them to the extent that it does not speak of the sensible world. If, however, we accept (2), recognizing that sensible realities are also involved in the λόγος in question, then the kind “man” partaking in the kind “being seated” will be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for determining the truth of the λόγος “Theaetetus sits”, which will require later verification of the actual and concrete condition of the specific individual Theaetetus, if he is sitting or standing at the moment the λόγος in question is pronounced (a verification that will be impossible for the reader of the *Sophist*, unless it is assumed implicitly that during their dialogue the speakers are in any case always seated); in this case the truth of our λόγος and the knowledge it produces will be exclusively contingent and never necessary, and so will depend on an empirical act of verification. As a result, we will have either an *a priori* analytical λόγος (1) inapplicable to the sensible realm and so unable to produce truth and knowledge about our world, or a paradoxical *a posteriori* analytical λόγος (2) whose criterion of truth must be confirmed each time on the basis of the content of sensible experience, and so unable to produce universal and necessary, or scientific, truth and knowledge. Either way (2) seems the one to accept here, as it corresponds more exactly to the position expressed by the Stranger, who certainly does not evoke an ideal subject (the kind “man”) in his λόγος, but a sensible and specific subject (“Theaetetus”), about whom he enunciates a condition, “being seated”, that immediately suggests the possibility of empirical verification. Notice, however, that, though (1) was left on one side for the interpretation of this passage, a λόγος constructed on the exclusive connection of ideal kinds (for example: “man is an animal”) is in general wholly possible, and subject to the same conditions of truth described above and valid for the λόγος that has a sensible individual as subject, the only difference being that it is characterized by the eternal and unchangeable necessity typical of the status of ideal kinds.

Let us turn now to the false λόγος, which λέγει ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων, οἷα τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα, περὶ σοῦ¹¹, so that these ἕτερα are also legitimately

11 Like most editors, I read at 263b11 Cornarius’ correction ὄντων, which gives a genitive plural connected to the following ἕτερα (“He says... things that are different from those that are”), and not the adverb ὄντως in manuscripts βΤW (which would give: “He says ... things that are *really* different”, a reading that is defended by Frede [1967] 58, and De Rijk [1986] 207, but which is a retreat

ὄντα, its falsehood emerging from the non-correspondence or difference between the λόγος that speaks about a subject and the being of what is said about this subject: the λόγος “Theaetetus flies” is therefore false because it establishes a relation between a predicate, flying, and a subject, Theaetetus, that does not correspond to and is different from an objective actual condition, to the extent that “Theaetetus” does not truly partake of “flying”, and “flying” therefore is “what is not” for him, although it is fully “what is” in and for itself, as it is for many other possible subjects (a “bird”, for example, of which we can truly say that it “flies”). But here too there are some difficulties. The first, which I mention only in passing, concerns the nature of the “non-correspondence” or “difference”, for example, between “Theaetetus” and “flying”, which determines the falsehood of the λόγος and which, quite apart from the debate it has aroused¹², seems to me to consist in the lack of any partaking between the subject in question, Theaetetus, and the things that are not, regarding him, and so are (for they too “are”) differ-

from what the Stranger has just stated twice: that false discourse is what says “things different from those that are” [ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων, 263b7] or “things that are not as if they were” [τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα, 263b9]), as it seems clear to me that at this point of the analysis the Stranger has not only now shown that falsehood expresses a “real” difference, but has also made clear that this difference is in relation to the things that are. This also explains why another codex (*Ven.* 186) has a correction tending in the same direction: ὄντος, in the genitive singular (“He says ... things that are different *from what is*”), and why Robinson has suggested another analogous correction: ὄντως ... ὄντα ἕτερα <τῶν ὄντων> (“He says ... things that are *really* different <from those that are>”), which, not uncharacteristically of the Oxford editors, is an excessively drastic modification of the text, one that is not really necessary. On the whole question, particularly from the philological and codicological point of view, see O’Brien (1995) 117–130.

- 12 This “difference” or “non-correspondence” has been understood in the form of “non-identity” (by which the predicate “flying” is not identical to some of the predicates attributed to the subject “Theaetetus”, cf. Ross [1951] 157, but see also Pippin [1979]), of “incompatibility” (by which “flying” is one of the predicates incompatible with the subject “Theaetetus”, cf. Ackrill [1971] 201–207), of “contradictoriness” (by which the predicate “flying” contradicts the predicate “not flying”, which certainly belongs to the subject “Theaetetus”, cf. Moravcsik [1962] 73–77, and Kamlah [1963] 25–26), and of “subjective” or “weak” difference (by which “flying” is not part of the predicates belonging to the subject “Theaetetus”, cf. Ray [1984] 91–92), by contrast with an “objective” or “strong” difference (by which “flying” and “being seated” are mutually exclusive predicates, so that if the subject “Theaetetus” is seated, he cannot fly for that reason, cf. Ferejohn [1989] and Jordan [1984] 126–127).

ent from the things that are (in fact, “Theaetetus” does not partake of “flying”, and “flying” is, for him and of him, a “thing that is not”, that is to say, a “being” different from the “beings” that, for him and of him, “are” and of which he therefore partakes)¹³. But once again the fundamental problem that is raised in relation to the false λόγος concerns the nature of the subject and the predicate of this λόγος, if they are (1) only ideal kinds or (2) sensible things too. Accepting (1) would mean that the λόγος “Theaetetus flies” is false to the extent that the kind “man”, of which Theaetetus is a specific instance, does not partake of the kind “flying”; in this case, however, (2) would be immediately false as well, and for the same reason, because no sensible individual that is a “man” can fly, irrespective of any factual ascertainment and empirical verification. The result would be a λόγος whose falsehood would be necessary and universal, so that, to express ourselves as above in the case of the true λόγος, the falsehood of the *a priori* analytical judgment of (1) is shown to be sufficient, as well as necessary, to exclude any possible contingent truth of (2); in these conditions the qualification that the “flying Theaetetus” is the one “with whom” the Stranger is “talking at this moment” (ὃ νῦν διαλέγομαι, 263a9) seems absolutely irrelevant, even misleading, since no man, whoever and wherever he is, and whatever he does, can fly (note that this qualification would, however, be valuable in the case of the true λόγος, which, in enunciating a proposition whose truth or falsehood depends on the empirical verification of its content, would become clearer through the claim that the “seated Theaetetus” is the very one “with whom” the Stranger is “speaking at this moment”). Despite this, it is plausible that, as in the case of the true λόγος, we have once again to prefer (2), and that the Stranger, with an example that is certainly not very well chosen, intends to refer to the lack of partaking between the sensible and particular subjects, “Theaetetus”, and the kind “flying”, which can be ascertained empirically (although, in the specific case, this λόγος is in any case false *a priori*, without any verification being necessary): otherwise, there would be no point in positing a specific individual, “Theaetetus”, as the subject of the λόγος or in specifying that the subject is “here present”. There is no doubt that (1) too produces significant λόγοι that prove to be false on the basis of the very criterion of λόγοι which connect a sensible and specific subject to an ideal predicate, but which, involving as they do exclusively ideal kinds, will be characterized by a

13 See O’Brien (2005) 143–144.

necessary and non-contingent falsehood, since the relations (of communication or lack of communication) between the eternal and immutable kinds will be necessary and non-contingent, while the relations between sensible and ideal kinds, which change and modify with the passage of time, will be contingent and non-necessary. In short, both λόγοι, true and false, can be such either (1) necessarily, solely by virtue of the communication of kinds that they reproduce, correctly or incorrectly, in the connection of subject and predicate, or, as is plausibly the case in the Stranger's examples, (2) contingently, by virtue of a sensible and specific subject partaking of kinds they reproduce, correctly or incorrectly, in the connection of subject and predicate; in any case, to bring out this symmetry better, the Stranger could clearly have chosen either (1) a different true λόγος to set against the false λόγος, so that the communication between the kinds that this λόγος reproduces by the connection of subject and predicate proves to be a sufficient criterion to establish its truth (in this case positing λόγοι containing only ideal kinds, and for that reason necessarily true or false, for example setting a true λόγος: "man is an animal" against a false λόγος "man flies") or (2) a different false λόγος to set against the true λόγος, in which the communication between a sensible and specific individual and ideal kinds that this λόγος reproduces by the connection of subject and predicate is not a sufficient criterion for establishing its falsehood, but requires further empirical verification (positing in this case λόγοι containing a sensible and specific subject and an ideal kind as predicate, therefore true or false λόγοι contingently, for example setting a true λόγος: "Theaetetus sits" against a false λόγος: "Theaetetus is standing", assuming that empirical verification tells us that he is actually seated)¹⁴.

To sum up, the λόγος refers to a subject (περι σοῦ), and says "things that are" (τὰ ὄντα) in every case: when it is true, the "things that are" that it says correspond to the actual condition of the subject (ὡς ὄντα); when it is false, the "things that are" that it says are different (θάτερα) from the actual condition of the subject (ὡς τὰ αὐτά), *that is* (I am rendering καὶ at 263d2 in an exegetic sense), they do not correspond to this condition (μὴ ὄντα), even if they are said to correspond to it (ὡς ὄντα). The truth and falsehood of the λόγοι are therefore to be found in the union of subject and predicate (σύνθεσις ἐκ ῥημάτων καὶ ὀνομάτων), and depend on the exact reproduction of the relations objectively existing between the real terms to which subject and predicate

14 More on this passage in Keyt (1973); in McDowell (1982); and in Frede (1992).

refer: a true proposition therefore attributes a predicate to a subject that really possesses it, and to this extent “says about it something which is as it is”; while a false proposition attributes a predicate to a subject that does not really possess it, and to this extent “says about it something which is, but which is different from how it is”, in other words, as regards that subject, a “non-being”. However, the analysis of true and false is not limited to evaluating the relations between subject and predicate in language¹⁵, because it is above all a matter of understanding at what level these relations are posited, whether (1) exclusively on the intelligible level and in correspondence with communication between ideal kinds, or whether (2) also on the sensible level and in correspondence with empirical and specific individuals partaking of ideal kinds¹⁶: The first option (1) leads to forming λόγοι whose truth or falsehood may prove necessary and *a priori*, but at the same time without any relation with the sensible domain and so inapplicable to the empirical world; the second option (2) leads to forming λόγοι that may posit a relation between sensible things and ideal kinds, but leaves the determination of their truth or falsehood to an empirical and so merely contingent verification, associated with a judgment based on sensible perception¹⁷. The greater plausibility, in my opinion, of option (2) does not mean that only λόγοι like those introduced by the Stranger can be considered, which connect a sensible and specific subject to an ideal kind in the position of predicate (“Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies”). There are also λόγοι (1) that allow an ideal kind in the position of subject too (for example [1a] “man is an animal” or [1b] “man flies”), and it is important to note that, in this case, the criterion of the truth and falsehood of the λόγος remains the same, and consists in the correct or incorrect reproduction of the communication between corresponding ideal kinds in the connection between subject and predicate: therefore, (1a) since the kind “man” partakes of the kind “animal”, the λόγος “man is animal” is true, while, (1b) since the kind “man” does not partake of the kind “flying”, the λόγος “man flies” is false, so that the first λόγος says things that are (the kind “animal”) of the subject (the kind “man”), as they are (reproducing the communication that really exists between the two kinds), while the second says things that are (the kind “flying”)

15 As indicated, for example, by Lorenz–Mittelstrass (1966).

16 As asserted, among others, by Seligman (1974) 106–107, and Detel (1972) 25, n. 43.

17 See again Seligman (1974) 110–112.

of the subject (the kind “man”), unlike as they are (reproducing a communication that does not really exist between the two kinds), in other words, things that are not (the kind “flying” in communication with the kind “man”) as if they were (as if they communicated with each other). It follows that the difference between the λόγοι (1) that connect only ideal kinds in the position of subject and predicate and those (2) that allow a sensible and specific subject does not lie in the criterion of truth that characterizes them, but in the type of truth or falsehood that each deals in, and in how it can be verified: in fact, while (2), to be verified or falsified, *may* need a procedure for ascertaining the facts, in order to understand whether the sensible, specific subject is or is not actually partaking of the kind posited in the position of predicate (“Theaetetus sits” is true if and only if “Theaetetus” is at this moment “seated”, but false if “Theaetetus” is at this moment “standing”¹⁸), (1), by contrast, is always true or false *a priori*, quite apart from any process of factual verification, because its truth or falsehood depends on the partaking or lack of partaking between kinds, which are eternal and immutable conditions (“man is an animal” is always true, because the kind “man” partakes of the kind “animal”, eternally and without possible changes, and so cannot stop partaking of it; “man flies” is always false, because the kind “man” does not partake of the kind “flying”, ever and without possible change, and so cannot start to partake of it). Consequently, while (2) expresses a contingent truth or falsehood, because these depend on temporary and shifting relations of partaking between the particular sensible individuals and the ideal kinds, and so is able to produce knowledge that is always new and different, although empirical and directed at sensible individuals, (1) expresses necessary truth or falsehood, because these depend on immutable relations (or lack of relations) between ideal kinds, and so is able to produce knowledge that is always true and directed at ideal kinds, but, assuming that ideal kinds and their relations are finite in number, of a limited extent

18 But (2) does not necessarily *always* need this factual verification: for example, “Theaetetus flies”, even if “Theaetetus” is the specific sensible individual Theaetetus, is always false, because, whatever Theaetetus is doing now and so whatever kind he is partaking of at this moment, he certainly cannot fly, because the kind “man”, to which the individual “Theaetetus” belongs, does not partake of the kind “flying”, and this excludes *a priori* the individual “Theaetetus” from partaking of “flying”.

and quantity that cannot be increased¹⁹. Hence, since they are eternal and unalterable, it should be in theory possible to arrive at a true formulation of all the λόγοι (1) concerning intelligible reality, that is to say, a complete reconstruction of the entire map of the relations between the kinds, something impossible, even hypothetically, for “mixed” λόγοι (2), since they are forever changing according to the changing relations between sensible subjects and ideal kinds, thus constantly changing from true to false, and vice versa.

Truth, logic and time

I referred earlier to the Platonic conception of the λόγοι as ἐξηγηταί of the things they speak of (cf. *Tim.* 29b); now, in the light of this conception, applying the distinction just traced between the λόγοι (1) that connect only ideal kinds in the position of subject and predicate and those (2) that admit a sensible individual as subject, it follows that these two sorts of λόγοι will be ἐξηγηταί of different facts or different things respectively: in (1), clearly, only of ideal kinds; in (2) of sensible things in relation to ideas. Now, the λόγοι (1) that connect exclusively ideal kinds in the position of subject and predicate, by virtue of the peculiar ontological conception that Plato defends with regard to the immobile and eternal nature of the intelligible, are effectively a Russellian language of pure logical forms, by which linguistic terms and the things or states of things named (= ideal kinds) are posited in a one-to-one relation, each proposition falling into the standard types “Pa” or “aRb” and always proving to be independent of beliefs and verifications – a logically perfect language, but, as we have already said, basically useless, because it cannot

19 Both (1) and (2) propose the cases of two elementary λόγοι, the simplest of all (262c), that connect names and predicates “without remainders” (in the sense that all the terms in the λόγος can be reduced to names or verbs), thus anticipating what Russell, *mutatis mutandis*, called in his *Principia Mathematica* the “logical form” (or rather the “atomic form”, the simplest of the “logical forms”) of a proposition, whose identification allows us to construct a language without ambiguities, in which logical form and grammatical form coincide and are able to express immediately, and in a way that brings out their opportune ontological implications, the subject–predicate relation (although Russell preferred to speak of “atomic forms” rather than “subject–predicate” relation, precisely because for him this maintained a certain ambiguity, cf. also Russell [1989] 43–45).

say anything about sensible reality and increase its referents, but can only be repeated identically. The λόγοι (2) that admit a sensible individual as subject, however, clearly introduce a variable, as they connect a sensible subject to an ideal predicate, unifying the two different functions of the λόγοι ἐξηγηταί, of sensible things and intelligible ideal kinds respectively, the former, like their object, changing and contingent, while the latter are immobile and eternal. If, as we know, for both (1) and (2), determining the truth (or falsehood) of the λόγος depends on the connection of name and verb (σύνθεσις ἐκ ῥημάτων καὶ ὀνομάτων) or, which is the same thing, of subject and predicate, the truth (or falsehood) of (1) will be given, eternally and necessarily, by reconstructing the immutable and necessary relations between the ideal kinds, that is to say, by a logical calculation in which the false can depend only on an error of calculation, so that true and false in that case are posited as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, irrespective of the passage of time; in (2), by contrast, determining the truth (or falsehood) of the proposition depends on a contingent verification, subject to time, of the relations that exist between one or more sensible subjects and one or more ideal kinds: in fact, to the extent that each sensible reality changes over time, as do its relations with ideal kinds, the λόγοι constructed on the connection of a sensible subject and an ideal kind may be true (or false) at most for a certain period of time and on condition of a contingent verification, changing from true to false or from false to true with the passage of time. The error of judgment entailed by the false λόγος does not depend, then, on logical calculation, but on the very nature (changing and becoming) of the (sensible) things involved in this case and from the perspective, which is also changing and becoming, of the judging subject (who is also a changing sensible body), so that true and false are posited now as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, but only in relation to an identical section of time, because they become complementary with the passage of time.

Predication and ontology

The theory of semantic realism and the correspondentist theory of truth previously attributed to Plato entail that predicates are “beings”, in other words, real entities. Thus, in both cases, (1) and (2), the connection of subject and predicate, which allows us to determine the truth or falsehood of the λόγος refers us to the ontological relation of the partaking

between particular entities (ideal “individuals” in [1], sensible individuals in [2]) and universal entities (ideal “kinds”) which will have to be reproduced, correctly or incorrectly, in the λόγος. So, starting from the need to distinguish between true and false, we are brought back to the logical mechanism of predication as the connection of subject and predicate, and from there to the ontological problem of communication between things that are, which is one of the fundamental and most delicate questions in Plato’s thought. Consider too that even if we drop the strictly ontological question of the relation that is established between universal realities and the specific individuals that partake of it²⁰, the way in which subject and verb are connected in a predication remains problematic to say the least: is the “Theaetetus” who “sits” a unique individual to whom the property of “being seated” belongs intrinsically? Apparently not, because otherwise pronouncing the name “Theaetetus” would already be enough to signify the “seated Theaetetus”. So we need to understand how the subject “Theaetetus” enters into relation with the predicate “being seated”, which, although it is exclusively logico-linguistic by nature, appears to be different from the subject “Theaetetus”, even though it does not exist in the reality of things that are²¹. Otherwise, if the idea of the predicate were in some way part of the subject – *praedicatum inest subjecto* – the outcome would be the Leibnizian one of a monadological perspective, by which every subject appears to be a wholly autonomous reality, separate from all the others. But the problem of the unity of the proposition is further complicated when it is brought into contact with the question of determining truth or falsehood: if it is the connection of subject and predicate that makes a proposition true or false, and if a true connection reveals a

20 A question that cannot easily be dismissed as just naïve, if it is true, as Strawson (1974) and Strawson (1995) 9 recalls several times, that behind many of his writings “is the explicit theory or the implicit assumption that at bottom what supports or underlies the formal distinction of the terms in the fundamental combination is the ontological or metaphysical distinction between *space-time particulars* on the one hand, and *general* or *universal concepts* on the other”.

21 I want to claim that, even without the eminently metaphysical profile that Aristotle, for example, criticized it for, the Platonic problem of the relation between individual particulars and universal terms cannot be so simply resolved, because it re-emerges as acutely as ever in the relations between linguistic terms on the plane of the λόγος, as soon as we admit linguistic terms that refer to different meanings whose relations we must recognize. On Aristotle’s criticism of the status of ideas as properties of sensible individuals and as universal terms, see Fronterotta (2005).

“fact”, that of attributing to a subject a predicate that refers to a property which it actually possesses, what will a false connection correspond to? Certainly not to a “non-fact”, because in that case the false would be impossible, just as it seemed at first to the Stranger in the *Sophist*²². The various solutions that have been proposed to this dilemma by Russell, Quine and Davidson proceed on two parallel planes, whose kinship with Plato’s analysis is not difficult to grasp²³: on the one hand, the predication effectively unifies the proposition, in some way which is not easy to determine (and which Russell never thought he had actually determined), but which pertains to a certain conception of the truth of the proposition, so that what is predicated of a subject coincides with what is true of that subject (as Quine wants²⁴), that is, when the subject is part of the set of things designated by that predicate: it follows that a true predicate connection indicates an individual’s belonging to a class, while a false predicate connection indicates the non-belonging of an individual which is the subject of the false proposition to the class designated by the predicate of that proposition, which, for that reason, is not true of that subject (according to a “semantic” solution, once again inspired by Tarski’s correspondentist theory, and developed by Davidson in particular²⁵); on the other hand, not-being or what does not exist at all, as such, is simply rejected as a logical or grammatical error depending on a misuse of language: ontological transparency requires that it always be evident whether there is something corresponding to the subject of a proposition, since clearly, if there is not, we must doubt whether the subject in question really refers to an accomplished meaning, and suppose that it is an “incomplete symbol” that will disappear when the proposition is analysed more carefully²⁶.

22 Paradoxically (and certainly involuntarily) this is the conclusion that the Stranger returns to at the end of his complex analysis of false discourse, according to Casertano (1996) 198–204.

23 For this brief review I have drawn on the pages of Davidson (2006) 69–125.

24 For Quine this shift towards a “semantic” conception of predication is possible to the extent that linguistic terms refer to meanings that do not exist at all, but are just names, in a perspective that is “nominalist” and not “realist”: “Being considered entities only and simply means being considered values of a variable”, cf. Quine (1966) 13.

25 Cf. Davidson (2006) 126–145.

26 Quine goes so far as to propose the systematic elimination of these “doubtful” names by, for example, transforming them into corresponding predicates: moving from a name referring to a subject that does not exist (“Pegasus does not exist”) to the corresponding predicative expression “Nothing pegasuses”,

In short, we need once again to separate falsehood from what is not, placing it in the connection of subject and predicate, and once again take leave of what is not, which is effectively removed as an object of analysis: at the end of this long and tiring journey, which significant fragments of contemporary philosophy and logic share with Plato, if what is not really has legitimately returned to the sphere of competence of the λόγος, the Stranger will have seized the initiative and may finally succeed in hunting the sophist down.

would remove the difficulty, because it is one thing to posit something that *is not*, and another to use a predicate that is not *true* of anything. See from this point of view Quine (1939) and Varzi (2002) 161–165.

Difference and Negation: Plato's *Sophist* in Proclus

Jesús de Garay

1. Introduction

Like many other Neo-Platonist thinkers, Proclus (AD 412–485) sets out to offer a systematic exegesis of Plato's philosophy, relating it also to other traditions of either a philosophical nature (such as Eleaticism, Aristotelianism and Pythagoreanism) or a religious one (mainly *The Chaldean Oracles* and Orphism)¹. The totality of Plato's dialogues and his *agrapha dogmata* thus constitute a complete and coherent structure, with a philosophical and religious value, which surpasses and enhances any other philosophical or religious doctrine.

Chronologically, Proclus belongs to a late period of the Platonic tradition; so he is continually undertaking a critical revision of all previous interpretations of Plato's philosophy and texts, with the goal of establishing the correct exegesis of Platonic doctrine.

As such, the interpretation which Proclus provides of Plato's *Sophist* is embedded in a systematic doctrine², wherein each work of Plato has its own goal (σκοπός). In this way, Proclus' reading of the *Sophist* assumes that Platonic doctrine forms a unitary and coherent structure; and also that each dialogue occupies a precise place in Plato's doctrinal system.

Proclus' systematic understanding of Plato is consistent with the interpretation provided by other Platonic philosophers, notably Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Syrianus. However, while Proclus differs somewhat from Plotinus, he is acknowledged to be a faithful follower of the teachings of his master, Syrianus. Because of this, it is difficult to tell when Proclus' exegesis is offering us something novel and

1 This goal of reconciling all philosophical and religious traditions is particularly evident in the Neoplatonic School at Athens, re-established by Plutarch of Athens at the beginning of the 5th century and continued by Syrianus, Proclus' master. Cf. Saffrey (1992).

2 Cf. Charles-Saget (1991).

when he is merely repeating the doctrine of Syrianus³. Furthermore, Proclus accepts many ideas of Iamblichus in regard both to Platonic doctrine and to his interpretation of particular Platonic dialogues⁴.

Within this Neo-Platonist tradition, Proclus' philosophy is singular in its doctrinal stance. On the one hand, he offers a highly rationalist view, where everything has its "raison d'être" and where he tries to determine with precision the totality and continuity of every causal mediation. Dialectic and (especially) negation have a prime place in this rationalization of reality. It is a hierarchized conception, which reaches its highest point in the One and is extended to Matter, where everything is explained by its subordination to a superior reality in a relationship of strict causal dependence. On the other hand, along with this rigorous rationalism, Proclus is a convinced believer in traditional Greek religion (which had been itself transformed by the integration into it of elements from other religious traditions). He especially values *The Chaldean Oracles* as his main sacred text, and continues Iamblichus' theurgic tradition. Any religious text –including that of Homer – acquires philosophical and rational validity, given his allegorical exegesis.

This double facet – rational and religious – of Proclus' thinking explains why the same philosophic doctrine can be expounded in two apparently different works, the *Commentary on the Parmenides*⁵ and the *Platonic Theology*⁶. Both of them have as their backbone Plato's *Parmenides*, considered by Proclus to be the synthesis of Plato's theology. However, the one book is strictly a philosophical commentary on Plato's text, while the *Platonic Theology* tries to establish the philosophical basis of Greek religion, justifying, in detail, the reality of each divinity and other figures as daemons and heroes.

But Proclus' singular place in the Platonic tradition as a whole is also characterized by its place in history as well as its particular doctrinal stance. Unlike that of other authors (say Syrianus or Iamblichus), Proclus' subsequent influence is remarkable, despite the complexity of his

3 The abundance of surviving writings of Proclus significantly contrasts with the scarcity of those of Syrianus, for whose commentary we rely on some *loci* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

4 Cf. Bechtle (2002).

5 I quote from the edition by V. Cousin (1961). For the English edition, cf. Dillon (1987).

6 Cf. Saffrey – Westerink (1997).

thought⁷. The best proof of his success lies in the preservation of so many of his writings.

2. The *Sophist* in Proclus

We do not have a specific commentary on the *Sophist*, and it is doubtful whether he ever wrote one. What we do have is the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, from which some have hypothesized that he also wrote one on the *Sophist*.⁸ Whatever the case, the explicit references to this dialogue are many, and they affect crucial issues in Proclus' thought. In particular, *The Elements of Theology* aside (which, because of its axiomatic treatment does not include textual references of any kind), allusions to the *Sophist* are very frequent in his three most relevant systematic works: the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, the *Platonic Theology*, and the *Commentary on the Timaeus*.⁹

Some of the citations from the *Sophist* are merely circumstantial and short: as, for example, when the Eleatic Stranger is presented as a real philosopher¹⁰; when he asserts the difficulty of distinguishing between the philosopher, the sophist and the politician¹¹; when he points out the difference between the Ionian, Italic and Athenian schools¹²; or when he refers to the fragmentation of the body¹³. However, in other instances his quotations from the *Sophist* are the basis for some of the most important themes in Proclus' philosophy. Three of them are: 1)

7 For my analysis of the reception of Proclus' philosophy and his writings – with particular attention to the Latin European tradition up to Nicholas of Cusa – see Garay (2007).

8 ὅπως δὲ χρή τὴν ἀμείξαν αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν μίξιν ἐκλαμβάνειν, ἴσως καὶ εὐκαιρότερον ἐν ταῖς τοῦ Σοφιστοῦ διελεθῆν ἐξηγήσεσιν (*In Parm.*, 774,24–26). C. Steel (1992) appears skeptical of the possibility that he ever wrote a commentary. However, L.G. Westerink and H.D. Saffrey (1997, III, 137) think it likely that he did write one, or at least made some comments on various places in the *Sophist* – for example, in his *Commentary on the Republic*. A. Charles-Saget (1991) 477 seems to support this hypothesis.

9 An exhaustive documentation of references to the *Sophist* can be found in Guérard (1991). My own exposition will focus strictly on the *Commentary on the Parmenides* and *Platonic Theology*.

10 Cf. *In Parm.*, I,672 (cf. *Sof.*, 216a)

11 Cf. *In Parm.*, I,681 (cf. *Sof.*, 217b)

12 Cf. *In Parm.*, I,630 (cf. *Sof.*, 217c)

13 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, IV–19, 55 (cf. *Sof.*, 246b9–c2)

philosophy as the production of images; 2) the priority of the One with respect to being; 3) negation as anterior to affirmation, and negation as difference. I shall allude briefly to the first two of these, and will then develop the third one in more detail.

However, as has been pointed out by Annick Charles-Saget, to understand Proclus' interpretation of the *Sophist* we cannot pay attention solely to explicit quotations from the dialogue; but we must also consider his silences and significance shifts. In other words, on the one hand there are important questions in the dialogue which Proclus hardly adverts to: for example, the sophist as deceiver, and purveyor of falsehood in general; on the other hand, there are matters which Proclus presents in a different way, such as the vindication of poetic production in light of the definition of the sophist. Also significant is the way in which a number of very short passages from the *Sophist* are adduced over and over and again in support of his thesis.

2.1. The *Sophist* in the Neo-Platonist curriculum

The *Sophist* was also included in the study plan which, from the time of Iamblichus on, was followed in the various Neo-Platonist schools of the fifth and sixth centuries¹⁴, including the Athenian School. This curriculum was organized in accordance with a progressive scale of virtues (political, purificatory and theoretical) corresponding to specific kinds of knowledge (from practical to theoretical sciences, and, within the theoretical sciences, from the physical to the theological). Along with the works of other authors (like those of Aristotle, Epictetus and Porphyry), twelve of Plato's dialogues were selected as being especially suitable for detailed written commentary, to serve as a basis for the examination of such subjects.

In a first study cycle, the *Sophist* was included in studies of the theoretical virtues and the theoretical sciences; for the study of nouns, the *Cratylus* was read first, and then, for the analysis of concepts, the *Theaetetus*; and finally, for the study of things in themselves, physical realities were examined first, with the aid of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, and then theological realities, with the aid of the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. To end this first study cycle the *Philebus* served as a colophon. Then, in the second cycle, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* were utilized to give a deeper

14 Cf. O'Meara (2003); also Festugière (1971).

and more developed exposition of physical and theological realities respectively.

In other words, the *Sophist*, along with the *Statesman*, was studied with the aim of analyzing physical realities; the two dialogues are also in fact related in Plato. Proclus often mentions the *Statesman* in relation to the myth of Cronus and Zeus, and, more generally, with respect to world creation by the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. Either way, when Iamblichus or Proclus relate the *Sophist* to the physical world, they do so from the standpoint of their principles, especially that of the Demiurge.

A good illustration of this is the way in which Iamblichus considered that the σκοπός of the *Sophist* is the Demiurge operating in the sublunar world¹⁵. This could explain why Iamblichus considered the *Sophist* an appropriate dialogue for the study of the physical world. The sophist, in Iamblichus, was unencumbered with the more pejorative connotations he might have in Plato; he was an image producer, and similar to the Demiurge of the sublunar world. If the art of production can be divided into human and divine production, both gods and men are producers¹⁶. In this way both the sophist and the Demiurge are image producers (εἰδωλοποιοίς), and present many different faces (πολυκέφαλος), thanks to their interrelation with material things and movement.

So the sophist is akin to the philosopher, who is presented as an imitator of the Demiurge. Iamblichus points out how the art of division, typical of the philosopher, imitates the precedence of being which starts with the One. Proclus in turn takes up these correspondences between human and divine production, between philosophers and the Demiurge: "In the same way demiurgic Intellect makes appearances (ἐμφάσεις) exist in matter from the first Forms which are in him, it produces temporal images (εἶδωλα παράγει) coming from eternal beings, divisible images coming from indivisible beings, and pictorial images coming from true being. In the same fashion, I think, our scientific knowledge (ἡ παρ' ἡμῖν ἐπιστήμη), which represents the production of our intelligence (τὴν νοεράν ἀποτυπουμένη ποίησιν), fashions, through speech (διὰ λόγου

15 So Festugière (1971) 539; also Charles-Saget (1991) 487–488. For references to Iamblichus, see Dillon (1973).

16 Cf. Brisson (1974) 103: "...classer la sophistique en la définissant comme l'art de la production humaine de simulacres par la mimétique nous est d'un grand secours pour déterminer le sens et la nature de la production divine dans le *Timée*".

δημιουργεῖ), similarities with other realities and even with the gods themselves: what is indivisible by means of compounded things, what is simple by means of diverse things, what is unified by means of plurality”¹⁷. In this way philosophical speech produces images of physical reality, but also of the gods, representing indivisible and eternal things by means of complex and articulate language.

2.2. The *Sophist* as an initiation to the *Parmenides*

Proclus’ interest in the *Sophist* is not confined to his ideas concerning the Demiurge and the physical world. In the two works where this dialogue is most often quoted (*Commentary on the Parmenides* and *Platonic Theology*) he analyses matters different from these. As Carlos Steel has shown¹⁸, the *Sophist* has, for Proclus, a clear theological relevance, and offers some of the basic arguments affirming the reality of the One above being; hence it is to be used as a preparation (προπέλεια) for the reading of the *Parmenides*. According to Proclus, the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* are the two dialogues in which Plato expounds in a scientific way, i. e. dialectically (διαλεκτικῶς), the priority of the One over being¹⁹.

In this sense, *Platonic Theology*, III–20, where Proclus offers an analysis of *Sophist* 242c–245e, plays a determinant role. As Proclus understands him, Plato is arguing, first that being is the cause of plurality (and thus opposing authors like Empedocles), and secondly that the One is the cause of being (and thus opposing Parmenides himself). Proclus himself maintains the transcendence of the One with respect to being, along with his exposition of the intelligible triads (being, life, intelligence), which are presented starting from the negation of the One-which-is (ἔν ὄν), the negation of totality (ὅλον) and the negation of allness (πᾶν).

Specifically, the text in the *Sophist* which is most often mentioned by Proclus is 245b8–10: “Since, although being is affected (πεπρονθός) in a certain way by Unity, it does not seem to be the same as oneness,

17 *Th.Pl.*, I–29, 12–20

18 Cf. Steel (1992) 62: “Le *Sophiste* est par excellence le dialogue qui démontre l’existence de l’Un au delà de l’être”.

19 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, I–4, 18, 13–24

and totality will be bigger than unity”²⁰. That is, if being partakes in unity, it cannot be unity itself²¹.

At 245ab Proclus discovers the main argument that the Stranger propounds to Parmenides to establish the priority of the One over the One-which-is (i. e., over being): the One-which-is in Parmenides is a complete whole and has unity as a characteristic (πάθος τοῦ ἐνός). However, it is impossible for the One itself to receive unity (πεπονθός), because “what is really one (τὸ ἀληθῶς ἐν) is totally indivisible (ἀμερῆς)”. If the One is a whole, then that one is not the first, because it would have parts, and the One-which-is-first does not have parts.

The transcendence of the One with respect to being is one of the main tenets of the Neo-Platonist interpretation of Plato, and is so considered by Proclus in his critique of the interpretation of Origen the Platonist, who would have denied such a separation of the One with respect to being²², basing himself on the scepticism established by the *Parmenides*. This is the reason why the points made in the *Sophist* are really important, since they reinforce and extend other affirmations by Plato about the transcendence of the One in the *Republic* and the *Philebus*²³.

According to Proclus, the *Sophist* contains the necessary line of argument, with respect to the One in itself, for the later development of the hypotheses of the *Parmenides*. Hence, after completing *Th. Pl.* III–20, he affirms at the beginning of chapter 21: “We will deal with these themes in more detail a little later, when we discuss the *Parmenides*, because the Eleatic’s reflections are a preparation (προτέλεια) for the mysteries in the *Parmenides*”²⁴.

So the *Sophist* deals with being and the categories of being, since they are the introduction to, or preparation for, study of the One. The five categories of being in Proclus are ordered in three triads which form the order of intelligibility. All of them can be found, in different ways²⁵, in the order of being, in the order of life and in the order

20 Πεπονθός τε γὰρ τὸ ἐν εἶναι πως οὐ ταῦτόν ὃν τῷ ἐνὶ φανεῖται, καὶ πλεονα δὴ τὰ πάντα ἐνός ἔσται.

21 For example, in *Th. Pl.*, III–20, 68, 4: ὅτι τοῦτο πεπονθός ἐστι τὸ ἐν καὶ μετέχει τοῦ ἐνός. Or further on in *Th. Pl.*, III–20, 71, 3–5; or *Th. Pl.*, I–4, 18, 18–19.

22 Cf. Saffrey-Westerink (1997) II, X–XX.

23 Cf. *Th. Pl.* II–4.

24 Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν καὶ μικρὸν ὕστερον ἐπὶ πλεόν διαρθρώσομεν, ὅταν περὶ τοῦ Παρμενίδου λέγωμεν· προτέλεια γὰρ ἐστὶ τῶν Παρμενίδου λέγωμεν.

25 Cf. Saffrey-Westerink (1997) II.

of intelligence. The first triad belongs to the domain of being (οὐσία), which includes, in a hidden way, the other categories²⁶, but, in the most exact terms, is neither moving nor resting²⁷, neither itself nor the other. The second triad defines the domain of life, and is determined by rest and movement. The third triad, the properly intellectual one, is determined by the categories of identity and difference²⁸.

3. Negation

3.1. Senses of non-being

At *Sophist* 258a11–b4, Plato affirms: “Then, as it seems, the opposition of a part of the nature of different, and the nature of being, when they are reciprocally contrasted, is not less real – if it is licit to say that – than being itself, because the former does not mean contrariness to the latter, but just something different than this”²⁹. Proclus often alludes to this text, and, curiously, in a different way different from established interpretations³⁰. What he points out, in very simplified terms, is that Plato

26 Cf. Steel (1992) 63–64.

27 Cf. *Soph.*, 250c 3–7.

28 Cf. *Th. Pl.*, III–27.

29 Οὐκον, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ τῆς Θατέρου μορίου φύσεως καὶ τῆς τοῦ ὄντος πρὸς ἄλληλα ἀντικειμένων ἀντίθεσις οὐδὲν ἦπτον, εἰ Θέμις εἰπεῖν, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὄντος οὐσία ἐστίν, οὐκ ἐναντίον ἐκείνῳ σημαίνουσα ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτον μόνον, ἕτερον ἐκείνου.

30 With regard to *Th. Pl.*, II–5,39, 1–2, H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink (II, 99–100, note) offer a detailed explanation of the presence of this text in Proclus as follows: “Il y a chez Proclus plusieurs lieux parallèles pour cette citation du *Sophiste* 258 B 1–2 dans le cadre de la discussion sur la valeur comparée de l’affirmation et de la négation en fonction des degrés de l’être auxquels on les applique. Si on les recense, on constate que jamais Proclus ne suit exactement le texte reçu de Platon et que notre citation de la *Théol. plat.* diffère également de la manière habituelle dont Proclus rapporte ce texte. Le parallèle le plus proche se trouve dans cette sorte d’introduction à l’exégèse de la première hypothèse du *Parménide*, dans laquelle Proclus aborde neuf questions d’ordre général, cf. H.D.Saffrey dans *Philologus* 105, 1961, 318–319. La troisième de ces questions traite de la valeur de la négation (*In Parm.*, VI, col. 1072.19–1074.21). On lit (col. 1072.32–37): ὅπως δὲ αὐτὸς (Platon) ἐν Σοφιστῇ τὸ μὴ ὄν ἔφατο πρὸς τὸ ὄν ἔχειν οὐκ ἄδηλον καὶ ὅτι κρεῖττον τὸ ὄν οὐ παρ’ ἔλαττον (*non in minus*, Moerbeke, οὐπὲρ ἔλαττον, Cousin!) μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι φησιν ἢ τὸ ὄν, ἀλλὰ προσθεῖς τὸ εἰ θέμις εἰπεῖν ἐδήλωσε τὴν τοῦ ὄντος ὑπεροχὴν”. Cf. in the same sense Dillon (1987) 286: “It is noteworthy that, in quoting *Sophist* 258b1–2, Proclus repeat-

establishes in the *Sophist* that non-being is not inferior to being. The many times that he mentions this text are evidence how strongly he thinks they support the truth that non-being is – at least – on the same level as being. And because the differences between intelligible beings can be considered forms of non-being, Proclus will go further and emphasize the superiority of negation and non-being over affirmation and being. But first he has to show that non-being is not inferior to being; and nothing is as necessary for his argument as a reference to Plato himself.

Proclus is of course aware of the difficulty of maintaining that non-being is superior to being, and that something can be affirmed starting from a negation. In the *Commentary on the Parmenides*³¹, he goes directly to this question and makes explicit reference to the *Sophist* on four occasions. How is it reasonably (εἰκότως) possible to say something starting from what it is not? How can something be demonstrated or affirmed from non-being?³² We are given the answer, Proclus comments, by Plato in the *Sophist*³³, when he makes a distinction between what is not absolutely (τὸ μηδαμῆ μηδαμῶς ὄν) and deprivation (στέρησις, which is not itself except by accident). Besides, there are other senses of non-being: matter, and everything that is material, which exist at a phenomenal level (φαινομένως) but, properly, are not. And also the whole sensible universe, which never really exists (ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν)³⁴. Besides, there is non-being in souls (τὸ ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς μὴ ὄν), since they come to be and do not belong to the domain of intelligible beings³⁵. Starting in the *Sophist*, different senses for non-being can be distinguished, from absolute not-being to non-being in souls.

Nevertheless, “before existing in souls, non-being exists in intelligible things themselves (τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς νοητοῖς μὴ ὄν), non-being which

edly uses the phrase οὐ παρ' ἔλαττον (τὸ μὴ ὄν τοῦ ὄντος), which is not in Plato's text. [...] The text is quoted also above, 999.34–36, 1012.11–13, and below, 1076.8–10, 1184.37–39, always with παρ' ἔλαττον. Either Proclus is following a variant reading, or he has developed a fixed false recollection of this text”. Whatever the case, the complexity of *Sophist* 258a11–b4 (cf. Cordero [1988] 449–451) is simplified in Proclus' assertion: non-being is not inferior to being. From there, Proclus will advance to: non-being is superior to being.

31 *In Parm.*, V, 999.13–1000.33

32 *Ibid.*, 999.13–19

33 *Soph.*, 258e

34 *In Parm.*, V, 999. 19–29

35 *Ibid.*, 999. 29–32

is the first difference among beings (ἡ πρώτη ἐτερότης τῶν ὄντων), in the way that the *Sophist* shows us³⁶ when he says that non-being is not less real than being (τοῦ ὄντος οὐ παρ' ἔλαττον εἶναι)³⁷. That is: if, as far as the level of soul, non-being implies a deprivation of being, in the intelligible domain not-being is, by contrast, considered to be at the same level as being. And it is considered to be at the same level because difference (ἐτερότης) among beings is necessary for the affirmation of identity in each being. And this is the teaching of the *Sophist*, which establishes difference as one of the supreme categories of being.

However, “over and above this diversity of senses of non-being, there exists non-being that is previous to being (τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος μὴ ὄν), which is the cause of all beings (ὁ καὶ αἴτιον ἐστὶ τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων), and which transcends the plurality of beings.”³⁸. Hence there is a third sense of not-being, in which non-being is superior to being and its cause. Consequently, the senses of non-being can be divided into three levels: as inferior to being, as equal to being, and as superior to, and the cause of, being.

For this reason, the Eleatic Stranger agrees with Parmenides³⁹ rejection of the idea that one can say or think something about what is nothing at all⁴⁰. However, when we say that plurality is not, or that the soul or the One are not, we are not saying that they are not at all but that they are in certain sense and are not in another sense⁴¹.

“In general, negations come from difference in the intellectual domain (ὄλως γὰρ αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἔγγονοι τῆς ἐτερότητός εἰσι τῆς νοεῖας)”⁴². That is to say, when we think the differences which exist in reality, we think of them by means of negations. If for example, Proclus continues, we say that something is not a horse, it is because it is something different⁴³. So, negation is the intellectual way (νοεῶς) to think difference.

Once again Proclus refers to the *Sophist*⁴⁴: non-being that is contrary (ἐναντίον) to being is absolute not-being, about which nothing can be

36 *Soph.*, 258b 1–2

37 *In Parm.*, V, 999. 32–36

38 *Ibid.*, 999. 36–39

39 *Soph.*, 260d 2–3

40 *In Parm.*, V, 999. 39–1000.10

41 *Ibid.*, 1000. 10–21

42 *Ibid.*, 1000. 22–23

43 *Ibid.*, 1000.23–24

44 *Soph.*, 257b and 258e

said or thought; but when it is just the negation of being (ἀρνησιν μόνον λέγομεν τοῦ ὄντος), then many other senses of non-being appear⁴⁵.

3.2. Superiority of negation over affirmation

Summarizing what has been said up to now about Proclus' exegesis of the *Sophist*:

1. The philosopher reproduces dialectically – in the same way as does the Demiurge – through speech differentiation and articulation, all the differences and articulations within the real. The *Sophist* articulates this correspondence between divine and philosophical production. Dialectic uses negation as an adequate tool to reproduce differences in the real.
2. The One is superior to being and, in general, to all intelligible reality, which is plural. In the *Sophist* Plato shows that being has a certain totality but also has parts, and therefore is not first because it lacks the indivisibility of the One.
3. There is a great diversity in the senses of non-being and negation. The *Sophist* shows that non-being as difference is not inferior to being, and that it cannot be confused with absolute nothingness. And over and above the non-being of difference we have a sense of non-being as superior to being, and this is the non-being of the One.

These opinions, which Proclus draws by rational argument from the *Sophist*, are used as preparation to showing the superiority of negation to affirmation. In a long passage in the *Commentary on the Parmenides*⁴⁶ which serves as an introduction to the first hypothesis, Proclus analyzes the validity of Plato's argumentation in the dialogue that is marked by the use of negation. Hence he has to examine the validity of negation as a method within philosophy. In these pages Proclus refers frequently to the *Sophist* (and basically to the places already mentioned), but now he tries to show why negation is superior to affirmation.

In the first place he establishes the doctrine of the existence of a One in itself beyond Parmenides' One-that-is⁴⁷; and he does it by referring

45 *In Parm.*, V, 1000. 25–40

46 *In Parm.*, VI, 1064. 18–1092. 15

47 *Ibid.*, 1064.21–1071. 8

once again to the argument in the *Sophist* that the One itself does not have parts and is therefore prior to being, because being is a whole and has unity as an effect⁴⁸. But if this Primal One lacks parts, then nothing can be affirmed about it (because affirmation implies composition from parts) but merely negated. And this One about which everything is negated (οὐ πάντα ἀποφάσκειται) really exists, in the way that was indicated in the *Sophist*⁴⁹.

Furthermore, after pointing out that the “one in the soul” (τὸ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς) (in other words, unity present in us) or “the flower of the soul” (τὸ ἄνθος τῆς ψυχῆς) is the basis of rational language⁵⁰, he addresses the main question, which is how negation can be superior to affirmation. First of all, he accepts that in the differentiated domain of being affirmation is superior to negation: and he quotes *Sophist* 258b 1–2 as evidence that Plato’s reticence (“if it is licit to say” [that non-being is inferior to being]) alludes to the fact that, in the field of beings, it is paradoxical to place non-being on the same level as being⁵¹.

But non-being has many senses (πολλαχῶς τὸ μὴ ὄν): one as superior to being, another as equal to being, and another as deprived of being. And it is in the area where it is superior to being that negation is more appropriate than affirmation. Properly speaking, neither affirmation nor negation is valid, but negation is more appropriate because “negations have an indefinite potency” (αἱ δὲ ἀποφάσεις ἀόριστον ἔχουσι δύναμιν)⁵². Therefore, they are more suitable for the revealing of the indefinite and incomprehensible nature of the One.

Also, “in the same way as the One is cause of everything, so negations are cause of affirmations” (οὕτω καὶ ἀποφάσεις αἴτιαι τῶν καταφάσεων εἰσιν)⁵³. As a consequence⁵⁴, all the affirmations that can be made in the second hypothesis (in other words, affirmations about beings) have their cause in negations of the One: καὶ οὕτω τοῦτο τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἀποφάσεως γεννητικόν ἐστι τοῦ πλήθους τῶν καταφάσεων. In the *Sophist*⁵⁵ it is shown that affirmation is as valid as negation in the area of being (and in that of difference considered as non-being), but

48 *Ibid.*, 1065. 15–21

49 1065.31–1066.2

50 1071.9–1072.18

51 1072.19–1073.1

52 1074.2–3

53 1075.17–19

54 1075.33–37

55 1076.8–10

everything that can be said about being comes from what has previously been negated of the One, since all oppositions and antitheses originate in the One, such that negations of the One are the source of all subsequent affirmations. “The cause of all antithesis is not itself opposed to anything” (τὸ δὲ πάσης ἀντιθέσεως αἴτιον αὐτὸ πρὸς οὐδὲν ἀντίκειται); for in that case, a previous cause for antithesis would exist⁵⁶. And that is why negations generate affirmations (γεννητικὰς τῶν καταφάσεων)⁵⁷.

From this point on⁵⁸ the argument of the *Sophist* plays a determinant role once more. The question that Proclus asks himself is why Parmenides – in the dialogue of the same name – states that he is going to set out his hypothesis concerning the One, and then goes on to propound an argument in which he sets out several *negations* of the One⁵⁹. In answer to this question Proclus points out that Parmenides’ attitude in this dialogue is similar to the one that the Eleatic Stranger evinces in the *Sophist*. There the Stranger admits the wisdom of Parmenides in taking the One to be above plurality, but goes on to wonder whether that One Being is actually the Primal One. And he comes to the conclusion that it is not the Primal One, because it is a whole and non-indivisible; and hence receives its unity as something in which it participates. The person who follows this reasoning will necessarily end up negating every feature of the One⁶⁰. In the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* Plato begins the series of negations with a first negation: the One is not a whole, and that means that it does not have parts⁶¹. All other negations stem from this one, and later on, all affirmations. Even the categories of being examined in the *Sophist* (being, rest, movement, identity, difference) presuppose a previous negation of the One⁶².

Regardless of this, Proclus warns us, referring to the One by negation is not a sign of human impotence, but the appropriate way to approach it, given its infinity; and this is why divine souls and Intellect itself know the One through negation⁶³.

56 1077.8–11

57 1077.11–14

58 1077.19–1079.26

59 1077.19–1078.13

60 1078. 13–1079.4

61 1079. 14–18

62 1084. 5 ff.

63 1079. 27–1082. 9

3.3. Negation as a difference of sense

There is a question in the *Sophist* to which Proclus pays particular attention: the community of the categories among themselves and their distinction one from another; hence the articulation of Sameness and Otherness, of Identity and Difference. On the one hand⁶⁴ it would be absurd (ἄτοπον) if the Forms could not partake of, or mix with one other, because being part of the One Intellect (τοῦ ἑνὸς νοῦ) they must move through one another and be in one other. It is precisely this interrelationship among the Forms which is the proper object of Intellect⁶⁵. In conclusion, we cannot say that the Forms are altogether unmixed and lacking in community with one another, nor must we say, on the other hand, that each one of them is all of them⁶⁶. How, Proclus wonders, are we to deal rationally with this question?⁶⁷

The first answer is to be found in the *Sophist*. “When Plato demonstrates, in the *Sophist*, the community of Identity and Difference (τὴν κοινωνίαν ταυτότητος καὶ ἑτερότητος), he does not call Identity Difference as well, but ‘different’ (ἕτερον), and hence *not-x*. For it became different by participation (τῇ μετουσίᾳ), while remaining Identity in essence (τῇ οὐσίᾳ)”⁶⁸. In short, each Form is what it is in essence, but by participation shares in the others.

To illustrate how we can rationally say that something is essentially one thing but another by participation; or whether it is rational to say that something is partially one thing but partially another, Proclus resorts to distinctions among senses, or manners of signification. “The term *as* (τό καθὸ) has a double usage”⁶⁹. On the one hand, we may use it to express the fact that if one thing is present then another thing is present also; for instance, when someone says that “just as” something is air, so too it is light, since air gets lightened⁷⁰. On the other hand, we can use the term in another way, meaning what we customarily express by *qua* (ᾗ); for example, man *qua* man (ᾗ ἄνθρωπος), is receptive of

64 Cf. *In Parm.*, II, 754. 1–6

65 Cf. *Ibid.*, 754 .26–28

66 Cf. 755. 5–8

67 Πῶς οὖν καὶ τίνας τρόπων περὶ αὐτοῦ διαλεκτέον; (755.8–9)

68 756. 33–40

69 Cf. 755. 36–37

70 Cf. 755. 37–756.4

knowledge. In this second meaning, it is not true that air as (*qua*) air contains light, because air does not necessarily imply light⁷¹.

These opinions of Proclus are not just a simple terminological digression. By means of the distinctions among senses (something is one thing in one sense but another in a different sense) he is able once again to indicate the way in which a plurality of senses can be articulated in a single term. Indeed, his logic is founded on the task of articulating differences among senses. What Intellect does is to think in a unified way what the senses present as diversity. In other words, the plurality of the senses is completely real because both Intellect which thinks and its intelligible realities are totally real. That is why the differences presented by the senses are also real. But these differences (something is A as A, but is B as B) would be expressed dialectically (something is A as A, but is not A as B). Negation and non-being establish dialectical discourse⁷², which culminates in the assertion of a diversity of unified senses in a single intelligible essence⁷³. In this way Intellect makes pos-

71 Cf. 756. 4–11

72 Cf. *In Parm.*, I, 649. 36–650. 9: “The wise Eleatic, however, just like the companions of Parmenides and Zeno, looks at what he says when explaining dialectical methods in the *Sophist* and “is able to do this (Plato is talking about not thinking that sameness is otherness and otherness is sameness): to distinguish one single Form which spreads out completely through many others which are, each of them, separate; and many, each of them different from the others, and surrounded from outside by only one; and not only one but made up now into a unity stemming from several groups; with many differences, and totally separate” (*Sph.*, 253d 5–9)”.

73 Cf. the constant use that Proclus makes of differences among senses in the *Elements of Theology* (*Inst.*). Already at the beginning he announces: “everything that participates in the One is one and not one”: Πᾶν τὸ μετέχον τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ἓν ἔστι καὶ οὐχ ἓν (*Inst.*, 2). With respect to participation in unity, cf. *Inst.*, 4: something will participate in unity *qua* (ἧ) unified. With respect to producer (τὸ παράγον) and produced (τὸ παραγόμενον), see proposition 28: in one sense (πῆ μὲν) the product is distinguished from the producer and in another sense (πῆ δὲ) they are identical. Cf. the same point in proposition 30: ἧ μὲν... ἧ δὲ. And the same differences among senses can be found between being according to cause (κατ’ αἰτίας), being according to existence (καθ’ ὑπαρξιν), and being according to participation (κατὰ μέθεξιν); cf. the same point in proposition 65, 118 and 140. In short, differences among senses are presented as the central notion forming the ultimate explanation for other notions, such as those involving cause or participation. If everything is related in accordance with this causal process, then everything is tied to everything (cf. *Inst.*, 103), and everything is, in some sense, present in everything, but is so in a different way in each case.

sible both community among and separation among the Forms, because it establishes the unity of a plurality of senses.

Each of these different senses (expressed as difference or non-being) corresponds, according to Proclus, to the partial intelligences which know all of reality but in a partial aspect only⁷⁴. So expressing Difference as non-being is just a provisional phase of dialectical discourse in the expression of Difference and Identity.

3.4. Negation and senses of Difference

The question for Proclus is whether there are other senses of Difference which might be prior to that Difference (ἡ ἕτερότης) which Plato presents in the *Sophist* as being one of the five first categories of being. And the answer is that there are at least three senses of Difference which are prior to Difference when it is viewed as the supreme category of being. This series of distinctions is very typical of Proclus' thinking, since Proclus, in disagreement with Plotinus, is continually looking to establish a strict continuity between all beings, from the absolute One to material infinitude. So the distance between the One and the five categories must be explained, and they are so, structurally, by Unity and Plurality. These latter, in turn, are explained by Limit and Infinite; and these, finally, by the One itself.

3.4.1. The distinction unity (τὸ ἓν, ἡ ἕνωσις) – plurality (τὸ πλῆθος, τὰ πολλά)

In an attempt to clarify how it is possible to conjoin into a unity the five categories of being, and in particular identity and difference⁷⁵, Proclus shows that unity and plurality are presupposed in the distinction among categories of being, hence these should be considered the most general (γενικώτατα) of all beings⁷⁶. Proclus adds that it is not sur-

74 Cf. *Inst.*, 170: “Each intelligence understands all things simultaneously; but whereas unparticipated intelligence understands everything in an absolute way, every intelligence sequential to this knows everything but only in one particular aspect”: Πᾶς νοῦς πάντα ἅμα νοεῖ· ἀλλ’ ὁ μὲν ἀμέθεκτος ἀπλῶς πάντα, τῶν δὲ μετ’ ἐκεῖνον ἕκαστος καθ’ ἓν πάντα.

75 Cf. *In Parm.* II, 753–757. Cf. *supra* 3.3.

76 *Ibid.*, 764.1–2

prising that Plato does not include them in the *Sophist*⁷⁷, since unity and plurality are not in Intellect, but are Intellect itself⁷⁸ (οὐκ ἐν τῷ νοῦ ἔστιν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸς ὁ νοῦς): their unity is a wholeness (δολότης), and their plurality the many parts of wholeness. Unity and plurality are, therefore, the cause of all the Forms, being both one and many.

In other words, “plurality and unity not only exist at the level of being, but also above being (πληθος καὶ ἐν οὐ μόνον οὐσιώδες ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν); however, identity and difference exist in beings (ταύτων δὲ καὶ ἕτερον ἐν οὐσίαις)”⁷⁹. Hence, Proclus insists, it is not surprising that Plato does not include them as categories of being⁸⁰. In that section of the *Sophist* Plato calls being the greatest and most supreme of all categories (τὸ ὄν μέγιστον καὶ ἀρχηγικὸν τῶν γενῶν); at this level identity and difference are appropriate, but they are not so in the case of absolute unity and plurality (ἀπλῶς), whose reality is prior to being⁸¹.

Unity and plurality can be distinguished (διέστηκε) from identity and difference because the former have a nature that is absolute (καθ'αὐτὸ) while the latter are always relative (πρὸς τι). The priority of unity and plurality is that of absolute to relative⁸². So negation, because of its being relative to something (non-x), lies clearly within the ambit of difference, not that of plurality.

There is an analogy between unity and plurality and the first Limit and the first Infinitude (ἀνάλογον πρὸς τὸ πέρας τὸ πρῶτον καὶ τὴν πρωτίστην ἀπειρίαν), since what unifies plurality is limit⁸³, while infinitude causes plurality in every thing⁸⁴. Not all infinitude causes plurality, but the origin of plurality is infinitude⁸⁵. In other words, neither Unity nor Plurality is viewed by Proclus as the first distinction in the real, because prior to them one can find the first Limit and the first Infinitude.

77 764.3–5

78 764.5–11

79 764.28–30

80 764.26–28

81 764.34–765.2

82 765.6–15

83 764.20–22

84 765.18–21

85 764.21–26

3.4.2. The distinction Limit (τὸ πέρας) – Infinite (τὸ ἄπειρον, ἢ ἀπειρία)

Limit and Infinity are “in Plato’s theology the two principles of beings that manifest themselves as coming immediately from the One (αἱ δύο τῶν ὄντων ἀρχαὶ προσεχῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀναφανεῖσαι κατὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος θεολογίαν)”⁸⁶. Proclus bases this doctrine on the *Philebus*: God has made everything by mixing the limit with the infinite⁸⁷. In this, Plato has followed the theological thinking of his predecessors, and also agrees with what Philolaus has written⁸⁸.

The argument⁸⁹ puts in a further appearance in an implicit quotation from the *Sophist*⁹⁰: The One itself is prior to the One-which-is, because the latter includes not only unity but also plurality. To explain how plurality of being can arise from the One, we have to presuppose that the One has potency for generation (δύναμις γεννητική)⁹¹. This potency is an intermediate existence between producer and produced⁹². As a consequence, “the being that is produced and is not the One itself but has the form of the One (οὐκ ὄν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ’ ἐνοειδές) originates from the One thanks to potency (διὰ τὴν δύναμιν); from this comes being, which makes manifest the One”⁹³. In the *Philebus* Plato characterizes as infinite (ἄπειρον) this generating potency of being (τὴν δὲ γεννητικὴν τοῦ ὄντος δύναμιν)⁹⁴.

“Each unity, totality or community of beings, and all divine measures depend on the first Limit, while every division and fertile production and every procession towards plurality emerge from this essential Infinitude”⁹⁵. So Unity and Plurality depend on Limit and Infinitude, while Infinitude means generating or multiplying potency.

At *Platonic Theology* III–9 Proclus continues with his exposition of the doctrine of Limit and Infinitude, and quotes the *Sophist* three times. The first is a restatement of the Platonic assertion that non-

86 *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 34. 21–23

87 *Th.Pl.*, III–8, 30. 19–21

88 *Ibid.*, 30. 17–23

89 30. 23–34.19

90 31. 2: ὡς τὸ πεπονθὸς τὸ ἓν (cf. *Soph.*, 245b8–9)

91 31. 19

92 31. 21–22

93 31. 23–32.1

94 32. 4–5

95 32.21–23: Πᾶσα μὲν γὰρ ἕνωσις καὶ ὁλότης καὶ κοινωνία τῶν ὄντων καὶ πάντα τὰ θεῖα μέτρα τοῦ πρωτίστου πέρατος ἐξήρηται, πᾶσα δὲ διαίρεσις καὶ γόνιμος ποίησις καὶ ἡ εἰς πλήθος πρόοδος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχηγικωτάτης ταύτης ἀπειρίας ὑφέστηκεν.

being is not inferior to being⁹⁶, but on this occasion it carries a different sense from other such quotations from the *Sophist*⁹⁷. “How can non-essences produce essence?”⁹⁸ If Limit and Infinitude are above essence (ὑπερούσια), then essence has being (ὑπόστασιν) which comes from non-essences (ἐκ μὴ οὐσιῶν).

Proclus finds the answer to this question in the same *Sophist*, when Plato defines the first being as a possessor of potency (δυνάμενον)⁹⁹ and further as potency (δύναμιν)¹⁰⁰. Being exists for participating in Limit, and being has potency for participating in that first potency which is the Infinite. If the Eleatic Stranger adds that being is potency, it is to emphasise that being generates all things and is all things in a unitary form (ὡς πάντα ὃν ἐνοειδῶς)¹⁰¹. “Potency is everywhere the cause of fertile processions and all plurality: hidden potency is the cause of hidden plurality; however, potency as an act that manifests itself is the cause of the totality of plurality”¹⁰².

To sum up: plurality is the result of the infinitude of potency. In other words, the One is able to be all things (and all things indefinitely), and in the same measure is the cause of plurality. But the One is cause of plurality because it possesses a hidden potency, which manifests itself firstly as infinitude as opposed to limit. And that is why this infinite potency is expressed more properly by means of negation, and not so much by affirmation. Because being able to be all things involves not being any one of them in particular, so nothing can be affirmed about this first potency, only denied.

96 Cf. *Sph.*, 258b 1–2

97 The text is corrupt: cf. Saffrey-Westerink (1997) III, 124.

98 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 38. 15–16

99 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 39. 4–6 (cf. *Soph.*, 247d8: κερτημένον δύναμιν)

100 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 39. 8–9 (cf. *Sph.*, 247e4: ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις). A similar reference to the *Sophist* (in that it defines being as vested with potency and as potency) is found at *Th.Pl.*, III–21, 74. 11–13: καὶ τὸ ὃν ὁ Ἐλεάτης ξένος δυνάμενον καὶ δύναμιν ἀποκαλεῖ.

101 Cf. *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 39. 10

102 *Th.Pl.*, III–9, 39. 11–14: Ἡ γὰρ δύναμις αἰτία πανταχοῦ τῶν γονίμων προόδων καὶ παντὸς πλήθους, ἡ μὲν κρυφία δύναμις τοῦ κρυφίου πλήθους, ἡ δὲ κατ' ἐνέργειαν καὶ ἑαυτὴν ἐκφήνασα, τοῦ παντελοῦς.

3.4.3. Transcendence (ἡ ὑπεροχή, τὸ ἐξηρησθαι) of the One with respect to being

Finally, the transcendence of the One with respect to being cannot be identified with difference (ἡ ἐτερότης) as a category of being. Separation (χωριστόν) means something different when it refers to the separation of the One with respect to being and when it refers to difference among beings¹⁰³; in the same way, for example, the word *always* is used in a different way with respect to cosmos (because it is then the temporal always) and with respect to Intellect (where it is the eternal always, beyond all time)¹⁰⁴. *Transcendence* (τὸ ἐξηρησθαι) also means something different in the case of the One with respect to beings and in the case of Intellect with respect to the soul: Intellect spreads by means of the difference (ἐτερότητα) that divides beings, while the transcendence of the One consists in its priority with respect to such a difference (πρὸ ἐτερότητος)¹⁰⁵.

He appeals once again to the *Sophist* on two occasions to reinforce this sense: on the one hand, what is not absolute is not something else (ἕτερον), because difference is, in a way, non-being¹⁰⁶ and in another way being; on the other hand, non-being is not inferior to being¹⁰⁷, and just as difference involves being and non-being, so too can the transcendence of the One be distinguished from difference in being¹⁰⁸.

So if negation and difference are considered equal at the level of being, it is because being-another is an affirmation (τὸ δὲ ἕτερον κατὰφασίς)¹⁰⁹. That is, the non-being which is difference can be radically changed by an affirmation. However, the transcendence of the One is completely different: in this case it is not possible to transform negations into an affirmation, and not even the term *transcendence* or any other name is adequate to describe the One¹¹⁰.

So the categories of being analyzed by Plato in the *Sophist* are indications of divine and intellectual orders¹¹¹. On the other hand, as is

103 Cf. *In Parm.*, VII, 1184. 16–22. Cf. *ibid.*, *infra* (32–34): ἄλλως οὖν ἐκεῖνο κεχώρισται τῶν ὄλων καὶ ἄλλως ἢ ἐτερότης χωρίζει τὰ ὄντα ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων.

104 1184. 22–26

105 1184. 26–30

106 1184. 35–37: cf. *Soph.*, 257b 3–4

107 1184.37–39: cf. *Soph.*, 258b 1–2

108 1184. 39–1185. 5

109 1185. 8

110 1185. 5–10

111 1172. 31–33: ἐνταῦθα δὲ συνθήμασι θεῶν καὶ νοερῶν τάξεων

shown in the *Parmenides*¹¹², identity and difference are completely inappropriate to the One, which is the cause of so-called “transcendental negations” (ὑπεραποφάσεσιν)¹¹³, though without participating in such negations or being any of them, because the One lies beyond the intellectual domain (τῆς νοερᾶς διακοσμήσεως)¹¹⁴. However, by means of negations of the categories of being – and especially of the four negations related to identity and difference – it is possible to refer to the One. The One: 1) is not other than itself; 2) is not other than the others; 3) is not the same as itself; 4) is not the same as the others¹¹⁵.

112 139b 5–6

113 Cf. *In Parm.*, VII, 1172. 34–35. See Dillon (1987) 523: “ὑπεραπόφασις, a technical term of Stoic logic [...], properly used of such a double negative as “It is not the case that it is not day”, or $\sim\sim P$. Presumably, in the case of the One, such a “hyper-negation” would be e. g. “It is not not at rest” or “not not the same”. For the Stoics, the double negative simply equalled an affirmative, while in this case it signifies the One’s transcendence of both sides of the opposition”.

114 Cf. 1172. 35–38

115 1177. 27–34

Difference in Kind: Observations on the Distinction of the *Megista Gene*

David Ambuel

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates observes how the discussion has led its participants bit by bit to fall “unexpectedly into the middle,” pulled between Eleatic and Heraclitean doctrine (*kata smikron gar proiontes lelēthamen eis to meson peptōkotes*) (180e), adding the ironic hope that examination of one side will prove persuasive and rescue them from the other, since, should it turn out that neither doctrine is worthy (*metrion*) (181b), Socrates and Theaetetus surely cannot presume to best them.¹ Theodorus, in response, finds it imperative to carefully examine (*diaskepsasthai*) both opposing forces, and they agree to examine each in turn. Yet the *Theaetetus*, occupied extensively with Heraclitean metaphysics, defers consideration of Parmenides. (183e) Eleaticism is the issue in the *Sophist*, and in this way the two dialogues are complementary, the *Theaetetus* dialectically addressing Heraclitus and the *Sophist* Parmenides.² Also at issue in each dialogue is a distinction, perhaps also complementary: in the *Theaetetus*, the distinction between knowledge and opinion, in the *Sophist*, that between being and not-being.

1 They agree to examine each in turn. Insofar as the discussion of Parmenides is curtailed in the *Theaetetus*, and prominent in the *Sophist*, the latter dialogue could be taken as the continuation of this task, in which case, in light of the perplexities, it must be said the desired extrication has failed. The *Theaetetus*' remark is further ironic in that, as interpreted for Plato's purposes, Heraclitus and Parmenides appear diametrically opposed, pulling them in opposite directions, whereas they are in fact pulling in the same direction insofar as both doctrines imply the same metaphysical inadequacy: a kind of nominalism that renders the distinction impossible.

2 I am setting aside here any questions as to whether or not Plato has accurately represented the argument of the historical Parmenides or of the historical Heraclitus. Along with this, also set aside is the question whether, if there is a misrepresentation, it is unwitting or intended. Instead, for present purposes, Eleatic metaphysics or Heraclitean metaphysics should be taken to mean the metaphysics as Plato (re)conceives them for purposes at hand in the present dialogue.

Heraclitus asserts a universal flux – the only reality is change; therefore, “things” are ever different and no sameness is to be identified anywhere. Parmenides denies any change in any respect: the uncaused eternal sameness of being entails the impossibility of difference in any sense. Ironically, this tugging in opposite directions is also a push in one direction. Either, in Plato’s analysis, leads to the impossibility of discourse, thought, or meaning. Following the *Theaetetus*’ argument, the absence of any constancy or sameness makes the employment of any word – including the simple “this”, or even “thus” – an absurdity (*Theaetetus*, 183b). A parallel consequence follows from the Eleatic denial of any difference: the absolute unity of being itself renders it impossible even for the word “being” to be. (244d)

The Eleatic-Heraclitean impasse remarked upon in the *Theaetetus* reappears in the *Sophist* with the formulation of a response to the challenge of Eleaticism. That response is introduced by a discussion of “combinations” that will both introduce and be illustrated by some of the *megista gene*, the “greatest kinds,” which, by the conclusion of the analysis, will number five: “rest,” “motion,” “being,” “sameness,” and “other.”

The philosopher, the reader is told, must neither accept the account by which being is entirely at rest and always the same (regardless whether such an account posits a plurality of unchanging forms or a monism), nor the account that asserts all being is ever in motion. (249c–d) Either account would render all accounts unintelligible, by stripping mind from reality (*noun mēdeni peri mēdenos einai mēdamou*). (249b) The advocates of absolute rest and the advocates of absolute motion represent respectively a metaphysics resting on Eleatic inspiration and Heraclitean inspiration.³ And so “being” is neither “rest” nor “motion”, but both together.

The concept “combination” that is employed to define the greatest kinds is introduced subsequent to this conclusion that “being” cannot be identical to “rest,” nor identical to “motion,” and therefore must be something distinct. That is, it must be possible to intelligibly think

3 Broadly conceived, broad enough to include derivative arguments that seem little more than a poor parody of the Parmenidean model, to wit, the “late learners” mentioned at 251b–c. The Visitor explicitly frames the discussion so broad and unspecific that it will address “all who have ever stated anything whatsoever about being” (*hina toinun pros hapantas hēmin ho logos hēi tous pōpote peri ousias kai hotioun dialexthentas*). (251c)

and state that “motion is” (or “moving things exist,” or “this particular moving thing exists”) where the attribute “being” has some relation to but is not identical to the subject. This leads the Visitor to his exhortation at 251a that might initially strike the reader as an unanticipated transition: the exhortation to examine how we call the same thing by many names (*legōmen dē kath’ hontina pote tropon pollois onomasi tauton touto hekastote prosagoreuomen*).

But that question is the question about the very possibility of thought and discourse, threatened by the two metaphysical extremes, and here, again, the examination of “combination” begins by rejecting two extremes: it would be equally untenable to assert either that everything combines or to assert that nothing combines.

The thought that nothing combines might be cast as a notion of Eleatic inspiration: entity simply is what it is; combination with anything would entail that something simultaneously is and is not something else. An utter absence of combination issues from a metaphysics of Parmenides, or from a sophistry of the “late-learners”, such as an Antisthenes, who denies the possibility of attributing any name to a subject other than its own.

The thought that everything combines, on the other hand, issues from a metaphysics of Heraclitus: by the assertion of universal flux, a radicalization of pluralism, every so-called “individual” is changed at every instant and so is called with equal justification by one property or its opposite. The analogous doctrine in sophistry is the relativism of Protagoras as interpreted in the *Theaetetus*.

This is important for consideration of the distinction between being form and having form. If, with Parmenides, there is only the most barren oneness and self-sameness, with no pluralities in which unities are to be discerned, or, with Heraclitus, there is only sheer difference, and no unity that extends through it, then there can be no coherent conception of entity that is both something in itself and can be characterized in various respects. (That is the case regardless whether “entity” is understood here on the model of Platonic form, or Aristotelian substance, or something else.) The totality of combination or the nullity of combination both amount to a denial of all relation, which includes relation between one and many, between form and particular, between subject and predicate, or also the ontologically disparate relation between original and dependent image.

This sharpens the *Sophist’s* earlier challenge to the possibility of false statements: to say what is false is to say what is not and therefore requires

a conception of “not-being,” which, however, can neither be thought nor said intelligibly. If no statement can be false, then no statement can be intelligible. The examination of combinations will provide, after a fashion, a response to the dilemma: false statements state not things that are not, but rather things that are, but are other, that is, state only what is, though it is different from what is stated.

The combinations of kinds have remained an enduring puzzle. Nevertheless, without straying into the finer points that separate interpretations, but instead speaking in broad generality, it may be observed that a common focus of attention is the establishing of a distinction. For the present purposes, let this distinction be painted in the broadest strokes as that between what it means to *be* a form (character, property, kind) and what it means to *have* a form (character, property, kind). The distinction that is here sketched in greatest generality encompasses within it multiple possibilities for narrower and more determinate variations.

The distinction might be determined as one emphasizing its ontological aspect. It might, for example, be specified as the differentiation of that which is absolute and that which is relative. Or, alternatively, it could be seen as an indication of distinguishable senses of “not-being,” namely as a definite “entity” that is the opposite of “being” (and therefore incoherent and unthinkable) or as alterity, which always indicates some relation, some difference *from*.⁴ Frequently, on the other hand, the distinction is fixed not as an ontological one, but rather as a purely grammatical and logical one. Such an interpretation sees in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* an emerging maturity in logic: the lack followed by a discovery of a way to distinguish identity from predication, two distinct senses of the verb “to be,” revealed in the concluding identification of not-being with difference, which marks the way to the final definition of the sophist.⁵

The following remarks will examine this distinction, not in one of its determinate variants, but in the general form. It will be seen that

4 Cf. O’Brien (1995).

5 For this style of interpretation, see, for example, Hamlyn (1955), for whom communion of kinds is an awkward and imperfect advance in logic; Ackrill (1955), for whom it is an attempt to explain the conditions for the meaning of words; prominent also in the same interpretive tradition that would read the *Sophist* as a study in the grammar of the verb “to be” are Frede (1967), and Owen (1971). The notion that the source of the puzzles can be found in a confusion about propositions dates from much earlier: see Campbell (1883), Appendix E.

the distinction in the *Sophist* is not discovered or newly devised, but rather the object of a studied ambiguity that is a pointed, if indirect, critical encounter with the type of metaphysical assumptions that exclude it. Against this, one might take pause due to the appearance that the distinction in one form or another answers the *Sophist's* conundrum about false statements. But any interpretation that takes the dialogue's resolution as an authentic solution is confronted by insurmountable difficulties to be found in the structure of the dialogue's analysis of the combination of kinds.⁶

This marks the concentration of the following observations, which are intended to offer an analysis of the "communion of kinds," with attention directed to the manner in which the five *megista gene* are distinguished from each other. Here, too, the focus will be on the distinction that the passage signals. However, when one looks to the way in which the kinds are sorted out one from the other, it will become evident that the passage does not introduce a distinction, much less a new one, but rather is a carefully structured exercise in studied ambiguity: departing from the initial opposition of rest to motion, each step in the argument

6 An interpretation that perceives a genuine solution rather than an aporetic conclusion to the dialogue, apart from the dialectical structure of the combinations of kinds, which is the topic of this paper, is unsatisfactory in two ways, merely noted here, and not pursued in greater detail. First, as a "solution" the resolution offered to the problem of false statements, if it answers any problem, answers a problem other than the one stated. The issue was to find a satisfactory account of the image as something that is real in some sense, but less real than the kind of reality that is real in itself and not a dependent and derivative image. The resolution makes no attempt to account for degrees of reality, but instead explicitly drops any attempt to confront the concept of "not-being" as the opposite of "being." The final account, consequently, shows a way to call "Theaetetus sits" true and "Theaetetus flies" false, but not a way to explain how "Leprechauns are not" is true or "Theaetetus is not" is false. Secondly, there is nothing new, either emerging or revolutionary, about the distinction. As in the *Republic* passages cited above, Plato never had difficulties to distinguish identification from attribution: the theory of participation, whatever its shortcomings, has no difficulty in accounting for false statements. Where Plato does consider the confounding of identity and attribution, it is uniformly deemed a piece of sophistry. (See, for example, *Euthydemus* 298c–d, *Philebus* 14c–d.) The issue in the *Sophist* is not how to discover an account for false statement, but rather what is the source that can give the sophistic challenge to the possibility of false statement a thin patina of plausibility. It is, therefore, not about grammatical weaknesses or logical stupidity, but about examining metaphysical error.

distinguishing the kinds simultaneously assumes and denies the distinction between being a character and having a character.

Method of distinction

The greatest kinds are distinguished principally on the basis of possibilities of combination: if kind A and kind B do not match completely in their respective mixing relations, then they must be different kinds. The exception to the pattern is the starting point: “rest” and “motion” are distinguished on the grounds that they are completely opposed one to the other (*enantiōtata*, 250a).

Four points should be noted about “rest” and “motion,” which are distinguished before they are called “kinds” or “great.” 1) The opposition of rest to motion suggests a spatial metaphor, and is at points employed in a manner that underscores the metaphor, e. g., the assertion that it would be an absurd consequence to conclude that “rest moves” or “motion rests”; nevertheless, throughout the passage as a whole, the terms evince a conscious vagueness both in terms of reference—does “rest” designate a “kind” as one entity in itself, or something that is physically at rest, or a collection of things at rest?⁷—as well as in terms of connotation—“motion” could conceivably designate “change” not only spatial, but qualitative or other change, insofar as it is initially introduced as a mark of *dynamis*, of power, and is associated with “life,” “mind,” and “soul.”⁸ 2) “Rest” and “motion” are excluded from each other as opposites, and so, by implication, in virtue of their opposed natures. Later all distinctions of kind from kind will be attributed to participation in the kind “difference” and explicitly *not* in virtue of a kind’s own nature. 3) The opposition of “rest” to “motion” grounds the absolute impossibility of their combination. This assumption, namely that “rest” and “motion” as opposites do not combine, will be a necessary assumption for establishing each of the three remaining *gene* as distinct kinds. And the assumption will, at the conclusion, be

7 The “kinds” are explicitly taken as distinct individual forms, and, with the example of “difference,” it will be acknowledged that a “kind” can admit of “parts,” each of which is itself likewise a “kind.”

8 Cornford (1935), without offering justification, asserts that the communing of bodies with generation and soul with reality posited by the friends of the forms is just verbal happenstance, rather than the same concept of one related to the communion of forms.

retracted. That the assumption grounding the distinction of kinds is, in the end, rejected as ill-founded is the first signal that the communion of kinds is a dialectical tool, not the establishment of new doctrine. 4) The distinction of kinds on the basis of opposition reflects a parallel in the *Republic*: at *Republic* V, 475e–476a it is asserted that, since the form of the beautiful is opposite to that of the ugly, they are two and each is one. The passage also mentions “communion”; however, unlike the present discussion of rest and motion, no qualms are raised about their opposed natures preventing some kind of mutual communion: each in itself is one, but appears many through communion with actions, bodies and each other, an account also said to hold for “just and unjust, good and evil, and all the forms.” Unproblematic in the *Republic*, the communion of kinds now in the *Sophist* becomes an issue, precisely because, under the Visitor’s Eleatic presuppositions, no distinction is drawn between form as reality and that which participates in form as dependent entity, not fully real in the same sense as forms.⁹ The *Republic* distinction between that which is and that which is between being and not-being is, of course, one way to draw a distinction between being a character and having a character.

In the *Sophist*, once “rest” and “motion” have been set apart, each subsequent distinction of kinds that is made will both assume and deny the distinction between being a character and having a character.

“Rest” and “Motion” distinguished

1) “Rest” and “motion” do not mix. (254d7)

If either had the other as an attribute, then it would imply that it is the other, which would be contradictory, since they are opposites. The Visitor’s denial of their combination, of course, does not specify this or any other reason, but is a simple reiteration of the earlier agreement, based

9 The strikingly neutral sense with which “communing” and “blending” (*summignusthai*) is used here alongside terms that elsewhere in Plato indicate participation in forms (*metexein*, *metalambanein*) shows that that combination in the *Sophist* cannot be identical to or an extension of the relation of participation that in earlier dialogues relates particulars to forms, as Heineman (1983) 175 asserts: “Plato has simply transferred to the realm of Forms the old relation of participation which holds between individuals and Forms.” If Plato does this, it is not “simply,” since it would entail a reversal of the ontological understanding of forms that grounded the distinction of forms from particulars in the first place.

on the opposition of “rest” and “motion”. One could certainly construe the claim that the two never combine in a way that avoids a conflation of being a character with having a character, if, that is, one were to specify the respect in which it is understood that they do not combine. But that is precisely to presuppose the absent distinction. The differentiation of the five kinds is throughout muddled by the ambiguity over just what it is that the name of any “kind” actually names: continuing the pattern of thought that produced the preceding puzzles over “being”, all of the kinds now, like “being” before, are taken simultaneously as one, that is, a name for a distinct individual nature, and as many, that is, as a whole of parts or a sort of class name for every entity to which the name can be attributed.

“Rest,” “Motion,” and “Being” distinguished

2a) “Rest” mixes with “being”, and 2b) “Motion” mixes with “being”. (254d12)

Because both are, which in turn is taken to imply that each kind (“rest” and “motion”) has being as an attribute, or participates or mixes with being, but is not identical to being, which would lead to contradiction. Therefore,

3) “being”, “rest”, and “motion” are three. (254d12)

The conclusion rests on denying the distinction in the first step and simultaneously accepting the distinction in the second.¹⁰ That is to say,

10 One might seek to rescue the argument from the inconsistent implicit assumptions as follows: The mutual exclusion of “rest” and “motion” is ambiguous, as noted above. It could be read either, as here, to assert that 1) their combination would imply their identity or 2) that combination would assign to each a property incompatible with its own nature. In other words, “motion”, as a property, attributed to “rest”, as a subject (and vice versa) would be to attribute a property that is incompatible with the essential nature of the subject; then, the attribution of “being”, should it be identical to “motion”, would likewise assert an essential incompatibility. Just as, to adapt an example from the *Phaedo*, the number 4 is neither oddness nor evenness, but has only “even” as a property and never “odd.” The ambiguities attending Plato’s formulation of the kinds, each of which is treated at times as a singular entity, and at times as the name for a class of individuals with a common property, evades such specificity, and so to supply it presupposes the distinction that the ambiguity is designed to disguise. But beyond this, other considerations count against such an attempt to refashion the Visitor’s argument into consistency: the rejection of any combi-

the first step that separates “rest” and “motion” relies on the assumption that “motion” cannot in any way be attributed to “rest” or “rest” to “motion,” because the attribution would imply identity: if the kind “motion” *has* “rest” as a property then it *is* “rest.” The next step in the argument assumes, incompatibly with the first, that “being” can be attributed to both “rest” and “motion” without that attribution implying identity. Consequently, 1) the three kinds are distinguished as three on the grounds that they do not overlap in their patterns of combination—“rest” combines with “being” but not with “motion,” “motion” with “being” but not “rest,” and “being” with both “motion” and “rest”; but 2) the resulting pattern of combinations is obtained by first implicitly denying then implicitly assuming the distinction.

The opposition of rest to motion will serve as a premise in each step of the argument distinguishing the several kinds, along with the implication that this entails the impossibility of any mixture of rest and motion, an implication that the argument, by the conclusion, will revoke.

The separation of “rest”, “motion”, and “being” permits the introduction of sameness and difference by identifying a distinct plurality: each of the three (as one among many) is other than the others and the same as itself. (254d14)

“Same” and “other” distinguished from “rest” and “motion”

4) Neither “motion” nor “rest” can be “same” or “other”, (255a4–5) since whatever is attributed to “motion” and “rest” in common cannot be either. (255a7–8). Thus, the same argument that distinguishes “being” from “motion” and “rest” also distinguishes “same” and “other” from “motion” and “rest.”

Evidently sameness and difference, in terms of the sheer extent of their mixing, are, like being, in effect, transcendentals; they are of unlimited extent. Should the pattern of combinations alone mark distinct names as naming distinct entities, then “being”, “same” and “other” cannot be separated. To the extent that the pattern of possibilities for combination has been used to separate, first “rest” and “motion”,

nation whatever of “rest” and “motion” is grounded exclusively on their opposition, and as indicated in the *Republic* V 475e – 476a, and also later concluded here, opposition alone does not provide sufficient ground to preclude the possibility of combination.

then subsequently, “rest”, “motion” and “being”, it would follow that “being”, “same”, and “other” would be rendered indistinguishable, which in turn would lead to a version of the same dilemma that grounded the initial separation of “rest” and “motion”: namely, “same” and “other”, as opposites, should not admit of combination. Of course, from the universality of sameness and difference, it follows that they must combine. “Same” and “other” are jointly distinguished here from “motion” and “rest”, and in the final two steps of the passage will individually be distinguished from “being”, but the Visitor never cleanly separates sameness from difference.¹¹

These troublesome consequences could be avoided by the distinction that the Visitor will introduce later to separate “other” from “being”, the distinction between *pros alla* and *kath’ hautō*. Something can “be” something in some respect. It is a distinction that implicitly invokes the lost distinction between being a character and having a character. A thing cannot be (identical to) a character partially, in some particular respect, but very well can possess character in some respect.

The distinction only comes later, but the necessity of a means to draw the distinction is foreseen already at 255a7: whatever we attribute (*proseipōmen*) to rest and motion in common (*koinēi*) can be neither (*oudeteron autōin hoion te einaī*). It is a more explicit formulation of the reason that was used to distinguish being from them.

While this claim distinguishing sameness and difference from “motion” and “rest”, on the surface, is a more direct invocation of the distinction that has been obscured, it is also, in its entirety, a more explicit repetition of the pattern of reasoning that justified the initial distinction of the first three kinds. And so, in the same way as previously, it simultaneously 1) implies a distinction between having a form and being a form—“same” and “other” must mix with both “rest” and “motion” without therefore being either “rest” or “motion”—and also 2) implies the denial of the distinction—the conclusion that the identity of a character that is attributed to both “rest” and “motion” with either would entail the identity of “rest” and “motion”. Curiously, then, the reason

11 The lack of a sharp division between “same” and “other” when the Visitor is so meticulous about separating the other kinds is significant—ultimately there will be no basis to distinguish them and, following the logic of the divisions, the nature of a kind, that is, what it is to be something, will be determined by difference alone.

supplied for the distinction rests on the assumption that the distinction does not obtain.

“Being” distinguished from “same”

5) The same pattern of reasoning, simultaneously assuming and denying a difference between having and being a form, justifies the distinction of “same” from “being”. It again exploits the prior assumptions about the opposition of “rest” and “motion”, with the kind “being” providing a connecting bridge to the pair.

5a) “Same” cannot designate the same kind as the word “being” does. Since it has already been asserted that sameness mixes universally, and that, like other kinds, “being” is the same as itself, this assumes that for “being” to *have* the character of sameness can be distinguished from the assertion that it *is*, that is, it is distinguishable from its being identical to the character of sameness.

5b) Otherwise, if “being” and “same” did mean the same thing, a contradiction would follow. (255b11–c1) Assume that “being” and “same” mean the same.¹² Then “being” would both have sameness as a characterizing form (“being” is the same as itself, just as the kind “same” is the same as itself, and so on); also, it would be the same kind as sameness, and to state that something is would be equivalent to stating that something is the same.

Just how to construe the sense of an equivalence (that is, the equivalence between “being” and “same” that is rejected here) is left vague. There is an evident sense to statements such as “Socrates is” or “Unicorns are” that does not extend to some attempted statement such as “Socrates is the same,” which calls for completion by specifying the respect in which sameness is said of Socrates.¹³ As we have seen, however, the line of argument, a crafted study in ambiguity, is mute on suchlike, and will make argumentative use of its silence. That sameness and difference are correlates has already been implied in the assertions that every distinct individual is the same as itself and different from other distinct individuals. The explicit distinction between that which is in itself

12 Here the word *sēmainein* is used. There is no indication that would justify imputing some demarcation of meaning from reference: *sēmainein*, to designate, is to designate some thing.

13 As noted by others, e. g., Bostock (1984) 91.

and that which is with respect to another awaits the distinction of the final kind.

5c) Since, then, both “rest” and “motion” are (from the initial assumption), it follows that the identity of “being” with “same” would imply that “rest” and “motion” are the same, and consequently, if the ambiguities are left unresolved, the contradiction would follow that “rest” moves and “motion” rests. That would violate the assumption that, as opposites, “rest” and “motion” do not mix in any way. It therefore assumes that no distinction between having and being a form obtains. It is the conclusion opposite that reached by a parallel line of reasoning when it was agreed that both “motion” and “rest” do combine with “being.” The imputation that things stand otherwise when it is now a question of combination with “same” is reinforced by the play upon the ambiguity in the meaning of “same,” namely, that when we consider the assertion “Rest and motion are both (the) same,” we might just assume the unwarranted completion: “as each other” rather than “as themselves.”

Alternatively to reading this step in the argument as a renewed conflation of having a character with being a character, one could read this fourth step globally as a *reductio* starting from the assumption that the distinction does not obtain and arguing to a contradiction, implying that the distinction must be made. In that case, the argument leads up to the *pros alla – kath’ hauto* distinction, which will be made next. However, the concluding step in distinguishing “being” from “same” works only on the assumption that the distinction between being and having a character must be made and denied simultaneously. If, that is, we remedy the ambiguity about the meaning of “same” (which the text does not do at this point), then we would need other grounds and a different argument to separate “being” from “same.” Moreover, as will be seen, the *pros alla – kath’ hauto* distinction will not be immune to the Eleatic difficulties that have accompanied the reasoning thus far.

Before proceeding to the separation of “being” from difference, one further note of elaboration on the preceding observations is in order. In light of the play about the ambiguities of “same,” there are two possible salient readings of the conclusion that separates “same” from “being.”

On the first reading, the concluding step allows that “motion” and “rest” both are, that is, both mix with the kind “being,” thus assuming the distinction, while asserting that the identification of “being” with sameness would render the opposites “rest” and “motion” identical, thus denying the distinction.

Alternatively, one could read the concluding step not as a logical inference that is based on the conflation of a distinction, but as a verbal one that exploits an ambiguity in the word “same.” If “being” is the same as “same,” then the statement that “‘rest’ and ‘motion’ are” is equivalent to the statement that “‘rest’ and ‘motion’ are the same.” It is a reading more evocative of outright sophistry than failed logic, and yet it represents a sort of verbal equivalent of the simultaneous affirmation and denial of our distinction. “Same,” unlike the previous kinds, is a relative term: whatever is same is the same as something or same in some respect, and the possibility of relations requires the possibility of having a form without being that form. At the same time, the omission of any specification of respect in the implication that “‘rest’ and ‘motion’ are the same,” obscures the same distinction, giving it the appearance of an identity statement.

“Other” distinguished from “being”

6) Both “same” and “other” were separated from “motion” and “rest” with one same argument. An extension of that same argument served to distinguish “same” from “being”.¹⁴

Nothing would prevent a further application of the argument to “other” if we follow the first reading: if “rest” and “motion” are both “other” (i. e., identical to the kind “other”), then they are both the same (i. e., identical to each other) which contradicts the initial premise that, as opposites, they absolutely cannot mix.¹⁵

Instead, however, the distinction of “other” from “being” is drawn in another way, explicitly designating the distinction that has been employed and denied at each step thus far: among the things that are (*tōn ontōn*) some are always said (*aei legesthai*) in themselves (*auta kath’ hauta*),

14 It would not function for “other”, insofar as the previous argument relied on the confusion lurking in the ambiguous statement that “‘rest’ and ‘motion’ are the same.” This is noted by Malcolm (2006) 276.

15 And so, it is not *strictly speaking* the case that, as Malcolm (2006) 276, states, the prior argument cannot be extended to the distinction of otherness, thus requiring the *pros alla – kath’ hauta* distinction. Malcolm is correct insofar as the on the surface the seeming discrepancy between the two equally ambiguous statements “‘motion’ and ‘rest’ are the same” and “‘motion’ and ‘rest’ are different” provide a device for introducing the *pros alla – kath’ hauta* distinction, yet the distinction was implicit before, even if it is only made explicit now.

and others with respect to others (*pros alla*). This is the distinction of what something is as such, in virtue of itself, as opposed to what a thing might be said to be, not in and of itself, but with respect to something else that is not identical to it. In other words, the distinction outlines the separation between what it is to be a form and what it is to have a form, between character and characterized.

One might be inclined to render *kath' hauto* and *pros alla* as “absolute” and “relative.”¹⁶ Elsewhere in Plato, say, for example, *Republic* V, the distinction captures the ontological opposition of being and becoming, that is, the reality of forms as compared to the nature of the existence of particulars that participate in forms, and so, as participants, are what they are not in themselves but with respect to other things.¹⁷ And so, if the distinction is to hold any ontological import, and is not simply a grammatical distinction, then “absolute” and “relative” (or other terminological variants, such as “complete” and “incomplete”) are inadequate, for too narrow. It indicates something broader, such as the Platonic distinction between what it is to be a form from what it is to participate in form or the Aristotelian distinction of essential from non-essential predication. For example, a statement such as “Socrates is small” must be understood as indicating “small” relative to someone larger, or to an average height. However, statements such as “Socrates is ugly” or “Socrates is barefoot” are not relative, but also not equivalent to, say, “Socrates is this individual human.” Thus, in “Socrates is ugly,” “ugly” is not said *kath' hauto*. Socrates is not ugly in virtue of being Socrates; after all, with a little botox and plastic surgery, he just might be made both Socrates and beautiful. It is a relative attribution, not like “large” but as the relation of particular to universal that is not that particular. It is not said as such, but rather in some respect. Soc-

16 Perhaps the most widely defended view of the *pros alla* – *kath' hauto* distinction, advocated in modern times by Campbell (1867), Cornford (1935) and many since. Frede (1967) gives a survey. The interpretation defended here, though avoiding as potentially misleading the terms “absolute” and “relative,” might also be assigned to this group, provided we do not lose the ontological dimension to the distinction and equate it to a distinction between complete and incomplete uses of “is.”

17 The interpreter who would follow the tradition of a grammatical or logical reading of the passage will want to deny any such connection of the *pros alla* – *kath' hauto* distinction to a *pros ti* – *kath' hauto* distinction, despite the fact that *pros alla* and *pros ti* are often equivalent. (Cf. *Philebus* 51c) See Malcolm (2006) 283–284.

rates is ugly, not as ugliness is ugly, but with respect to the standards of human beauty, and so, *pros alla*. Furthermore, if we are to assert that a given entity is “the same as itself,” then the attribute “same,” grammatically a relative term, is attributed not *pros alla* but *kath’ hautō*. It might be added, however, that this remark makes for a much cleaner fit to Platonic ontology than to Aristotelian, for whom there is no separation—the form itself is at some level nothing other than the immanent form.¹⁸ And yet, while the distinction evokes its ontological background, it does not, here, reclaim it: the ontological nuance of participation has been replaced with the neutrality of combination, the interval between original and image leveled out.¹⁹

If the manner of distinction that separated sameness from “being” was honed to the ambiguities that exploited the meaning of “same” (namely, the meaning of “same” as a relative in the proper sense), the current step follows suit with respect to the meaning of “difference”.

The Eleatic Visitor now asserts, in words of broadest ambiguity, that “Other is always with respect to what is other” (*to d’ heteron aei pros heteron*). (255d1)

What sense can be given to the assertion? While the *kath’ hautō* – *pros alla* distinction suggests a means to disambiguate what may be said of a thing in itself as contrasted with what may be said in some respect, the assertion, twice repeating *heteron*, is itself vague as formulated, precisely because (just as with the employment of terms designating the previous kinds) *to heteron* could be construed to mean 1) otherness as a kind, or 2) that which is characterized as being other, in other words, either otherness in itself, or otherness with respect to something else that may be said to have otherness as a property.

Among possible construals of this equivocation, two stand out. On the surface at least, the interlocutors are investigating “the other” as a kind, an individual entity. In that case, *to heteron pros heteron* would mean something like: otherness is what it is with respect to otherness.

18 It might be noted in passing that the expressions *kath’ hautō* and *pros alla* are referred to as forms (*eidōin*), 255d4, that can be participated in, mimicking one of the terms used to designate the kinds, but are not in turn distinguished as an additional two kinds.

19 In this regard, see Malcolm (2006) 279–280 for a clear criticism of Frede’s attempt to restrict *kath’ hautō* to statements where a form is the subject. While the inclination to do so would make sense in the context of an exposition of the theory of forms and relation of forms to particulars, it does not fit the *Sophist* passage.

That is, the statement might be taken as an expression, applied to “other”, of the general claim that every kind is the same as itself; the assertion that otherness is what it is to be other. It would then be an assertion of the “nature,” the *physis* of otherness. The notion of the nature proper to a kind, implicit in the initial opposition of rest and motion, will be invoked repeatedly in the subsequent exchanges summarizing the separation of kinds. Moreover, if *to heteron* is construed here as a kind, as a form or entity of sorts, then, unless the assertion that “other is always with respect to other” contradicts the claim, both made earlier and repeated later, of the universality of sameness, then this expression of the nature of otherness has the paradoxical implication that “other” in itself is difference with respect to others: the *kath’ hautou* is the *pros alla*, in a quasi denial of the distinction just introduced to illustrate the so-called nature of otherness.

If instead we take the statement as an assertion, not about otherness as a kind, but about the class of things that are other, that is, about other as a character that things (including perhaps but not limited to otherness itself) have, then we obtain a different reading of the statement, but again one that echoes through the subsequent summary. Then, *to heteron pros heteron* means: whatever is other, that is, whatever has the property of being other than something else, has that property with respect to otherness as a kind. This construal is mirrored in the conclusion at 255e that the “other” mixes with every kind, and that each of them differs from all others, “not by its own nature” (*ou dia tēn hautou physin*), but by participation in the “other”.

Where the first rendering posits a so-called “nature” of difference that undoes the difference between what a thing is in itself and what it is with respect to others, since the “other”, by its own nature, is always *pros alla*, the second rendering effaces altogether the idea of a positive and distinct nature: each and every thing is just what it is by its difference from what it is not. The differentiation of the *megista gene* has presented an abstract logic underpinning the divisions, where definition is exclusively negative.²⁰

20 The divisions of the *Sophist*, in contrast to the instructions for proper division in the *Politicus*, proceed by blunt dichotomy, not dividing “at the natural joints,” (*Politicus* 287c, cf. *Phaedrus* 265e) each step separating the object of definition from what it is not. Division in the *Sophist* is definition by negation, the only type of determination of “nature” that the analysis of combinations ultimately will allow. See Ambuel (2007); cf. Dorter (1994).

In doing that, the examination of the *megista gene* also provides a dialectical bridge to the resolution, such as it is, of the dialogue. The identification of “other” with “not-being” ought, one should think, to imply the identification of “being” with “same”. But that may seem problematic, given the previous distinction of “being” from “same” and now the assertion that “not-being” is not the opposite of “being”. In that case, the identification of “other” with “not-being” ought instead to imply the identification of “being” with the “not-other”. Either to accept or to reject the implication appears problematic. Not to draw the inference would entail the unacceptable result that the uses of the term “being” in the affirmative kind “being” and the negative “not-being” are utterly equivocal. If that consequence is not contradictory, it is certainly incoherent; it would mean, for example, that the “is” in “Theaetetus is flying” and the “is” in “Theaetetus is not flying” have an entirely different sense. Moreover, insofar as all types of “not-being” are accorded a spot among the things that are, such equivocation between “being” and “not-being” is surely precluded. On the other hand, if “being” is the “not-other”, then “being” is both “other” and “not-other” in the same sense, namely, as not the “other”, which is to say, different from the kind “other”.

Even if we should find a way to finesse these troublesome implications about this possible identity of two nominally distinct kinds, the dialogue’s further explication of the kind “other” leads directly to analogous implications that hold globally for all kinds in general, not only the contrast of “being” and “not-being.” At 256c, an inference is drawn: “according to the present argument motion is in a way not other and in a way other.” The Visitor leaves it to us to spell out the respect in which it is not and is: namely, motion (and, indeed, every kind) is other, since it is one entity in itself distinct from, or other than, every other kind; it is also not other, because motion (and every other kind, apart from “other” itself) is a kind in itself that is distinct from the “other,” which is also a kind in itself. The “discovery” of the “other” as a kind holds consequences for the understanding of “being,” that is, for what it means for any part of being to be an entity in itself. Just how insidious these consequences are and their full implications for the assertion that the argument shows “motion” to be “in a way other and in a way not other” only become evident when we take into consideration how otherness is analyzed and how it stands with respect to other kinds.

The “other” (*thateron*) is designated as a kind, an *eidos* or a *genos* at 255d–e: “the nature of the other must be counted among the forms that are” (*tēn thaterou phusin lektein en tois eidesin ousan*). Placing it explicitly among things that are foreshadows the assertion at 257b that “not-being” (*to mē on*) does not designate an opposite (*enantion*). The acknowledgement that the “other” has a nature in itself as a distinct entity is followed immediately by the assertion, both most curious and most significant, that every distinct entity differs from every other entity “not by its own nature, but by participation in the idea of the other” (*ou dia tēn autou phusin, alla dia to metechin tēs ideas tēs thaterou*). Consequently although an unspecified “nature” is imputed to every kind, no kind differs from its opposite or from any other kind by its own nature; rather, in all instances of otherness the difference is by the nature of the “other.”

It follows that this applies to the distinction between “motion” (or any kind except “other” itself) and otherness as well. Therefore, when we spell out in greater detail the relevant senses in which motion is “other in a way and not other in a way,” we obtain:

1. “Motion” (or any *genos* except “other”) is *other* by participation in otherness with respect to the other; and
2. “Motion” (or any *genos* except “other”) is *not other* by participation in otherness with respect to the other.

“Motion” or whatever you will is, therefore, both other and not other in the same manner and in the same respect.

One could respond that the two statements do not, in fact, express otherness in the same respect. In the positive formulation, “motion” is said to be other than otherness, and that is a predicative statement, attributing the property “other” to the kind “motion.” On the other hand, in the negative formulation, “motion” is said not to be the “other,” and that means that “motion” and “other” are not identical. So the first statement is an attribution, the second an identity statement; or, perhaps, the first is about *having* a property, the second about *being* a property.

But this attempt to rescue consistency by resorting to a version of the distinction that has been simultaneously drawn and denied with artful ambiguity throughout the passage will not stand up to inspection. Consider an alternate example: “Red is not green.” Abiding by the stipulations about the nature of otherness, this difference is explained not by the nature of red and of green, but by the participation of red in the

“other” with respect to green. Therefore, “Red is not green” is equivalent to “Red is other by participation in otherness with respect to green.” To make the quandary clear, if we now substitute the kind “other” for the kind “green,” we obtain the equivalence of statements of forms 1) and 2) above namely: “Red is *not other*” is equivalent to “Red is *other* by participation in otherness with respect otherness.”

Although an unspecified “nature” is imputed to every kind, no kind differs from its opposite or from any other kind by its own nature; rather all instances of otherness are by the nature of the “other.” This is joined to the further assertion that the complement of any kind is to be counted as a being, an entity among the things that are as real, as much “one” and as much entity with its own nature in itself as every other kind. Thus, if, say, “the beautiful” is a kind and is one, so too is “the not-beautiful,” which must include, not only “the ugly,” but also, “the round,” “the green,” “the barefoot,” “the attractive,” and so forth. The distinction of kinds loses all definition: a thing is what it is not, and, after the failure to clarify “not-being” or “being”, the Eleatic Visitor has indeed, as indicated, taken both together. The *Sophist* concludes, not with a portrayal of philosophical dialectic, but of an Eleatic logic that abstractly illustrates the logic of the initial divisions, which proceed entirely by negative definition: a thing is what it is not.

The analysis of the “other” as a form that can lead to an answer in the hunt for “not-being” is embroiled in contradiction. Beyond this, however, its *physis*, the nature of the “other” as the Visitor sketches it, has consequences that are not confined to the interpretation of the *genos* “other” alone; rather, the subsequent passages show that the “nature” of “other” determines the “nature” of all kinds.

Once having established that “motion” is in a sense other and in a sense not other, the Visitor offers the cryptic assertion that, with respect to each of the forms, “being” is many, “not-being” unlimited in number. (256e: *peri hekaston ara tōn eidōn polu men esti to on, apeiron de plēthei to me on.*) The sense of this remark can be tied to the Visitor’s next step, which is intended to illustrate how “not-being” construed as “other than being” need not be opposed to “being,” but in fact can be understood as one part of being. To designate something “not-great” (*to mē mega*) does not mark it as small, rather than equal. Consequently, the “not-great” is not the opposite (*enantion*) of the “great.” Furthermore, there is nothing in the text to confine the term *to mē mega* to some determinate wider genus, such as “size.” The Visitor asserts that “not” (*to mē kai to ou*) indicates any of the things that are other than that which is

designated by the expression without negation. (257c) It follows that the “not-great” (and analogously for the “not-small,” “not-being,” etc.) refers to the logical complement of the “great,” which includes, therefore, both the “small” and the “equal,” but also “rest,” “motion,” “being,” “beautiful,” and so forth. The Visitor adds (257c) that every instance of otherness—the “not-great,” or the “not-beautiful,” etc.—is a part of the form “other,” each part of which possesses a distinct nature with its own unity. The Visitor makes this inference explicitly with the example of the “beautiful” and the “not-beautiful.” (257d–258a) Since the nature of the “other” (*he thaterou physis*) really has being no less than any other kind, each of its parts must really be, no less than any other kind. (258a) Since, then, the complement of any form (for example, the “not-great,” which includes the “small,” the “equal,” the “beautiful,” and so on) is likewise a form and just as much as any other form a being in itself with unity and a distinct nature, it follows that any collection of parts whatsoever is also a form.

This result holds unmistakable implications for what it means to be a part of “being” and to have a “nature.” It leads directly to the already asserted unlimited multiplicity of “not-being,” (256e) and that in the following way. First note that all entities that are kinds or forms in themselves are also parts of multiple forms, each of which is itself one in and of itself. For example, the “small” and the “beautiful” are both parts of the “not-great,” but also both are parts of “not-being” and “not-rest,” and so forth. Since, then, there is a form “not-great” that is not the opposite of the form “great,” but is a part of the form “other,” there must also be a form that is the “not-not-great.” The “not-not-great” cannot, of course, be identical to the “great,” because “great” and “not-great” are not opposites. This becomes clearer still if we consider: the “small,” which most certainly is not a part of and is other than the “great,” is consequently a part of the “not-great,” but the “small” must also be a part of the “not-not-great” since it is itself a distinct form that is other than the form of the “not-great.” Therefore, there must also be a form of the “not-not-not great,” and so on, *ad infinitum*.

To return, finally, to “being,” “not-being,” and “other”: what, then, constitutes the unity that is the nature of any reality, of any part of being, each of which is one in and of itself? It follows from the determination of the nature of “other” that, while “not-being” is not the opposite of “being,” the “other” and its parts all include opposed natures within their nominally unitary natures. “Motion” and “rest,” or

the “beautiful” and the “ugly,” are all together parts of the single nature that is the “not-great,” as well as of innumerable other distinct forms.

What ultimately does it mean then to “be” a distinct form? It follows that “nature” is undeterminable as any sort of essence; rather, the nature of anything that is, is determined exclusively by what it is not. This will provide, not an account of the image and snare for the sophist, but an image of the image, providing an awkward means to distinguish the truth of “Theaetetus sits” from the falsity of “Theaetetus flies,” but no means to explain the truth or falsity of statements such as “Theaetetus is” or “Unicorns are not,” or “Images are real but not really real.”

In short, the nominalism of an Eleatic metaphysics (or of a Heraclitean metaphysics, as they are interpreted in the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*) cannot state what anything “is,” which would require the means to conceive of a character that is universal, distinguishable from things that are characterized by it, and attributable in the same or in related senses to a plurality. Consequently, what a thing “is” becomes what it is not. The analysis of combinations furnishes the abstract, if contradictory, logic underpinning the method of division used to pursue the sophist. The irony is that, by setting aside the ontological inquiry into the opposite of “being” and identifying “not-being” (in one sense) with “other,” the being and nature of anything as a result is constituted entirely by its difference from what it is not. Being, in effect, is nothing other than not-being.

Mimesis in the *Sophist**

Lidia Palumbo

Mimesis is the production of images (*Soph.* 265b1–3). These cover a very wide semantic field, including the meanings of “opinion” and “viewpoint”. A false image is a wrong opinion that says the things that are not: in believing, we imagine; in thinking, we represent what we think. The false belief is therefore a mental scene, an image that possesses neither a corresponding reality nor a model, although it is perceived as a real scene. The virtue of an image (the *arete eikonos*) lies in its being similar to what is true, whereas the similarity between false and true can produce a deception similar to that caused by a dream or by poetry.

The aim of this paper is to show that in the *Sophist* falsity is closely linked to *mimesis*. This is not because every *mimesis* is false, but because all falsity is mimetic. That not every *mimesis* is false is shown at 235c–236c. The crucial distinction between *eikastike* and *phantastike* must be understood as the distinction between true and false *mimesis*. That every falsity is mimetic is a far more complex issue, which I shall be discussing in this paper. I shall claim that falsity does *not* consist in confusing something for something else, but, more specifically, in confusing an image for its model.

Plato illustrates his theory of perceptive deception by recalling the confusion between image and model. This happens at 234e–236c, where the production of false representations of ‘things which are’ is addressed. In my opinion Plato’s accounts of false statement can be understood only by focusing on the production of such false representations. Unlike a number of scholars¹, I claim² that the *Sophist* possesses a deep unity. This unity is not acknowledged in their interpretations of the dialogue, which see either no link, or only a very loose one, between the section on image and that on false statement. I will try, therefore, to

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1 Owen (1971); Frede (1992).

2 Following Notomi (1999).

demonstrate that all statements are images. There are true and false images; the same cause is responsible for the falsity of statements and all other images, and consists of an intermingling with 'what is not' (*to me on*). 'What is not' is not the other, but only that part of the other which is opposed to the reality of each thing (258e2)³. In the *Sophist* the genus of 'what is' (*to on*) represents reality: "to participate in 'what is' means therefore 'to really be'"⁴, "to really have a given nature". 'What is not' is by no means difference in general, but only what is different from 'what is'⁵. Only a thing's image can represent the difference from 'what is'. The image *is* this difference, but sometimes it *conceals* it, passing itself off as the thing it is the image of. When this happens, *and only when this happens*, is the image 'what is not'. When the difference between a thing and its image is not displayed, 'what is not' is generated. This is the *mimema*, and more particularly that specific form of it which is called *phantasma*.

In the *Sophist* the issue of 'what is not' is highlighted because the dialogue addresses the difference between reality and appearance⁶. This link between 'what is not' and appearance is missing in analytical interpretations of the dialogue.

The difference between reality and appearance is introduced together with the *mimema* and its deceptive similarity to what it is the *mimema* of. The relationship between true and false images can be understood only through an analysis of this deceptive similarity: both the true and the false image are *mimemata*, but only in the case of the true image does the soul receive a *mimema* that *corresponds* to reality, i. e., a representation that 'tells how things are as they are'. A closer look at the *mimema* will clarify the meaning of the expression 'corresponds to reality'.

A *mimema* is an image which generates a perception similar to that caused by the object which is represented through it. For instance, a depicted image of a house is a *mimema* because the image of the house taking shape in the soul of the spectator is *similar* to that arising in the soul

3 Cf. Cordero (1993) 270 n. 338; O'Brien (1995) 66–71; Fronterotta (2007) 454, n. 252.

4 This reading meets the requirement of 'Parity Assumption' between the two concepts of 'what is' and 'what is not' (cf. Owen [1971] 229–231), because it shows that 'what is not' (*to me on*) represents appearance, i. e., non-reality. See Palumbo (1994) 203.

5 Dixsaut (1991) 205.

6 Notomi (1999) 122.

of the spectator looking at a genuine (and not simply at a depicted) house. Even the dream is a *mimema*, since dreaming of a house means looking at it as one would look at a house made of bricks (266b–c)⁷.

In all of these cases the images of the objects take shape in the soul even if the objects themselves are absent. These images take shape in the soul and mingle with other images which also arise in the soul, but the latter follow the perception of something real, not of an image. Every image taking shape in the soul following a perception generates an opinion – both if the perception is that of an image and that of a real object. If a person perceiving an image of a house believes he is looking at a real house and not an image he is mistaken.

The thought, the *phantasia*, and the opinion of the mistaken perceiver are in touch with ‘what is not’ (260c, 261a). It is very important to observe that when Plato dwells on falsity he refers to *phantasia* (260e), *phantasia* being the seat of mental images.

In my opinion, in the *Sophist* there is no falsity other than that which indissolubly links opinion to representation, and which consists in looking at a *mimema* believing it is what it is the *mimema* of. There is no ‘what is not’ other than the confusion between the original and the image, between reality and appearance.

The *mimemata* pose the issue of truth. Each of them raises the question whether we are facing ‘what is’ or ‘what is not’. The *Sophist* allows us to understand whether the *mimemata* are true or not in the following way: if we notice that the *mimema* is different from what it is the *mimema* of, it is true, and is a ‘what is’; if instead we mistake it for the object it is the *mimema* of, it is false, and is a ‘what is not’.

The first *mimema* is the *eikon*, while the latter is the *phantasma*. To prove the strong link between *mimemata* and falsity, Plato states:

“Since the existence of false statement and false opinion has been proved, it is possible for the ‘representations of the things which are’ (*mimemata ton onton*) to be, and for a deceptive art to come to be from this disposition” (264d).

This passage is decisive. It maintains that demonstrating the existence of the false is equivalent to demonstrating the existence of *mimemata*. Usually this passage is interpreted as if the Stranger were stating that all *mimemata* are false⁸. I disagree with this view. Plato is stating here that the

7 Sörbom (2002) 21.

8 Rosen (1983) 151.

existence of the false entails a gap, a difference, a distance between things as they actually are and the way they appear; only within this difference can something like an image exist. If there were no difference between the way things are and the way they appear, images would not exist, since they are nothing but the way things appear, by contrast with the way they are. This distinction is absolutely crucial in Platonic gnoseology. If images did not exist, all perceptions would be perceptions of realities, and therefore true (this is what the sophist claims at 260c1–d3). However, falseness exists, and along with it the possibility that things can appear different from how they are. So they can be represented by an image not only truthfully, but also falsely.

In Plato's account of the mimetic image the similarity⁹ between image and model is particularly important. At 235d–236c Plato says that, among the *mimemata*, the *eikon* is faithful to the proportions of the model (i. e., of what the *mimema* is the *mimema* of), while the *phantasma* is not. It is however important to point out that the *phantasma* is not faithful to the proportions of the model because it aims to create an impression of reality: it alters the proportions of reality not in order to be different from it, but to be as much as possible similar to it: the alteration of truth aims at establishing the paradoxical possibility of being “mistaken for true” (235e–236a): in order to appear natural the upper and therefore more distant segments are made bigger, whereas the lower and nearer ones are made smaller.

Only what is mistaken for true is false. But what exactly does ‘to be mistaken for true’ mean? What does this expression mean when it refers to a non-pictorial *mimema*? The cases reported by Plato in the *Republic* (598d–602c) are very interesting: he mentions the poet as being capable of making everyone believe that he is *truly* an expert in all the fields his poetry deals with: medicine, the art of strategy, and the education of mankind. In Plato's opinion the poet is by contrast only *falsely*, and not *truly* expert in those fields. We could say that ‘he is an expert only in poetry, not in life’, which has the same import as ‘only in image, not in reality’. The point of Plato's interpretation is that the poet tries to appear an expert without being one, exactly as the sophist does¹⁰. He is like an image trying to resemble the reality it is the image of.

9 Pradeau (2009) 138.

10 Notomi (1999) 129–133; Palumbo (2008) 50.

At 233b the sophists are described as those who have the skill to raise in their listeners the belief that they are the wisest of all in every field. At 234b1 *to mimetikon* is defined as a “mockery” (*paidia*), and two examples of it are provided: the first involves someone who shows a number of depicted *mimemata* to mindless children so as to make them believe that “he is capable of making everything”. The second involves someone who seduces inexperienced young people by pointing to statements which he calls “spoken images” (234c5–6) and makes them believe that those spoken images tell the truth. The passage describes the first case as a visual, the second as an auditory piece of deception. Their common feature is that in both cases the false *mimemata* are passed off as true, and it is precisely this being passed off as true which makes them false.

We might ask in what sense the *mimemata* are passed off as true. The first case is clear: pictures of realities are passed off as realities, which means that the spectator believes he is looking at realities not at pictures. He therefore believes that whoever is making them is capable of making “anything he wants” (234b10). In order to render the example plausible, Plato says that these spectators are children, and moreover mindless.

As for the second case (to which the definition of sophist pursued throughout the dialogue will be applied), we must ask: how exactly does the deception work? The passage in question says that the false statements are believed to be true. If we examine the text more carefully, however, we discover what the first and the second example have in common: in both cases the *mimetes* tries to create an opinion in someone’s soul. In the first example the opinion is that the viewer is facing a creator (the images are believed to be realities), in the second that the audience is facing a wise man (the speeches are believed to be true). He tries to create these opinions through *mimemata*, i. e., through images, the point being that such *mimemata* are “that which makes an opinion come to be”¹¹.

The *mimema* exists in order to bring about a certain opinion in the observer. When this opinion is such that it takes the *mimema* to be not a *mimema* but a reality, the *mimema* is a *phantasma* (this happens in both of the above mentioned examples). The creations of the sophist live on in the souls of those who listen to him. Such creations are opinions¹², all of them related to the opinion that he, the sophist, is the wisest of all in

11 Benardete (1984) II, 101; Notomi (1999) 126; Pradeau (2009) 138.

12 Pradeau (2009) 335, n.4.

every field. This opinion is the *phantasma* of the sophist, that is, his false appearance, the subjective and objective side of his technique of deception.

Both examples can therefore be paraphrased as follows: the mindless children believe, not that they are looking at something fake, shallow or insubstantial (i. e., at an image created in order to *be similar* to reality), but at the reality *itself*. In the second case the young people who listen to the sophists are seduced. In fact, seduction prevents them from getting *directly in touch* with reality: they don't make contact with reality, but only with its prefabricated images. They do not form their opinion by perceiving reality. They build their belief on illusion, i. e., on images they believe to be realities. This reminds us of the famous example of the cave, but also of all the examples of images located in the first section of the divided line (*Resp.* VI).

Let us observe the *phantasmata* more closely. They are images which are not dissimilar from their originals (as scholars commonly hold)¹³. In fact, according to Plato the false is such not because of its dissimilarity from the true, but rather because of its determination to appear true without being so. If the false did not resemble the true, it could not be mistaken for it; on the contrary, the true and the false are actually mistaken for each other. So it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of similarities: a real similarity, which is shared by realities of the same genus, and which I shall call similarity I, and apparent similarity, which associates the originals with their false images, and which I shall call similarity II¹⁴.

In the *Cratylus* Plato says that “images are far from having the same qualities as the originals of which they are images” (432d). However, the *Sophist* shows that in certain conditions the originals and their images can appear *more than similar*: they can appear identical.

This appearing “more than similar” (= similarity II) is possible because it is linked to perception. In fact, this similarity exists only at a perceptual level. For this reason Plato's account of the genesis of *phantasmata* at 235e–236c focuses on the “viewpoint” of the observer, which is presented as the objective of the production of such images. The peculiar feature of *phantasmata* (i. e., the images produced by a *mimetes* who aims at deceiving the observer, making him believe they are identical to reality) is that they are arranged *to be seen*: all their proportions have cer-

13 Fronterotta (2007) 303 n.105.

14 Cf. *Soph.* 231a 7–8; Palumbo (1995) 175–183.

tain features because they must *appear in a certain way to the eye of the observer*. The insistence with which Plato sticks to this point (which is noticeable in other dialogues as well) enables us to differentiate between the two above-mentioned similarities: the first, which is real, pertains to the similar features of realities belonging to the same genus; the second, which is apparent, concerns the ontologically dissimilar features of a reality and its image. The first is a true similarity (which can be grasped through *logoi*)¹⁵, since it relates to the set of features *objectively* belonging to similar realities; the second is a false similarity because it does not belong to the objects of its perceptions, but to the relationship occurring between a subject and those objects.

The relationship between a subject and the objects of its perceptions is manipulable, and this manipulability is the cause of falsity. According to Plato, the reason why the cause of falsity lies in human ignorance is because ignorance is nothing other than the incapacity to distinguish an object from its false images.

Beginning with the *Cratylus*, the issue of truth is posed in terms of the pattern of similar images, and already at *Crat.* 433a Plato is pointing out the difference between the way images and words are similar to the things they represent.

While discussing visual art, the Stranger maintains that there are some *demiourgoi* who “dismiss what is true, and work at producing in their images not the proportions that *are* but those that *seem* beautiful” (236a5–6). This is how *demiourgoi* produce *phantasmata*. The *phantasma* is a *phainomenon* that appears to be similar to the beautiful (ἔοικέναι τῷ καλῷ, 236b5) because it is seen from a non-beautiful viewpoint (b4–5); once observed properly it “would not even look similar to what it says it resembles” (μηδ’ εἰκὸς ᾧ φησιν εἰοικέναι, b6–7).

This statement is not immediately clear. If on the one hand it is obvious that the crucial point of the argument about false appearance concerns the issue of similarity, on the other hand it is less clear what type of similarity it is which is at issue. In other words we must ask: what resembles what? Probably the similarity Plato is talking about when he maintains that a properly observed image “would not even look similar to what it says it resembles” is not similarity to the original (as scholars commonly hold)¹⁶, but rather similarity to the beautiful¹⁷.

15 Cf. *Pol.* 258 A2–3.

16 Meinhardt (1990) 83.

17 Cordero (1993) 122.

We can assume that, according to Plato and his contemporaries, the question whether a body was beautiful or not was not a matter of mere appearance and opinion, but rather something depending on accepted measures and proportions for the composition of parts into a harmonious whole. Thus, if someone believed that an object was beautiful and well proportioned, those proportions and relations could be measured in order to find out whether that object was actually beautiful or just appeared to be such¹⁸.

In my opinion, all these references to measures and proportions show that to Plato it is all about verifying the similarity of the *phantasma* to the beautiful. This is proved by a passage in which Plato says that if someone saw the *phantasma* as it is and not as it appears, it would look not in the least *similar to what it pretends to resemble* (236b7). I want to make clear that a *phantasma* in no way declares its similarity to the original, but rather its identity to it. What it declares that it resembles cannot therefore be the original, but only the beautiful, as explicitly stated at 236b5.

Obviously, the *phantasma* is also similar to the original, but this similarity is never *declared*. What is declared instead is that the *phantasma* is exactly what it appears to be, i.e., the original itself (see *Resp.* 476c5–7). Once seen, it resembles the original because it produces the same impressions as the original itself would produce once seen. For this reason the *phantasma* is said not to be what it appears to be (*Soph.* 236b7).

Mimetike is a *poiein*, a “making”, a “bringing to being”. More specifically, it brings to being the series of *eidola* that accompany every perception. At the end of the *Sophist* a distinction occurs between the perceptions of *eidola* and the perceptions of realities. This ultimate *diairesis* (265b etc.) begins by distinguishing divine from human production: natural realities are a divine production, artificial ones a human production. Both are subject to *diairesis*: we have, therefore, within divine production, 1) realities and 2) images. The same happens within human production: 1) realities and 2) images. It is worth noticing that this opposition between real things and their images is the most important one in the whole dialogue.

In reference to divine production of realities the stranger mentions the example of “ourselves”; in reference to divine production of images he mentions the images of ourselves which appear in our dreams (or are

18 Sörbom (1966) 158.

reflected in water, or by shadows). In reference to human production of realities he mentions a house built with building skill; in reference to human production of images he mentions a house painted with painting skill (i. e., a sort of man-made dream produced for non-sleeping men, according to the famous definition of 266c). At this point the text explicitly recalls the previously mentioned *diareseis*, and the Stranger asserts that within the technique of the production of images two parts could be discerned (one producing *eikones* and the other one *phantasmata*), provided falsehood comes to light as it really is and reveals itself as one of the things that are (266e).

After these words, which seem to me the clearest statement of the link between *phantasmata* and falsity, the stranger proceeds to divide *only* the false images. The technique for producing *phantasmata* (*phantastikon*) – false images – is divided into two types: that performed by those who create the representation using tools different from themselves and their bodies, and that performed by those who use themselves and their bodies. An example of the latter type are those who make use of their own body in order to make it look similar to the way someone else looks, or of their own voice in order to make it sound similar to the voice of someone else. It is interesting to notice that Plato emphasizes how it is this specific aspect of *phantastike* “above all” (*malista*) which is called *mimesis* (267a8–9). In my opinion this means not only that there are other aspects of the *phantastike* that are called *mimesis* which can be described and understood as “imitation”, but also that there are *mimeseis* which are not aspects of *phantastike*, and which are not false¹⁹.

However, these true *mimeseis* are not discussed in this section of the *Sophist*²⁰, and since the definition being sought is that of the sophist, room is made only for false *mimeseis*. The stranger asks his interlocutor to define as *mimetikon* only that part of the mimetic genus which consists in using ourselves as a tool for a false representation (267a10–11). The following *diarexis* further defines the *definiendum*: the mimetic falsifier who introduces himself under a fake identity has no knowledge at all of the reality he tries to simulate (267b–e). He is aware that he does not know it, and he fears that the ignorance he strives to keep hidden will be discovered (268a). He is a specialist in short, private statements, whose aim is to bring the interlocutor to contradict himself. The sophist

19 Pradeau (2009) 139: “il existe une espèce non sophistique de la *mimesis*”.

20 Palumbo (2008) 21, n.31.

wants to appear as a *sophos* to his interlocutors. He is the image of a *sophos*, and since every image is a kind of derivative reality, his name too is derived from that of the *sophos*.

This proves that the section on images at page 240 is closely linked to the final one on the last *diairesis*. Between the two sections the analysis of false statements occurs. It provides an explanation of falsity which can be understood as the 'substitution of the original for the image'.

At this point we can draw the conclusions the whole argument has led to. False statement represents not 'what is', but 'what is not', i. e., not 'what is' as it really is, but as it falsely appears to be. It is an image that passes itself off for the original.

"Theaetetus sits" is a true statement because Theaetetus is actually sitting and the statement (which is a *mimema*) depicting him while sitting is a true image, an *eikon* corresponding to reality (Theaetetus is just sitting there). "Theaetetus flies" is a false statement because Theaetetus does not fly, and the speech depicting him flying is a *mimema* which presents an image of something that does not exist, a *phantasma* that does not correspond to reality.

As a dream is a representation without reality, the representation of Theaetetus flying is false because it represents the image of something which does not have any reality except within the spoken image of which the statement is composed. It is a representation that does not represent anything but itself, a representation that has no original. As I said in the beginning of this paper, the false is the image of an object taking shape in the soul while the object itself is absent. This false representation is similar to what is true, since it has the capability of generating a mental scene similar to that which can be generated by a real object.

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