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## **SOCRATES' SILENCE: PLATO AND THE PROBLEM OF SOPHISTRY**

SOCRATES' SILENCE: PLATO AND THE PROBLEM OF SOPHISTRY

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## Abstract

This study focuses on Plato's "problem" with Sophistry. In recent years, that "problem" has come to be understood either as Plato's disagreement with the "philosophical" doctrines of the ancient Sophists or as his unreflective condemnation of their way of life. Hegel is responsible for the first way of thinking, Nietzsche for the second. For both, the "problem" posed by the ancient Sophists was of considerable importance. It confronted Plato with the challenge that philosophy justify itself--a challenge which Plato could not fully understand and which he failed to meet. According to Hegel, the challenge posed by the Sophists cannot be met by advancing a doctrine. It can only be met dialectically. According to Nietzsche, it cannot be met at all for the Sophist is justified in his rejection of the "rules" of all philosophical discourse, including dialectical argument.

After offering some historical background on the ancient Sophists, I examine Hegel's and Nietzsche's understanding of Plato's "problem" with them. My argument is that both are correct to identify the "problem" posed by the Sophists as a challenge that philosophy provide for itself a justification. I argue that Hegel is right to conclude that such a justification can only be given dialectically but that Nietzsche teaches us that it must be conducted in an *ad hominem* manner. Contrary to both, I argue that Plato understood this very well and that the dialogues are written in accordance with this understanding. I then focus on the drama of the *Sophist* in order to show that Plato fully understood the challenge posed by the ancient Sophists and that his response to it is adequate. Plato does not think that the challenge of the Sophist can be met for once and for good. For that reason, the philosophical life is justified.



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## Introduction

The focus of this study is the "problem" of Sophistry. This "problem" was given its first thematic treatment in Plato's dialogues many centuries ago. For centuries thereafter, it was a commonplace part of philosophical thinking to believe that Sophistry was something philosophers ought to guard against and that, whatever a philosopher was, a philosopher was no Sophist.

Such thinking is no longer commonplace. Its erosion began in the nineteenth century when G. W. F. Hegel--who offered the first thematic treatment of the "problem" since Plutarch--identified the ancient Sophists as philosophers. For him, Plato's "problem" with the Sophists arose as an historically and logically necessary clash over philosophical positions. Not too many years later, Friedrich Nietzsche advanced the debate by advancing a position contrary to Hegel's. For him, the Sophists were not philosophers. Instead, they represented the finest moment of Periclean Greece which the philosophers, Socrates and Plato, helped to destroy--to the lasting detriment of the West. Since then, with few exceptions, Plato's "problem" with the Sophists has tended to be understood in one of two ways: as his problem with the "philosophical doctrines" advanced by the Sophists or as a problem stemming from his unreflective preference for a life dedicated to the search for "truth" over all other ways of life.

My interest in Sophistry is not historical. I am not concerned with the question whether Plato, Nietzsche, Hegel and others have painted an historically accurate portrait of the activities and interests of particular Sophists in ancient Greece. There is, in fact, considerable agreement among philosophers and scholars concerning their public activities and publicly expressed interests. Rather, I am interested in the reason why the very ancient "problem" Plato had with the Sophists continues to spark philosophical debate today.

It seems to me that the reason that Plato's "problem" with the Sophists lives on in modern philosophical debates is that, as Hegel and Nietzsche understood, the ancient Sophists represented a serious challenge to the philosophical life. For Hegel, that challenge is the problem that philosophical sceptics have always posed for philosophers in search of knowledge, namely, that any philosophical doctrine can be shown to rest upon unsupported, fundamental assumptions. For Nietzsche, the problem is more serious. According to him, Sophists were not *philosophical* sceptics. They did not represent a challenge to philosophy from *within* the philosophical horizon. They were not interested in exposing the weaknesses of philosophical doctrines in the name of philosophical integrity. Rather, they represented a way of life which is, at root, anti-philosophical and, in the face of which, the "love of wisdom" as philosophers have understood it is nothing more than a prejudice arising from various kinds of psychological illness. For both Hegel and Nietzsche, while Plato had some understanding of the challenge posed to philosophy by the Sophists he did not and could not fully appreciate its seriousness. According to Hegel, Plato's very position in history would have deprived him of the understanding required to fully appreciate, let alone answer, the Sophistic threat. According to Nietzsche, Plato's own psychological illness, coupled with any philosopher's great capacity for denial, would have stood in the way of his appreciating the Sophists for what they were.

Plato's "problem" with the Sophists continues to provoke debate within philosophical circles due to the fact that it seems pretty clear that Plato perceived the Sophists as challenging his own philosophical enterprise. The debate concerns the nature of the challenge, whether Plato understood that challenge, whether he could meet it and, if he did not, whether anyone else has or can. That is, Plato's "problem" with Sophistry continues to raise questions which go to the heart of the attempt to adequately describe and justify the philosophical enterprise.

My argument is that Plato understood the Sophists to represent a serious challenge to the way of life espoused and lived by Socrates--a challenge which is both perennial and personal and

which cannot be addressed by a "doctrine" in the usual sense of the word. It is not a challenge the philosopher can "meet" in such a way that he can put an end to it for once and for good. That it cannot be so met, however, does not mean that the philosopher must cede the field to the Sophist. It means that the philosopher's quest to understand himself does not admit of closure. Plato did not understand the Sophists to be mistaken philosophers who represented a threat to his own philosophical doctrines. Nor was his attitude towards them one of moral condemnation stemming from an unreflective dedication to a way of life which happened to suit his temperament. As I shall argue, he understood the Sophists as posing extremely important questions about the philosophical life itself (and not just about various philosophical "doctrines") which the philosopher cannot avoid if he is genuinely a "lover of wisdom". It seems to me that Plato's great insight is that, *because* such questions cannot be answered for once and for good, the philosophical life is justified.

My argument is divided into four sections. In the first, I offer some historical background on the ancient Sophists and some of the controversies which surrounded them in ancient times. Despite the fact that my focus is not to offer an historical account of the activities and interests of the Sophists, it seemed important that this material be included. First, the reader should have some idea as to who the ancient Sophists were and the kinds of things for which they were known. We have no self-professed Sophists in the twentieth century and, even if we did, we might be hard pressed to decide if they were Sophists in the ancient sense of the word. Plato, however, could expect his readers to be familiar with people who called themselves Sophists and with some of the controversies which surrounded them. My first reason for supplying this historical information is simply to enable my reader to have some of the familiarity with the ancient Sophists that Plato expected his readers to have. My second reason for including this information is to show that, despite the fact that the Sophists were often surrounded in controversy (often political), they nonetheless were known as Sophists and prospered until well into the second century A. D. I

wanted to make this clear lest it be thought that Plato's "problem" with the Sophists in any way diminished their public reputation in ancient times.

The second half of the first section is devoted to examining Hegel's and Nietzsche's understanding of the "problem" of Sophistry. My aim here is not simply to supply the background to modern debates over the "problem" of Sophistry but to show just how serious the "problem" of Sophistry can be thought to be. I accept Hegel's claim that the "problem" of Sophistry cannot be settled by coming up with a "philosophical doctrine" which could answer all the questions the Sophist can generate. I also accept his argument that a defense of philosophy against Sophistry can only be conducted dialectically. However, I also accept Nietzsche's claim that the Sophist is not the philosophical sceptic that Hegel takes him to be and that the problem the Sophist poses for the philosopher cannot be settled by recourse to a philosophical "doctrine". It cannot be settled by recourse to what ordinarily passes for "reasoned" philosophical debate. If the "challenge" of Sophistry is as serious as Nietzsche maintains then it appears that philosophy can only defend itself against Sophistry dialectically and in an *ad hominem* manner.

The second section of my argument is devoted to examining the form and function of the Platonic dialogue. There are two reasons for this. First, the question as to how a dialogue should be read is an ancient one which provokes considerable disagreement among scholars even today. Plato's dialogues are dramas in which Plato himself never appears as a character. And, he never tells us, in his own voice, what to make of the dramas he has authored. There are, however, several discussions of writing to be found in the Platonic corpus which explore the aims of philosophical speech and writing in general and which contrast these forms of speech and writing with others. I will argue that Plato's dialogues conform to what these discussions teach us about the aim of philosophical discourse and I will use them to clarify and justify my own approach to the dialogues.

There is, however, a more important reason for devoting considerable discussion to the form and function of the Platonic dialogues. In so far as these discussions concern the aim of philosophical speech and writing and, in so far as the dialogues are written in conformity with these aims, these discussions shed considerable light on Plato's understanding of philosophy. I will argue that they reveal that for Plato, an important part of the philosopher's quest for self-knowledge is the demand that the philosopher justify his way of life over other ways of life and that this justification must proceed dialectically and in an *ad hominem* manner with living individuals who are not themselves philosophers. My discussion of the nature of Platonic writing should clarify what this means.

The third section is devoted to examination of Plato's *Sophist*, the dialogue to which one naturally turns if one wants to understand Plato's "problem" with the Sophists. Before looking at the *Sophist* itself, however, I explore some of the reasons why the "problem" of Sophistry is a pressing one throughout the dialogues. Simply put, the "problem" of Sophistry begins with the difficulty of distinguishing the philosopher from the Sophist. Over and over again, Plato contrives his dramas in such a way that his character, the philosopher Socrates, is virtually indistinguishable from the Sophists as they are presented and described in the dialogues. Plato also makes it clear that Socrates' condemnation and death were due, in no small part, to the belief that he was a Sophist.

The *Sophist* itself opens with Socrates asking whether the Sophist, philosopher and statesman can be distinguished. This follows his claim that there are those who appear to be philosophers but who really are not and his claim that philosophers appear as statesmen, Sophists and those "who are altogether mad." On the face of it, the central focus of the *Sophist* is to tell us not just what a Sophist appears to be but what he really is.

I will argue that the *Sophist* does tell us what a Sophist is, what the Sophist's serious challenge to the philosopher is and how and to what extent this challenge can be met. The



dialogue does not tell us these things in a straight-forward way, however. On the surface, the *Sophist* presents a "teaching" which its proponent, the Eleatic Stranger, maintains could be delivered as a monologue. That "teaching" is that a Sophist is someone who possesses "pseudo-knowledge" of the things the philosopher knows. The "teaching" itself is arrived at through the practice of an analytical/synthetic method of generating definitions in much the same way a geometer constructs and considers figures in order to broaden the field of geometric understanding. What I will argue is that this surface "teaching" is the Stranger's. It is not the "teaching" of the dialogue.

While the *Sophist* appears to be a dramatically austere dialogue, it is nonetheless a drama like all other Platonic dialogues. Its "action" is a discussion between two people of markedly different characters--Theaetetus and the Stranger. They are not the only participants, however. We know something about the various witnesses to the discussion, one of whom is Socrates, who says absolutely nothing after he asks the question which the Stranger attempts to answer. Plato is responsible for creating his characters, for the setting of the dialogue and for the action of the dialogue. I will also argue that he is responsible for the fact that the dialogue is part of a trilogy written by a character which he has contrived for this purpose namely, Euclides, whose notion of philosophical writing is odds with what the Platonic corpus teaches elsewhere.

These dramatic details are essential to the *Sophist*. I will argue that they reveal Plato's distance from his character, the Eleatic Stranger, and from both the method and content of the Stranger's "teaching". The *Sophist* is a dialogue which explores the nature of Sophistry. It is also a dialogue which explores two, very different philosophical approaches to the question of Sophistry. One way, the way of the "psychic gymnast" who approaches this issue "geometrically" and who can deliver a monological "teaching" on the matter is the way of the Stranger. The other way, the way of the practitioner of "psychic medicine" who approaches this issue dialectically in an *ad hominem* manner in order to bring his interlocutors to the realisation of what they know and do not

know is the way of Socrates. The action of the *Sophist* makes it clear that, from the Stranger's point of view, the Socratic way is the way of the Sophist. The action of the *Sophist* also makes it clear, however, that the Stranger's approach to the issue of Sophistry is seriously deficient. He is mistaken in the belief that the Sophist can be defined in a "value-free", geometrical manner and that the Sophist can be put out of business by identifying him as someone who possesses pseudo-knowledge instead of the genuine goods. I will argue that the reasons for the Stranger's failure to define the Sophist are highly instructive and that, when considered together with the dramatic details of the *Sophist*, they reveal Plato's endorsement of the Socratic understanding of and approach to the challenge of Sophistry. The concluding section of my argument will lay out what I take this approach to be.

I should emphasize that, throughout my discussion of the Platonic dialogues in general and the *Sophist* in particular, any reference to "Socrates" is a reference to the Platonic Socrates. The relationship between the Platonic and the historical Socrates has been the subject of many enquiries. However, I am interested in *Plato's* "problem" with the Sophists and how *he* explores this problem. I am not interested in the extent to which his views are the same as or differ from those of the historical Socrates. I am interested, however, in those places where Plato, the writer of the dialogues can be in agreement or disagreement with the various *characters* he has created. That is, I will make a distinction between Plato, the writer of the dialogues, and Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger (to mention only two) who appear as characters in the dialogues. This is not the same as attending to a distinction between Plato and the historical personage of any of his characters. Plato explores various matters through the dramas of the dialogues in which his *character*, Socrates, usually plays a leading role. In the second section, "playing the leading role" is not the same as being Plato's mouthpiece. What any of the the words and deeds of any Platonic character communicate in the course of the action of a given dialogue is essential to understanding what Plato thinks of the issues his characters raise. What Plato thinks of the words

and deeds of various characters can be determined by considering the action of the dramas in which he has involved them. What Plato would have us make of their words and deeds must be understood in the context of the dramas which he has constructed for them.

There is one place where I discuss what is known about one of Plato's characters who is drawn from real life, namely, Euclides, the character contrived by Plato to narrate the trilogy of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*. Plato has this character outline some principles in accordance with which he wrote the dialogues. I will argue that these "principles" are very much at odds with those endorsed by his creator. They are, however, perfectly consistent with a way of looking at the world for which the historical Euclides was known. The fact that Plato chose to have his character Euclides write as he did should have come as no surprise to an ancient audience familiar with the turn of mind of the original from whom the character was drawn. The historical Euclides is not nearly as well known today as he would have been to ancient readers. I have, therefore, included some of the known details of the historical Euclides' life only to supply some of the reasons why Plato would have a *character* like Euclides narrate the three dialogues as Plato has his character tell us he did. In my discussion of Euclides' style of writing, the reader should bear in mind that I am interested in Plato's disagreement with his *character* Euclides. I do not mean to suggest that the historical personage, Euclides, wrote the dialogues in question.

Much of the over all approach was suggested to me after I read Charles Griswold's article, "Plato's Metaphilosophy". In it, he discusses the many ways in which Plato's dialogues, in general, are directed to offering a "metaphilosophical" justification for the philosophic life--a justification which is both dialectical and *ad hominem*. Griswold also discusses the general advantages of such a justification and the notion of philosophy which it supposes. He makes use of the work of Hegel and Nietzsche to set up the problem of the justification of philosophy, a problem for which, he argues, Plato supplies an adequate response. What I have attempted is to focus in on a specific challenge to the philosophical enterprise, namely, the challenge of Sophistry and to determine the

extent to which Hegel's and Nietzsche's characterisations of this specific challenge give us an indication as to how it can be met. I have, therefore, extended Griswold's general line of enquiry into the specific details of Hegel's and Nietzsche's discussions of Sophistry. I have then attempted to show the merits of Plato's response to this particular challenge through a detailed examination of the *Sophist*.

The great difficulty I initially faced was that, to my mind, the book on the *Sophist* had already been written--Stanley Rosen's *Plato's Sophist: The Drama of Original and Image*. Rosen's analysis of the *Sophist* is remarkable in its coverage of dramatic detail and for the extent to which he offers a clear and compelling commentary on the Eleatic Stranger's discussion of Being and non-being--surely one of the most difficult discussions in the Platonic corpus. Because I believed I had nothing to add to Rosen's work, my original intention was to look at Plato's *Protagoras*, the dialogue in which Socrates encounters one of the greatest Sophists of ancient times. My section on the *Sophist* began as a footnote intended to explain why Plato's approach to the problem of Sophistry might be more clearly seen in the *Protagoras* than in the *Sophist*. The footnote, however, became longer, turned into a chapter and then into several chapters.

The reason for this is now clear to me. Rosen's focus on the dialogue is not mine. The thread which he pursues through the dialogue is the fascinating problem of the relation of images to their originals. A large part of his commentary on the *Sophist* is devoted to examining many of the shortcomings of recent attempts to find in the *Sophist* a late, systematic "Platonic doctrine" of Being, predicationalist theory of Forms, or theory of pure "eidetic numbers". He certainly addresses the problem of Sophistry but it is not his primary focus and, as a result, his characterisation of the "problem" is, in places, dependent upon dialogues other than the *Sophist*. This is not a problem for Rosen's analysis of the *Sophist*. It became, however, a problem for my analysis of the *Sophist* in so far as I could not leave it be. The "problem" of the Sophist in the *Sophist* had to be

addressed in detail before I could feel confident enough to move on to the *Protagoras*. The *Protagoras*, it turns out, will have to wait.

As a result of my focus, there are several things to be found in my study which are not in Rosen's. Rosen is interested in showing that the *Sophist*, a "late" dialogue, does not mark a development in Plato's thinking about the relation of images and their originals away from what is found in the so-called earlier dialogues. Given his focus, he makes his argument largely by examining Socrates' arguments in the *Philebus* (which concern this issue), a dialogue which is considered to have been written after the *Sophist*. None of the dialogues allegedly written after the trilogy of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman* are devoted to the "problem" of Sophistry and so my argument for the same conclusion concerning Plato's thinking on this "problem" has had to rely upon the drama of the *Sophist* itself. As a result, I am interested in the significance of the fact that Plato has Eulcides of Megara narrate the dialogue and that he has Socrates remain silent throughout. I also spend considerable time examining the significance of the fact that there are two rival notions of philosophy in the dialogue. The result has been that I identify the Stranger with the practitioner of "psychic gymnastics" and explore the implications of this where Rosen is silent on the matter. Finally, I am interested in showing that the incoherencies in the Stranger's account of false speech are already evident if one considers what he might mean by a "false image" which cannot, on the Stranger's account, be the same as a *phantasm*.

In addition to Rosen's work, there is one other excellent study of the *Sophist* found in the second part of Seth Benardete's treatment of the trilogy, *The Being of the Beautiful*. Benardete's focus is on the drama of all three dialogues and, as his title suggests, on the "being of the beautiful", a theme which runs through all three. Again, the major difference between my analysis and his is one of focus and the same elements which distinguish my study from Rosen's distinguish

it from Benardete's. In addition, the density of Benardete's argument--which makes it highly provocative--is something I have tried to avoid and the result, I hope, is much easier to follow.<sup>1</sup>

The contribution of this study lies in a few areas. First, it offers a detailed analysis of the connection between Plato's "problem" with the Sophists and the problem of the justification of the philosophical enterprise as the latter problem has come to be defined in modern times. While I do not emphasize the point, the problem of justification bequeathed to us by Nietzsche is still very much alive in debates surrounding the work of Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida. Yet, it should not surprise us that it is still alive if Plato is right and that the problem of the justification of the philosophical life does not admit of closure. Second, this study contributes an understanding of the way in which the *Sophist* is an exploration of and response to this problem. While there are many other worthwhile threads which others have followed in the *Sophist*, I have tried not to follow them except in so far as they lead to a clear appreciation of the central problem of the dialogue. Finally, although again I do not emphasize the point, by offering some historical background on the ancient Sophists in the context of a study on the "problem" of Sophistry, I hope I have shown that an historical examination of their publicly expressed interests and activities will not help us understand the serious challenge they pose for the philosophical enterprise. According to the Platonic understanding, the Sophist is a creature of disguises who is not confined to life in ancient Greece. According to the same understanding, given the nature of the search for philosophical self-knowledge, that's not such a bad thing.

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<sup>1</sup>In the course of my argument, I will cite two other works as being quite useful for understanding the *Sophist*. Jacob Klein's *Plato's Trilogy* and Sallis' *Being and Logos*. Rosen offers an extensive and insightful critique of the former (*Plato's Sophist* 49-57) with which I agree. Nonetheless, Klein's analysis of the definition of the angler is useful and complements my own. Sallis' book focuses on the phenomenological meaning and role of *logos* in a number of Platonic dialogues and includes a chapter devoted to this issue in the *Sophist*. His emphasis, that is, is not the same as mine but provides a complementary analysis to the one I have offered.

I have followed the MLA style of referencing throughout. Explanatory footnotes are numbered consecutively within each of the four major sections. The first note of each section is numbered "1". Translations of Greek passages are my own unless otherwise indicated.

It is so much a part of "thinking philosophically" to be impressed with the special character of mathematical truth that it is hard to shake off the grip of the Platonic Principle. If, however, we think of "rational certainty" as a matter of victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known, we shall look toward our interlocutors rather than to our faculties for the explanation of the phenomenon . . . We shall, in short, be where the Sophists were before Plato brought his principle to bear and invented "philosophical thinking" . . . . (Rorty, 157)

## I. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM OF SOPHISTRY

### Who Were the Ancient Sophists?

Somewhere, between the middle of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth centuries B.C., there emerged in Greece a prominent group of men who called themselves Sophists (*sophistai*).<sup>1</sup> Almost from the moment of its inception, the Sophistic movement was surrounded by controversy. Twenty years after the most famous of the Sophists, Protagoras, had given laws to the Athenian colony of Thurii, the comic poet Aristophanes levelled a scathing, satirical attack on the movement as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Not many years later, the philosopher Socrates too became a critic of the Sophists and was followed in short order by Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle. What is remarkable about Plato, in particular, is that he chose to name no fewer than seven of his dialogues after some of the more famous Sophists. Together with the *Sophist* itself, they reveal his overwhelming preoccupation with

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<sup>1</sup>This is, at any rate, what the character Protagoras tells us in the Platonic dialogue that bears his name (317b). I trust that the account that follows should dispel any notion that the word "sophist" was originally a term of derision (though it did become one for some) and that the Sophists would not have wanted to be known by this title.

<sup>2</sup>The colony at Thurii was founded in 444 B.C. and Aristophanes' *Clouds* was first performed in 423 B.C. I will have more to say about the Aristophanic attack on Sophistry below.



Sophistry in general. Even in his other dialogues, this preoccupation is central. At virtually every Socratic discussion, Sophists or their students are present even if they do not always actively participate in the dialogue. If only because students of philosophy continue to read Plato, the controversies surrounding the Sophists have never been completely forgotten.

This is not to say, however, that we have the same access to these controversies as did Aristophanes and Plato.<sup>3</sup> We stand at a considerable distance from the Sophists and their critics. There are, after all, no self-proclaimed Sophists in the twentieth century. Even if we should chance to meet such a person, we would be at a loss as to whether we should give him the name "Sophist". The only self-proclaimed Sophists anyone knows anything about live in old books. We would still have to bridge the distance between ourselves and these old books in order to discover what a person calling himself a Sophist ought to say and do. Is it the mark of a Sophist to hold that knowledge is perception, that nature and convention are distinct? Is one a Sophist simply if one receives remuneration for teaching? Can we say with confidence that we really know what it means to be a Sophist?

The reason why there are no self-proclaimed Sophists in the twentieth century and the reason why the discovery of one would cause some confusion is the fact that the word "sophist" is a highly derogatory term in contemporary, customary usage. Today, a "sophist" is understood to be someone who characteristically argues in a specious manner deliberately in order to persuade somebody of something questionable. A "sophistic" argument is one which appears to be cleverly contrived and persuasive but which, upon closer examination, reveals itself to be flawed and hence loses its persuasive force. While the occasional or unintentional use of a sophistic

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<sup>3</sup>Of course, even if we did, all would not be immediately clear. As far as Aristophanes was concerned, Socrates was a Sophist (see below) and yet Socrates, as he is presented by Plato and Xenophon, was highly critical of the Sophists. Yet even Plato appears to recognise the ambiguity here. In the *Protagoras*, he represents Socrates as being mistaken for a Sophist (314d). In the *Sophist*, Plato presents Socrates as claiming that philosophers often appear as Sophists (216c-d).

argument does not entail that the arguer merits the title of "sophist", someone who indulges in such arguments habitually and intentionally does merit the title. Simply to question the way someone argues is not to call him a sophist. To call someone a sophist is to raise a serious question about his moral integrity as a writer or speaker. For this reason, people do not tend to have any desire to be called sophists. A person who has no intention of arguing speciously tends to feel indignant if labelled a sophist. A genuine sophist, on the other hand, has no interest in being identified for what he is. This kind of person argues sophistically in order to be persuasive. If his arguments should ever be thought to be sophistic or should he ever become suspected as a sophist, he will not be very successful. A truly successful sophist, in the modern, customary use of the word, would be impossible to identify.

Clearly the word "sophist" did not mean for the ancient Greeks what it means for us today. If it did, professional Sophists would never have assumed the name and remained as highly esteemed as they were for so many centuries (see below). Even Aristotle distinguishes between people who argue sophistically (in the modern sense) and genuine Sophists (*Sophistical Refutations* 169b18 ff.). This is not to say that the Sophists were uninterested in techniques of persuasive speaking or that they were not regarded with suspicion and even criticised by many on account of their argumentative style. Indeed, it is these interests that are captured by contemporary use of the word "sophist". But that the ancient word itself did not originally suggest this appears obvious.

There are reasons--philosophical and otherwise--for being interested in the phenomena of specious argumentation. What I am interested in showing, however, is that there are other reasons to be interested in Sophistry. I am particularly interested in the response of the ancient philosophers to Sophistry and, more particularly, in Plato's response. I think it is fair to say that, until recently, those who considered themselves to be engaging in philosophy distinguished their aims and practices from those of Sophistry. Yet, over the years, that distinction has come under

increasing fire. As I shall discuss at some length, the issue here is not simply whether philosophy can be distinguished from Sophistry, but whether what philosophers have tended to think they were doing is reasonable or justifiable according to their own standards of reasonableness or justifiability. Rather than an issue of the viability of this or that philosophical opinion or doctrine, this question is directed towards the possibility of a justification of the aims and practices of philosophy *per se*.<sup>4</sup> I want to show that Plato's response to the ancient Sophists cannot be understood without due consideration of the ways in which his response concerns this issue of the justification of philosophy. I will argue that Plato's treatment of Sophistry constitutes not only an effort to distinguish it from the activity of philosophy, but an attempt to provide a dialectical justification for the philosophic life *per se*. This is of continuing relevance to the debate which predominates today surrounding the nature and possibility of the philosophic enterprise. Not only is the theme of the philosophical life of central importance in the Platonic dialogues, Plato is the first philosopher to explore it in such depth and at a time when philosophy was not generally perceived as a defensible activity. I shall argue that Plato took this general perception very seriously and that, as a philosopher, he was interested in giving a satisfactory account of his own activity and of those like him. The breadth and profundity of this attempt are revealed in his treatment of Sophistry.

Before examining Plato's response to Sophistry and his attempt to justify philosophy, it is important to gather some notion as to what the profession of Sophistry entailed and something of the nature of the controversy which surrounded it.

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<sup>4</sup>A discussion of what such a justification of philosophy might entail will be found below. For now, what I mean by "philosophy" is only meant provisionally and in the widest possible sense. I take it that, until Nietzsche threw into serious question the "philosopher's faith in opposite values" (see below), philosophy was understood to be, among other things: the search for what is true as opposed to merely persuasive; the attempt to give a reasonable account of what one had discovered to be true; and, in particular, to give a reasonable and true account of those matters upon which everything else turns (e.g. the gods, being, knowledge, human nature etc).

## The Ancient Sophists

While the word which the Sophists used to describe themselves (*sophistes*) appears to have been of late origin, it does not appear to have been coined by them. Pindar, writing well before the emergence of professional Sophistry, offers the earliest recorded use of the word. He uses it to describe the poets--the traditional sources of religious and moral education in Greece (*Isthmians* 5: 28). In another place, he calls the poets wise (*sophos*), which is the root of the word *sophistes*, underlining the esteem with which they were regarded (*Olympians* 1: 8-10). Herodotus, writing much later, uses the word *sophistes* in the same way to refer to the legislators and sages of Greece and, in particular, to Solon, who were known for their shrewd judgement and good counsel in political and practical affairs (I: 29). In other contexts, however, the word refers to a more usual kind of practical adeptness or skilfulness. Herodotus uses it in the same way to describe Melampus, a skilled diviner (II: 29). The word was not always used as a term of praise, however, and could refer to a low kind of crafty cunning, as when Hermes, in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, refers to Prometheus' *sophistes* as that which enabled him to steal the fire of the gods (944).

Before the Sophists appropriated it, the word "*sophistes*", in its widest sense, appears to have described someone possessed of a high degree of practical ability of one sort or another. In assuming the name *sophistes* for themselves, the Sophists too suggested that they were highly skilled men, capable of shrewd judgement and good counsel and, like the poets, able to educate others in the ways of such excellence. To some members of the Greek community, however, their name must have conjured up the Aeschylian Prometheus whose cunning played no small part in the *hubris* for which he was punished by Zeus.

There is no evidence in any of the ancient writings to suggest that the Sophists ever called themselves "philosophers" (*philosophoi* or "lovers of wisdom"). There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that this word was used very widely at all until Socrates made the philosophical life itself a theme for philosophical reflection. Tradition has it that Pythagoras coined the word but it is strikingly absent from the fragments which remain for us of the writings of philosophers before Plato (Diogenes Laertius, I: 12).<sup>5</sup> The verb *philosopheo* was used in a general way to describe the endeavours of "lovers of learning" by both Herodotus and Thucydides but, in these cases, the context makes clear that neither the Pythagorean "love of wisdom" nor professional Sophistry is meant.<sup>6</sup>

This is not to say that one cannot identify the "lovers of wisdom" before the time of Socrates or that the Sophists were not familiar with who they were and what their activities amounted to. Protagoras is said to have been a student of Democritus who, in turn, gave the highest praise to a life dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom (Philostratus, I: 10).<sup>7</sup> Gorgias is said to have been a student of Empedocles and the latter also characterised his life as a "continual striving for wisdom" (Diogenes Laertius, VIII: 58-59).<sup>8</sup> Most of the evidence we have indicates that the more famous of the Sophists were well acquainted with the philosophers of their time but it is highly likely that they did not want to be closely identified with them. After all, the investigations of these early philosophers were inaccessible to most people and not in any obvious way of relevance to the practical concerns of life. Furthermore, at the same time that the first Sophist, Protagoras, was gaining respectability in Greece, the philosopher Anaxagoras was being condemned to death for

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<sup>5</sup>See also Cicero, V: iii: 8-9.

<sup>6</sup>In Herodotus, I: 30, this activity is attributed to Solon by Croesus. In Thucydides, II: 40, Pericles refers to it as one of the distinguishing features of the city of Athens.

<sup>7</sup>See also Diels-Kranz, DK 68B 126.

<sup>8</sup>See Diels-Kranz, DK 31 B3.

impiety (Diogenes Laertius, II: 12). Socrates, of course, suffered the same fate. Whether out of a genuine interest in distinguishing their activities from the impractical pursuit of philosophy or out of a prudent concern for their lives and reputations, the name *sophistes* was better suited to the Sophists' profession of practical sagacity than the name *philosophos*.<sup>9</sup>

The great political success of the Sophists, from the moment they made their appearance until their demise in the third century A. D. under the Roman Empire, has been well documented.<sup>10</sup> Protagoras of Abdera was not only the intimate friend of the great Athenian general Pericles, he was also chosen by the Athenians to be the law-giver for their colony at Thurii. He and the other three most famous of the early Sophists--Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis--all regularly served their home cities as diplomats and ambassadors on important foreign missions. All four are reputed to have made a great deal of money from their pedagogical activities in the cities they visited. Like the ancient poets, many competed for and won prizes at Delphi in contests designed to exhibit their prowess in public speaking. Like the poets, they

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<sup>9</sup>Guthrie (*The Sophists* 173) notes that Aeschines called Socrates a Sophist (*Timarch.*, 173) and that Lucian called Christ "that crucified Sophist" in his *Peregrinus*. It may be that, in the first case, the word means professional Sophist whereas, in the second case, Lucian may be using the word in its older, wider sense. The word "sophist" (*sophistes*) seems to have retained its general, customary meaning even as late as the second century A. D. Atheneus includes among his "banqueting sophists" philosophers, lawyers, Sophists . . . in short, knowers and practical men of many varieties. The word philosopher, on the other hand, never seems to have enjoyed such wide application until recently when it appears that anyone who has an interesting opinion is likely to merit the title. I know of no case where a Sophist is ever referred to as a philosopher in the ancient literature.

<sup>10</sup>The ancient sources for this information are Dionysus of Halicarnassus (30 B. C.), Philostratus (200 A. D.), and Sextus Empiricus (200 A. D.). The existing fragments of the early Sophists have been collected in Diels-Kranz and these, in turn, have been translated into English in *The Older Sophists*, by Rosamond Sprague. Sprague includes some important material not available to Diels-Kranz: *Anonymous Iamblichii*, *Dissoi Logoi*, and the speeches and fragments of Antiphon.

addressed large audiences and won a reputation for being able to teach young men the paths of human excellence.<sup>11</sup>

It appears that the political and educational influence of the Sophists continued, virtually uninterrupted, until well into the third century A. D. In *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire*, G. W. Bowersock demonstrates that the wealth and social standing of the Sophists in Rome are beyond question (30). They enjoyed tax-free status under the Emperors, amassed great wealth, and devoted their intelligence and riches to enhancing the prosperity of their cities (34, ch. 4). Their involvement in the Roman civil service is well documented and many of them attained consular rank (50).<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting that while various "schools" of philosophy had been institutionalised by this time, they did not enjoy the tax-free status accorded to the Sophists. That they often came under attack for their lack of patriotism and political involvement is highly probable. In a rather revealing speech, Aelius Aristides (the tutor of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius) attacks the philosophers on precisely these grounds in order to display the superiority of Sophistry to philosophy. Implicitly, this attack suggests the public and educational services offered by the Sophists in the second century. Bowersock summarises Aelius' charges as follows: ". . . philosophers do not speak or write *logoi*, adorn festival assemblies, honour the gods, advise cities, comfort the distressed, settle civil discord or educate the young"(11).<sup>13</sup> These charges are levelled against philosophers in general and not

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<sup>11</sup>H. D. Rankin and G. B. Kerferd both stress this point in their work.

<sup>12</sup>There has been a tendency in much recent scholarship to argue that Sophistry had become nothing but oratory under the Empire. The distinction between orators and Sophists is as difficult to draw in Greek times as it is in Roman times. The distinction appears to have been the same for the Romans as it was for the Greeks. The Sophists were the great teachers of the principles of persuasion which included rhetoric, argumentation, political science, etc. The rhetoricians appear to have been "second order" teachers dependent upon the more reputable Sophists for their pedagogical material.

<sup>13</sup>Aelius' attack is found in his *Oration on the Four*.

against any particular school. Further, they are levelled against the practices (or lack thereof) of the philosophers as opposed to being levelled against any particular set of doctrines. In fact, they are explicitly intended as a resurrection of a charge directed against philosophy in Plato's *Gorgias*. There, Calicles, a student of Gorgias, is represented as arguing that philosophy is a fine thing to engage in when one is young but, of a man of advanced years who continues to engage in such a pursuit, he says:

(T)his person is bound to become unmanly through shunning the centres and marts of the city in which, as the poet says, "men get themselves honour and glory"; he must cower down and spend the rest of his days whispering in a corner with three or four lads, and never utter anything free or great or high-spirited. (484c-486d)

The great reputation of the Sophists is certainly due, in no small part, to their pedagogical activities. More than anything else, it is their novel and reflective approach to education that distinguishes them from the tradition of Greek culture which preceded them and from the philosophical tradition as a whole.<sup>14</sup> They came to be regarded with high esteem largely because they satisfied an intense political/educational need that was felt by democratic Greek states after the Persian Wars.

The extension of the political franchise to all free-born men in the great number of Greek city-states which adopted a democratic constitution after the Wars created an educational vacuum.<sup>15</sup> Previously, political leadership had been the privilege and responsibility of a few whose title to rule had been based upon blood. The education of these few consisted in learning to follow in the footsteps of ancestral and Homeric heroes, in understanding the sayings of the poets and law-givers and in preparation for military service. This aristocratic education in "music and gymnastic" had been at the centre of Greek culture for centuries. Its aim was the development

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<sup>14</sup>Excellent discussions of Sophistic education can be found in Jaeger, I: 286-331, and in Marrou.

<sup>15</sup>For a more detailed discussion, see Grote, *History VIII*: 464-465.



of *arete* or the excellence required for political rule. The extension of the political franchise in the newly formed democracies, however, meant that leadership came to be the preserve of the many who had no training in *arete*. Given that leadership could no longer be secured by appeals to ancestry, many of those descended from aristocratic families who aspired for political office now found themselves having to compete for the position. It became important to learn how to speak persuasively in public assemblies and to understand those matters around which public debate revolved. The traditional education in music and gymnastic was no longer sufficient. To achieve ascendancy over one's fellow citizens, one had to know how to speak and argue persuasively on any number of topics. The cultivation of such ability had never been an explicit or systematic part of Greek education.

The Sophists stepped in to fill the gap. Their professed aim was to instill in a young man the requisite *arete* for becoming a gentleman (*kaloskagathos*) and leader of citizens. To be such a gentleman was to be recognised for one's shrewd political judgement and political counsel. While individual Sophists may have pursued different paths--Protagoras the path of political "science" and antilogic argumentation, Hippias the path of polymathy, Gorgias the path of rhetoric and Prodicus the meaning of words and utterances--it is clear that they were united in this over-arching educational project.<sup>16</sup> They can be said to be the originators of that reflective, systematic and optimistic pedagogy of which we are the inheritors. To be a *sophistes* in the professional sense of the word was, therefore, to advertise oneself not only as possessed of shrewd judgement and good counsel but also as being able to impart this capacity to others systematically. One has only to compare the themes and style of the famous "Melian Debate" in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* or any number of dialectical exchanges in the tragedies of Euripides and

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<sup>16</sup>See Jaeger; Marrou, 74-102; Dupreel, 397; Guthrie, *The Sophists* 44; Brumbaugh, 112-119; *Dissoi Logoi* VIII and *Anonymous Iamblich*, in Sprague, 291-292, 272.

Sophocles with extant Sophistic writings to gather some notion of their great influence at this early date.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, as I noted earlier, the Sophists were not unopposed. According to Plato, Hippias was not allowed to speak in that most theocratic of Greek regimes--Sparta (*Hippias Major*, 283b-285e). In the *Protagoras*, the young Hippocrates, while desperately wanting the instruction of the great Sophist, blushes at the suggestion that he might become one himself (312a). Anytus, one of the foremost accusers of Socrates, has his wrath aroused in the *Meno* when Socrates suggests that Sophists might be better educators than Athenian fathers (91a-c). Given the Sophists' novel approach to education, there is no reason not to believe what is suggested in these Platonic accounts. Not only did Sophistic pedagogy fly in the face of more traditional, aristocratic notions of virtue and education, there was also something questionable about its aim. Perhaps Robert Brumbaugh is right when he suggests that the "double appearance" of Sophistry--as something to be admired and of which to be suspicious--is best captured by the use of the English word "sophistication" (112). While the Sophists aimed to give young men the sophisticated tools required for leadership, they also taught techniques of argument and rhetoric that could be mustered in the service of any cause whatsoever. The English word "sophisticated" may be used to describe a clever and charming person. It may equally be used to describe individuals who are clever but who lack depth or who use their cleverness to achieve questionable goals.

Many members of Greek society must have regarded the profession of Sophistry with suspicion. The more traditional aristocrats may well have regarded Sophistic education as being perniciously democratic if not hubristic in so far as it challenged the claims of blood and the wisdom of the ancients. There is no reason to believe, however, that only the more traditional aristocrats

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<sup>17</sup>Compare Thucydides V: 86-113 to *Dissoi Logoi* (in Sprague, 282) and Anitphon (in Sprague, 291-292). See also Rankin, 122-134 for the influence of Sophistry on the writing of Greek tragedy as well as Zeller, 91-92.

would have been suspicious of the Sophists. Sophistic education was expensive. This meant that only young men with enough money could afford it. It also required that a student have a fair amount of leisure time to pursue it and hence ruled out students who had to work for a living. The new Sophistic education, in other words, threatened to establish a new aristocracy in the very democracies where it had emerged. To many ordinary citizens who enjoyed their newly won freedom under the democracies, this was surely a cause for envy and resentment. It would be a mistake, in other words, to think that all of the members of Greek society who supported democracy also esteemed the educational practices of the Sophists. Most were, in fact, small landowners and artisans of deep religious conviction who would most likely have been suspicious of the new education even if they could have afforded it (Grote, *History* VIII: 484).<sup>18</sup> After all, it was the Athenian *democracy* which put Socrates to death believing, among other things, that he was a Sophist (see below).

One of the most famous revilers of the Sophists was the comic poet Aristophanes, who satirised the Sophists both collectively and individually. In the *Birds*, for instance, the chorus refers contemptuously to a "barabarian race" of those who "live by their tongue" among whom are found the "Gorgiases"(1695-1705). As far as is known, he is the first writer to characterise the argumentative style of the Sophists as "making the weaker (or unjust) argument the stronger (or just) argument". The exchange he offers between the "Just" and the "Unjust Speech" in the *Clouds* is nothing other than a clever parody of the "antilogical" arguments which Protagoras is said to have invented (line 112 ff.). The form and content of the exchange are highly evocative of several, well-known Sophistic exercises.<sup>19</sup> While Aristophanes does allow his "Unjust Speech" to win the debate, he is interested in showing the consequences of its triumph. The young Pheidippides,

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<sup>18</sup>For an interesting study of the way of life and culture of more ordinary people in ancient Greece at this time, see Fustel de Coulange.

<sup>19</sup>See the Antiphon speeches in Sprague, 218-221 and *Dissoi Logoi*, in Sprague, 279-293.

schooled in this new form of argumentation, loses his respect for the laws of his city, parental authority and the taboos against incest (lines 1400-1445, line 1370). As far as Aristophanes is concerned, these techniques, along with the Sophistic disdain for traditional authority, teach one how to manipulate the meaning of words and to rationalise any form of conduct.<sup>20</sup>

Aristophanes' attack is not limited to Sophistry. Above all, the *Clouds* is a fabulous attack on the philosopher, Socrates.<sup>21</sup> Not only does he present Socrates as guilty of the crimes for which Anaxagoras was punished, he presents Socrates as teaching the "Just" and the "Unjust Speech" as well as encouraging the irreverence so characteristic of Sophistry.<sup>22</sup> After the dialogue between the two speeches concludes, Socrates takes the young Pheidippides in hand and promises the boy's father that he will make him a "shrewd sophist" (line 1111). The consequences of this education have already been noted. According to Aristophanes, Socrates is also guilty of corrupting the youth. Indeed, the presentation of Socrates in the *Clouds*, as Plato has Socrates remark in the *Apology*, played no small part in arousing public sentiment against him and it was these sentiments that formed the backdrop against which he was charged and brought to trial.<sup>23</sup> In the *Apology*, Socrates says that he knows full well that what is behind the charges against him is a widespread sentiment to the effect that

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<sup>20</sup>Compare *Clouds* 660-690 with the remarks about Prodicus at lines 1240-1255. For an example of the political consequences of this kind of manipulation of words see Thucydides, III: 82-83.

<sup>21</sup>See Rankin for a discussion of the extent to which Socrates was a favourite subject for Attic comedy.

<sup>22</sup>To be more exact, Aristophanes does not present Socrates as teaching the "Just" and "Unjust Speech" but rather as inviting the Speeches themselves to educate the young Pheidippides. However, Aristophanes' Socrates is quite explicit about the religious irreverence at the heart of the education he offers.

<sup>23</sup>Socrates cites Aristophanes' *Clouds* as reinforcing the prejudices against him at *Apology*, 19c.

Socrates does injustice and is meddlesome, by investigating the things under the earth and the heavenly things, and by making the weaker speech the stronger, and by teaching others these same things. (19b)

While Socrates stood accused of the crimes associated with natural philosophy, according to Plato, he also stood accused of teaching a highly disreputable form of Sophistry.

Critics have often tended to dismiss the charges of Aristophanes against Socrates (cf. *Apology*, 19c) but there are important reasons not to do so if one is to understand the Platonic response to Sophistry. To understand this response, one must be able to account not only for the ways in which Plato recognised resemblances between Sophistry and philosophy but also the extent to which he indicates that problems are encountered when we try to distinguish them.<sup>24</sup> In the *Apology*, Socrates admits that he publicly questioned the traditional Athenian understanding of justice and goodness and that, by his example, many of the Athenian youth became "clever speakers" (23c, 33a-b). As many have noted, some of Socrates' dialectical arguments in the dialogues are difficult to distinguish from various kinds of Sophistic rhetoric.<sup>25</sup> The Sophist's interest in early philosophical investigations into Being have been noted above and Socrates, clearly, shared that interest.<sup>26</sup> While he is said to have turned his attention away from the direct examination of "Being" to the indirect examination of the *logoi*, nonetheless, Socrates remained interested in giving an account of the whole that was not derived from religious authority. To the extent that Socrates and Plato were opposed to Sophistry, clearly their opposition did not stem from either an acceptance of traditional Athenian morality or the political worries of Aristophanes.

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<sup>24</sup>See note 3 above.

<sup>25</sup>See, for example, Perelman, 16-17 and Grote, *History* VIII: 669.

<sup>26</sup>See Plato, *Phaedo* 99a and context. While this passage marks Socrates' famous "turn" away from "looking at Being" directly towards looking at the "*logos*", his interest in doing so remained an interest in understanding "Being", i.e.: it remained an interest in the kind of thing Anaxagoras was interested in albeit pursued along another path.

Plato's attempt to distinguish Socrates' endeavours from those of the Sophists was to lay down a cornerstone of philosophical self-understanding for centuries to come. Until recently, it was a commonplace assumption that Sophistry and philosophy were quite different and that the latter was, unquestionably, the more noble pursuit. As Henry Sidgwick put it:

The old view of the Sophists was that they were a set of charlatans who appeared in Greece in the fifth century, and earned their livelihood by imposing on public credulity: professing to teach virtue, they really taught the art of fallacious discourse, and meanwhile propagated immoral practical doctrines. (289)

Whatever else a philosopher might be interested in, there was a traditional consensus to the effect that he had no interest in appearing other than he was, that he made his money honestly, that he was interested in the discovery of true discourse and that he would not propagate any doctrine he knew to be immoral. While I have no particular interest in resurrecting this traditional understanding of the difference between Sophistry and philosophy, I am interested in the fact that, in recent years, there has been a tendency for philosophers to deny that there is or was *any* distinction between Sophistry and philosophy or to argue the superiority of Sophistry over philosophy.<sup>27</sup> What follows is a discussion of Hegel's attempt at the first and Nietzsche's attempt at the second. Both of these philosophers have been enormously influential with respect to both the way the Sophists have come to be viewed in recent times and the questions the Sophists are taken to generate about the activity of philosophy itself. I shall argue that Plato anticipated these questions and that his treatment of them continues to merit serious consideration.

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<sup>27</sup>Nor, by the way, do I wish to suggest that what has been handed down as the "traditional" view, was Plato's own. Clearly, the distinction between philosophy and Sophistry can be traced back to Plato. But Plato stands at the beginning of this tradition and is not a product of it. For the tradition which took its cue from Plato, the question of the difference between Sophistry and philosophy could be regarded as having been settled in the dialogues. For Plato, it presented an original problematic. It is this that I am interested in. I am interested in showing the current problematic that has surfaced through modern attempts to deny any distinction between philosophy and Sophistry. Ultimately, I am interested in showing that this is, in fact, a re-surfacing of the ancient problem Plato took great pains to address.

## The Modern Problematic of Sophistry

G. B. Kerferd is undoubtedly right when he credits Hegel as being the first philosopher to challenge what Sidgwick (above) called the traditional view (6). In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel identifies the Sophists as the originators of culture which, properly speaking, cannot be said to have existed before them (356). For Hegel, it is the mark of culture, ". . . that what free thought is to attain must come out of itself and become personal conviction; it is no longer believed but investigated--in short, it is the so called Enlightenment of modern times" (356). The Sophists, in other words, are considered by Hegel to be the originators of education in the sense that it has come to have today. Unlike the priests, poets and rhapsodes before them, who taught men what to believe, the Sophists taught men not to bow down before any external authority but to base their personal convictions upon rational reflection (355).<sup>28</sup> According to Hegel, this means that they taught men to grasp critically the universal implications of any particular judgement (358). They taught men to investigate the universal assumptions upon which any particular law, custom, or religious injunction rested and to evaluate these particulars in the light of their universal assumptions. Given that this education was to be universally applicable, the Sophists enabled men to "say something of everything". For this reason, according to Hegel, the Sophists were, above all, teachers of eloquence (357).

Hegel goes much further than this in challenging the traditional view. He insists that the Sophists are to be understood, first and foremost, as speculative philosophers (357).<sup>29</sup> This claim puts him at odds not only with the "traditional view" articulated by Sidgwick but also with the whole

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<sup>28</sup>See also Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* 253.

<sup>29</sup>Kerferd notes that Hegel was the first philosopher to maintain this.

history of philosophy which preceded him.<sup>30</sup> The issue here is not simply one of taxonomy. Hegel wants his audience to consider the Sophists as motivated by the same interests as philosophers. In his view, both seek to reconcile thought with reality and to arrive at knowledge of thought itself.<sup>31</sup> More important, however, Hegel is ultimately interested in showing that the negative and formal dialectic of the Sophists, which becomes fully developed in ancient Scepticism, is no threat to philosophy. He argues that while it can be turned against philosophy, it is nonetheless a moment of speculative philosophy by which it is overcome (*Lectures* II: 328-329, 344).<sup>32</sup> Hegel considers Sophistry to be an essential moment of philosophy which, among other things, leads to the philosophical challenge that philosophy justify itself. According to Hegel, philosophy can and does find its justification in and through its own activity.

There are several reasons to examine Hegel's argument in detail. The publication of the *Lectures* signalled a renewal of interest in the ancient Sophists which continues to this day.<sup>33</sup> His treatment of them sets the stage on which many later disagreements about the Sophists have been played out.<sup>34</sup> The more intriguing of these disagreements concern the extent to which the Sophists did represent a philosophical movement and the extent to which they pose a threat to philosophical inquiry *per se*. With respect to Hegel's own understanding of the Sophists, I will argue that it does indicate the direction that a justification of philosophy must take. On the other

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<sup>30</sup>See note 9 above.

<sup>31</sup>For Hegel's understanding of philosophy, see *Lectures* I: 51-52; III: 546. For his discussion of Greek philosophy, see *Lectures* I: 149-153. For a further explication of Hegel's understanding of philosophy, see Kojève, ch. 4 and Fackenheim, 92-93.

<sup>32</sup>For the historical connection between Sophistry and scepticism, see *Lectures* I: 377-378. For the logical connection, see *Phenomenology* 124.

<sup>33</sup>As far as I know, Hegel was the first philosopher in centuries to write extensively about the Sophists. The last comprehensive treatment was probably a lost dialogue of Plutarch called *Against the Sophists*.

<sup>34</sup>See Kerferd for a good discussion of Hegel's legacy for Sophistic studies.



hand, I will argue that Hegel's attempt to understand Sophistry as a movement *within* philosophy underestimates the challenge it poses to philosophy.

Hegel never explicitly defends his claim that the Sophists were speculative philosophers.<sup>35</sup> He simply understands them to represent a rational movement beyond the thought of Anaxagoras (*Lectures I*: 352). Whereas Anaxagoras had attempted to find the reason for everything being the way it is in *Nous*--the immanent, self-identical objective "Mind", determining the order of nature--the Sophists turned to the human mind to determine what is and what can be known (*Lectures* 362). For Hegel, the Sophists' movement away from the authority of the priests, poets and rhapsodes is part and parcel of their attempt to discover the truth of things, not in something foreign and external to consciousness (e.g. in Thales' "water" or Heraclitus' "fire"), but in consciousness itself (*Lectures* 329-332).

As Hegel describes it, this entailed that all consciousness of worldly matters and human relations--both theoretical and practical--was to be evaluated before the tribunal of human reason (*Phenomenology* 104-105; *Lectures I*: 349). The Sophists, as a result, came to treat all matters of consciousness dialectically, after the manner of Zeno who had dialectically examined the concept of motion (*Lectures I*: 265, 277, 354, 371). That is, following Zeno, the Sophists did not begin by asserting anything to be true. Rather, they took whatever conceptions, principles and laws they found in consciousness and isolated the explicit or implicit presuppositions upon which these conceptions, principles and laws rested. The Sophists discovered that any presupposition in consciousness could be shown to be either self-contradictory or to contradict another such presupposition. As a result, the conceptions, principles and laws founded upon these presuppositions lost their compelling force. Using this kind of critical examination, for example, Gorgias dissolved the conception of "Being" in his treatise *On Nature* (*Lectures* 378).

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<sup>35</sup>This claim has remained questionable to some. See, for example, Strauss, *Natural Right and History* 16, for the view that the Sophist is "a non-philosopher of a certain sort".

The employment of dialectical reasoning by the Sophists was intended to free personal conviction from what was not true. When extended to all practical and theoretical matters, this revealed that any notion whatsoever could be dissolved in this manner. The Sophists, according to Hegel, therefore concluded that personal conviction could not attach itself to anything beyond the satisfaction of personal impulses and desires. For this reason, they pursued and taught the study of oratory as that tool whereby one could manipulate and satisfy the impulses and desires of others (*Lectures I*: 359, *II*: 63). A man who became a great orator was thereby greatly esteemed by the people, for he could move them to choose propitious courses of action (*Lectures I*: 358-359).

The study of oratory essentially involved seeing how all the points of view implicit in anything could be grasped and learning how to select the one which would give the greatest force to what was desired. According to Hegel, in the absence of fixed principles of action to which one could appeal, the Sophists turned their attention to the rationalisation of self-interest (*Lectures I*: 365). Their extension of Eleatic dialectical reasoning to all matters of consciousness revealed not only that there were no essentially true conceptions but also that there were no intrinsically good courses of action, laws or virtues. Rationalising one's self-interest was thus a matter of finding the external or instrumental reasons for doing one thing as opposed to another. The ends of action themselves were given by one's desires.

Hegel notes that this kind of practical reasoning, the end of which is the fulfilment of self-interest, is quite common. He offers the following examples: "Do not cheat, else you lose your credit, hence your wealth . . . Be temperate, or you will spoil your appetite and hence suffer." (*Lectures I*: 367). He further notes that the Sophists themselves were well aware that, on the basis of such reasoning, the goodness of any action could be proved or disproved. Such reasoning, in so far as it denies that the ends of action can be evaluated, cannot establish that some means are more appropriate than others for "the good life" (*Lectures I*: 369). The ends, after

all, are relative to any given individual. There is no intrinsic connection between means and ends. Cheating may, at times, lose one one's credit, but it doesn't have to. Nor does one's well-being, according to such reasoning, necessarily depend upon one's temperance. Hegel further notes that such reasoning has often been employed against philosophy and offers the following examples:

There are, they say, various philosophies, various opinions and this is contrary to the one Truth; the weakness of human reason allows of no knowledge. What is philosophy to the feelings, mind and heart? Abstract thinking about such matters produces abstruse results which are of no use in the practical life of man. (*Lectures I*: 368)

According to Hegel, these examples are also a form of reasoning the force of which is simply dependent upon one's self-interest. Hence, unlike the more powerful dialectic of Zeno, which can and does demonstrate the nullity of the presuppositions of consciousness, instrumental reasoning can neither prove nor disprove anything. According to Hegel, the Sophists were quite aware that this was the case.<sup>36</sup>

The Sophists' employment of dialectical reasoning in all matters of consciousness and their insistence on utility as a principle of action secure them, for Hegel, a place in the history of philosophy (*Lectures I*: 371). In particular, Hegel credits Protagoras and Gorgias with being most profound philosophers (*Lectures I*: 373, 378). According to Hegel, Protagoras enunciated the principle of Sophistry *per se*: that the subjective individual--his passions and interests--is the final ground of appeal for what is right and true (*Philosophy of History* 269). Protagoras' understanding that the truth of things lies in how they appear to an individual and that there is nothing more to what is than what appears to an individual, was appropriated and further extended by the later Sceptics (*Lectures I*: 377, II: 328). While Hegel describes Protagoras as essentially a Sceptic, Gorgias he considers the more profound Sceptic. Protagoras had simply asserted and spelled out the relativity of truth to the subjective individual. Gorgias dialectically dissolved the very conception

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<sup>36</sup>For the distinction between the two forms of reasoning see *Lectures I*: 264-265.

of Being itself (*Lectures I*: 379-380). That is, he showed that the concept of Being is itself self-contradictory and that, hence, nothing could be said or known of it.

While Hegel insists that the Sophists are speculative philosophers because they extend the negative dialectic of Zeno to all matters of consciousness, clearly (as the example of Gorgias shows), he understands that they pose a great challenge to the philosophical quest for positive knowledge of the world and of thought. If any conception, principle or law can be shown to rest upon self-contradictory assumptions, it would appear that man can know nothing about himself and the world around him save in a relative and contingent manner. According to Hegel, it is the Sceptics who develop the consequences of this negative dialectic for philosophy itself. In his words, Scepticism is "firmly established Sophistry" and it is the Sceptics who bring the theory of the subjectivity of knowledge to completion (*Lectures II*: 328, *Phenomenology* 124).

Scepticism, says Hegel, ". . . has been held to have been the most formidable, and, indeed, the invincible opponent of Philosophy, because it signified the art of dissolving all that is determinate, and showing it in its nullity" (*Lectures*, II: 328). What the Sceptics attempt to show is the unreasonableness of any attempt to give an objective, sufficient, and non-contradictory account of anything. They thus take the negative dialectic of the Sophists to its logical conclusion. They go further than the Sophists. They attempt to show not only that any *given* principle, conception or law can be shown to rest upon contradictory presuppositions, but that the very attempt to establish these things rests upon contradictory assumptions. The Sceptics attempt to show that whatever is thought cannot be a reflection of what truly is. They do this by showing that philosophical thinking is itself fundamentally contradictory (*Lectures II*: 335).

According to Hegel, the most formidable examples of this attempt to dissolve philosophical thought are the *tropes* of Sextus Empiricus. These *tropes* are nothing other than the specific errors to which thought is prone any time an attempt is made to give a positive, objectively true account of anything. Hegel lists them and then goes on to reconstruct the argument against positive

philosophical thinking which they imply. What follows is a paraphrase of that argument (*Lectures II: 360-362*).

1. Philosophers contradict each other with respect to what is true (e.g. some say the truth is to be found in sense perception, others say it is to be found in thought). If there is no way to resolve these contradictory assertions, then judgement must be reserved with respect to what is true. More important, however, the existence of unresolvable contradictory positions within philosophy shows that, while philosophers believe themselves to have discovered the truth of things, they have no adequate criteria for measuring whether or not they have succeeded. If they had such criteria, the contradictions within philosophy could be resolved.

2. Philosophers are wont to ground their judgments by appealing to a first principle or reason which is said to require no further argument. Yet the reason for what makes any reason such as to require no further argument can always be demanded. Hence there is no first principle or fixed ground of appeal for reason-giving itself. All attempts to find a sufficient reason for anything lead to an infinite regress.

3. If a philosopher attempts to avoid this infinite regress by appealing to the reasonableness of an assertion as the ground of its truth, he will fall into the trap of circular reasoning. For, if he goes on to say that what makes the assertion reasonable is its truth, then nothing has been proved.

4. This circular reasoning can, of course, be avoided by presupposing some axiom or principle from which to argue anything else. Yet, in so far as such an axiom remains unproved, it cannot prove anything else. Nor can it be used to refute its opposite which can with equal justification be presupposed.

5. Any attempt to ground what is true in thought or perception ignores the fact that both thought and perception are relative to individuals.

The Sceptical attack on positive philosophical thought involves showing that reason-giving cannot be what philosophy takes it to be or that it is not in the nature of thinking to know reality.<sup>37</sup> Despite its pretensions to the contrary, philosophical thinking cannot unearth the reasons for things. When it does not beg the question, all positive philosophical thinking leads ultimately to an infinite regress. Positive philosophers, while claiming to be engaged in the most reasonable of activities, are in fact engaged in the most unreasonable of activities. They attempt to transcend the limits of reason itself.

Hegel, of course, thinks that philosophy is a reasonable activity and that its reasonableness can be shown. He thinks that philosophy can defend itself against the extension of Sophistic dialectic or Scepticism. He points out that these *tropes* concern only a certain kind of philosophy which posits something determinate as the foundation of all that is real or true (e.g. the "ego", "Being", "Thought" or "Sensation") (*Lectures II*: 363). Hegel calls this kind of philosophy "Dogmatic Philosophy" and argues that the mistake of Scepticism is to regard all philosophy as Dogmatic. Hegel argues that Speculative philosophy avoids the limitations of its Dogmatic cousin in so far as it does not posit some absolute starting point from which to deduce all else. He argues that it is possible for philosophy to attain objective knowledge without deducing what can be said about the world and man from some presupposed first principle (*Lectures II*: 364). He agrees that, against Dogmatic philosophy, Scepticism is invincible but against Speculative philosophy, it is not (*Lectures II*: 344, 365).

Hegel explains that Dogmatism, "... as a way of thinking, whether of ordinary knowing or in the study of philosophy, is nothing else than the opinion that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result, or which is immediately known." (*Phenomenology* 23). Given that Scepticism shows the futility of this assumption, Hegel concludes that philosophy which is to be

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<sup>37</sup>The problem of first principles at the heart of the Sceptical attack is an ancient one. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 72b5-73a20.

reasonable cannot subscribe to this notion of truth. For positive philosophy to be justifiable, it cannot presuppose some Archimedean point of reason that can be discovered or immediately known and from which all true claims about the world might be deduced (*Hegel's Science of Logic* 49, 73). As Hegel says, philosophy cannot presuppose anything but must rather doubt everything (*Lectures I*: 406). For Hegel, in other words, philosophy must begin in Scepticism (*Lectures I*: 344, *Phenomenology* 51).

In accepting Scepticism as the only reasonable starting point for philosophy, Hegel recognises that reason cannot justify its own activity from some standpoint that requires no further justification. Philosophy cannot assert some standpoint over and against the various other forms of experience and thought or even over and against conflicting philosophical positions. Rather, it must begin with an examination of these forms of consciousness and experience and be able to show that any result it arrives at follows necessarily from the process of this reflective examination (*Phenomenology* 28, 87).<sup>38</sup> Philosophy cannot assume that it knows what knowledge is independently of its own attempts to know and independently of an examination of other attempts to know. It can only examine what it is to know by examining the various attempts consciousness has made to know itself and the world (*The Logic* par. 10).

Like Scepticism, Speculative philosophy comes to recognise the contradictions between what consciousness sets out as criteria for evaluating what is true and what it thinks it knows (*Phenomenology* 51). Unlike Scepticism, however, Speculative philosophy does not rest with pointing out these contradictions. It recognises that there is an essential connection between the criteria that are assumed to be valid for evaluating knowledge and anything that is thought to be known (Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy" 11-12). Put more simply, what we think we know is determined by a prior assumption as to what can be known and how it can be known to be known.

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<sup>38</sup>For a more detailed discussion of this process, see Fackenheim, 29.

When Scepticism discovers that anything one thinks one knows can be shown to have arisen in a manner that contradicts the criteria one has for determining how something can be known, it assumes that the knowledge claim in question is false. Speculative philosophy, on the other hand, while it recognises the contradiction to have occurred in thought, does not reject the knowledge claim itself as false or "betokening nothing" (*Phenomenology* 22). It recognises that such contradictions arise out of specific modes of thought (or understanding) and that these modes are themselves determined by the criteria presupposed for evaluating knowledge. Reflective thought (or reason) which recognises such contradictions, *precisely because it is capable of recognising them*, is capable of transcending them (*Logic* 46, *Phenomenology* 36). In moving forward, Speculative philosophy does not simply reject a self-contradictory mode of understanding and go on to posit dogmatically a wholly new mode of understanding which it believes is beyond contradiction (*Logic* 71). Rather, it recognises that the contradictions inherent in a given mode of understanding are always specific contradictions. It is in the attempt to unify the opposing sides of these contradictions that reason, as it were, pushes the understanding forward (*Phenomenology* 36-37). In doing so, the understanding not only progresses with respect to what it knows, it also develops criteria which are more adequate for determining what is known and which do not lead to the same contradictions as before.

From the point of view of Speculative philosophy, the wholly negative dialectic of Sophistry and Scepticism appears to be one-sided. While it is capable of demonstrating the contradictory character of a given mode of understanding, it cannot, among other things, demonstrate the self-contradictoriness of reason itself (*Lectures II*: 344). As Hegel points out, any time it attempts to do so, it only attacks some specific understanding of "reason" which, by itself, does not show that the activity of reason is self-contradictory (*Lectures II*: 369). Furthermore, Hegel argues that to rest with the negative dialectic of Sophistry and Scepticism is to rest with a wholly self-contradictory way of thinking. On the one hand, such thinking holds that all matters of thought are contingent,



empirical and formed by what has no reality for thought. On the other hand, such thinking subscribes to the universal truth and self-consistent character of thought itself. It assumes the inviolability of thought while, at the same time, maintaining that thought is radically contingent, empirically conditioned and self-contradictory (*Lectures I*: 371, *Phenomenology* 125). Put more simply, the negative dialectic of Sophistry and Scepticism, according to Hegel, subscribes to the standards of reason (consistency, etc.) which it then uses to attack reason.

Hegel's discussion of the Sophists and the Sceptics is instructive on many levels. His account of the impact of the Sophists in Greece, the originality of their educational activities and their influence on the history of Western culture was the first of its kind and has been supported by considerable historical research.<sup>39</sup> More important, Hegel understood the challenge posed to philosophy by Sophistic dialectic and that philosophy cannot ignore it. This dialectic tends to be directed, not towards any one philosophical doctrine *per se*, but towards the very activity of philosophy as it has usually been understood. The challenge is that philosophers who claim to know anything about the world must justify their activity without presupposing it. The Sophistic challenge, as Hegel understood, is not so much philosophical as meta-philosophical. It demands that philosophers not only spell out the most basic principles upon which their knowledge rests (in so far as they are presupposed in philosophic activity), but also that they justify them.

Furthermore, Hegel's analysis demonstrates that there is an intimate connection between the criteria one presupposes in order to determine how one is to know that one knows something and that which one thinks one knows. The implication is that there is an intimate connection between how one justifies or evaluates philosophical knowledge and the philosophical knowledge one thinks one has discovered. How one conceives and justifies one's philosophical activities, in other words, have implications for one's philosophical positions or hypotheses.

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<sup>39</sup>See, for example, Jaeger and Marrou.

Finally, Hegel shows the limits of the Sophistic/Sceptical challenge to Speculative or dialectical philosophy. The dialectical activity of examining given modes of experience and thought and the rational attempt to move progressively beyond any limited mode cannot be shown to be unreasonable or unjustifiable. While any particular attempt to progress may be shown to be limited, and while any Dogmatic philosophical position may be defeated, the Speculative attempt to move beyond contradiction cannot itself be directly refuted.

Hegel, of course, wants to go further than this and to claim that there is a philosophical refutation of any way of thinking that rests with Sophistic dialectic or Scepticism. Clearly the refutation he proposes is successful if, and only if, the person who rests with such dialectic is implicitly a proponent of reason or is implicitly committed to reason as a standard for evaluating modes of understanding. Hegel refutes the critic of positive philosophy if he shows this critic to be implicitly committed to rational thought and the principle of non-contradiction. Hegel assumes that the proponent of Sophistic dialectic will find himself in the self-contradictory position of having placed his faith in reason on the one hand, while absolutely denying the power of reason on the other.

As Charles Griswold, Jr. points out, this kind of assumption is one frequently assailed by Hegel's critics, especially with respect to his treatment of art and religion.

(T)hey focus on the supposed *Aufhebung* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Encyclopedia*, of art and religion into "abstract knowledge". They assert that Hegel is simply showing that art and religion contain the "conceptual truth" that he has already read into them. In fact, so the objection runs, art and religion are not really assertions about "conceptual truth" at all. They are not simply continuous with philosophy . . . From this radical standpoint, Hegel's error is the same as that of all philosophers, indeed of philosophy *per se*. The error derives from a philosophical effort to impose (and then to pretend to discover) a structure on all spiritual activity in terms of which philosophy emerges as dominant. ("Plato's Metaphilosophy" 12)<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>See also Fackenheim in the chapter, "The Crisis of the Hegelian Middle".

Hegel's refutation of Sophistry is also dependent upon the assumption that Sophistry is continuous with philosophy and the search for conceptual truth. This amounts to the assumption that the challenge posed by the Sophists leads to a debate which can be conducted "*entre nous*" between different kinds of philosophers who share a commitment to reason.

That this assumption is anything but self-evident is clear, not only from the analysis of Sophistry offered by Nietzsche (to which I will turn shortly), but also from the treatment of the Sophists in the Platonic dialogues. While the Sophists in the Platonic dialogues are represented challenging the possibility and scope of philosophical reasoning, they are never represented as being lovers of wisdom themselves. I intend to show that this amounts to the recognition by Plato that it is not to philosophers that philosophy must be defended. It must be defended to those who challenge the enterprise of philosophy itself. Plato recognises that philosophers cannot assume the inherent reasonableness of their own activity. Nor can they assume that the more interesting challenges to philosophy are themselves philosophically motivated.<sup>41</sup> A sufficient justification of philosophy can only come about as a result of meeting radically anti-philosophical challenges. I will argue that Plato's use of the dialogue form of writing indicates his fundamental agreement with Hegel that a defense of philosophy cannot be conducted Dogmatically but must be conducted dialectically. But he disagrees with Hegel in his understanding of the radical nature of the challenges philosophy must meet.

A radical challenge to philosophy that cannot be assumed to be philosophical in the traditional sense can be seen in the challenge posed by Nietzsche. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche goes right to the heart of the matter by demanding an account of "the philosopher's faith in opposite values" (#2: 10). For Nietzsche, there have always been unjustified assumptions underlying all manifestations of the philosophical enterprise: that reality is opposed to appearance;

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<sup>41</sup>For a discussion of the extent to which and reasons why Hegel is not interested in addressing those who are anti-philosophical, see Kojève, 95.

that truth is opposed to falsity and that good is opposed to evil (*Beyond Good and Evil* #35: 46). In the absence of any justification for this "faith in opposite values", Nietzsche concludes that it is a mere prejudice which serves the pre-existent moral drives of philosophers, a prejudice fortified by the seduction of grammar (*Beyond Good and Evil* #20: 27). Even the "will to truth" cannot be accounted for as anything but a prejudice (*Beyond Good and Evil* #1: 9). Nietzsche is interested in showing that this is the case not only with what Hegel would call Dogmatic philosophy, but also with dialectical or Speculative philosophy as well.

What provokes one to look at all philosophers half suspiciously, half mockingly . . . (is) . . . that they are not honest enough in their work, although they all make a lot of virtuous noise whenever the problem of truthfulness is even touched on remotely. They all pose as if they had discovered their real opinions through the cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic . . . while knowing at bottom it is an assumption, a hunch, indeed a kind of "inspiration"--most often a desire of the heart that has been filtered and made abstract--that they defend with reasons after the fact. (*Beyond Good and Evil* #5: 12)

For Nietzsche, philosophy can be no more than a pretence or mask for what is implicitly a kind of faith, inspiration or desire (*Beyond Good and Evil* #6: 13). In the absence of any justification for this faith in opposite values, even dialectical philosophy appears as no more than a kind of advocacy on behalf of the particular prejudice of a philosopher.

This amounts to the charge that the philosopher's search for objective truth, as traditionally understood, can only be defended as a kind of faith for which no "reason" can be found. It is a mere idiosyncratic prejudice alongside many others. Given that no judgement can be satisfactorily evaluated by this faith in opposite values, Nietzsche suggests that instead, life itself should be the standard of the judgments we make (*Beyond Good and Evil* #4: 12). He would not have us ask of anything whether it is good, evil, true, or false, for these questions stem from an unjustifiable prejudice. Rather, he would have us ask to what extent anything is "life promoting, life preserving, species preserving and perhaps even species cultivating". That this is not intended as another kind of philosophical principle in any usual sense is clear from the conclusion Nietzsche draws from it:

untruth is a condition of life (*Beyond Good and Evil* #4: 12). From this point of view, all abstract philosophising which wills truth and goodness to the exclusion of falsehood and evil is a denial of life (*Will to Power* #462: 254).

Nietzsche's radical challenge to philosophy does not lead him to make the same assumptions about Sophistry that Hegel makes. According to Nietzsche, Sophistry was the first critique of and genuine insight into morality. The Sophists understood that every morality can be dialectically justified or, as Nietzsche puts it, ". . . they divine that all attempts to give reasons for morality are necessarily *sophistical*" and that "it is a swindle to talk about truth in this field." (*Will to Power* #428: 232, my emphasis). The Sophists incarnate the great instincts of Periclean Greece (*Will to Power* #428: 232). Living in full harmony with these great instincts and resisting all attempts to formulate morality in terms of a faith in opposite values, the Sophists fully affirm life. It is the philosophers who instigate its denial.

Nietzsche accuses Socrates and Plato of initiating "the most scabrous period in the history of the spirit" (*Will to Power* #428: 232). The attempt to impose their preference for "truth" on all matters of morality (beginning with Socrates and continuing throughout the entire history of philosophy) results in the following:

(M)oral judgments are torn from their conditionality, in which they have grown and alone possess any meaning . . . to be denaturalized under the pretence of sublimation. The great concepts "good" and "just" are severed from the presuppositions to which they belong and, as liberated "ideas", become objects of dialectic. (*Will to Power* #430: 234-235)

The philosophical thinking begun by Plato and Socrates is, for Nietzsche, not only rationally unjustifiable, it rests upon a thoroughgoing denial of life.

Nietzsche's challenge is particularly radical because any attempt to meet it, even dialectically, by trying to show that his position may be rationally inconsistent, is to beg the question. It is precisely the philosophical insistence upon things like rational consistency that Nietzsche throws into question. His challenge, in other words, is not formulated from a point of

view which subscribes to the "rules" of rational discourse. Because these rules are grounded in a faith in opposite values, Nietzsche's challenge is formulated from a point of view outside any such "rules". He does not have a philosophical position which can be evaluated by rational philosophical discourse. He questions the very nature of philosophical rationality and, in the absence of any appeal which can justify it as being more than a mere prejudice, he feels free to reject it altogether. According to Nietzsche, the relationship of the Sophists to Socrates and Plato is the same as his own relationship to the history of philosophy.

Several conclusions may be drawn from the above discussion. They shed considerable light on Plato's treatment of the Sophists. A summary of these is in order. Hegel has amply demonstrated that philosophical rationality cannot be refuted by any direct attempt to argue that any articulation of what it means to be rational runs into contradictions. Such a refutation succeeds only with respect to the particular articulation of reason in question. His treatment of Sophistical dialectic shows that any attempt to refute philosophical rationality, which presupposes it as a criterion for refutation, is self-contradictory. The example of Nietzsche, however, shows that the most serious challenges to philosophical rationality do not presuppose it. Such challenges do not function as "rational refutations". They place the onus upon philosophers to justify their own activity in a way that does not presuppose it. In the absence of such justification, philosophy cannot meet the challenge.

It seems to me that Hegel is right in recognising that a defense of philosophy can only proceed dialectically. Yet, as Griswold points out, the debates between the critics and proponents of reason "cannot fairly be seen as the dialectical self-explication of Reason" ("Plato's Metaphilosophy" 19). To regard such a debate as between positions based upon the same rules of acceptable discourse is to beg the question. As Griswold explains, in a dispute as radical as this one, a "philosopher is compelled to question not just this or that doctrine, but also why anyone should be persuaded by the meta-philosophical view that philosophy as such is possible" ("Plato's

Metaphilosophy" 19). In the absence of any commensurable criteria for evaluating the sides and outcome of such a dispute, it appears that any dialectical attempt to justify philosophy can be carried out only at the level of persuading individuals that philosophy is a justifiable enterprise. That is to say, such attempt must be carried out in an *ad hominem* manner.<sup>42</sup>

It is my contention that the model for such a defense is to be found in the Platonic dialogues. More than any other philosophical texts, the dialogues are an attempt to illustrate ". . . the origin of philosophy itself out of the medium of opinion" (Griswold, "Plato's Metaphilosophy 15). It should be noted that, while there is a philosopher present in every Platonic dialogue, he only ever carries on extended conversations with those who are not themselves mature philosophers. Indeed, it is more often the case that these conversations are carried on with individuals who are implicitly, if not explicitly, anti-philosophic. The theme of any dialogue, therefore, is not simply the examination of some particular question. It is also an attempt to show how these interlocutors can be brought to an appreciation of the need for and a participation in philosophical inquiry. That this "program" is not successful in every case is, of course, eminently clear from the example of the *Gorgias*. Any unsuccessful attempt, however, is only unsuccessful *within* the dramatic world of the dialogue itself. The most important participant in any dialogue is the reader herself who, to the extent that she is moved to examine the reasons for any success or failure within a dialogue, may find herself moving along the path of philosophical inquiry. The dialogue form of writing, therefore, allows Plato to explore a dialectical defense of philosophy in the manner outlined above in two ways. It is always an *ad hominem* attempt within the dramatic context of any dialogue and it is always an *ad hominem* attempt directed to a given reader. And, what prevents such an attempt from becoming Dogmatic, is that Plato never says anything in his own name.

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<sup>42</sup>For an in depth examination of what such *ad hominem* arguments look like and for an extensive justification of their use, see Johnstone.

I will now turn to a detailed examination of the form of writing found in the Platonic dialogues. After showing what the dialogues themselves teach about the manner in which they are to be read and what they suggest about how one is to understand the philosophic life, I will then proceed to a discussion of Plato's *Sophist*. I will argue that the *Sophist*, read carefully as a dialogue, outlines the challenge to philosophy which Sophistry represents. I will also argue that the "method" used by the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* to catch the Sophist is shown by the dialogue to be deficient and incapable of providing a justification for itself in the light of the Sophist's challenge. Nonetheless, I hope to show that, in spite of the Stranger's failure, the *Sophist* does point to a way in which philosophy can respond to the Sophist's challenge so as to justify itself. While I will not return explicitly to the discussion I began regarding the Hegelian and Nietzschean ways of looking at the Sophists, the reader is encouraged to keep in mind the issues raised by that discussion. By the end of my discussion of the *Sophist*, it should be clear the extent to which Plato's response to Sophistry is dialectical and yet not based upon the Hegelian assumption that Sophistry is continuous with philosophy. It should also be clear the extent to which Nietzsche has mistaken the Eleatic Stranger's approach to both philosophy and Sophistry for Plato's own. While I am hopeful that the Platonic defense of philosophy summarised in my concluding chapters offers a way of meeting the challenge to philosophy put forward by Nietzsche, a detailed examination as to how this might be the case would make my discussion far longer than any reader could bear. I can only trust that I have offered enough instructive suggestions concerning how this might be done that the reader might carry this out for him/herself.



To interpret . . . the beginning of the tradition in terms of the tradition to which this beginning gave rise is to risk covering over decisively the depth of questioning in which the Platonic writings are engaged; it is to risk obscuring the richness of the Platonic problematic. (Sallis, 15)

## II: THE PLATONIC DIALOGUE

### The Problem

An unassuming reader, interested in discovering the opinions of one of the most influential philosophers in history, can be expected to find herself in something of a quandary when faced with a Platonic text. The majority of Plato's writings are dialogues. As the reader will quickly discover, in the dialogues, Plato himself never says anything. While the reader will encounter a host of characters engaging in any number of conversations about any number of things, she will never encounter Plato himself as a participant in these conversations. In his dialogues, Plato never speaks in the first person. Nor does he offer prefaces or explanatory notes which would indicate to the reader what he, Plato, thinks of the conversations he has presented. An unassuming reader who has observed this much about the dialogues may well be expected to turn to Plato's letters for guidance. The letters, after all, are written in the first person and one might expect from them a relatively unambiguous presentation of Plato's opinions. The unassuming reader, however, will be surprised and perhaps disappointed to discover that, in the letters themselves, Plato denied ever having communicated in writing his deepest philosophical thoughts (*Seventh Letter* 341c-d, 344c).

Upon returning to the dialogues, the unassuming reader's puzzlement over their content will, no doubt, increase. One would expect such a reader to assume that Socrates is, in some sense, Plato's spokesman. After all, it is Socrates who seems to get the better of everyone he talks to and, at first glance, his ability to do so would appear to be rather heroic. Yet Plato seems to have employed two other "*heroic personae*". One of them--the Eleatic Stranger--appears highly critical of some of Socrates' views.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Plato's very characterisation of his "*heroic personae*" may be expected to raise serious questions for an unassuming reader. In the *Republic*, for example, Socrates engages in the spinning of highly obscure, poetic yarns in apparent violation of the very critique of poetry which the dialogue offers.<sup>2</sup> In other dialogues, these "*heroic personae*" often appear to contradict themselves and frequently to stoop to the level of equivocal and contentious argument to secure agreement from their interlocutors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See *Sophist* 248a-249d where the "friends of the ideas" are criticised and *Republic* 507b-511e where a theory of ideas is put forward by Socrates.

<sup>2</sup>*Republic* 599c1-607d. In this passage, Socrates defines poetry as a kind of "imitation in speeches". Later he says that ". . . imitation keeps company with the part in us that is far from prudence, and is not comrade and friend for any healthy or true purpose." (603b1) To the extent that the Platonic dialogues are themselves "imitations" of real conversations, the injunction against poetry raises questions, not only about myths found in the dialogues but about the genre of the dialogues as a whole. As Stenzel (2) notes, Aristotle too recognised that Socratic conversations or Platonic dialogues are forms of poetic imitation. See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b11. Three very important Platonic myths are to be found at *Republic* 614b ff., *Statesman* 268e ff., *Laws* 713b ff.

<sup>3</sup>Compare *Meno* 86b with 89b ff. The first part of the dialogue concludes with the thesis that *all* knowledge is recollection whereas the second half of the dialogue presupposes that virtue is not acquired by recollection but imparted by a teacher. Compare *Sophist* 227a-227c and 227d. Immediately after the Eleatic Stranger instructs Theaetetus to embrace a "neutral" art of discrimination among "kinds" (one that does not classify kinds according to "better and worse"), he himself violates his own instruction. Compare *Laws* 853b,c where the Stranger says that the laying down of penal laws in a city is a shameful activity with 730d, where he claims that, "He who does not do injustice is honourable; but he who does not allow unjust men to work their injustice is more than twice as honourable . . . the great man in the city, the man who is proclaimed perfect and the bearer of victory in virtue, is the one who does what he can to assist the magistrates in inflicting punishment."

A notable example of Socrates' use of equivocation can be found in *Gorgias* 474c-475e9. See also Sichel, 141-152. Sichel, while arguing that Socrates is not a sophist, provides many examples of his apparent sophisms: inconsistent argument; the use of emotional devices to secure

On the whole, the dialogues can easily appear to be filled with bad arguments, obscurities and omissions. Aside from the difficulties already raised, what is an unassuming reader to make of the arguments on behalf of the laws of Athens which Socrates offers his oldest friend in the *Crito* and of his apparent lack of concern for the law in the *Apology*?<sup>4</sup> What is one to make of the inconclusive character of so many of the dialogues? Why is it that, despite Socrates' insistence on the importance of dialectic, Plato never offers a sustained, philosophical discussion of it in any of the dialogues?<sup>5</sup> And why did Plato never write the *Philosopher*, the dialogue which one would have expected to follow the *Sophist* and *Statesman*?<sup>6</sup> Surely such a dialogue might have cleared up at least some outstanding mysteries in the Platonic corpus. Plato, it may seem, preferred to remain an enigma.

While an unassuming reader who reaches such a conclusion may well wonder what she has missed, she should take some small comfort from the fact that she is not alone. As E. N. Tigerstedt has observed, the problem of how to interpret the Platonic dialogues goes back to antiquity itself. He cites a famous passage from the Late Neoplatonist, Olympiodorus:

Shortly before he died, Plato dreamt that he had become a swan which flew from tree to tree, thereby causing the utmost trouble to the archers who wanted to shoot him down. Simmias the Socratic interpreted the dream as meaning that Plato would elude all the pains of his interpreters. For to the archers the interpreters are similar

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agreement; contentious argument. Sichel cites two excellent discussions of this issue: Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* IV: 143-144, 147-148, 159, 166-167, 193, 195, 222; and Grote, *Plato and the other Companions of Socrates* I: 393-402, 517, 527-564.

<sup>4</sup>Compare *Crito* 50c ff. and *Apology* 29c-d.

<sup>5</sup>See *Phaedrus* 277b; *Sophist* 253d, 264e; *Statesman* 258b ff., 261a-268c, 286a; *Republic*, 533c, 537d, 539b; *Phaedo* 101e. While many aspects of dialectic are discussed throughout the dialogues, one looks in vain for a comprehensive treatment of the matter.

<sup>6</sup>At the beginning of the *Sophist*, Socrates charges the Eleatic Stranger with the task of defining the sophist, the statesman and the philosopher (See *Sophist* 216c-217e, *Statesman* 257b, 311.) He complies with the first two demands and the titles of the two dialogues in which he does this reflect their subject matter. In the "literary world" of the dialogues, the discussion of the philosopher never takes place; the *Philosopher* was never written.

who try to hunt out the hidden meaning of the ancients, but elusive is Plato because his writings, like those of Homer, must be understood in many senses, both physically, and ethically, and theologically and literally. (11)<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Tigerstedt's own work shows that Plato has proven as elusive to his modern interpreters as he was to the ancients.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to say that most or even many scholars interested in interpreting the Platonic dialogues are as candid as Olympiodorus about the difficulties attending such an enterprise.<sup>9</sup> An unassuming reader who is overwhelmed by the ambiguities in the dialogues, upon turning to the "experts", will find that there are hundreds of works on the Platonic dialogues, all purporting to explain the teaching found therein. Yet, as Tigerstedt points out, the disagreements among these "experts" run very deep (13).

Some scholars deny that there is any kind of unifying principle underlying the Platonic corpus. They see Plato as now a poet, now a politician and now a philosopher who occasionally changes his mind. Some regard Plato as a thinker who worked out his teaching before the advent of clearly articulated principles of logical reasoning and who for this reason, despite his contributions in many areas, is rather inconsistent and naive. Others, agreeing that a unified Platonic doctrine is not to be found in the dialogues (according to the apparent testimony of the *Seventh Letter* and other ancient sources) have concluded that it must have been kept secret from all but

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<sup>7</sup>This passage is taken from the so-called *Vitae Platonis* of Olympiodorus which is an introduction to his commentary on the *Alcibiades Major*.

<sup>8</sup>See also Griswold, "Introduction" and Shorey for other discussions of the debates which have shaped the history of Platonism.

<sup>9</sup>As Charles Griswold Jr. points out, ". . . in modern times the whole problem of interpreting Plato--and with it, the problem as to why Plato wrote dialogues--has not received the attention it deserves. Scholars working on Plato tend to proceed in their work with insufficient reflection on their own assumptions . . . (as to how to read a Platonic dialogue and why Plato wrote dialogues)". He adds that, "The differences between interpretive assumptions, combined with a certain lack of self-conscious analysis of the given assumptions, helps account for the bitterness of the polemics that have accompanied recent exchanges about the problem of interpretation . . . ("Introduction" 3).

a few and that this secret teaching can be reconstructed from second-hand reports that have come down to us from antiquity. Finally, some other scholars have concluded that Plato's teaching must have evolved over time and that this evolution accounts for many of the apparent omissions in and contradictions between the various dialogues. Even among these last, there is little agreement as to whether the evolution of Plato's thought is to be understood as a symptom of non-philosophic, psychological and historical influences or as a logical development of the philosopher's initial insights.<sup>10</sup>

As Tigerstedt's study demonstrates, those who have found it impossible to resolve the dilemmas attending the numerous ironies, contradictions and sceptical elements in Plato's dialogues have tended to conclude that Plato has no teaching. On the other hand, those who have been dissatisfied with such a conclusion have either had to ignore many of the ironies, contradictions and sceptical elements of the dialogues or explain them by appealing to Plato's naivety, his development as a thinker or his secret teaching. Tigerstedt's study, in other words, demonstrates that Simmias the Socratic was no false prophet.

The problem with trying to offer a systematic interpretation of Plato's thought as it is presented in his dialogues is that the dialogue form of writing itself resists such interpretation. Whatever else may be said about Plato's uniqueness as a philosopher, he is certainly unique in this: that while other philosophers have occasionally adopted the dialogue form of writing as a vehicle for public philosophical expression, Plato adopted the dialogue form exclusively.<sup>11</sup> Even if it should turn out that Plato changed his mind about the things that he wanted to say (and this

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<sup>10</sup>The positions discussed by Tigerstadt include those of George Grote, R. Robinson, Julius Stenzel, and Eduard Zeller. While Tigerstedt may be guilty of some degree of simplification in his presentation of these positions, his account is, by and large, quite fair.

<sup>11</sup>While there is evidence that Plato may have delivered lectures (the most famous being "On the Good"), there seems to be considerable agreement to the effect that these were not meant for the consumption of the general public. See Cherniss, 1-30.

might account for the various tensions among the dialogues) it would appear that he never changed his mind about the way in which he decided to present them.

In their accounts of the "Platonic doctrine", most Platonists tend to omit those elements of Plato's dialogues that would appear to militate against the idea that the dialogues present such a thing as a unified, coherent and complete teaching. As Tigerstedt notes:

(T)he skeptical and ironical aspects of Plato's philosophy have never been popular with Platonists--ancient or modern. With the exception of the so-called New Academy in Hellenistic times, their followers in later times and a few modern scholars, the overwhelming majority of Plato's admirers and followers--past and present--have seen in him the great, inspired and inspiring, Master and Leader, quietly disregarding those passages in his works that do not tally with such a view of their author. On this point too, Plato's modern detractors have simply accepted the *opinio communis*, never questioning its validity, only replacing love and admiration for Plato the dogmatist with the hate and scorn for the same mythical being. (37)

Tigerstedt argues that what is needed is an attempt to account for all the aspects of Plato's thought as it is presented in the dialogues--to bridge the gap between Plato the sceptic and ironist on the one hand and Plato the dogmatist on the other. He recommends that one take seriously the dialectical nature of the dialogues--the give and take of question and answer--as an expression, not of a completely developed doctrine nor of an inherently sceptical mind. Rather, for Tigerstedt, the dialogues are to be understood as the expression of Plato's conception of philosophy as open, on-going inquiry which consists of attempts to formulate better and better approximations of an adequate account of reality (107).

The problem, as Tigerstedt understands it, is that scholars have tended to look to the dialogues for an internally consistent doctrine of all that Plato thought could be adequately said about the world.<sup>12</sup> To the extent that they have claimed to have found it (whether as a doctrine which develops or becomes better articulated through the course of the dialogues, or as a naive

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<sup>12</sup>I take it that this is what Tigerstedt means when he talks about the attempts of scholars to find a "unified, philosophical system" in the dialogues.

and unintentionally inconsistent doctrine), they have had to regard certain aspects of Plato's writings (e.g. the ironies and the many sceptical impasses) as unimportant or to ignore them altogether. To the extent that they have not found such a doctrine in the dialogues, they have either had to search for it elsewhere or conclude that Plato was not a philosopher. However, the assumption that philosophy is equivalent to the attempt to lay out a complete, internally consistent doctrine of all that a thinker thinks can be adequately said about the world is, of course, questionable. And, such an assumption is clearly responsible for the kind of impasse which has afflicted Platonic scholarship in the past two hundred years.

Tigerstedt's own recommendation, however, does not go far enough to remedy the situation. It too fails to answer the most important hermeneutical question, namely, how is one to read a Platonic dialogue? As Alan C. Bowen argues, even if we accept Tigerstedt's suggestion that it is questionable hermeneutical practice to assume that Plato understood philosophy to be the having of a complete, internally consistent doctrine of all that can be said to be true (or that, if he did not, he was no philosopher), assuming that the dialogues are evidence of Plato's on-going attempts to formulate such a doctrine (as Tigerstedt assumes) will not help us understand the dialogues either.

Bowen describes the problem as follows:

Tigerstedt insists that the dialogues are self-contained units and infers that the question of overall system is a secondary issue: for him, the first problem is to interpret each dialogue with its contradictions, ambiguities and gaps. But if so, how is the reader to view the relation between Plato's inquiry in a given dialogue and the text? Does Plato report or gradually disclose in the dialogue an inquiry that is already completed? Or does the dialogue reveal an inquiry that is in progress and evolving? Do the contradictions indicate blunders in Plato's study of an issue? Or do they really show that there is no sustained inquiry in the dialogue? (57)

The problem with Tigerstedt's recommendation, according to Bowen, is that it simply pushes the issue he wants to address to a higher level. While it allows one to avoid the problematic consequences of the assumption that Plato must have had a complete, systematic doctrine or he

was no philosopher, it will not help us resolve the problems attendant upon our search for evidence of Plato's systematic philosophic inquiry.

One might conclude from the above discussion that any attempt to make sense of a Platonic dialogue is doomed to fail. This must certainly be true if philosophic writing is either the expression of what a philosophical writer takes to be a complete, internally consistent doctrine of all that can be adequately said about reality or the expression of a philosopher's on-going attempt to approximate such a doctrine. There are, however, good reasons for rejecting these two assumptions.

Both assumptions are, as it were, two-sided. On the one hand, both embody a certain understanding of the nature of the philosophical enterprise. On the other hand, both embody a certain understanding of proper philosophic writing or of a philosophic writer's relation to his text. First, it is assumed that a philosopher must either be someone who "has a philosophy" (i.e. a complete, internally consistent doctrine of all that can be truly said about reality) or, at the very least, be trying to develop one. Second, it is assumed that the philosopher's intention in writing is to display this complete system or, at least, to display as much as he has worked out while raising questions that require further investigation. As to the first assumption, one need only raise the spectres of Nietzsche and Heidegger to call it into question. While neither professes a philosophic "doctrine" in the sense discussed above and, in fact, both question any attempt to "discover" one, not without sustained argument could one cast serious doubts on their claims to the mantle of philosophy. But even if many, if not most, philosophers have considered their goal to be the attainment of such a doctrine, it does not follow that their reason for writing is always to give a complete or partial expression of this doctrine (Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* 22-37). In particular, the intentions of any writer who never speaks in the first person (i.e. who makes no attempt to tell his reader unambiguously what his intentions are) are very difficult, if not



impossible, to discover. Even if one chooses to ignore the warning of the *Seventh Letter*, one should be wary of making assumptions as to Plato's intentions in writing his dialogues.

What I am suggesting is that the above assumptions about the nature of philosophy and philosophic writing are not only questionable as general assumptions about the nature of the philosophic enterprise. More important, they have a tendency to result in hermeneutical approaches which are inappropriate to the interpretation of the Platonic dialogues. In the first place, it is not clear that Plato shares the same conception of philosophy which has become dominant among his interpreters over the past two hundred years. As Charles Griswold puts it,

It seems fairly clear that whatever Plato means by "philosophy", it is not quite the same as what contemporary textbooks mean by the term. Both Plato and Socrates are unique in their radical dedication to dialogue as a medium for philosophizing (written dialogue in the one case, spoken dialogue in the other). Moreover, few philosophy professors would dare advocate Socrates' bizarre claims that the one thing he understands is erotic matters, that he possesses an "*erotike technē*" and that philosophy is divine erotic madness. ("Plato's Metaphilosophy" 1)

To Griswold's "philosophy professors", one might add the vast majority of Plato's admirers and detractors over the years. In the second place, as I noted above, it is not clear that Plato's intention as an author is to give full, written expression of his "philosophy"--whatever it may be. What is clear is that an attempt to read the dialogues as expressions of a complete or incomplete philosophic system rests upon hermeneutical assumptions which "work" only to the extent that they disregard the form and much of the content of a Platonic text.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>If I have appeared to be overly concerned with the problems surrounding the interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, I have had two reasons for doing so. First, it is clear that no responsible commentator can afford to be unconscious of the assumptions which he or she brings to the interpretation of any philosophical text. Further, if one's goal in interpreting such texts is, among other things, to hold open the possibility of learning something new, these assumptions must be as flexible as possible. One must be prepared to discover that the text in question embodies a different understanding of the philosophical enterprise from one's own and/or that it places certain hermeneutical constraints on an interpreter which are not found in other philosophical texts. It may appear from the above discussion that the hermeneutical difficulties surrounding the interpretation of a Platonic dialogue are such as to make any attempt a futile exercise. I intend to show, however, that this is not the case and that the dialogues themselves offer many indications as to how they are to be read.

Is there then a way to approach the interpretation of the Platonic dialogues which avoids employing these questionable assumptions and which, at the same time, holds out the promise of deciphering these ambiguous texts? I intend to show that this question can be answered in the affirmative. As with any text, one's hermeneutical approach must, to a great extent, proceed from the text itself. If a text includes explicit instructions as to how it should be read and/or an explicit discussion of the purpose of the text, these should be heeded.<sup>14</sup> In today's academic market, for instance, the introduction to a paper or a book usually indicates clearly and univocally the topic under consideration and its method of treatment. In interpreting such papers and books, we are

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My second reason for belabouring the issue of the difficulties facing Plato scholars is, for my purposes, the more important of the two. While one's responsibilities as a commentator dictate that one should attend to the question as to how to read a Platonic dialogue, attention to such an issue tends to lead one to wonder why Plato wrote as he did. What purpose is served by Plato's absence from his own works? Is there a reason why Plato did not seek to express himself clearly and univocally? Why would a philosopher devote his time and energy to crafting works that resemble dramatic set-pieces perhaps more than they resemble anything else? What is the role of the characters in the various dialogues? These considerations are, for my purposes, extremely important because they may well reveal the way in which Plato thinks important matters should be treated. That is, they may well reveal his understanding of philosophy. In particular, they may reveal the way in which his critique of the Sophists can be most fruitfully understood. Much more will be said below about the reasons why Plato might have preferred the dialogue form to all other forms of writing as well as the implications of these reasons for his treatment of the Sophists.

<sup>14</sup>This is not to say that there are never times when it is legitimate to use a text for purposes other than those it is intended to serve. At times, for instance, one may find it useful (perhaps for pedagogical reasons) to consider the speech of a character in a novel as an argument or statement which is interesting in itself independently of its dramatic context. For example, consider the argument offered by Mr. Abraham Adams (in Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, New York: New American Library, 1979, p. 265) to the effect that ". . . we must submit in all circumstances to the will of Providence, and set our affections so much on nothing here, that we cannot quit it without reluctance." One may certainly consider this argument independently of the fact that it is Adams who makes it and independently of the circumstances in which he is portrayed as doing so. The argument, after all, is interesting from a theological point of view. It may indeed be useful to consider Adams' words as constituting a serious theological argument in spite of the fact that Fielding lays out quite clearly in his Preface many of the reasons why the things his characters say should not be taken very seriously. (Indeed, Adams' own behaviour shortly after his speech on Providence makes it difficult to consider his speech as anything but ridiculous.) When one considers the words found in a text independently of the way in which its author would have one consider them, however, one should acknowledge that one is not embarked on a project of interpreting the text but on something quite different.

responsible readers when we read them as they are meant to be read. One would certainly be inclined to say to someone who judged Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* a poorly written poem or bad novel that he/she had missed the point. The fact of the matter is that the Platonic dialogues bear little resemblance to the academic books and papers of the past two hundred years. This in itself should be sufficient to give one pause in assuming that their purpose and manner of inquiry are the same as those we have come to expect from what generally passes as acceptable philosophic writing.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, as many have noted, the dialogues do in fact offer suggestions as to how they are most appropriately to be read.<sup>16</sup> The most important of these suggestions are to be found in Books III and X of the *Republic* and in the concluding discussions of the *Phaedrus*. To these should be added an important, albeit short, section of the *Laws* (718b-724a). In these passages, Plato depicts his characters as engaged in lengthy discussion of the characteristics of good and bad poetic imitation on the one hand and of the characteristics of good and bad writing on the other. These passages are extremely important for understanding the peculiar form of a Platonic dialogue. Any Platonic dialogue itself is, after all, a written work. And, in particular, it is a written

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<sup>15</sup>Even Aristotle is highly sensitive to the distinctive character of what he calls "the Socratic dialogues". In the *Poetics*, they are defined as a form of poetry, ". . . which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, either in some one or in a plurality of metres. This form of imitation is today without a name." (1447b11 ff., trans. Ingram Bywater in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. McKeon) This form of imitation (which according to Aristotle was also employed by Sophron and Xenarchus) comprises one of the three genres of poetry although it is not usually recognised as such. In his treatise on rhetoric, Aristotle notes that, ". . . mathematical discourses depict no character; they have nothing to do with moral purpose, for they represent nobody as pursuing any end. On the other hand, the Socratic discourses do depict character, being concerned with moral questions." (1417a19-21, trans. W. Rhys Roberts in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. McKeon) That is to say that, for Aristotle, "Socratic dialogues" are poetic imitations which, among other things, represent agents pursuing their own interests (which may or may not be philosophical) and the intention behind such imitation is the exploration of certain moral questions.

<sup>16</sup>In particular, I have found the following works immensely helpful: Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus*; Bloom, "Interpretive Essay"; Rosen, *Plato's Symposium*; Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*; Friedlander, *Plato*.

imitation of human beings engaged in various ways with each other.<sup>17</sup> What is remarkable about these passages is not only that they offer a description of "good" poetic imitation and writing but also that they accurately describe the Platonic dialogue itself. Furthermore, in so far as they offer reasons why such writing and imitation are to be considered as good writing and imitation, they reveal the intentions behind the form of the Platonic dialogue. These intentions, in turn, delimit the hermeneutical constraints placed upon a reader of the dialogues as well as suggest a certain conception of philosophy which dictates this kind of writing.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>See note 15 above.

<sup>18</sup>My discussion of Platonic writing will be drawn from pertinent passages in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*. What the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* suggest about writing has been discussed in many places. I am indebted to much of the work of those authors mentioned above (note 16 above) and, in particular, to the excellent analysis offered by Charles Griswold Jr. in his *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (202 - 229). For a discussion of the use of the dialogue form in philosophy and literature, see Levi, 1-20. Levi discusses many of the commitments underlying the use of the dialogue form as well as some of the reasons for its demise.

## Noble Discourse and the Problem of Writing

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents his character Socrates as offering a critique of the art of writing, in two parts (274c-279a). In the first, Socrates tells the story (which he claims to have heard from the ancients) of two Egyptian deities--Theuth (the inventor of numbers, calculation, geometry, draughts, dice and letters) and Thamus (king of Upper Egypt, also known as the god Ammon)--debating the merits and usefulness of Theuth's various inventions. In particular, Thamus is against the popularisation of the art of letters, despite Theuth's argument to the effect that it will make the Egyptians wise by improving their memories. This part of Socrates' critique is largely devoted to explaining Thamus' position. In the second part, however, Socrates not only takes over much of Thamus' position as his own, he offers his own argument as to why "serious" or "noble discourse" should be considered in every way superior to either the writing or reading of texts.<sup>19</sup>

The claim made on behalf of the art of writing is that it is an invaluable aid to memory (274e). The written word possesses a fixity and permanence which allow it to be referred to time and time again. When something gets written down, it is not liable to be forgotten--at least, not for very long. As long as it has been written down, it can be retrieved. It is significant that Theuth--the inventor of the art of letters--is also said by Socrates to be the inventor of numbers, calculation and astronomy. In these areas, it is extremely useful to be able to write down and so preserve highly complicated discoveries in as precise and clear a manner as possible. The capacity to preserve these complicated discoveries and to communicate them to others with precision is highly

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<sup>19</sup>Their positions are not completely identical. While both Socrates and Thamus agree that the art of writing presents dangers to memory (see below), Thamus does not appear to see any redeeming features in the power of writing "to remind" one of something one is in danger of forgetting. Socrates, on the other hand, considers this to be one of its few redeeming qualities (compare 275a with 276d).

useful for education or for what is now called "the advancement of learning". That Theuth identifies the improvement of memory (*mnemonikoterous parexei*) resulting from the art of letters with an improvement in wisdom should not, therefore, be surprising.

Socrates, however, is not convinced. The problem, as he and Thamus understand it, is that writing does not, in fact, tend to enhance one's memory. They contend that reading what others have written tends to lead people to the thoughtless appropriation of the words of others and this, in turn, leads to self-forgetfulness. While appropriating the words of others does allow one to seem to know many things, this appearance of knowledge is to be distinguished from genuine wisdom. People who delight in spouting the opinions of others in an effort to display their "wisdom" make irritating companions. At best, it seems that writing things down serves only to remind a writer of the things he himself knows in the event that he forgets them in old age or to remind others "who follow the same path".

The most obvious interpretation of Socrates' and Thamus' critique of writing is, ". . . that people who rely on books do not exercise their capacity to remember ideas and so lose this capacity. They thus become thoughtless." (Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 206) While such people may possess much information and various "informed" opinions about many things, they have lost the capacity to think things out on their own. Filled with "book-learning", they lack the perspicacity and introspection of the unlettered but reflective human being.

Socrates gives some indications as to how it is that the written word has a tendency to produce thoughtlessness in its readers:

Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect itself. (275d-276a, trans. Fowler)

The apparent liveliness of the written word--the sense one has when one reads a text that the text is "speaking" to one--is an illusion. A text cannot engage in conversation. It cannot ask questions of its readers and it cannot respond to its readers' questions. A text cannot, properly speaking, communicate or offer instruction. If one fails to understand what it says, it cannot explain itself. Because it does not ask questions of a reader, it cannot test whether a reader has adequately understood what it has to say. The very silence of texts in this regard renders it possible for a reader to think that he has an adequate grasp of their contents when, in fact, he may not. That is, the written word does not prevent someone from thinking he knows something when he does not. It cannot prevent someone from having a mistaken understanding of himself. A text by itself, therefore, cannot ensure that its reader will appropriate its words thoughtfully. Despite the fact that a text may appear to have "all the answers", because no text can ask questions or "speak" in the crucial sense, it has a tendency to engender self-forgetfulness. Finally, no text can prevent itself from "falling into the wrong hands". While a text may be written for a specific group of readers, it cannot guarantee that only members of that group will read it. It cannot, for instance, ensure that only people capable of understanding what it has to say will read it. The ultimate danger of the written word is not simply that it is liable to be unjustly censured if read by those who cannot understand it. It is also liable to be "bandied" about dogmatically as an authoritative source to the detriment of other people. As Griswold points out, "(h)istorical examples of this problem are not difficult to find . . . consider the misuses to which some of Nietzsche's writings were put not long ago. Perhaps the Good Book itself has on occasion served as an excuse for some cruel piety." (*Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 208) Only the writer himself, engaging in living conversation with his readers, could mitigate such abuse. Despite appearances, therefore, the written word expresses nothing clear (*saphes*) or permanent (*bebaios*) in and of itself (275c, 277d, 278a).

For these reasons Socrates concludes that, ". . . the living and breathing word (*logos*) of him who knows, of which the written word may justly be called an image (*eidolon*) . . ." is superior

to the written word in every way. It alone is capable of begetting ". . . the word which is written with intelligence in the mind (*psyche*) of the learner" and is more powerful in so far as it ". . . is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak and before whom to remain silent . . ."

The spoken word is superior to the written word. But not *all* forms of the spoken word are superior as Socrates shortly makes clear (276e-277a). He is, in effect, praising only that kind of speech which, because its effect is opposite to that of the written word, can function as an antidote to the illness brought about by the written word. Only speech by someone who knows what he is talking about, who knows the kind of person he is talking to, who is capable of adjusting his speech accordingly, and who is capable of bringing his interlocutor to an intelligent assessment of what he has learned, is the "nobler" speech which is praised by Socrates.<sup>20</sup> As he explains, the "nobler" speech is dialectic informed by an understanding of the human soul in general and by knowledge of the soul of one's interlocutor in particular (277b-d). It is superior to the written word in so far as it can explain itself by answering the questions of someone who does not understand, in so far as it can put questions to its listener and so gauge and challenge the depth of his understanding, in so far as thereby it can prevent its interlocutor from being persuaded that he knows more than he does know, and in so far as it can adjust itself in such a way as to militate against its being used for purposes for which it is not intended.

"Noble" or "serious" discourse, as Socrates terms it, must therefore always be rhetorical. It must say different things to different people both to bring about its intended effect and to prevent those for whom it is not intended from doing harm. What this means can again be illustrated by considering the limits of a written text. At best, perhaps, a text can be written in such a way as to

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<sup>20</sup>See 277e. There Socrates identifies a form of speech which is not noble, namely, the recitations of the rhapsodes. It is not noble precisely because it is delivered ". . . to sway people's minds without opportunity for questioning and teaching. . ." One can certainly think of many kinds of public discourse--campaign speeches, political oratory, courtroom rhetoric, modern advertising, lectures of almost any variety--that are akin to the recitations of the rhapsodes in this regard.



answer a limited number of possible questions. However, no text can anticipate all the questions which may be asked of it. This is connected to the fact that no writer can know in advance all the various kinds of people who are liable to read his text. A text cannot enter into conversation with a reader. It says what it has to say to *anyone* who happens to read it--regardless of whether a reader is or is not capable of understanding what it has to say. Noble discourse on the other hand, involves attending to the questions of an interlocutor and responding with answers which are of benefit to that particular interlocutor. Different interlocutors will have different questions to which different answers may be required. These answers, in turn, will not only be responses to given questions but will be crafted in such a way as to make sense to the interlocutor. A speaker who engages in noble discourse must learn from his interlocutor the kind of person his interlocutor is, have a fairly extensive understanding of human psychology and be able to craft his words in such a way as to appeal to the interests, commitments, experience, knowledge and virtues of his interlocutor.

A model for this kind of discourse is offered in the *Laws*. At one point, the Athenian Stranger distinguishes between two kinds of doctors on the basis of how they communicate with their patients.

Then you understand that sick people in the cities, slaves and free, are treated differently. The slaves are for the most part treated by slaves (apprentice doctors) who either go on rounds or remain at the dispensaries. None of these . . . doctors gives or receives any account of each malady afflicting each domestic slave. Instead, he gives him orders on the basis of opinions he has derived from experience. Claiming to know with precision, he gives his commands just like a head-strong tyrant and hurries off to some other sick domestic slave . . .

The free doctor mostly cares for and looks after the maladies of free men. He investigates these from the beginning and according to nature, communing with the patient himself and his friends, and he both learns something himself from the invalids and, as much as he can, teaches the one who is sick. He doesn't give orders until he has in some sense persuaded; when he has on each occasion

tamed the person with persuasion, he attempts to succeed in leading him back to health. (720b-720e, trans. Pangle)<sup>21</sup>

The "free doctor", in other words, considers it important not only to be able to diagnose his patient's physical malady and to know the correct medical treatment. He must also be able to "diagnose" his patient's character in order to know how to persuade him to receive the required treatment. The "free doctor" in other words, must be both a psychologist and a rhetorician. Whatever he says to his patient--whatever arguments he offers--will always be *ad hominem*.<sup>22</sup>

Just as the discourse of the "free doctor" is similar in these respects to "noble discourse", so the discourse of the "apprentice doctor" is similar in the same way to the written word. A text may indeed contain opinions drawn from the experience of its author which the author may believe he has expressed with great precision. In this, however, the writer like the apprentice doctor, resembles "the headstrong tyrant". Such a tyrant believes he has no need to converse with and to understand his subjects; he feels that his subjects can teach him nothing of importance and, for these reasons, he believes that his will is best realised through precisely worded edicts rather than attempts at *ad hominem* persuasion. In the same way, most written texts resemble the edicts of tyrants. They are monological expressions of the opinions of an author which may be thoughtlessly appropriated by a reader in such a way as to seem to the reader to be his own opinions. And, because no writer is capable of meeting and conversing with all of his readers face to face (indeed,

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<sup>21</sup>The context in which this discussion of "doctoring" occurs is very important. At this point in the *Laws*, the question under discussion is quite similar to the question of writing as it is discussed in the *Phaedrus*. The discussion in the *Laws* concerns the question of the appropriate way in which a law-giver is to write his laws (which explains the reference to the "headstrong tyrant" in this passage). I will have more to say about this passage later.

<sup>22</sup>Socrates makes this point quite clearly a little later at *Phaedrus* 271a-b where he offers advice to Thrasyarchus. See also *Gorgias* 456b-c where Gorgias talks of the role of rhetoric in medicine; *Gorgias* 464b-466a for Socrates' elaborate account of the relationship of rhetoric to medicine; *Protagoras* 313c-314c for Socrates' discussion of the "medicinal" practices of the Sophists. While the term "*ad hominem*" is usually used perjoratively to describe certain kinds of invalid arguments, Henry Johnstone has done much to demonstrate why many, if not most, of these kinds of arguments are rhetorically valid in his book *Philosophy, Rhetoric and Argumentation*.

many writers feel there is no need to do so) he cannot accommodate his speech in such a way as to ensure that it will be rhetorically persuasive to all readers. His expressed opinions, therefore, while they may be appropriated thoughtlessly by others, may equally be unpersuasive or misunderstood.<sup>23</sup>

To return to the discussion of "noble discourse" in the *Phaedrus*, it should be emphasised that while "noble discourse" may stand a better chance of being more rhetorically persuasive than the written word, this is not the most important reason why Socrates prefers it. Written words, like the edicts of tyrants can be thoughtlessly mistaken for true and worthy opinions. In so far as neither edicts nor texts tend to encourage subjects and readers to question both themselves and the edicts and texts they encounter, both edicts and texts are problematic. The goal of "noble discourse", therefore, is not simply rhetorical. Someone who engages in "noble discourse" is not simply interested in persuading other people that whatever he has to say is true and that he is an authority to be followed and admired. Rather, the ultimate aim of "noble discourse" is to induce self-examination on the part of both speaker and listener through the process of question and answer.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, Plato's Socrates is praising a form of discourse which he himself made famous.<sup>25</sup>

However, Socrates does not say that there are no good reasons for writing. In fact he offers two reasons why a sensible man might write: to store up reminders for himself against the onset of old age and/or reminders for those who "follow the same path" (276d). Even for Socrates,

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<sup>23</sup>I use the term "most writers" and "most texts" rather than "all writers" and "all texts" because it is my contention that a Platonic dialogue is immune to these Socratic criticisms (see below). The political and legal implications of the limitations of the written word are further explored in *Laws* 718b-724a, 890e ff. and *Statesman* 295c ff.

<sup>24</sup>See Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 214. This point is also made by Rosen who distinguishes between Sophistic and philosophical/Platonic rhetoric (*Plato's Sophist* 1-4, 20).

<sup>25</sup>See *Apology* 21b ff.; *Theaetetus* 149a ff.; *Gorgias* 458a-b.

it seems that the written word can function as an aid against forgetfulness. Its weakness remains for it cannot, by itself promote self-knowledge. It cannot by itself bring a reader to question what he reads and to question whether or not he understands what he reads. At best, the written word can serve to remind those who are already on the road to self-knowledge (i.e. people who are already engaged in self-examination and in examining the truth of the words of others) of those things which they may have forgotten or of those things which they already know but which they may not have fully examined.

According to Socrates, therefore, while there may be good reasons to write, a sensible man will write mostly for amusement and play. No sensible man, according to Socrates can take his own writings or the writings of others "seriously" (276d, 277e-278a).<sup>26</sup> Serious speech, according to Socrates, is always spoken. It is the speech of a man who has discovered within himself as far as is possible what is just, beautiful and good and who offers his speech for the sake of instructing others. For the sensible man, however, "instruction" does not mean the transmission of important facts and information to anonymous readers. It means bringing another person to examine himself and the things he thinks he knows through the give and take of question and answer. For this reason both the sensible writer and the sensible reader (one who is already on the path of self-examination) realise that writing is not, properly speaking, an appropriate vehicle for instruction. For a sensible man, only spoken discourse will do.

Socrates adds that if anyone can be found whose writings are in accord with the truth, in as much as he has it, and who is both capable of defending his writings and demonstrating that the written word is of little worth, he merits the title *philosophos* or "lover of wisdom". The title of

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<sup>26</sup>The words "serious" (*spoudaios*), and "amusement" or "play" (*paidia*) are Socrates'.

"wise" (*sophos*) is, according to Socrates, too great and befits God alone (278b-d).<sup>27</sup> Such an individual is to be distinguished from other mortals who do not love wisdom. He is also to be distinguished from the gods who have it. It is not possible, according to Socrates, for any human being to be wise. Even the give and take of living discourse cannot bring a human being to wisdom itself. Although the "noble" discourse lauded by Socrates may be informed by knowledge of what is just, beautiful and good, although it is such as to prevent self-forgetfulness on the part of one who engages in it and, although it can bring its interlocutor to a kind of self-knowledge, it cannot make him wise. The success of such discourse, therefore, is not to be measured by whether or not those who engage in it become wise. Rather it is to be gauged by the extent to which such discourse engenders in the minds of its participants other discourses (*logoi*) which are sufficient for continuing the process interminably and for making whomever shares them as happy as is possible for any human being (277a). What Socrates seems to be saying is that "noble", philosophical discourse is endless; it never terminates in some account after which there is no question left to be asked. Philosophical discourse can never arrive at all the answers; the philosopher can never attain that which he ultimately seeks. Socrates maintains that the endless quest itself--the constant engagement in "noble" discourse --brings a human being to the pinnacle of human happiness.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>The saying that "No man is wise, but God alone" is attributed to Pythagoras by Diogenes Laertius who contends that this is why Pythagoras referred to himself as *philosophos* and not *sophos* (Diogenes Laertius I: 13).

<sup>28</sup>See also *Apology* 23a-b where Socrates maintains that his own "wisdom" is nothing compared to the "wisdom" of the God. See also *Apology* 21b-22e where Socrates describes his own wisdom as a recognition of his ignorance and where he also outlines the importance of self-examination and the examination of others for the acquisition of human wisdom. In the *Symposium*, a philosopher is described as one who knows his own ignorance and who seeks the wisdom of the gods (202a, 202e). Socrates is, of course, well known for denying that he is wise. Another famous disclaimer can be found at *Theaetetus* 149b-e where Socrates says that he has no wisdom at all and that no "child of wisdom" has ever been "born" in him.

Whatever the Platonic Socrates' understanding of his own wisdom and ignorance, one thing seems clear. His admission that he is not wise is not an admission that he knows nothing. Indeed,

This discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus* raises a number of questions a few of which I will mention shortly. For now, I will only focus on what is perhaps the most intriguing issue raised by this discussion and that is that this discussion of writing is itself incorporated in a *written* text. The irony of this is, of course, lost on the character Socrates who has not been depicted by Plato as knowing that he is a character in a written text. However, such irony should not escape a reader and what a reader decides to make of it will, no doubt, be of great consequence for her own approach to reading the Platonic dialogues in general. If the character Socrates is to be taken as Plato's spokesman on the question of writing, then Plato, in so far as he is a "serious" writer, is manifestly inconsistent. If Plato, through his character Socrates, is in all seriousness instructing us to understand that writing cannot offer instruction, his act of writing is inconsistent with what he has written. The other possibility of course, is that Plato is not a "serious" writer but that his dialogues are written for amusement and as reminders for those who already know the things of which they speak. If this were the case, however, then the dialogues and the speeches they contain could not be expected to "defend themselves". If we assume that Plato the writer is in full accord with his own character Socrates or that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece, we are forced to conclude that either the Platonic dialogues offer a manifestly inconsistent teaching or that they offer none at all.

But what is Plato's relationship to his characters? In particular, what is his relationship to his philosophic characters of whom Socrates is the most famous? Must we assume that Plato so

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as the passage in the *Phaedrus* suggests the Platonic philosopher has a fairly extensive grasp of human psychology (see p. 62, above). Even in the *Apology* and the *Theaetetus*, Socrates makes claims to know certain things.

These passages, of course, raise serious questions regarding the Socratic/Platonic understanding of philosophy. Perhaps the one question from which all others arise is this: if one cannot know everything, then how can one know that the knowledge one has of something, really is knowledge? There is another way of putting this question. What the Platonic Socrates seems to be suggesting in the *Phaedrus*, is that progress towards wisdom is possible for human beings but wisdom is not. Yet, without wisdom itself, how is one to know when one is making progress towards wisdom? These questions will receive attention later in this thesis.

closely identified himself with his main character that he was unaware of the consequences that might be drawn from this identification? Or was Plato completely aware of such consequences but unconcerned in so far as he intended his writing only as a form of personal amusement? The conclusion that Plato contradicts himself in his discussion of writing or that the dialogues are not intended to offer instruction must follow if it is assumed that Plato intends to express his own opinions unambiguously through the words of his character Socrates. Indeed, if after making this assumption, we try to avoid the conclusion that Plato manifestly contradicts himself by concluding instead that the dialogues are not meant to offer instruction, we will find ourselves in a rather awkward predicament. We will have taken the character Socrates as offering, on the one hand, a serious teaching about the nature of Platonic writing while, on the other hand, denying--on the basis of this teaching--that the dialogue can offer any serious instruction. The assumption that Socrates is Plato's mouthpiece leads to the conclusion that Plato's act of writing is simply at odds with what he writes.

Although many scholars have a tendency to identify the character Socrates with his creator, there is no compelling reason for doing so. Indeed, as Plato's own discussion of poetry in the *Republic* and the *Laws* suggests, there are important reasons for rejecting the notion that Plato is to be identified with any of his characters. When this discussion is understood and put together with what is suggested in the discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus*, much light can be shed on the question of how to read a Platonic dialogue.

### Platonic Writing: Simple Imitation

The discussion of poetry in Book III of the *Republic* falls into roughly two parts. The underlying issue is the question of the appropriate poetic education of the warrior class whose function is to protect the city which Socrates and his companions are building in speech. The first part of the discussion concerns the content of this poetic education while the second part concerns its form. It is the latter which is of particular interest here. It sheds light on the peculiar form of Platonic writing in general.

Before addressing the specific form of poetry which is appropriate for the education of warriors *per se*, Socrates engages the young Adeimantus in a discussion of the poetic forms in general (392c-397d).<sup>29</sup> While one would expect this discussion to focus upon the conventionally recognised forms of poetry in Greece--comedy, tragedy and epic verse--curiously enough, it does not do so. Rather, Socrates divides poetry into three genres, the result of which is to suggest, among other things, that there is no formal or stylistic difference between performed tragedies and comedies.

The three genres identified by Socrates are simple narration (*diegesis*), simple imitation (*mimesis*) and that genre which employs both. Using the example of the opening of Homer's *Iliad*, Socrates explains what he means:

Tell me, do you know the first things in the *Iliad* where the poet tells of Chryses' begging Agamemnon to ransom his daughter, and Agamemnon's harshness, and Chryses' calling down curses from the god on the Achaeans when he failed?

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<sup>29</sup>The word I am translating as "form" is *lexis* or "style". The focus in this part of the discussion is, according to Socrates, a consideration of *how* things are said in poetry as opposed to merely *what* is said (392c). Today, this distinction tends to be expressed as a difference between the form and content of what is written.



I do.

Then you know that up to these lines,

And he entreated all the Achaeans,  
But especially Atreus' two sons, the marshallers of the  
host,

the poet himself speaks and doesn't attempt to turn our thought elsewhere, as though someone other than he were speaking. But, in what follows, he speaks as though he himself were Chryses and tries as hard as he can to make it seem to us that it's not Homer speaking, but the priest, an old man. (392d-393b, trans. Bloom)

According to Socrates, these two different ways of telling a story correspond to the distinction he wants to draw between narration and imitation. A narrative is a story wherein it is clear that the only voice in the narrative is the story-teller's own. An imitation, on the other hand, is a way of telling a story wherein the only voices presented are those of the characters in the story. In a simple poetic imitation, the poet's own voice is absent.

The distinction between these two ways of telling stories is not a distinction between direct and indirect discourse. As the example makes clear, indirect discourse makes up a large part of narrative.<sup>30</sup> Telling a story in indirect discourse, where one reports that "He said . . .", and "He did . . .", even if one never adds "I think . . .", or makes direct observations about one's characters is, according to Socrates, a story in which the storyteller speaks in his own voice (Zaslavsky, 22). He is not hidden but reveals himself as the one who is telling and hence is responsible for the story. It is only when a story-teller leaves out such "connections" between the speeches of his characters and leaves only the exchanges themselves that he has produced an imitation (394b). The most obvious example of simple imitation is a drama or play. A play is a genre of story-telling

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<sup>30</sup>Clearly both indirect and direct discourse can be used in both imitative and narrative story telling. A character in a play may address other characters in a play directly or tell stories about other people using indirect discourse. The same is true of a narrator who may choose to address his audience in the first person or, as in the example, using indirect discourse. See Socrates' account of what it would take to turn Homer's imitative presentation of Chryses and Agamemnon into a narrative, 393d-394b.

in which the characters alone speak and the voice of the poet himself (unless, perhaps, he writes himself in as a character) is absent.

Socrates makes it clear that the distinction between the two kinds of story-telling has to do with the story-teller's relationship to his characters.

But whenever (the poet) gives a speech as though he were someone else, won't we say that he likens his own style as much as possible to that of the man he has announced as the speaker? (393c, trans. Bloom)

In poetic imitation, a poet attempts as much as possible to efface his presence from his story. He does so by depicting characters who are *other* than himself. When crafting his story he pretends now to be one character and then another, drafting *their* words and deeds and not his own. In poetic narration, even when such narration is characterised by the indirect reporting of the words and deeds of others, the poet is always clearly present *in* the narration as someone other than his characters. As Robert Zaslavsky puts it, ". . . he is peripherally visible as the one determining what is spoken and done for us, the one selecting and ordering." (23)

What Socrates has described here is not particularly odd. Surely anyone who has tried to figure out what Shakespeare is trying to say in any of his plays has faced the difficulty of finding the poet's own "voice". It seems obvious that none of Shakespeare's characters in particular speak for Shakespeare but rather that he has crafted them in order that they appear to tell their own story. One does, at times, wonder whether his voice is to be found at all. By contrast, while it may be difficult to discover what a novelist who writes in the third person has to say, when that novelist provides an observation upon a character or event it is at least clear, at that moment, that *the novelist* is responsible for the story and the observation he has made.

This does not mean, according to Socrates, that one cannot find the imitative poet's own voice. It is quite possible to turn any imitation into a narrative.<sup>31</sup> What is required is that one

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<sup>31</sup>Socrates gives an example of how this is to be done at *Republic* 393c-394b.

bring to light the "connections" between the speeches and deeds which, as it were, have been "rendered invisible" by the imitative poet (Zaslavsky, 23). To find the voice of the imitative poet, one must understand that he too, is responsible for the way his story is told (the order of events, the choice of characters, the features of his characters which come to the fore, etc.). One then must supply, as it were, the poetic voice which has connected the various elements of the story in such a way that it is the story it is. One does this by spelling out those connections for which the poet is responsible and, in such a way, one renders the poet himself visible.

More could be said about this account of poetic narration and imitation. Certainly, the consequences Socrates draws from it for the education of warriors merits attention. At this point, however, I am simply interested in pointing out what might appear to be obvious. Plato's dialogues, according to this discussion in the *Republic*, are themselves, without exception, poetic imitations. Every dialogue tells a story but none of these stories is narrated by Plato himself.<sup>32</sup> Plato has erased his own presence from every dialogue and cannot be identified with *any* of his characters. Only by reconstructing the dialogues as Platonic narratives, that is, by supplying the "connections" between the exchanges and deeds of the characters can the Platonic voice--or Plato's own opinions--be made audible. One must bring to light the ways in which it is Plato who is responsible for his stories proceeding the way they do--for their outcomes and the way they arrive at their ends. As Leo Strauss explains:

(T)he Platonic dialogues are dramas, if dramas in prose. They must then be read like dramas. We cannot ascribe to Plato any utterance of his characters without having taken great precautions. To illustrate this . . . in order to know what Shakespeare, in contradistinction to his Macbeth, thinks about life, one must consider Macbeth's utterance(s) in the light of the play as a whole . . . (*The City and Man* 58)

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<sup>32</sup>Leo Strauss offers the following division of the dialogues: of "performed" dialogues (in which there is no narrator), there are 26; of narrated dialogues, there are 9; of these, 6 are narrated by Socrates and 3 by someone else mentioned by name (*The City and Man* 58). Even the "narrated" dialogues, in other words, must be considered imitative in so far as Plato himself makes it quite clear that he is never himself a narrator.

This requires that not only speeches in the dialogues, but also deeds be given full attention. Plato's characters do not only speak but they act and, when they speak, they do so in specified contexts with others. Not only by *what* they say but by *how* they say it and *what they do* is the action of a Platonic drama is defined. To find Plato's own voice, one must attend not only to what every character in a dialogue says but how and to whom Plato has him say it, what he has him do and the indications he has given as to why his characters speak and act as they do.

Of course, at this point, it could be objected that discussion of poetry in the *Republic* concludes with a rejection of poetry and, in particular, with a rejection of imitative poetry. Indeed, Book III is highly censorial of all conventional Greek poetry and not only of its content but of its form. In fact, when the discussion of poetry is resumed at the beginning of Book X, Socrates boldly states that he has utter confidence in his decision to banish imitative poetry in particular from the city they are founding in speech (595a-b). This may appear to be more than a claim that imitative poetry is an inappropriate vehicle for the education of warriors--the apparent conclusion of Book III. It may also appear to be more than a claim that imitative poetry of any form has no place in the education of philosophers who have been introduced by the end of Book V. While Socrates' own discussion of imitative poetry indicates that one should not assume that his opinions as a character in an imitative poetic story are those of his creator's, nonetheless, one is entitled to wonder why it appears that Plato would have his character banish his own form of writing from the best political order.

It is not clear, however, that Socrates does so. Contrary to his claim at the outset of Book X, he and Adeimantus had indeed allowed a form of imitative poetry into the city. According to Socrates, a sensible writer is pleased to imitate the speeches and deeds of a decent man. While he is loathe to imitate in his writing those who are worse than himself, he will nonetheless do so at times, in play (396c-e). While Socrates notes that the mixed writer (he who employs both

narration and imitation) is pleasing to most people, and that the writer who is able to imitate everyone and all things is wonderful and pleasing, he and Adeimantus resolve to allow into the city:

. . . a more austere and less pleasing poet and teller of tales for the sake of our benefit, one who would imitate (*mimoito*) the style of the decent man and would say what he says . . . . (398a-b)

Why then does Socrates assert at the outset of Book X that they have banished all imitative poetry from the city?<sup>33</sup>

I would suggest that the reason for this, as Book X itself makes clear, is that the form of imitative poetry contemplated by Socrates and Adeimantus--the imitation of the style and words of the decent man--does not, as far as *they* know, exist. While all *known* forms of imitative poetry have been banished from the city, in Book X Socrates holds out the possibility that imitative poetry can be reformed and then be admitted (607a).<sup>34</sup> It is through the exploration of the deficiencies of existing imitative poetry that the way is indicated for its reformation.

While the discussion in Book X merits a great deal of attention, it is not necessary for my purposes at this point to offer a detailed interpretation of the arguments found there. I will only point out that, according to these arguments, the essential problem with all known poetry is its relationship with its audience. It is because of this relationship that poetry--at least poetry by

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<sup>33</sup>For another approach to the arguments in Book X, see Gadamer, 39-72. This approach is highly illuminating and his account of the self-forgetfulness brought about by poetic imitation (63-64) and the way in which the Platonic dialogue functions as an antidote (65 ff.) is, in particular, extremely important. Gadamer, however, does not seem to consider seriously enough the possibility entertained by Socrates that imitative poetry could be admitted into the city.

<sup>34</sup>Socrates also says that if imitative poetry, as it now stands, can make an argument on its own behalf or if someone can be found to provide one, they will cease to censure it. As Allan Bloom points out, Socrates thus indicates the way for Aristotle's understanding and defence of tragedy ("Interpretive Essay" 434).

conventional Greek standards--is, according to Socrates, incapable of depicting the best kind of human being (604e ff.).<sup>35</sup>

Socrates' complaint against imitative poetry is not unfamiliar to modern ears.<sup>36</sup> He blames the poets for crafting their works in such a way as to appeal to the lowest common denominator of humanity (605b). The imitative poets depict publicly, for all to see, those things which a prudent and decent man keeps to himself--private griefs, fears concerning death, sexual desires and lust for power. While the tragic poets indulge our fears and elicit our pity for pitiful human beings, the comic poets relax our sense of shame and cause us to laugh at and enjoy what we might otherwise censure. Imitative poetry, in other words, leads us to indulge our passions at the expense of careful and prudent consideration not only of these passions but of the poetic spectacles which elicit them.

The reason for this, according to Socrates, is twofold. On the one hand, a poet must appeal to such private passions if he is to secure for himself a good reputation. People enjoy the spectacles of tragic and comic poetry and the passions they allow one to indulge. In pleasing the majority of human beings, a poet cannot help but expect their gratitude and adulation (605a). On the other hand, as Socrates explains:

. . . the prudent and quiet character, which is always nearly equal to itself, is neither easily imitated nor, when imitated, easily understood, especially by a festive

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<sup>35</sup>The argument for this begins at 603c and, at this point, the analogy between imitative painting and poetic imitation is dropped completely. This analogy had been introduced at the beginning in order to suggest that the distance between an imitator and that which he imitates (the thing itself) entails distortion of the thing imitated. At 603c, when the analogy between painting and poetry is dropped, what results is an exploration of that which poetry *per se* imitates. This indicates that whatever conclusions were arrived at on the basis of the analogy between painting and poetry are provisional and should not be taken as part of Socrates' "final word" on the subject of imitative poetry.

<sup>36</sup>One has only to consider the vast array of literature on the connection between television violence and its effects on children or the connection between pornography and its effects on societal perceptions of women to have an idea of what Socrates is talking about.

assembly where all sorts of human beings are gathered in a theatre. For the imitation is of a condition that is surely alien to them. (604e)

Not only do imitative poets tend to craft their stories and their characters in such a way as to appeal to the dominant passions of their audiences in order to win their applause, it is extremely difficult for them to do otherwise according to Socrates. The fact is that decent individuals--who are prudent, not overcome by passion, and who deliberate carefully over their actions--make boring protagonists.<sup>37</sup> Socrates' argument is that the majority of people--who find it difficult to be prudent and calm in the face of disasters or overwhelming desires--identify with and hence much prefer watching people like themselves. Certainly if one considers the fact that the dominant theme of the *Republic* is the superiority of the philosophic way of life, Socrates' assessment of imitative poetry seems justified. It is indeed very difficult to imagine a philosopher such as the *Republic* describes finding favourable portrayal on the stage.

Such a person, however, is favourably portrayed in the Platonic dialogues which, as I have noted above, are poetic imitations according to the Socratic definition of the term. Socrates does not censure all forms of poetic imitation but rather suggests that if a form of poetic imitation can be found which adequately portrays the best way of life--the life of the philosopher--that form of poetic imitation would be acceptable and instructive.<sup>38</sup> Socrates, the philosophic founder of the

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<sup>37</sup>I had an interesting experience when teaching the Greek tragedies at a liberal arts college in the United States. One day, during a discussion of *Oedipus Rex*, the students began to complain that Oedipus was really rather rash in his actions and should have given more careful consideration to the consequences before speaking and acting as he did. I enquired whether or not they would have found the play as interesting if its hero had been presented as doing everything a prudent and considerate man should do or indeed whether they would still be interested in the whole series of stories comprising Western literature if all the characters in this series always did "the right thing" and reacted in "the right way" to what ever confronted them. They indicated that such literature would be uninteresting in the extreme.

<sup>38</sup>He also allows for the possibility that an argument could be made in support of conventional imitative poetry (see note 34 above).

city of the *Republic*, has therefore no reason to banish but has, on the contrary, every reason to welcome the writer of the *Republic* and his form of poetic imitation into his city.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>In this vein, it is interesting to consider *Laws* 811c ff.



## Reading the Dialogues

I now return to the question I raised at the end of the discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus*. How is one to read a Platonic dialogue? It should be clear that Socrates' denunciation of writing in the *Phaedrus* should no more be taken as Plato's final word on the matter than should the denunciation of imitative poetry found in the *Republic*. No character in a Platonic dialogue, including Socrates, should be taken as representing the opinions of Plato--his creator--in any straightforward way. While this presents difficulties for anyone interested in offering an interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, it is still possible to discern the extent to which Plato agrees or disagrees with his various characters. In the case of Socrates' denunciation of imitative poetry, for example, it is reasonable to conclude that while Plato agrees with his character regarding the dangers posed by conventional poetry, he must have considered himself to have discovered a form of dramatic imitation that is immune to Socrates' criticisms. While Socrates does not consider the possibility that writing too could be reformed, his very critique of the written word suggests how this might be done.

I noted above that, according to Socrates, if anyone can be found whose writings are in accord with the truth, as far as he has it, and who is capable of defending his writings in speech while demonstrating that the written word is of little worth, he merits the title *philosophos* or "lover of wisdom".<sup>40</sup> Socrates, in other words, is willing to grant that there could be a kind of writing which he considers to be appropriate for a philosopher, so long as it meets certain conditions. Such writing, however, could never be as worthy as the noble discourse Socrates described earlier.

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<sup>40</sup>Above, p. 65.

What then are the conditions which the written word would have to meet for Socrates to consider it to be "noble" or "serious"?

According to Socrates, the written word is an image (*eidolon*) of living (spoken) discourse. Although like living discourse in that it communicates, the written word is deficient in that it cannot instruct. It is to living discourse in the way that a mirror image is to that of which it is an image. Each shares all the features of the other save one. But the lack of this feature (depth, in the case of a mirror image and the ability to instruct in the case of the written word) renders the image deficient when compared to the original. They are not the same and hence cannot be used for the same purposes.

Indeed, it would appear that according to Socrates, the written word as a medium for representation is even more deficient than a mirror. While a mirror produces an equally adequate or deficient image of whatever is brought before it, the written word cannot. While the written word can imitate the spoken word, it cannot perform the highest function of the spoken word--the give and take of question and answer the content of which is determined by knowledge of the characters who engage in it and which is capable of bringing its interlocutors to self-knowledge. It would appear that, according to Socrates, the written word can only imitate the kind of speech which he attributes to the rhapsodes--a monological kind of public speech designed "to sway men's minds without the opportunity for questioning and teaching".<sup>41</sup> As I have noted above, this kind of discourse is a far cry from the noble discourse praised by Socrates.

While the majority of written texts which attempt to be "serious" or instructive may indeed mirror the speech of the rhapsodes, it should be obvious that a Platonic dialogue does not. One has only to imagine someone memorising a Platonic dialogue and delivering it orally to an audience. Its effect would be quite different from that of rhapsodic speech. It is not at all clear that

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<sup>41</sup>See p. 62 ff. and note 20 above.

such a presentation would persuade even the majority of an audience of anything. Indeed, one would expect it to generate more questions than answers. Whatever it is that the written word of the Platonic dialogue imitates, it is not rhapsodic speech.

The Platonic dialogues are poetic imitations or dramas. In particular, they are imitations of conversations. More precisely, they are poetic imitations of conversations between mature philosophers and others who are not mature philosophers.<sup>42</sup> These conversations are the kind of discourse made famous and praised by Socrates. That is, the "original" of which the written Platonic dialogue is an "image" is the very same "noble" discourse praised in the *Phaedrus*. It can be argued, therefore, that Plato both agrees and disagrees with the Socratic condemnation of writing. In so far as he is a writer, he disagrees with his character Socrates that the written word must necessarily imitate rhapsodic speech. In so far as he is a writer of dialogues, however, he agrees with Socrates that "noble" discourse is the highest form of living speech (Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 220). His solution is to create a written text which is an image of this kind of speech.

This image, however, is one which is laden with reminders of its original. The Platonic dialogue itself cannot be taken as a substitute for "noble", living discourse. The aim of a Platonic dialogue is not to induce its reader to memorise it in the belief that thereby he will implant in himself all that is worth knowing. Not only does the form of the dialogue prevent such a mistaken evaluation of its worth but the dialogues themselves are fraught with both serious and playful warnings against such pretensions (see below).

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<sup>42</sup>It might be objected that the *Parmenides* is an exception to this rule. However, in this discussion Socrates is very young. The dialogue begins with the aged Parmenides trying to show Socrates the need to overcome a certain non-philosophical reluctance to consider the possibility that there might be forms of "hair, mud, dirt or any other trivial and undignified objects". In effect, he tries to show Socrates that even "noble discourse" can concern such lowly matters (*Parmenides* 130c-131a). In the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, Socrates drops out of the conversation while the Eleatic Stranger takes over.

The discussion of writing in the *Phaedrus* and the discussion of imitation in the *Republic* are themselves examples of these kinds of warnings against taking the written word and dramatic story-telling too seriously. Indeed, the motivations behind taking the words of others (whether written or spoken) too seriously are often the subject of examination and criticism in many of the dialogues.<sup>43</sup> One has only to consider the comic portrayal of Apollodorus (the fanatical disciple and imitator of Socrates) in the opening scene of the *Symposium* to see that the Platonic drama does not even direct one to imitate its hero in any usual sense of the word (172c-173e). Later in the *Symposium*, the puzzlement of Alcibiades at the peculiar nature of Socrates, and his inability to adequately describe what he has found in the ugly philosopher are presented as betokening a far more serious approach to Plato's favourite than that of Apollodorus (216b-217b, 221d-222a). The dialogues, in other words, contain many warnings against considering the opinions of others as more important than the ones one has arrived at oneself through reflection, against becoming the disciple of anyone--including a philosopher, and against taking any written text or dramatic portrayal too seriously.

The Platonic dialogue is therefore an image of serious or noble discourse which warns against mistaking the dialogue itself for noble or serious discourse.<sup>44</sup> It is an image which constantly points to its original. Platonic writing is therefore neither completely "serious" nor frivolously "playful". It "seriously" points to its original while at the same time, "playfully" exposes its

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<sup>43</sup>See *Republic* 480a ff. where a distinction is drawn between "lovers of wisdom" (*philosophoi*) and "lovers of opinion" (*philodoxoi*). Disciples are, quite often, "philodoxers" in the Platonic sense. Eric Voegelin offers the following observation about this distinction:

We have philosophers in English, but no philodoxers. The loss in this instance is particularly embarrassing, because we have an abundance of philodoxers in reality; and since the Platonic term for their designation is lost, we refer to them as philosophers. In modern usage, thus, we call philosophers precisely those to whom Plato as a philosopher was in opposition. (*Plato* 63)

<sup>44</sup>Serious or noble discourse here means discourse which is instructive in the Socratic sense. See above, p. 65 ff., where playfulness in writing is also discussed.

own inadequacies as "serious" speech.<sup>45</sup> Even if Plato could not meet the other conditions set down by Socrates, he certainly meets one of the important conditions under which one is entitled to be called a philosopher.<sup>46</sup>

Plato, however, does more than simply portray through poetic imitation the noble speech praised by Socrates. The Platonic dialogue is not only a poetic imitation whose content or story is the depiction of a philosopher engaged in noble discourse. It is itself a written image of this form of discourse whose interlocutor is the reader himself. That is to say, the Platonic dialogue is not only concerned to depict a philosopher questioning and answering his interlocutors, gearing his arguments to the state of their souls, bringing some of these interlocutors to self-knowledge and defending his words to others. It is primarily concerned to engage its reader in the same kind of undertaking in the course of his reading. The Platonic dialogue, if it is to be a genuine image of noble discourse cannot simply portray noble discourse. It must be capable of engendering in its reader the desire for such discourse, of asking him questions and supplying answers (without thereby becoming an "authoritative text"), and of saying different things to different readers.<sup>47</sup> For Platonic writing to be of the kind that Socrates would consider "serious" or instructive, it must point the way to "noble speech" in a way which accords with "noble speech".

For this reason, it is extremely important to note the ways in which Plato's decision to efface himself from his texts is in keeping with an attempt to produce a kind of writing which imitates serious discourse. I noted above that the form of the dialogue itself militates against its being used as an authoritative text. The primary reason for this is that Plato himself never says anything in his dialogues. His *characters* speak; Plato himself does not. Plato himself, therefore, is not an

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<sup>45</sup>For a more extended discussion of the interplay of seriousness and playfulness in the Platonic dialogue, see Friedlander, 124.

<sup>46</sup>See above p. 65 and note 40.

<sup>47</sup>See p. 61 ff. for the way in which noble discourse must be rhetorical according to Socrates.

authority to whom one can appeal and in the face of whom one can neglect one's own powers of questioning and reflection. Plato has, of course, been referred to as such an authority but he never presents himself as one (Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 221). Indeed, the extent of the disagreements among those who have claimed to have discovered the authoritative voice of Plato demonstrates the difficulty of finding this "authoritative" voice.

By effacing himself from his writings and adopting the style of imitative poetry, Plato has discovered not only a form of writing which is resistant to the kind of authorial canonization feared by Socrates, but a kind of writing that is capable of saying different things to different readers. The way in which a kind of imitative poetry serves this latter purpose is, in fact, discussed in the passage of the *Laws* to which I referred earlier.<sup>48</sup> Earlier, you will recall, I was interested in showing the connection between the Athenian Stranger's description of the speech of "the free doctor" with the noble discourse praised by Socrates. But what is perhaps more interesting about this passage is that it occurs within a larger discussion about writing. The discussion concerns the question as to how laws can be written in such a way as both to persuade citizens to be law-abiding and to make citizens better "learners" (718c-719a, 722a-722c, 723a).

This larger discussion concerning how laws are to be written is provoked by the Athenian Stranger himself who speaks as an imitative poet on behalf of imitative poetry (719c-720b). The poet complains that the problem a lawgiver faces is that he must always "exhibit one speech about one subject". For instance, when he wants to ensure that the burial ceremonies of citizens are "well-measured", he will praise neither the overly elaborate funeral nor the one which is too "skimpy". He will praise, "without any qualification" a "medium size" burial ceremony (719d). The problem, as the poet sees it, is that different people have different notions as to what "well-measured" means. A rich woman will tend to believe that an elaborate funeral is "well-measured" while

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<sup>48</sup>See p. 62 above.

a poor man is liable to praise a "skimpy" one. A law which simply mandates medium-size funerals may well appeal to a man of moderate means. Such a law, however, will probably be unpersuasive to the rich or to the poor. As far as the poet is concerned, it is not clear which one of these human beings is right. In his poetry, therefore, he shows the appropriateness of elaborate funerals for the rich and skimpy funerals for the poor. As a poet, he is well aware that humans contradict each other over many things; the conflicts between human beings, after all, constitute a great deal of the "stuff" of which poetry is made. He therefore demands that a lawgiver offer some justification to his subjects for his decisions, which takes into account their different characters, circumstances, and beliefs.

The "poet" who criticises the usual way of writing laws is none other than the Athenian Stranger himself. While the discussion specifically concerns the appropriate way for a lawgiver to write his laws, it is more generally concerned with the question as to how one must write in order to be both persuasive and instructive. The Athenian Stranger's criticisms suggest that the imitative poet holds a clue to the discovery of a kind of writing which is both persuasive and instructive. It is the poet who sees the limitations of writings which "always exhibit one speech about one subject". The imitative poet considers his own writing to be superior for the following reasons. He is capable of sensitively presenting diverse characters in different situations who hold different beliefs. He is capable of showing the intimate connection between the beliefs these characters hold and the circumstances in which they find themselves. He is capable of showing the specific kinds of conflicts that arise from their different commitments, characters and beliefs. And finally, he is capable of showing what is appropriate for people in different circumstances. The imitative poet, in other words, both understands the great variety of human beings and is capable of communicating this understanding through his poetry.

The poet's difficulty is that, while he can sympathetically portray to his audience a vast array of human beings who disagree with each other, he himself does not know which of these

characters is right. What the poet implicitly demands is that the lawgiver (and anyone else who believes he knows how human disagreements should be settled), present his arguments "poetically". He demands that anyone who thinks he knows how human disagreements ought to be settled should show how his arguments are superior to those of others by contrasting his position with the positions of others, by depicting these sympathetically and by showing how it is advantageous for them to accept his arguments given their particular circumstances. Clearly, in so far as such "arguments" must take into account the differing circumstances and needs of different people, they cannot "always exhibit the same speech about the same subject" but must say "different things to different people".

The Stranger refers to the kind of speaking or writing that accomplishes all of this as a "prelude" and agrees that, "at the beginning of every legislation as well as at the beginning of every speech (*logos*) one should pronounce the prelude which is by nature appropriate to each" (723c, 722d ff).<sup>49</sup> As an example of an "unmixed" or "pure" prelude,<sup>50</sup> the Stranger offers the dialogue

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<sup>49</sup>Preludes can be spoken or written. The Stranger draws a distinction between a "prelude" and an argument (*logos*) at 723b. "Preludes" are intended to put someone "in a frame of mind more favourably disposed and therefore more apt to learn something". The Stranger does not explain what he means by *logos* in this case. It seems likely, however, that he is referring to what one learns after one has been made ready by the "prelude".

<sup>50</sup>There is another kind of "prelude" which is most commonly employed throughout the *Laws*. This is the kind which prefaces "laws that are really 'laws', the laws we assert to be political" (722e) and which the Stranger sharply distinguishes from argument (see note 49 above). The difference between the dialogical and the legal prelude is that the former is much more akin to the speech of the "free doctor" while the latter has in it something of the "despotic command" of the "slave doctor". Laws that are really laws, according to the Stranger, cannot derive their force from pure persuasion. They should be mixed or "double" (see 720e). That is to say, they should be prefaced by preludes which give citizens reasons for obeying them. However, they must nonetheless be *laws*, i.e. they must command even those whom they do not persuade. While the dialogical prelude would appear to be the best kind of prelude as an answer to the criticisms of the imitative poet, the Stranger rarely offers one in his capacity as lawgiver (he does offer one to those who "despoil sacred things", see 854b ff.) For a brief discussion of the Platonic dialogue as a dialogical prelude and a more detailed discussion of the nature of the legal preludes in the *Laws* see Pangle, 447-449.



he and his two companions have been engaging in up to this point. This dialogue, of course, is nothing other than the first three books of the *Laws* itself.

It can be objected that the dialogue to which the Stranger refers is the "living" or "spoken" discourse which he and his companions have been conducting and not the *written* dialogue, the *Laws*. The Stranger, like all of Plato's characters, is not represented as knowing that he is a character in a dialogue written by somebody else. As a character, therefore, his reference to the dialogue cannot literally be taken as a reference to the *Laws*. But if we, as readers, recall that the "living" or "spoken" dialogue to which Plato's creation--the Stranger--refers, is itself a written dialogue, we may well be led to the conclusion that, not only the *Laws*, but the rest of Plato's written dialogues, are to be understood as "preludes" in the Stranger's sense of the word.

For this to be the case, however, it would not be sufficient for Plato's dialogues simply to depict preludes; they must be able to function as preludes. One may grant, in other words, that the Platonic dialogues depict a protagonist engaged in contrasting his views with those of others who disagree with him, that they depict these others sympathetically and that, to the extent that these others come to accept the view of the protagonist as to what they should believe and do, the dialogues show why it is advantageous for them to do so given their particular circumstances. The question will remain, however, as to how, in depicting such things, Plato can sympathetically contrast his own views with those which may be held by his *readers* in such a way as to persuade his readers that his views as to what they should believe and do are appropriate for them in their various and particular circumstances.

The key to the answer to this question can be found if one considers the relationship which obtains between an imitative poet and his audience. An imitative poet does not communicate directly to his audience. His works are crafted in such a way that whatever it is that he wants to communicate is communicated through the words and deeds of his characters. As Socrates notes in the *Republic*, in order for an imitative poet to craft a successful work, his characters must be

drawn from the real-life experiences of his audience. That is, while no character in a poetic work is a "real, live person", a successful poetic imitation must be peopled with characters who are good imitations of "real, live people". What constitutes a "good imitation" is, of course, dictated by the poet's audience and its members' experiences of the words and deeds of "real, live people". To the extent that members of an audience identify with the characters and are thereby led to participate vicariously in the experiences of these characters--momentarily forgetting that they are imitations and not "real"--the poetic work will be more or less successful.<sup>51</sup>

It is this ability that humans have to identify or sympathise with characters drawn from experience that the poet relies upon to help him communicate to his audience *through* his characters. One can see how this is so by reconsidering the example of funerals discussed by the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*. Here, the poet explains that he praises (or shows the appropriateness of) the elaborate funerals of the rich and the skimpy funerals of the poor. Being an imitative poet, he does not praise these funerals in his own voice. Rather, by showing, for example, the comic or tragic consequences that result if a poor man throws a funeral which is beyond his means or if a rich woman throws one which is below hers, the poet persuasively communicates his praise and blame of such things to his audience. He is able to do so to the extent that his characters are drawn from the "real life" experience of his audience and to the extent that its members identify with these characters and the consequences that attend upon their actions. Because the poet's characters have different needs depending upon their circumstances, what can be depicted as praiseworthy for one can be depicted as blameworthy for another. By depicting such things, the poet is able to communicate one thing to certain members of his audience (the appropriateness

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<sup>51</sup>It is an interesting question as to how and why such identification and vicarious participation are possible. Here, however, I am only interested in pointing out what I trust no one will contest--that is, that they happen.

of elaborate funerals to the rich) and another thing to other members of his audience (the appropriateness of skimpy funerals to the poor).

Plato, as an imitative poet, also speaks to his audience--his readers--through the words and deeds of his different characters. These characters, in turn, are drawn from many walks of life. To list but a few, a Platonic character may be a rhetorician, Sophist, poet, geometer, philosopher, rhapsode, courtesan or ambitious young man who has yet to decide what he will be when he grows up. The protagonist is invariably identified as a philosopher who engages in discussion with any one or more of these characters, sometimes in private and sometimes before an audience of others. Even the most cursory reading of a Platonic dialogue reveals that the main goal of any dialogue, as Steven Rendall notes, is for this philosophical protagonist, "to *change* the participants, to convert them to a different view of the issues . . . (under discussion) . . . and of the world in general." (166) And, as Rendall points out, ". . . the interlocutor's active participation and assent to each step of the argument--which make it his own argument as well--are essential to realising the main goal of the dialogue" (166).

Plato, in other words, employs imitative poetry in order to do what the imitative poet of the *Laws* demands. He depicts in various circumstances various characters who are drawn from the world of concrete human experience. They are shown in conversation with a philosophical protagonist who endeavours to change their views of the issues under discussion and of the world in general. This protagonist attempts to bring about this change by engaging his interlocutor in what Socrates has called "noble" or "serious" discourse which, among other things, entails that he address the specific questions and needs of his interlocutor in terms which are appropriate to the character and circumstances of this interlocutor.<sup>52</sup> The extent to which this protagonist is

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<sup>52</sup>Perhaps the clearest example of this is in the *Gorgias*. There, Socrates endeavours to convince three interlocutors that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it. Given the differences in temperament, introspective proclivity and circumstances among the three, three different arguments are necessary. What Gorgias assents to is rejected by Polus and that to which Polus

successful is indicated by the extent to which his interlocutor honestly assents to the various stages of the argument.<sup>53</sup> By inviting his readers to participate vicariously in these discussions where the questions and concerns of a variety of human beings in various circumstances are addressed by discourse which is appropriate to these various human beings, Plato anticipates the varying concerns and circumstances of his readers and offers them the discourse which he deems to be appropriate for them.<sup>54</sup> Plato's dialogues, in other words, are designed in such a way that they do not "always exhibit the same speech about one subject" but rather in such a way that they say

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assents is rejected by Callicles. Socrates does not, therefore, continue to "exhibit the same speech about the same subject" but rather attempts to develop arguments to which these characters will assent, given the kind of people they are. For a detailed discussion of the rhetorical side of Socrates' discourse in the *Gorgias*, see Rendall.

<sup>53</sup>The term "honestly" is important in this context. Socrates often chastises those who assent to what is put to them for reasons other than that they honestly agree. Protagoras and Callicles offer good examples of this. Protagoras, for instance, assents to a number of things Socrates says in order not to have to say what he really thinks before an audience and in order to appear to be a good sport (333b-334a, 335a, 338e, 348b-c). Callicles assents to a great deal in order that the dialogue may be brought to a speedier conclusion (499b-c, 501c-d, 505b-507a). Socrates threatens to leave the discussion with Protagoras and he criticises Callicles for not being honest.

Socrates does not always point out the insincerity of his interlocutor, however. Sometimes he takes an interlocutor's insincere position seriously in order to dismantle it and show his interlocutor that it would be more to the interlocutor's advantage to be honest. In the *Republic*, for example, Thrasymachus gets himself into trouble for advancing a position (340d-343a) to which he does not really subscribe in order to protect his reputation. When the position is shown to be ridiculous, Thrasymachus too, is shown to be rather foolish. From then on, Thrasymachus answers Socrates' questions more honestly. See Bloom, 329-330.

<sup>54</sup>Here I am interested in discussing the *intent* of "noble" or "serious" discourse, not whether or not the discourse of Socrates or any other Platonic protagonist actually realises these intentions. Whether the discourse of a Platonic protagonist does, in fact, live up to the demands of "noble" discourse is, however, a question that Plato himself would have us ask. See, for example, *Euthyphro* 11b-e, where Socrates is accused of asking irrelevant questions in order to confuse his interlocutor and *Republic* 336c-d, where he is accused of asking questions simply to secure his own victory in an argument.

different things to different readers. That is, a Platonic dialogue is designed to meet the rhetorical demands of "noble discourse" as outlined by Socrates.<sup>55</sup>

A word of caution is necessary here. As I have noted, while Plato's dialogues are images or poetic imitations, they should not be taken as simply images or poetic imitations.<sup>56</sup> What I mean can be illustrated by considering again Plato's writing in contrast with that of the imitative poet as described in the *Laws*. The imitative poet communicates his praise and blame by depicting the desirable or undesirable consequences which follow from the actions of his characters. To the extent that his audience forgets, during their reading or viewing of the drama, that the drama is not "reality" but an imitation thereof, and to the extent that the audience is thus "swept up" in the action of the drama, the poet's work will not only have been entertaining, it will have conveyed the poet's various "messages".<sup>57</sup> Poetic imitation *per se*, in other words, is most effective and powerful

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<sup>55</sup>Griswold offers the following description of the kind of images Plato's dramatic imitations (his dialogues) are:

The Platonic dialogues are "imitations" in the sense of being "phantasms" rather than "eikons" (*Sophist*, 253d-236c). That is, the proportion of the parts of the written dialogue do not precisely reproduce those of the original, but instead are suited to the multitude perspectives of types of readers, with the aim of bringing the original to life in themselves . . . Socrates in effect rejects the possibility of a phantasm that could successfully lead a reader to engage in that pursuit. Plato's brilliant use of the dialogue form shows that Socrates was mistaken on that point. (*Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 226)

<sup>56</sup>See above p. 81 ff.

<sup>57</sup>Here it should be noted that I do not intend to suggest that Plato believes that imitative poets always consciously use their poetry as a kind of "propaganda". Socrates, in the *Apology* (22c), complains that the poets have a great deal to say but that they themselves do not know what their poetry means. This is certainly in accord with the passages I have discussed in the *Republic* where the imitative poets are presented as unconscious flatterers of the baser fears and desires of human beings. What Plato is pointing out, however, is that imitative poetry is a powerful vehicle for the communication of praise and blame whether or not any given imitative poet would admit this to be the case and whether or not any given imitative poet is aware of all that he is praising and blaming in his poetry. This position should be familiar to anyone who has followed, for example, the current debates surrounding whether or not and to what extent violence and pornography should be shown on television.

when the fact that it is an image is forgotten and when an audience is so "swept up" in the action that questions are not raised as to whether the consequences are as desirable or undesirable as the poet presents them.

Clearly the Platonic dialogues can be read as poetic imitations in this sense. One can read the Platonic dialogues as poetic imitations which are meant to engage the unquestioning participation of their readers such that these readers come to praise and blame what the action of the dialogue appears to praise and blame. One can read the dialogues, in other words, as Plato's poetical propaganda. To the extent that one does this, it is possible to argue that one has discovered Plato's "teaching"--a "teaching" which Charles Griswold sums up in the following way:

(B)e virtuous, be pious, do not break the law, stay away from sophistry, cultivate the desires of the soul rather than those of the body, and do all this lest you be unhappy or punished in the next life. (*Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 221)

One can arrive at this "teaching" simply by noting that characters who hold views opposed to this "teaching" tend to be bested in argument by the philosophical protagonist of any given dialogue in such a way as to appear ridiculous or immoral. I have said that one *can* read Plato's dialogues this way. It is difficult to believe that Plato himself, who was quite aware of the propaganda-like nature of poetic communication, was not also aware that his dialogues could be read in such a way (see below). However, as Paul Friedlander argues, there is strong evidence to suggest that the dialogues should not be read this way:

Again and again Plato's written work is mimesis; but it struggles against being nothing but mimesis. And, where it seems to represent most strongly a pure work of art, it must not ultimately be read as such, but as an "existential" document, that is, with the constant reminder, *tu res agitur*. (124)

Plato's dialogues cease to be poetical propaganda the moment one considers the kind of "action" in which they invite their readers to participate. The "action" of a Platonic dialogue is, after all, a conversation--a conversation which begins when a philosophical protagonist either encounters an interlocutor who has a question or induces an interlocutor to ask a question. As I have already

noted, the ensuing conversation or "action" is what Socrates describes as "noble discourse". That is, the "action" in which Plato invites his reader to participate is not the appropriation of a set of "teachings" but rather the activity of questioning and being questioned in turn, of discovering when one does not know what one may have thought one knew and of coming to knowledge of oneself.<sup>58</sup>

This invitation succeeds in so far as we, as readers, bring to bear on both the dialogues and ourselves the questions which the "action" itself leads us to ask. Any dialogue, of course, raises a question which is more or less central. The centrality of such a question is what, in large part, distinguishes one dialogue from another. The *Republic*, for instance, raises the question as to whether justice is good in itself or for its consequences whereas the *Sophist* raises the question as to what a Sophist is. There is, however, another "class" of questions which are not peculiar to any given Platonic dialogue and these are the questions that stem from the demands of "noble discourse". These questions are central to the way in which the "action" of any Platonic dialogue progresses. They concern such things as whether an interlocutor really believes what he has to say, whether he says things simply for the sake of the argument and whether he has been shown to be in disagreement with himself. They concern the reasons why an interlocutor believes what he does, the consequences that follow should he act upon his beliefs and whether or not he would find such consequences acceptable. They also concern the reasons why the question the dialogue addresses is important both for the interlocutor and others.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>It is for these reasons, by the way, that it is essential that Plato's characters do not have "all the answers". "Noble discourse" cannot proceed unless there is a question. An interlocutor may either bring one with him or be induced to admit that he has one. As readers, we may become annoyed with some of the answers given to the philosophical protagonist of a dialogue, disappointed that they are not more sophisticated and attentive to the logical traps into which they may fall. The point of "noble discourse", however, is to prevent an interlocutor from evading argument and to induce him to respond honestly on the basis of his convictions and experience. See note 53 above.

<sup>59</sup>This is not intended as an exhaustive list.

I am arguing that, to the extent that one takes the dialogues to be Platonic poetic propaganda, one must ignore the extent to which they invite their readers to participate in the asking of these questions. That is, one must ignore the extent to which Plato invites his readers to consider such things as: whether the questions raised by his philosophical protagonists and their interlocutors do, in fact arise out of human experience; whether or not the reader assents to the answers offered and why; what turns upon the fact that a given interlocutor can be shown to be in disagreement with himself; whether the reader can avoid the same inner disagreement; whether the resolution arrived at in a dialogue is satisfactory and the reasons for and consequences of any lack of resolution. Rather than being simply poetic vehicles for Plato's doctrines, the dialogues are written in such a way as to invite readers to question what is depicted in them and, in so doing, to lead readers to question and better understand themselves.<sup>60</sup>

This is not to say that Plato conveys nothing of his own opinions in the dialogues. I have, after all, been arguing that it is possible to discover the extent to which Plato agrees and disagrees with his character Socrates over the Socratic condemnation of writing in the *Phaedrus*. I have also been arguing that Plato has discovered, in the dialogue form, a way of writing which allows him to convey these opinions in an undogmatic way. Plato is neither a rhapsodic writer nor a poetical propagandist. What he succeeds in doing, by presenting his opinions through a drama which entices its readers to question, is to invite his readers to test these opinions for themselves. In

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<sup>60</sup>Rendall reminds us that one of the best devices Plato employs for enticing his reader to engage in this kind of questioning is the presence of an audience in the dialogue. Rendall notes how the presence of an audience whose members listen to the conversation entices a reader to think of himself as a member of such an audience. In wondering what the audience in the dialogue might think about what they are listening to, a reader is drawn to participate quite actively in the "action" of the dialogue. It seems to me that another device Plato often employs which serves the same purpose is to have his philosophical protagonist occasionally conjure up a hypothetical "somebody" to raise questions or counter-arguments which an interlocutor has not foreseen (as in the *Hippias Major*). The effect is often to induce a reader to wonder whether there are not even more considerations that the dialogue could take into account and what the outcome of the conversation might be if they were to be taken into account.



doing so, Plato indicates a further agreement with his character Socrates. Human beings can never attain wisdom but that human opinions are, at best, partial or incomplete.<sup>61</sup> As Stanley Rosen puts it:

Just as in contemporary psychodrama the patients act out their ailments, so the Platonic dialogues show men of varying kinds acting out the disease of ignorance. Every opinion, *including those of the philosopher*, is defective to one degree or another. Every man, including the philosopher, is fundamentally a cave dweller, a resident in the domain of opinion. (*Plato's Symposium* xlix, my emphasis)

Plato does convey his opinions in his dialogues. However, by effacing himself from them, by making his own opinions difficult to discover and by enticing his readers to assent to any opinion put forward in a dialogue only after having tested it for themselves, Plato indicates his caution with respect to his own opinions. More important, Plato invites his readers to question any position put forward in a dialogue, to consider their own beliefs and convictions in the light of the questioning presented in any dialogue and to embark on the path of self-knowledge as described by Socrates.<sup>62</sup>

It is this invitation that makes the dialogues "existential" documents, to use Paul Friedlander's term (above). The point of the dialogues is not to convey a "teaching" which could otherwise have been written in treatise form but rather to engage a reader in a kind of activity which, among other things, includes questioning "dogma" *per se*. In so far as the intention behind the Platonic dialogue is to invite a reader to engage in noble discourse, it cannot have as its governing intention to do for a reader what that reader cannot do for himself--namely to tell him

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<sup>61</sup>See p. 66 above and note 28.

<sup>62</sup>All of this may suggest that Plato is not as undogmatic as I have been arguing. It could be argued on the basis of what I have said, for instance, that Plato is quite certain about the importance and viability of noble discourse itself which, in turn, presupposes (among other things) a belief in the principle of non-contradiction. I can only offer an observation of Stanley Rosen's: "Certitude with respect to principles is not the same as a completed system." (*Plato's Symposium* xlix) I would also add that, to the extent that Plato has arrived at any "certain principles", he still invites us, not to accept them on his authority, but to "prove" them on the ground of our own experience.

what to think. Indeed, if the goals of noble discourse are to prevent someone from thinking he knows something he does not know, to get him to understand *himself*, and to generate such discourses in his soul as are capable of continuing the process of noble discourse forever, it is clear that such "existential" ends cannot be brought about by *telling* them to another. While such ends can, perhaps, be described as possibilities for someone, they cannot be brought about on the *authority* of someone other than oneself. Self-knowledge--knowledge which includes knowing what one knows and does not know--cannot be "taught" to someone by someone else through a treatise. My realisation of what I know and what I do not know is something only I can have. I can be *told* what I know and do not know or even what I "should" know but only I can realise whether I know or do not know that what I have been told is right. What Plato's dialogues are intended to effect in a reader cannot be "taught" or inculcated authoritatively. What they offer is an invitation, by way of example, for a reader to participate in an activity for which he is already equipped. It is this kind of observation that leads Hans-Georg Gadamer to conclude that:

The particular literary form which Plato invented for his Socratic discourses is not merely a clever hiding place for his "doctrines"; it is a meaningful expression of them within the possibilities which the art of writing allows. (95)<sup>63</sup>

Of course, it could be objected that, if Plato intended to bring his readers to participate in the kind of activity I have described, he would have told his readers in a more straight-forward fashion. If "a more straight forward fashion" means saying so in a treatise, however, the argument I have just put forward indicates why it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Plato to do so. Nonetheless, one may well wonder, if Plato's dialogues are intended to engage a reader in asking questions, why do they appear to offer so many straight-forward teachings--the likes of which Charles Griswold notes.<sup>64</sup> If Plato really wants us to *question* whether we should

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<sup>63</sup>Rosen observes that, for Plato, "Philosophy is a condition of the psyche and so a way of life, rather than solely a system of true propositions." (*Plato's Symposium* xlviii)

<sup>64</sup>Above, page 91.

"be virtuous, be pious, do not break the law, stay away from sophistry, cultivate the desires of the soul rather than those of the body" etc., why does he portray as ridiculous or immoral characters who argue against virtue, piety, lawabidingness, etc?

I think there are two answers to this, and they are connected. Firstly, as Griswold points out, it is not necessarily the case that Plato's protagonists and Plato himself do not believe in the "teachings" the dialogues appear to put forward; it is more likely the case that they do not believe in them for the reasons that most people might (Griswold, *Self-Knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* 221). Secondly, given that Plato expects most people to have a tendency to read texts uncritically and that it is possible that they may use the "teachings" they find in texts as justification for harmful acts, it would be surprising if he did not take steps to guard against such a thing happening with his own texts.<sup>65</sup> As Plato has his Socrates observe, it is generally the case that people read books in order to acquire a "teaching" which they believe is important for them to have. That is, Plato and his Socrates expect that a majority of readers pick up a text in order to be told what to think. That Plato understands that texts can be highly instrumental in influencing people's beliefs and actions is clear from his discussions of imitative poetry.

I am suggesting that Plato did not think it was possible to bring all of his readers to participate in the questioning and pursuit of self-knowledge underlying "noble discourse". He expected that, no matter how one writes, one is bound to be misunderstood by a great number of readers. Plato could expect this misunderstanding to be acute in the case of his own writings.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, Plato wanted to invite his readers to engage in the questioning required for noble

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<sup>65</sup>See above p. 59 ff.

<sup>66</sup>Gadamer offers the following observation: "As Plato knew, what is written must of necessity be exposed to misunderstanding and misuse, for it must fend for itself and do without the insistence in achieving proper understanding which a speaker can provide in a discussion. Having seen this, Plato developed and consummately mastered the literary form of the dialogue . . . ." (126)

discourse. On the other hand, he expected that most of his readers would read the dialogues looking for "teachings". Those who search the dialogues for "teachings" will, therefore, find them. Such teachings, in turn, will tend to be politically salutary: it is better to suffer injustice than to do it (*Gorgias*); obey the laws (*Crito*); good people are rewarded with immortality (*Phaedo*); etc. Again, this is not to say that Plato and his philosophical protagonists do not believe in these things. It is to say that, to the extent that they consider such "teachings" from the point of view of the questioning underlying noble discourse, they understand the incomplete character of such "teachings" and, if they believe them, they do so for reasons different from what most people are likely to think.<sup>67</sup>

This means that, in addition to attending to the rhetorical and dramatic dimensions of the dialogues, an interpreter of the dialogues must also be on the lookout for Platonic irony.<sup>68</sup> While there may appear to be many straight-forward "teachings" in the dialogues, they should not be taken as such.

Just as Socrates tests the nature of his interlocutors, in order to determine whether he may be of service to them, so Plato tests the nature of his readers. Just as Socrates is protected from unsatisfactory companions by his daimonion, so Plato is protected from unsatisfactory readers by his irony. Those who cannot be cured by the inner charms of the dialogue will at least not be harmed by its exterior. (Rosen, *Plato's Symposium* xlviii)

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<sup>67</sup>This apparently "elitist" approach to one's readers may be unpalatable to modern democrats. Indeed, most writing today is based upon the *modern* democratic opinion that all readers are equally capable of being "enlightened" by a text. One should be careful in supposing that Plato shared this assumption particularly as there is no evidence in the dialogues at all to suggest that he was a democrat in this modern sense.

<sup>68</sup>This is not to downplay the role of Socratic irony in any dialogue. To the extent that Socrates considers noble discourse to involve saying different things to different people and, to the extent that any dialogue is an example of noble discourse, discovering what the "real opinions" of any noble speaker are, even *within* a dialogue, will be very difficult.

This is not to say that the opinions of Plato which underlie any of his texts are the exact opposite of what the text or drama appears to be saying.<sup>69</sup> It does mean that these opinions are not revealed in any kind of straightforward way and that they must be "reconstructed" from the drama as a whole.<sup>70</sup> It is this kind of irony that the above discussion of the passages concerning writing and imitation in the *Phaedrus* and the *Republic* has brought to light. While it might appear, for instance, that Socrates offers Plato's final word on the subject of poetic imitation and writing, further reflection upon the fact that it is Plato who has his character express these views in a *written* work reveals that they cannot simply be the author's own. For us to assume that these opinions are simply Plato's would be to conclude that Plato, an otherwise intelligent human being, is capable of making a mistake which would be obvious to a schoolboy. It is to assume, in other words, that an otherwise intelligent and consistent man is capable of great stupidity and inconsistency over something as fundamental as his own act of writing. While this may well be the case, it is highly unlikely. More important, however, the fact that this "mistake" can be interpreted in such a way as to preserve the Socratic insights while at the same time showing how Plato has moved beyond

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<sup>69</sup>As Paul Friedlander observes:

If irony were nothing but "a mere swapping of a Yes for a No"--to put it into the jocularly polemical definition of Jean Paul--then we would be at the end of our discussion even before we had started it. It is only recently that we have begun again to learn something about the problem of irony . . . (o)therwise our knowledge of the subject has been declining for the last hundred years. (137)

Friedlander's entire chapter, "Irony" (137-153), is immensely instructive.

<sup>70</sup>Perhaps the best book in English on the subject of irony is Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Irony*. As Booth argues, the recognition that an author is being ironic does not necessarily commit us to assuming that he really means the opposite of what he appears to be saying. Rather, this recognition forces a reader to make a "hierarchical choice" between what the writer appears to be saying but can't possibly mean and a "higher", more contextually informed view which accounts for why a writer would say something he can't really mean literally (40-42). Booth's discussion of Platonic irony is very instructive (269-276).

them suggests that the Socratic insights, in so far as they are "the words of Plato", are ironic utterances.<sup>71</sup>

It is through his silence (the fact that he effaces himself from his texts), his use of poetic imitation to present an image of noble discourse, and his use of irony that Plato writes in such a way as to conform to the ends laid down by Socrates for noble discourse. Not only does Plato present his characters engaged in noble discourse, but his own writing is an appropriate image of noble discourse itself. It, like noble discourse of which it is an image, is capable of saying different things to different people in accord with their differing characters. Through his silence and his irony, Plato attempts to do just that. But more than this, the Platonic dialogue, like noble discourse is not "authoritative". It does not represent Plato's attempt to *tell* someone what to think. Plato never *tells* anyone anything in his dialogues. Rather, he attempts to entice his reader to think things out for himself. To the extent that a reader cannot be brought to participate in noble discourse but requires authoritative "teachings", Plato offers teachings which are politically speaking, harmless.

The question remains whether any given dialogue can defend itself or, as Socrates says of all written texts, it requires its "father" to come to its aid. While the dialogue may be able to

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<sup>71</sup>Steven Rendall uses Barbara Hernstein Smith's distinction between "natural" and "fictive utterances" to make a similar point.

"Natural" utterances are those that can be taken as historical events; "fictive" utterances are those that can be taken to *represent* natural utterances but are not themselves historical acts or events. Fictive discourse thus represents natural discourse, that is, it represents utterances that "are understood to be the verbal acts of particular persons on, and in response to, particular occasions." . . . Plato's dialogues may be taken as *fictive*, in the sense that they *represent* the natural utterances of the characters who speak in them rather than *being* the natural discourse of Plato himself. (175-176)

Rendall here quotes Hernstein Smith's "On the Margins of Discourse", *Critical Inquiry*, 1 (1975-76), pp. 773-774. What I am arguing is that the dialogues are, at the same time, Plato's fictive and natural discourse and that the interplay between these two aspects of the dialogue is the play of Platonic irony.

mitigate the harms generated by misunderstanding and misuse, it remains to be seen to what extent the dialogue can defend the opinions it contains. This problem is exacerbated by Socrates' own claim that noble/philosophical discourse is itself endless and does not allow of closure. For, to the extent that a Platonic dialogue is an image of such discourse, one would have to conclude that no final defence of any of the opinions contained therein is possible. And, this would include Plato's opinions themselves about noble discourse. Certainly, whatever "defence" is presented in the dialogues of the opinions they contain will not be of the nature of some unified, systematic account of the whole put forward to meet all possible objections. But then, according to Socrates, such a "defence" cannot be mounted in noble discourse either. How then does someone engaged in noble discourse "defend" his argument? And does the Platonic dialogue "defend" its insights in the same way?

The key to the answer to these questions is found, I believe, in the connection Socrates draws between the activity of question and answer and the quest for self-knowledge or, the way in which the activity of question and answer functions as an antidote to self-forgetfulness. It is extremely important to note that the kinds of questions which Socrates is interested in exploring with any of his interlocutors are those which arise out of their concrete experiences as human beings. To the extent that they are not aware that they have such questions, Socrates is interested in bringing these questions to light. The intent of Socratic discourse, however, is not to befuddle an individual with questions that do not arise out of his own experience.<sup>72</sup> Rather, in showing an individual that he is not in agreement with himself, Socrates endeavours to demonstrate to that individual that he does not really know what he thinks he knows. When Socrates succeeds in getting an individual to this kind of recognition of his own ignorance, the stage is set for their joint examination of what would constitute a more satisfying account of the matter that concerns them.

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<sup>72</sup>Here, again, I am talking about the *intent* of Socratic discourse. Whether or not Socrates succeeds in every instance is not at issue here.

And, whatever emerges in this examination too, must be subjected to the same questioning as before.

In portraying these "Socratic" discussions, Plato invites his reader to join them as a participant. A reader is invited to consider whether or not the questions raised by Socrates or his interlocutor do, in fact, arise out of human experience and whether or not they do, in fact, betoken the inner disagreement of an individual with himself. Plato invites his reader to consider the consequences of such inner disagreements not simply for the lives of the characters in the dialogue but in his own life. Most important, he is invited to consider the satisfactoriness of any resolution arrived at in the dialogue or, conversely, the reasons for and consequences of, any lack of resolution. In constructing the dialogues as he has, Plato indicates the ways in which he thinks such questioning tends to proceed with individuals of various sorts and the kinds of answers that a self-reflective human being will arrive at. That is to say, Plato presents himself as knowing the vast range of human experience, as knowing that Socratic discourse is the answer to deeply felt human needs and as knowing some of the answers required by human beings if they are to live well. His texts "defend themselves" to the extent that when questioned thoroughly, from the point of view of human experience, they compel the reader to recognise and accept what he has been shown.



For the gods do take on all sorts of transformations, appearing as strangers from elsewhere, and thus they range at large through the cities . . . . (Homer, XVII: 485)

### III: PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

#### The Problem with Appearances

In the preceding section, I argued two things: that Plato's reasons for writing dialogues can be gleaned from the dialogues themselves and that an interpretation of the Platonic dialogues requires attention to their literary or dramatic dimension. To be more precise, I have argued that Plato's decision to write dialogues is in conformity with what these same dialogues "teach" is the goal of the philosophic life and with the aims of what Socrates calls "noble discourse". The Platonic dialogue is a way of writing whose form is in complete harmony with its content. Its form is a powerful expression of its "teaching" regarding the importance of self-knowledge and of the avoidance of self-deception, and the recognition that "noble discourse" is the appropriate means to this end. Its form is also in harmony with a recognition that while the quest for wisdom can lead to knowledge, it cannot lead to the knowledge of everything one would have to know in order to be completely wise. Plato's writings seem to be governed by the notion that one can only discover what one knows and what one does not know through the process of question and answer that is provoked by a vast range of human experience. In short, the dramatic or literary dimension of the Platonic dialogues indicates Plato's fundamental accord with a way of life espoused by Socrates.

I use the word "espoused" and not "practised" for an important reason. So far, I have been discussing the avowed intent of Socratic discourse and the Platonic dialogue. What I have not

addressed are two, larger questions which my account should provoke. The first concerns the viability of the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge as Socrates and Plato understand it. Whatever they understand self-knowledge and wisdom to be, these are a kind of knowledge that is not *given* to someone by somebody else. Only the individual herself is capable of realising whether she knows something or not. Others may tell her that she knows or does not know something, but only she can realise whether what they say is true. This, however, can be contested. It is not clear that human beings have the capacity for this kind of independent reflection. Even Socrates acknowledges the power of persuasion and stresses the rhetorical character of "noble discourse". He acknowledges that human beings are persuaded that they know many things that they do not in fact know and, in turn, that they are persuaded that they do not know many things that, in fact, they do know. The problem is this: what indication is there that human beings are at all capable of transcending the realm of persuasive speech in which they happen to find themselves (a realm that includes the "voices" of parents, friends, teachers, "public opinion makers", etc.) and that has informed and will continue to inform their opinions? The fact that an individual thinks he has realised that he knows or does not know something may stem from the fact that he has been persuaded to think so. One may wonder whether it is indeed possible to distinguish between the rhetorical effects of "noble discourse" and the effects of rhetoric as it is ordinarily understood.

The second question is this. If it is the case, as Plato suggests, that the philosopher's quest for wisdom cannot be completed, how is it possible for the philosopher to know when he has made progress in his quest? In order to know that I have become "wiser" than I was, it would seem that I must know what it means to be wise. But how is it possible for me to know what it means to be wise if it is not possible for any human being to become wise? As described by Plato, the philosophic life is a journey. Unlike journeys of the usual kind, the destination is not a place but, as it were, a state of mind. For this reason, the destination of the philosophical journey is not

knowable beforehand. If it were, there would be no need for the journey. The problem is that, once one has embarked upon the journey, one seems to have no way of knowing whether one is making progress towards one's destination.<sup>1</sup> Considerations like these can easily lead one to conclude that Plato's philosophic quest is a quixotic enterprise at best. More seriously, how is the Platonic philosopher to avoid being deceived about his own progress towards wisdom?

These two questions, concerning the viability and thus the desirability of the quest for self-knowledge and wisdom, in turn, can be brought to bear more specifically upon Socrates' "noble discourse" and upon the function of the Platonic dialogues. If there is no knowledge which is independent of persuasion and human beings have no access to a standard by which to measure claims to wisdom, then both Socratic discourse and the Platonic dialogues can be regarded as no more than exercises in persuasive speaking and writing despite the suggestions of both to the contrary. In the language of the previous section, one would be forced to conclude that the Platonic dialogue would be a kind of "poetic propaganda" for a way of life that is ultimately not viable.<sup>2</sup>

I will argue that the dialogues themselves teach us to ask these questions. More specifically, they do so through their presentation of the Sophists. My argument is that Plato understands the need to offer a defence of the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge. His presentation of the problems surrounding the Sophist in the *Sophist* provides both a demand for and example of his defence. A word of caution is in order, however. As I argued earlier, to the extent that any way of looking at things is "defended" in a Platonic dialogue, it is not from the point of view of some unified, systematic account of the whole put forward to meet all possible objections. Rather, it is given through portrayals of human beings confronting a vast range of questions provoked by

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<sup>1</sup>Plato himself offers two instances of this paradox. See *Meno* 80d-e and *Protagoras* 313e-314b.

<sup>2</sup>See above p. 91 ff. and note 57 in Section II.

experience. The satisfactoriness of any answer to these questions is, in turn, determined by a given human being's ability to hold this answer and, at the same time, to remain in agreement with himself. I want to show that Plato's attempt to defend the viability and needfulness of the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge is in keeping with this. This quest is an answer to questions provoked by ordinary human experience and is an answer capable of securing the full assent of an individual. Plato recognizes that if the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge is to be defended as a viable and needful quest, it can only be shown to be so on the ground of what human beings ordinarily recognize as viable and needful.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that, for Plato, human beings agree amongst themselves as to what is needful and salutary. Rather, it is precisely because human beings do not agree as to what is needful and salutary that a defence of the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge is necessary at all. Because the dialogues embody an attempt to defend this quest in the light of human experience which denies the validity and needfulness of this quest, Plato's use of dialogue avoids the presuppositions of Hegelian dialectic and provides a response to the charges of Nietzsche that I discussed in section one.

### The Sophist as an *Issue*

The claim that Plato's presentation of the Sophists concerns the kinds of issues I have just outlined will come as a surprise to many readers of the dialogues. After all, Sidgwick's description of the traditional view of the Sophists as charlatans, swindlers, practitioners of fallacious discourse and propagators of immoral doctrines can be traced back to the Platonic dialogues themselves.<sup>4</sup> In the dialogues there are, for instance, many such references to the Sophists: as men who appear to be wise in all things but who are not (*Sophist* 233c ff.); as base flatterers of public opinion (*Republic* 493a-b, *Gorgias* 463b); as peddlers of learning who care only for money and not for the well-being of their students (*Protagoras* 313c ff.); as money-making lovers of contradiction (*Sophist* 225e ff.); as men who deny the possibility of false speech (*Euthydemus* 283d); and as those who hold that, in politics, the stronger should rule (*Republic* 338c ff). For many, such passages suggest that Plato's presentation of the Sophists is unambiguous and amounts to an outright denunciation of what he took to be their plainly immoral and self-serving, intellectual charlatany. From this point of view, Plato's presentation of the Sophists has nothing to do with inviting his readers to consider whatever challenge they may pose to the quest for wisdom and self-knowledge. Rather, from this point of view, Plato's presentation of the Sophists can only be seen as an attempt--whether justified or not--to unmask the Sophists for public condemnation.

As W. K. C. Guthrie points out, since the 1930's there has been a sustained effort among a number of scholars:

. . . to reinstate the Sophists and their kind as the champions of progress and enlightenment, and a revulsion from Plato as a bigoted reactionary who, by black-

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<sup>4</sup>See above p. 18.

ening their reputation has ensured the suppression of their writings. (*The Sophists*, 10)

Yet oddly enough, and despite their intentions, it is often in the writings of these scholars that evidence is presented which militates against the view that Plato's primary intention is to unmask the Sophists for public condemnation. Consider, for example, the views of Werner Fite and Karl Popper. Fite, following in the footsteps of George Grote, takes Plato's condemnation of the Sophists to be unambiguous and maintains that the Sophists "indeed play the Devil in all Platonic dialogues" (192). He also argues, however, that the Platonic condemnation of Sophistry is unfair in that the only difference he can find between Plato's character Socrates and the Sophists is that the latter took money for their services and became rich whereas Socrates did not. Aside from this difference, Fite argues that, ". . . the Platonic Socrates exhibits all the vices attributed by Plato to the sophists, and that he indeed is Plato's best illustration of a sophist" (193).<sup>5</sup> Popper makes a similar, if not as broad, observation. Noting the specious nature of a particular *Socratic* argument he writes:

(I)n forming our judgement of *Plato's* procedure, we must not forget that Plato likes to argue against rhetoric and sophistry: *and indeed that he is the man who by his attacks on the "Sophists" created the bad associations with that word.* I believe that we therefore have every reason to censor him when he makes use of rhetoric and sophistry in place of argument. (1: 263, my emphasis)<sup>6</sup>

I mention Fite's and Popper's observations because they point to a serious problem in the Platonic dialogues. While much of what is said in the dialogues about the Sophists is such as to distinguish the Sophist from the philosopher and to show the superiority of the latter over the

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<sup>5</sup>See also note 3 in Section II above.

<sup>6</sup>This is a good example of the way in which Popper conflates the author of the dialogues with the character Socrates. For Popper, the Sophists are among the finest examples of the "Great Generation" against which, in his view, Plato expended all of his philosophical, political and literary efforts (199).

former, there is no question but that often the distinction between them is unclear. Popper and Fite, of course, maintain that this lack of clarity is a weakness of the dialogues.<sup>7</sup>

Fite and Popper are certainly right in this: Plato's presentation of the Sophists, particularly when considered in the light of his presentation of the philosopher Socrates, is anything but unproblematic (see below). The question remains, however, as to whether Plato was unaware of the problematic character of his presentation or whether his Sophists and philosophers have been crafted in such a way as to invite his readers to think through the perplexing character of the philosophic life. Such an invitation is described by Socrates in the *Republic*:

For if the one is adequately seen, itself by itself, or is grasped by some other sense, it would not draw men toward being . . . But if some opposition is always seen at the same time, so that nothing looks as though it were one more than the opposite of one, then there would now be need of something to judge; and in this case, a soul would be compelled to be at a loss and to make an investigation, setting in motion the intelligence within it, and to ask what the one itself is. And thus the study of the one would be among those apt to lead and turn around toward the contemplation of what *is*. (524e, trans. Bloom)

Plato's treatment of the Sophists and their relationship to philosophy constitutes this kind of forceful invitation. Plato presents neither the philosopher nor the Sophist as a "one" that is easily grasped by itself. He presents each so as to show the ways in which each appears as the

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<sup>7</sup>It is worth noting that, for Popper, the issue of Socrates' "sophistic" arguments is closely connected to what he calls "the Socratic Problem", i.e.: the relationship between the historical Socrates and Plato's character "Socrates". Popper suggests that Plato misrepresents the historical Socrates who was closer to the Sophists than the Platonic character. Despite this misrepresentation, however, Popper argues that Plato could not help but give us glimpses of the historical character (I: 307-312). Laslo Versenyi, in *Socratic Humanism*, goes further than this and argues that the historical Socrates was indeed a Sophist--a fact that Plato could not completely conceal from his readers (73-74, 178-184).

Such explanations of apparent inconsistencies in Plato's character Socrates, however, assume that Plato is manifestly unaware of these inconsistencies. This is because they suppose that Plato's intent in writing dialogues is to provide a systematic and internally consistent doctrine. I will argue that there is no compelling reason to believe that Plato is oblivious to the apparently contradictory aspects of his character Socrates. Rather, the dialogues themselves strongly suggest that in crafting his character as he has, Plato invites his reader to consider the peculiar nature and viability of the philosophic life.

other.<sup>8</sup> Such a presentation puts a reader at a loss to explain what each "is". Thereby it induces her to investigate the essential differences between Sophistry and philosophy -- to investigate what each "is".

Of course, Plato himself does not tell us that this is his intention. But, if I am right about the function of Plato's dialogues in general, then the way I have characterized his treatment of Sophistry is in accord with this function. In presenting the relationship between Sophistry and philosophy as a problem to be investigated, Plato is prevented from being dogmatic about the philosophic life. To the extent that Fite, Popper and others see Plato's problematic presentation of Sophistry and its relationship to philosophy as a weakness, this is due largely to the fact that they have failed to grasp the non-dogmatic and dramatic character of the Platonic dialogues.<sup>9</sup>

Before one assumes that Plato's intention is to unmask the Sophist for public condemnation and to show the superiority of philosophy to Sophistry, it is important to distinguish between Sophistry and philosophy as they are characterized in the dialogues. As I shall show, this is not an easy task.

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<sup>8</sup>In this context, see *Sophist* 216c-217a. I will have more to say about this passage below.

<sup>9</sup>Their reasoning could be characterized in the following manner: The dialogues include Plato's attempt to show the differences between philosophy and Sophistry as well as the superiority of the former over the latter. However, the dialogues also show that the differences between them cannot always be sustained. Therefore, Plato is inconsistent and fails in his attempt to render transparent the distinction between Sophistry and philosophy. It seems to me that all a reader can fairly conclude from the initial observations is that the dialogues show that the differences between Sophistry and philosophy may not be obvious.



### What's in a Name?

The problem of distinguishing between the philosopher and the Sophist is put most powerfully by Plato's character Socrates at the outset of the dialogue, the *Sophist*. One naturally turns to this dialogue to determine Plato's approach to this problem. The remainder of my discussion, therefore, will be directed to an examination of the *Sophist*. A word of caution is in order, however. The *Sophist*, as will be seen, seems to offer a fairly straightforward distinction between philosophy and Sophistry, one which turns on a fairly unflattering account of the latter. Indeed, the structure of the dialogue is such that it appears to call into question virtually everything I have argued about Plato's dialogues in general. It appears to offer an unambiguous teaching; it appears bereft of any significant dramatic content and the discussion it portrays can hardly be described as the "noble discourse" espoused by Socrates.<sup>10</sup> Yet, as I will show, one should no more be deceived by the appearance of the *Sophist* than by the appearance of any other dialogue. Despite appearances, the *Sophist* is as rich in significant dramatic tension as any other dialogue. It is this drama which renders the "teaching" of the dialogue anything but straight-forward and which cloaks a re-affirmation of the "noble discourse" praised by Socrates. But before turning to the wider issues surrounding the drama of the *Sophist*, it is worth noting how its central question comes to be posed and what answering it seems to entail.

The *Sophist* opens upon Theodorus (a mathematician), Theaetetus (Theodorus' student), young Socrates (Theaetetus' friend and fellow student), a Stranger (from Elea) and Socrates. Theodorus and Theaetetus have arrived in order to keep their promise of the day before to meet

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<sup>10</sup>In fact, it is for this reason that for many years I considered it to be the worst written of all Plato's dialogues.

again with Socrates in the morning. The Stranger was not present for the discussion on the previous day. The conversation of the previous day had ended with Socrates leaving for the portico of the King to face the indictment that Meletus had drawn up against him (*Theaetetus* 210d). In the dramatic time-frame of the dialogues, therefore, the *Sophist* takes place shortly before Socrates' trial and condemnation. Theodorus and Theaetetus are accompanied by a Stranger from Elea who is, according to Theodorus, not only a follower of Parmenides and Zeno but a genuine philosopher himself. Socrates wonders whether the Stranger might not, in fact, be a god who has come to refute them because they are so "worthless" when it comes to argumentation.<sup>11</sup> Theodorus insists that the Stranger is not a god but rather a philosopher (*Sophist* 216c).<sup>12</sup> This claim prompts Socrates to pose the dilemma which becomes the central problem of the dialogue:

. . . I venture that it is not much easier, as the saying goes, to discern this race (the philosophers), than that of the gods. For these men--I mean those who are not feignedly (*plastos*) but really are philosophers--through the ignorance of everyone else, appear (*phantazomenoi*) in all kinds of shapes 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 (*phantazontai*) as statesmen and sometimes as sophists, and sometimes they may give the impression that they are altogether mad. But I should like to ask our stranger here, if it is agreeable to him, what the people there thought about these and what they called them. (216c-d, my emphasis).<sup>13</sup>

When asked by the Stranger what "these" are, Socrates replies, "Sophist, statesman, philosopher" and explains what, in particular, he would like to know:

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<sup>11</sup>Socrates quotes Homer's *Odyssey* here (XVII: 485).

<sup>12</sup>Theodorus also says that the Stranger is more reasonable than those who devote themselves to disputation--a rather impious statement if Socrates is right about the "god".

<sup>13</sup>The difficulty of distinguishing between one thing and another which it appears to be is a difficulty which runs throughout the *Theaetetus* as well. It is playfully foreshadowed at 145a ff. when Socrates challenges Theodorus' claim that Socrates and Theaetetus resemble each other. The thread is again picked up in the *Statesman* where a young man who shares Socrates' name, but not his looks, converses with the Stranger. See Socrates' remark at this interesting "coincidence" at 257e-258a.

. . . Did they consider all these to be one or two or, just as there are three names, did they divide them into three kinds (*gene*) and, accordingly, attach to each one name? (217a)

The Stranger responds to Socrates' question by answering that they, the people there, considered them to be three (217b).<sup>14</sup> For the better part of a day, the Stranger will attempt to define one of these three--the Sophist.

I have quoted the preamble to Socrates' question and the Stranger's reply for two reasons. First, Socrates' preamble makes his simple question more complicated than it first appears. Indeed, the Stranger's reply and, hence, his attempt to define the Sophist, will fall short of what Socrates has asked.<sup>15</sup> Second, when considered in the light of his preamble, Socrates' question is one of the most fundamental questions concerning the nature of the Sophists and their relationship to philosophy. It is not surprising that it should be voiced at the beginning of the *Sophist*. It remains central for the whole dialogue.

What is involved in Socrates' question? On the face of it, what Socrates asks is fairly straight-forward. He wants to know whether "the people there" considered the Sophist, the statesmen and the philosopher to belong to three distinct kinds corresponding to their three distinct names, to two kinds despite their three names or to one kind despite their three names. This is precisely the question to which the Stranger responds.

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<sup>14</sup>"The people there", is an ambiguous phrase and, I think, deliberately so. By referring to the Stranger's abode as "there", Plato has Socrates leave the question open as to whether the Stranger is a god who has come to refute them, a philosopher from the "heights", a mere disciple of Parmenides and Zeno (the Stranger, after all, promises to expound the views of others) or some other human being who happens to be from Elea. In so doing, Plato indicates that even a philosopher may have difficulty recognizing another philosopher. The question of the Stranger's identity serves as a continual reminder of the dilemma posed by Socrates at the outset of the dialogue.

<sup>15</sup>I am not suggesting that the Stranger does not comprehend the difficulties involved in answering Socrates' question. While the Stranger explains that, "It is not difficult to say that they considered them three," he cautions that, "it is no small or easy task to define clearly the nature of each." (*Sophist* 217b, trans. Fowler).

The word which I have translated as "kind" is the Greek word, "*genos*"--"race" or "breed". Socrates does not want to know whether or not the Sophist, statesman and philosopher have different "looks" or "appearances" to which the three names correspond. He wants to know whether the three kinds can be "genetically" or "naturally" distinguished in spite of their appearances. The dolphin and the ichthyosaur appear to be the same kind of animal. They are, however, fundamentally different. One is a mammal and the other is a fish. Regardless of appearances, the two creatures are genetically different "breeds" or "races". The usual appearance of the ichthyosaur and the dolphin is no sure guide to what each really is.

In his preamble, Socrates makes it quite clear that he considers the way statesmen, Sophists and philosophers *appear* to be an insufficient guide to what they really or naturally are. Genuine philosophers, for instance, do not appear as what they are.<sup>16</sup> They appear as something other: as statesmen, Sophists and as those who are "altogether mad".<sup>17</sup> While some people do appear to be philosophers, according to Socrates, these are not genuine philosophers. The genuine philosopher, it seems, does not appear as what he is.<sup>18</sup> The situation is even more complicated. Unless every *apparent* Sophist, statesman and madman is a disguised philosopher,

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<sup>16</sup>In his preamble to his question, Socrates explains that philosophers do not appear as what they are due to the ignorance of "everyone else" (*tone allone . . . poleas*). "Everyone else" here is ambiguous. Socrates might mean that no one but a philosopher can recognise a philosopher for what he is. He might also mean that the philosopher will appear as other than what he is to everyone else simply. Whether the "Sophist", "statesman" and "Sophist" are "natural types" which close examination can distinguish or whether they are appearances which, among other things, can be feigned is a question which emerges in the dialogue. Even Socrates is unsure as to whether or not the Stranger is a philosopher and this is in spite of the fact that he seems to know what philosophers are. A genuine philosopher may fail to recognise another for what he is.

<sup>17</sup>It is interesting to note that Socrates drops his talk of those who are "altogether mad" and focuses instead upon the other "appearances" of the philosopher.

<sup>18</sup>If Socrates is correct, hiring and promotion committees in university philosophy departments face some rather intriguing problems.

some of these really are what they seem. Is it possible that those who appear to be philosophers are Sophists, statesmen or madmen in disguise?

It is a relatively simple task to determine the natural differences between the dolphin and its look-alike, the ichthyosaur. One need only dissect and compare them. Their apparent sameness is only skin deep. They appear to be the same kind of animal only when one has not looked closely enough. That philosophers appear to be Sophists and statesmen may be due to the ignorance of people who encounter them. Perhaps most people do not take a close enough look at the people they believe to be Sophists, philosophers and statesmen and hence mistake them for each other. In his preamble to the question he asks of the Stranger, Socrates says that genuine philosophers appear to "others" as what they are not because of the ignorance of those "others". Does this mean that distinguishing between genuine philosophers, Sophists and statesmen and their appearances is simply a matter of taking a closer look?

The Stranger seems to think so. He claims that "Sophist", "statesmen" and "philosopher" are three distinct or "natural" kinds although he acknowledges that it is not easy to distinguish them.<sup>19</sup> The Stranger, that is, accepts Socrates' claim that they are difficult to distinguish but contends that they are distinguishable kinds. Presumably, the reason they are mistaken for each other is that most people do not take a closer look. The fact that philosophers tend to be mistaken for Sophists and statesmen is due to remediable ignorance. Just as an informed marine biologist will not mistake the ichthyosaur for the dolphin because he knows better, so someone who has

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<sup>19</sup>The Stranger begins by indicating that he will explain what "the people there" take to be the Sophist, statesman and philosopher. What is not clear, at the outset of his discussion, is the extent to which he subscribes to their teaching. He does make it clear, however, that he will use names and arguments in order to make clear his own understanding of the matters he will discuss and he asks that Theaetetus do the same (218c). Further on, the Stranger clearly advances his own doctrine of Being (247e). That is, while the teaching offered by the Stranger may indeed be the teaching of the "people there", it also appears to be his own.

taken a closer look at the genuine statesman, Sophist and philosopher will not mistake them for each other.

The Stranger's account rests upon the assumption that "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" are natural kinds like "dolphin" and "ichthyosaur". Socrates had suggested two other ways of looking at the kinds in question. He had wondered whether "Sophist", "statesman" and "philosopher" might belong to two kinds in spite of their three names or to one kind in spite of their three names. The Stranger rejects these possibilities but they are worth considering as they illuminate precisely why his question is more complicated than it may seem.

What if the names "Sophist", "statesman" and "philosopher" correspond to two, as opposed to three kinds? This would mean that, despite the distinct appearances that give rise to their three distinct names, there are really only two kinds. The third name would refer only to an appearance that the two kinds have. For example, it might be the case that Sophist and statesman are two distinct kinds to which we refer using the names, "Sophist", "statesman" and "philosopher". "Philosopher", in this case, would not refer to a distinct kind but rather to a Sophist or to a statesman when either appears a certain way. If "Sophist", "statesman" and "philosopher" are names referring to two distinct kinds, then: the Sophist is an appearance of the statesman and the philosopher; or the statesman is an appearance of the philosopher and the Sophist; or the philosopher is an appearance of the Sophist and the statesman. This possibility, which the Stranger rejects, suggests that distinguishing among "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" is not a matter of distinguishing between three natural kinds which look the same to someone who is ignorant. It suggests that one of the "kinds" is not a natural kind at all but rather that it is something like a way of being which the other two kinds may exhibit. Perhaps the statesman and the Sophist exhibit "philosophical" behaviour. Perhaps the name "philosopher" does not designate a distinct, natural kind. Perhaps it designates a Sophist or a statesman when either appeared in

a certain way. Taking a closer look at the philosopher might reveal that the philosopher is not a natural kind but rather a way of being of two other natural kinds.

Socrates does not tell us whether he thinks that the names "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" refer to one, two or three kinds. His preamble, however, excludes the possibility that the three names refer to two kinds. Socrates believes that there are *both* genuine philosophers *and* those who are something else but who appear to be philosophers. If the three names refer to only two kinds then *either* "philosopher" is a natural kind *or* it is an appearance of two other natural kinds. It cannot be both. The distinction Socrates makes in his preamble between genuine and apparent philosophers would be meaningless if the three names refer to only two kinds.

But what of the third possibility? What if the names "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" refer to one kind? This would mean one of two things. Either one of these "kinds" is a real kind while the other two are names that are given to appearances of this kind or all three names refer to three possible appearances of another natural kind. What if the first is the case? Only three things are possible: either "philosopher" is a genuine kind and the other two, "Sophist" and "statesman" are appearances of this kind; or "Sophist" is a genuine kind while "philosopher" and "statesman" are its appearances; or "statesman" is a genuine kind while "philosopher" and "Sophist" are its appearances. Here again, the distinction Socrates makes between genuine and apparent philosophers would be meaningless. "Philosopher" would either be a genuine kind or an appearance of another natural kind. It would not be both.

What if the three names refer to appearances of another natural kind? This would mean that the kind of thing which is referred to by the names is not captured by any of them and that the names refer only to the way this thing appears. Sophist, statesman and philosopher, in this case, would be appearances of a natural kind. They would not themselves be natural kinds. Perhaps "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" are appearances of the natural kind, "human being". Would the distinction Socrates makes between real and apparent philosophers make sense on this

account? It would if one of the natural characteristics of human beings is the ability to appear as what they are not. If "philosopher" is not a natural kind but a way in which the natural kind "human being" can appear and, if human beings can appear to be what they are not, then it is possible that there are human beings whose way of being in the world is genuinely philosophical and those whose way of being in the world merely feigns the philosophical.

If the Stranger is right, then "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" are three natural kinds which can only be mistaken for each other by someone who has not taken a close look at them or who is ignorant. If the three are distinct, natural kinds then, in principle, the distinct nature of each can be made apparent. Once one knows the distinct nature of each one will not mistake one of them for either of the others. There is another possibility, however. "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" could be appearances of a natural kind which is capable of appearing as what it is not. If "Sophist", "statesman" and "philosopher" are not natural kinds but appearances which can be feigned, how would one go about distinguishing the human being who genuinely pursues one of these ways of being from one who merely feigns it? Knowing the behaviour entailed by the philosophical way of being, for instance, would not help one to distinguish the genuine from the apparent philosopher, for this behaviour is precisely what the apparent philosopher feigns. In order to say what the genuine philosopher is, we would need to know not only what the philosophical mode of being entails in terms of behaviour, for instance, but we would also have to know what makes an appearance genuine for a human being and what makes it only seem to be. This would require a close look at the natural kind "human being" for, whatever is entailed by the term "philosopher", it will not help one determine the difference between the genuine and feigned philosopher.

Socrates offers three possible approaches to the question of what the philosopher, statesman and Sophist are. The one the Stranger chooses suggests that the three are natural kinds which are distinguishable from each other and that a failure to distinguish them is due to



remediable human ignorance. Yet one of the approaches offered by Socrates suggests that the three are not natural kinds at all but rather appearances of another natural kind. If that natural kind is capable of appearing other than it is, then distinguishing among "Sophist", "philosopher" and "statesman" requires a close look at what constitutes a genuine appearance of this kind and what constitutes a feigned appearance of this kind. Classifying or defining the appearances in question will not settle the question as to what constitutes a genuine as opposed to false appearance.

Socrates claims that genuine philosophers are mistaken for Sophists, statesmen and madmen due to the ignorance of everyone else. There is no reason to assume that Socrates agrees with the Stranger that the ignorance in question is to be remedied by a close examination of three natural kinds. Socrates may believe that the ignorance in question is more difficult to remedy. It may require the capacity to distinguish between a feigned and genuine appearance of a being which is capable of appearing as what it is not. It may be that not only non-philosophers fail to recognise genuine philosophers but that *everyone else simply* (including other philosophers) will mistake the philosopher for something else.

These speculations are not as far fetched as may seem. In his attempt to define clearly the nature of the Sophist, the Stranger runs into a host of problems centring around the fact that the Sophist continually appears as something else--as what he is not. Most significantly, with each definition offered by the Stranger, the Sophist more and more comes to resemble the philosopher, Socrates (see below). It should not be surprising, therefore, that by the middle of the dialogue, the Stranger is forced into a long digression concerning the relation of appearances to reality or, to use language more appropriate to the dialogue, the relation of images to their originals. Because the distinction between images and their originals implies that a being can appear as what it *is not*, the digression quickly shifts to the problem of "non-being". Only after this discussion is the Stranger able to offer his final definition of the Sophist as one who imitates the wise man. As I shall argue, this constitutes the undoing of the Stranger's attempt to show that "Sophist", "statesman" and

"philosopher" are three names which correspond to three distinct, natural kinds and gives credence to Socrates' suggestion that the three may be appearances of one kind.<sup>20</sup>

The difficulties the Stranger encounters while attempting to define the Sophist are also enacted at the level of the drama of the dialogue. I have noted that, as the Stranger moves through various definitions of the Sophist, the Sophist comes to resemble the philosopher, Socrates. As I will show, the Sophist also comes to resemble the Stranger. The Stranger's attempt to define the Sophist, therefore, becomes intimately connected to the question of how to define the philosopher. This difficulty is not only prefigured by Socrates' preamble and his question to the Stranger, it is prefigured by Plato in the opening drama of the dialogue. Theodorus tells Socrates that the Stranger is a philosopher. He also says that the Stranger is more "measured" than those who devote themselves to disputation (216b-c). Theodorus has quite an aversion to *being drawn into disputations and regards Socrates' love of disputation as unseemly* (*Theaetetus* 162b-c, 165b, 169a-b, 183d). Socrates' claim that it is not easier to discern the race of philosophers than that of the gods is a direct challenge to Theodorus' confident identification of the "more measured" Stranger as a philosopher. The fact that Socrates and the Stranger are quite different (more on this below), when put together with Socrates' claim that discerning the race of the philosophers is no easier than discerning the race of the gods should lead one to wonder whether the Stranger is a philosopher. Who and what the Stranger is is never made clear in the dialogue. He remains throughout, the "Stranger". He is, however, a "Stranger" who will offer a definition of the Sophist which is a description of Socrates. The question as to whether Socrates or the Stranger is the genuine philosopher in the dialogue is a question which the Stranger's account provokes again and again. If the Stranger were to succeed in defining the Sophist as a

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<sup>20</sup>To anticipate, one of the reasons the Stranger's attempt to define the Sophist fails is that the criteria he employs to distinguish the Sophist from the wise man are the same criteria by which one can distinguish the philosopher from the wise man.

natural kind distinct from the philosopher, his account would settle this question. As I shall show, it does not.

*Before turning to the Stranger's difficulties, however, it is worth noting what it is that makes the problem of distinguishing between the Sophist and the philosopher such a pressing issue both in this and other dialogues.*

## Socrates the Sophist?

Within the dramatic time-frame of Plato's dialogues, the discussion that takes place in the *Sophist* occurs the day after Socrates was formally indicted for impiety and corrupting the youth. As I noted above, the dialogue of the day before had broken off with Socrates explaining that he had to go to the Porch of the King to answer the charges that Meletus had brought against him. Later, in his presentation of Socrates' trial, Plato presents Socrates as maintaining that Meletus' charges stemmed from a long-standing public prejudice to the effect that Socrates was a Sophist.<sup>21</sup> To be more precise, Socrates explains that Meletus' charges reflect the belief of the majority of Athenians: that Socrates is an investigator of divine and physical matters, a practitioner of the art of contradiction and a man who, like the Sophists, promises to teach young men wisdom for a fee (*Apology* 19a ff). As Theaetetus and the Stranger note in the *Sophist* (with Socrates listening in the background), these are precisely the things Theaetetus and the Athenian public associate with Sophistry (*Sophist* 232b-233a, 233b).

The Stranger's attempt to define the Sophist as a "kind" distinct from that of the philosopher must therefore be presumed to be of more than passing interest to Socrates. Socrates believes that philosophers appear to a great number of people as Sophists and he knows that the serious charges that he himself faces, which will cost him his life if they cannot be successfully rebutted, stem from the fact that he himself is believed to be a Sophist.<sup>22</sup> In his defense speech to the

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<sup>21</sup>That the explanation of the "long-standing prejudice" is meant as background to Meletus' charges, see *Apology* 19a.

<sup>22</sup>While Socrates mentions Aristophanes' play, the *Clouds*, in his defence speech as an early "encapsulation" of these charges, it is important to note that he never suggests that the play inspired them (*Apology* 19a). He does not claim that Aristophanes is responsible for the public's belief that he is a Sophist. This is consistent with his claim in the *Sophist* that philosophers (and

Athenian jury, he also notes that this common belief has endured for a great number of years, having begun to "circulate" when some jurors at his trial were youths and the majority were mere boys (*Apology* 18c). Whatever it is that Socrates has been up to all this time and however it is that he has appeared to the majority of Athenians, nothing he has said or done has suggested to the majority that their belief about him is inaccurate. For this reason, Socrates cannot help but be extremely interested in the Stranger's attempt to define clearly the nature of Sophistry as distinguished from philosophy. At least in public, Socrates has not been able to do this. And, as I shall argue, his failure to do so is in no way remedied by his defence speech in the *Apology*.<sup>23</sup>

In the literary time-frame of the dialogues, the Stranger's attempt to define the Sophist is heard by Socrates immediately after his indictment and shortly before his trial. The definition arrived at is described as "the very truth"(268c-d, 254a-b, 260d). Yet, in his defence speech to the Athenian jury, Socrates makes no reference to this definition; nor does he make use of any of the Stranger's account to distinguish his own activities from those of the Sophists. In fact, as we shall see, much of what Socrates says in the *Apology* confirms that Socrates himself is a Sophist according to the definition offered in the *Sophist*.<sup>24</sup>

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not just he himself) appear other than they are and that one of the things they appear to be are Sophists. Despite his protestations at the charges, in the *Apology*, Socrates never suggests that he is surprised that they have been brought against him.

<sup>23</sup>At this point I can well imagine someone arguing that there is something curious (to say the least) about my procedure here. After all, it is virtually an accepted fact that the *Sophist* was written well after the *Apology* and one may be inclined to argue that what Plato espoused in his later years would not be espoused by the Socrates of the *Apology*. That the "spokesman" of the later dialogue is not Socrates but the Stranger might suggest that Plato later sought to distance himself from the opinions of his earlier creation. I do not share this view but at this point can only beg the reader's indulgence for what follows. I shall compare below what Socrates says in the *Apology* with the Stranger's definition of the Sophist in order to show the problems created for Socrates by this definition.

<sup>24</sup>The question whether, in the *Sophist*, Plato improved upon the views represented in the *Apology* is implicitly addressed below in the chapter entitled "Plato versus Euclides", p. 138 ff. To anticipate, however, I do not believe that any such "improvement" is to be found (see note 23, above).

Towards the end of the *Sophist*, the Sophist is defined in the following way<sup>25</sup>: as someone who does not know justice in particular and virtue in general but who has an opinion of these things which he imitates in speech and deed (267c); who, because of his experience in disputation, strongly suspects that he is ignorant about the things he appears to know (268a)<sup>26</sup>; who dissembles this ignorance in private conversations by forcing those who converse with him to contradict themselves (268b)<sup>27</sup>; and who is distinguished from the wise man who has the wisdom which the Sophist imitates (268c-d). The fundamental distinction between the Sophist and the philosopher, according to the *Sophist*, appears to be that the philosopher actually knows those matters of which the Sophist is ignorant but which he pretends to know.<sup>28</sup> These matters include not only "justice in particular and virtue in general"; they also include: invisible or divine matters; visible matters including astronomy and "earthly" things; being and becoming in general (about

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<sup>25</sup>The Stranger indicates that the previous definitions of the Sophist (as hunter, controversialist, retailer, etc.) were deficient. He notes that while the Sophist appeared (*ephantazethe*) in all of these arts, he has been taken over by the imitative art (*mimetike*)--the art of producing images (*eidolon*) (265a). The final definition of the Sophist as "image-maker" thus supplants all the previous definitions. While the Sophist may have *appeared* to Theaetetus and the Stranger as a hunter, controversialist, retailer, etc., it is now clear that these *appearances* were images produced by the Sophist.

<sup>26</sup>In the *Phaedo* (89d-90d), Socrates offers a psychological explanation for the way in which those who spend their time engaged in disputation come to believe that nothing can be known and that this belief makes them wiser than other men.

<sup>27</sup>The word for "dissembles" here, *eironikon*, is that from which we get the word "ironic".

<sup>28</sup>The Stranger considers philosophy to be the practise of "psychic gymnastics" which, he says, is capable of bringing the soul to all it aspires to know (see p. 170 ff. and the discussion of "psychic gymnastics" beginning on p. 179 below). For a discussion of the final definition of the Sophist as one who is ignorant of those things he pretends to know, see p. 259 ff. To repeat, the distinction between the Sophist and the philosopher in the *Sophist* appears to be that the philosopher knows those things of which the Sophist is ignorant but which he pretends to know. I use the word "appears" here quite deliberately for, according to my argument, this distinction is shown to be untenable within the dialogue itself.

which the Sophist speaks in private); laws and public affairs; and how technically skilled men ought to answer those who disagree with them (about which the Sophists write books) (232c-d).<sup>29</sup>

It is, therefore, curious that in his defence speech Socrates insists that he is ignorant of all of these things. He denies that he has any knowledge of divine and earthly matters (*Apology* 19c); he maintains that he is unskilled at speaking before a law court (17d) and that he has had no leisure for and has avoided public affairs (23b, 31d). He says that he does not know how to teach men virtue and implies that he does not know what constitutes the excellence (*arete*) of a human being or citizen (20b-c). While he is convinced that no public man with whom he has conversed knows the "fine and good" things, he claims that he has no knowledge of these things either (21d). Concerning the things of which the poets write, Socrates claims to be as ignorant as they (21b-c). And, while he admits that technically skilled individuals do have knowledge that he lacks, he is as ignorant as they when it comes to matters outside their particular field of expertise (22d-e). When it comes to the question of knowledge, it appears that the only thing which distinguishes Socrates from the majority of other men is not knowledge of the matters about which the Sophist disputes but knowledge of his own ignorance concerning those matters (23a).<sup>30</sup> Yet, even in this respect,

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<sup>29</sup>Because this "list" is offered well before the final definition of the Sophist (it precedes the long digression into the possibility of false speech and image making), it might be argued that the items on this "list" are not implicitly included in the final definition. However, it is important to recall that it is the completion of this "list" which necessitates the digression. At 233c, Theaetetus and the Stranger have already concluded that the Sophist's knowledge is based upon "opinion" and not "true knowledge". Shortly thereafter, the Stranger hazards that the Sophist is a kind of "image-maker"--one who makes inaccurate "images" of what is (235b-236d). It is because the notion of "inaccurate" images (237a) and later, the very notion of "image" itself are so problematic that the digression takes place. After the digression, Theaetetus and the Stranger are free to return to the definition towards which they had been working when they began the "list".

<sup>30</sup>Socrates never denies investigating or discussing the things above and beneath the earth and the divine things. He says that no one will be found who will say that he has ever heard Socrates talk about these things (*Apology* 19d). It is, of course, quite conceivable that Socrates talks about such things in private with those who can be counted upon not to reveal this in public. According to the Stranger and Theaetetus, the Sophists, too, are reputed to talk about being and becoming in private (*Sophist* 232c).

Socrates appears to be in the same position as the Sophist who, according to the Stranger, strongly suspects that he does not know the things about which he disputes (*Sophist* 268a). If there is any difference between the Sophists (as described by the Stranger) and Socrates on this score, it appears to be only that Socrates is not as averse to wearing his ignorance on his sleeve.

Moreover, as Socrates tells it, his knowledge of his own ignorance has been reinforced by his habit of disputing the opinions of others. According to Socrates, much of his time has been spent cross-examining prominent Athenians on matters about which they claim to have knowledge. In every case that he reports, his showing the ignorance of his interlocutor also showed his own ignorance of the matters in question. Socrates does not merely present himself as ignorant of the matters about which he disputes. As in the case of the Sophist (according to the Stranger), there is an intimate connection between his awareness of his own ignorance and his success in argumentation (*Sophist* 268a). This did not prevent Socrates from discussing matters about which he claims to know little, if nothing. The Sophist is said by the Stranger to be ignorant of those things about which he disputes. So is Socrates by his own admission. He and the Sophists (according to the Stranger's account of the Sophists) appear to be interested in much the same sorts of things. He has spent a great deal of time talking about human virtue and justice (*Apology* 36c, 38a) and certainly his disputations with prominent Athenian politicians must have concerned political and legal matters. While he resists being identified as an investigator of divine and earthly matters, he does not consider such investigations to be dishonourable (*Apology* 19c). He does not even deny discussing such things but says only that no one will say he ever heard Socrates discussing them (*Apology* 19d). Even the Sophists, as the Stranger asserts, discuss these sorts of questions in private.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the Sophists, however, Socrates did not write any books.

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<sup>31</sup>Socrates does, however, "tip his hand" slightly when reporting on his conversations with the poets. He notes that the poets, like the *prophets* and *givers of oracles* "say many fine things but know nothing about the things of which they speak" (*Apology* 22c). Aside from what this suggests about Socrates' own investigation into divine matters, this casts an ironic shadow over



Nevertheless, Socrates appears to have "taught" the art of contradiction or disputation despite his claims to the contrary. While he states that he has no pupils and teaches no one, he admits that his cross-questioning activities have led to his having a reputation for wisdom.<sup>32</sup> He explains that those who hear him consider him to be wise in those matters on which he refutes others (23a). The result is that wealthy young men with time on their hands not only find it amusing to listen to Socrates refute others but they imitate him and thereby learn how to cross-examine others themselves (23c, 33c).

According to the Stranger in the *Sophist*, it is this very "power" of making young people think one is wise through one's ability to contradict others successfully that is the "marvellous power" of Sophistry (233a-b). As the Stranger explains, the Sophist's ability to dispute the opinions of others successfully leads young people in particular to believe that the Sophist is wise in the matters about which he disputes and it is for this reason that they are drawn to the Sophist in order to become his pupils. While Socrates claims that he has no pupils, he observes that the fact that many young people imitate him has made a number of people very angry and resulted in charges that he corrupts the youth (*Apology* 23a). If he is concerned about the fact that the young imitate his argumentative style, Socrates never says so. He certainly never says that he tried to do anything to discourage the young from cross-questioning others. Rather, he explains that he never discouraged anyone from listening to him but offered himself to anyone. And he adds that he did not converse with others *only* when he was paid (*Apology* 33b).

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Socrates' claims to have been sent on a mission by the God of Delphi. After all, this "mission" began when an excitable friend of Socrates received an ambiguous message from an oracle. Socrates never claims that the God himself (not to be identified with the "daimonic voice" which Socrates has had from childhood) ever actually spoke with him.

<sup>32</sup>For Socrates' denials that he has any pupils or that he ever taught anyone see *Apology* 19e, 23d, 33b.

In summary, the speech Plato has his Socrates deliver in his *Apology* does little to help a reader distinguish between the words and deeds of the philosopher Socrates and those of the Sophists. According to what the *Sophist* suggests is the popular view of the Sophists and according to the final definition of the Sophist put forward at the end of this dialogue, Socrates is a Sophist--albeit a rather unsuccessful and, perhaps, unsophisticated Sophist. By his own account, he spends his time refuting the views of others, challenging conventional notions of justice and virtue; he admits he is ignorant of the matters about which he disputes and hence offers no knowledge to replace the opinions he succeeds in refuting; he derives his reputation for wisdom from his ability to successfully refute the opinions of others; he is surrounded by wealthy young men who imitate his argumentative practices and from whom he occasionally receives money; and he does nothing to discourage these wealthy young men from refuting their fellow citizens. That the rest of the Sophists, unlike Socrates, wrote manuals on the subject of argumentation, habitually collected fees from their students and did not publicly confess any ignorance does not prove that Socrates was not of their number. Such practices may only suggest that they were more financially and politically astute and perhaps of greater public benefit than Socrates or, that they were "better" Sophists.<sup>33</sup>

It may be objected that I have overlooked Socrates' assertion that "the unexamined life is not worth living" (a crucial part of his defence speech) and his insistence that this is what has motivated him to examine both himself and others (*Apology* 38a). The problem, however, is that nowhere in the Platonic corpus is there a clear explanation of what such "self-examination" consists

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<sup>33</sup>Of course, none of these attributes that Socrates shares with the Sophists proves that he is a Sophist either. They do, however, underscore the difficulty in distinguishing him from the Sophists, a difficulty of which Socrates himself is acutely aware as his opening question in the *Sophist* indicates.

of and what it reveals to one who pursues it.<sup>34</sup> Certainly Socrates' "examinations" appear to the majority of the Athenians to be indistinguishable from the disputations of the Sophists.<sup>35</sup> And, what he says about these "examinations" in his defense speech does little, if anything, to remedy the situation.

The question of the relationship between Plato's Socrates and the Sophists does not arise only when one compares Socrates' account of his activities in the *Apology* with the final definition of the Sophist offered in the *Sophist*. Often in apparently irrelevant comments or, in some cases, bluntly, a great deal of Plato's writing underscores the difficulties of distinguishing the philosopher from the Sophist.

Consider the following events described by Socrates in the *Protagoras* after he and a companion (Hippocrates), arrive at the house of Callias who, according to Socrates, spent more money on Sophists than anyone else (*Apology* 20a):

. . . and when we arrived at the door, we stood and discussed some argument which had come upon us on the road . . . until we came to an agreement with one another. Now it seems to me that the doorkeeper, a eunuch, overheard us. It is likely that he is annoyed with the comings and goings in the house because of the large number of Sophists. In any event, when we knocked on the door, he opened it and when he saw us said, 'Ha! Some Sophists! He's busy.' He then seized the door with both hands and slammed it shut with as much energy as he could muster. (*Protagoras* 314d)

While Socrates gains admission to the house by explaining that he and Hippocrates are not Sophists and have not come to see Callias but rather to see Protagoras, the eunuch's hesitation to re-open the door suggests he does not quite believe them (314d). One may well imagine that,

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<sup>34</sup>One of the "answers" given to this question in the *Apology* seems to be that self-examination leads to the "knowledge of one's own ignorance". Yet, according to the Stranger, the Sophist too possesses this knowledge (*Sophist* 268a).

<sup>35</sup>Granted, Socrates does not accept many of the views of the majority of Athenians and he did not regard himself as a Sophist. The question remains as to the grounds on which he distinguished himself from the Sophists. Given the criteria used by the majority of Athenians, he had to appear as a Sophist to them. And, according to the less popular and apparently more "philosophical" criteria developed by the Stranger in the *Sophist*, Socrates is also a Sophist.

as far as the eunuch is concerned, his suspicions are confirmed immediately thereafter. Inside the house are three of the most famous Sophists of the day--Protagoras, Hippias and Prodicus--each surrounded by his own entourage of fascinated, wealthy, young Athenians. What the eunuch cannot help but observe, after he has allowed Socrates and Hippocrates to enter, is that, not only does Socrates bring Hippocrates in his train as he enters the door but, as Socrates himself notes, ". . . Alcibiades the beautiful . . . and Critias the son of Calaeschrus came through behind us" (316a). His conversation and the presence of his own "entourage" serve to underscore the difficulty of distinguishing Socrates from the Sophists.

The majority of young people who are so eager to hear the words of the great Sophists in the *Protagoras* are present at the *Symposium* to which Socrates was an invited guest. That is, as Plato presents him, Socrates spends a great deal of time in the company of young men who are associated with the Sophists. One wonders if these young people see any difference between Socrates and the Sophists, particularly since, as Socrates describes it in the *Apology*, their attraction to him seems to be the same as the attraction young people feel (as described by the Stranger) towards the Sophists in general.

Plato goes so far as to present Socrates as having a serious interest in the Sophists. After his conversation with Euthydemus and his brother, Dionysodorus, who, according to Socrates, are capable of "refuting any argument as readily if it be true as if it be false" (*Euthydemus*, 272b) (a practice he later calls "initiation" into the "Sophistic mysteries" 277e), Socrates tells his old friend Crito that he intends to take lessons from the two brothers (272d). Worried that the brothers will not accept him as a student on account of his age, he suggests that he and Crito take Crito's sons along with them to the school in order to use them as "bait" (272d).<sup>36</sup> While the *Euthydemus*

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<sup>36</sup>It is not unreasonable to assume that the "bait" Socrates requires Crito to provide is not only his sons but the money required for tuition. See *Cratylus* 384b where Socrates explains that poverty prevented him from taking Prodicus' fifty drachma course.

never makes explicitly clear the nature of Socrates' interest in the lessons of these Sophists, he never rescinds his request to Crito, a request which he repeats at the end of the dialogue (304c).<sup>37</sup>

While Crito, Socrates' long-time friend, is shown to be somewhat disturbed by Socrates' interest in the Sophists (*Euthydemus* 304d-305b), Plato dramatizes the way in which Socrates' apparent affinity for Sophistry could greatly anger influential Athenians. In the *Meno*, Plato has Socrates and Meno joined briefly by Anytus, one of the foremost accusers of Socrates, in a discussion of the teachability of virtue (90a). When Socrates suggests that Meno would do well to study with the Sophists (91a-b), Anytus is appalled:

By Heracles! Don't blaspheme, Socrates. May no relative or friend of mine, whether a fellow townsman or a foreigner, be seized with such madness as to be willingly corrupted by those men for they are a manifest mutilation and corruption of those who keep their company. (91c)

Socrates challenges this pronouncement (91c-92c) and questions Anytus' views as to who is qualified to teach young people the path of virtue (93a-94e). This discussion provokes a warning from Anytus:

Socrates, it seems to me that you easily speak ill of people. If you are willing to be prevailed upon by me, I for one, would advise you to be discreet: while in other cities it is perhaps easier to do people harm than good, such is the case more so in this city. I think you, yourself, understand this. (94e)

Then, not only does Plato present Socrates as conveying his interest in the Sophists to his close friends, he portrays Socrates as suggesting that the Sophists are better teachers of virtue than the most prominent of Athenian citizens to a most prominent Athenian citizen. By having

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<sup>37</sup>Is Socrates' request ironic? I can find no evidence to suggest that it is. Crito has no interest in attending the classes of the two Sophists and, given his low opinion of Sophists in general, he has no interest in exposing his sons to them. If Socrates is not interested in the instruction the Sophists offer, why should he pretend to be? Perhaps he thinks that Crito and Crito's sons could benefit from attending the Sophists' classes while he would not. While I do not think this is likely, if it were true, it would still support my contention that Socrates has some interest in the Sophists. Why else encourage his oldest friend and his oldest friend's sons to take instruction from them?

Socrates suggest this to Anytus, one of the three who was later to bring Socrates to trial, Plato underscores the fact that Socrates' proximity to the Sophists and his distance from certain prominent Athenians played no small part in his trial and condemnation.

Such a picture is only reinforced by Socrates' avowed admiration for Prodicus. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates is shown regretting the fact that his poverty prevented him from being able to enrol in the Sophist's fifty drachma course. He did, however, avail himself of the one drachma course.<sup>38</sup> In the *Protagoras*, not only does Socrates refer to the Sophist Protagoras as the wisest man living (309c-d), he calls himself a "disciple" of Prodicus whom he regards as "all-wise" and "divine" (*theios*) (314a, 315e). And, years later, on the day Socrates presented himself at the Porch of the King to face the charges brought by Meletus, Plato shows Socrates' respect for Prodicus to be undiminished. After explaining to Theaetetus that not all of his young associates benefit equally from his company, Socrates further outlines what he does with some of them:

I play match-maker most graciously and, as God is my witness, I guess most successfully with whom they can profitably associate. I have, indeed, given many of them over to Prodicus and many over to other wise and divine (*thespesios*) men. (*Theaetetus* 151b)

Whatever Socrates' views of the Sophists, unlike Anytus and other prominent Athenians, he did not consider them to be "a manifest mutilation and corruption of those who keep their company". On the contrary, Plato depicts Socrates as critical of the prejudices against Sophistry held by people like Anytus, as interested in taking their courses and as sending some of his young associates to the Sophists for instruction.

Socrates' speech in the *Sophist* to the effect that it is virtually impossible to distinguish the philosopher from the Sophist is thus supported by the fact that, in his deeds and in his accounts of his own deeds, the philosopher Socrates is not easily distinguishable from the Sophists. Plato, in other words, does not simply "state" the problem of the relationship between the Sophist and

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<sup>38</sup>See note 36 above.

the philosopher through the speeches of his character Socrates. He portrays that problem dramatically through the deeds of the same character. In so doing, Plato puts his reader in an interesting position. The reader is invited not only to note the distinctions drawn between the Sophist and the philosopher by any of Plato's characters<sup>39</sup> but to measure these distinctions against the deeds of the various Sophists and philosophers as they are presented in the dialogues.

When such a "measure" is applied, the results can be perplexing. As noted above, the long investigation into the nature of the Sophist in the *Sophist* concludes that the Sophist is a man who only pretends to know those things which the philosopher, in fact, knows.<sup>40</sup> Yet, if we take this as Plato's final word on the matter, it would appear that the philosopher Socrates is, as Werner Fite notes, ". . . Plato's best illustration of a sophist."<sup>41</sup> That is, we would be forced to conclude that Socrates' many claims to the effect that he is dedicated to philosophy<sup>42</sup> are vacuous and that he is, according to the "teaching" of the dialogues, a Sophist--a Sophist who, at best, is unaware of his own nature or who, at worst, uses the guise of a philosopher in order to seem to be what he is not. If the Stranger's teaching concerning the Sophist in the *Sophist* is to be taken as Plato's final word on the matter then either Plato's understanding of philosophy is inconsistent or the *Sophist* represents Plato's own indictment of his character Socrates who, until this point, appears in the dialogues as his special favourite. Perhaps Plato himself even suggests the latter is the case when he has Socrates express the concern that the Stranger might be a god who has come to punish him because of his worthlessness in argumentation (216b).

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<sup>39</sup>The Stranger's attempt in the *Sophist* is the most ambitious. For some of Socrates' descriptions which imply a distinction between philosophy and Sophistry see *Gorgias* 463b-465e; *Protagoras* 313c-314b, *Republic* 493a-d.

<sup>40</sup>See above, p. 123 and note 28 above.

<sup>41</sup>See p. 107, above.

<sup>42</sup>See, for example, *Phaedo* 69d; *Republic* 536c; *Apology* 29c; *Gorgias* 481d.

It is, however, equally possible that the teaching offered by the Stranger concerning the Sophist in the *Sophist* is, in some way, deficient. As Stanley Rosen points out, the Eleatic Stranger does indeed stand in opposition to Plato's Socrates in a number of crucial respects (*Plato's Sophist* 20-21). Perhaps the most obvious way in which this opposition is manifest is in their different approaches to their interlocutors and what they seek to accomplish through their discussions with others.



### The Stranger *versus* Socrates

In a famous passage in the *Theaetetus*--which takes place the day before the conversation of the *Sophist*--Socrates likens himself to a midwife who, by questioning young men, assists them in delivering the "offspring" contained in their understanding (*Theaetetus* 149b). As he describes it, however, his task is more difficult than that of ordinary midwives because these young men can give birth not only to genuine or true offspring but to *images of genuine or true offspring* and it is his task to know the difference.

It is not clear from his account, however, whether or not any of his "patients" have given birth to genuine offspring. He certainly never mentions the name of anyone who, through his agency, gave birth to one. Socrates does say that while those who associate with him at first appear very ignorant, they do make progress though not because he, himself, has anything to teach them. Rather, he says, their "progress" is due to the fact that they bring forth many fine (*kala*) things which they have found in themselves (151d). It is significant that Socrates does not say that their progress is due to their having found in themselves and brought forth *true* things. The reason that Socrates gives for why his associates could not have learned anything from him is also important:

For it is the case with me as it is with midwives: I am barren of wisdom, and the very reproach which, before now, has often been brought against me--that I question others but make no answer myself about anything--is a true reproach. The reason is this: the god compels me to be a midwife but prevents me from engendering (*gennan*). I myself then, am not at all someone wise nor do I have any discovery such as an offspring born of my own soul. (150c)<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>The verb "*gennao*" is rarely used of women. It tends to mean the male "engendering" of children. Socrates, in other words, seems to be saying that not only does he not bear true offspring himself, he does not engender them in others. Whether Socrates, like his associates, has ever produced anything fine (*kalon*) from out of his own soul or engendered a fine thing in the soul

As he describes it in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates' discussions with his associates have been characterized by the kind of noble discourse he praises in the *Phaedrus*. He is interested in what his associates hold "within" their understanding and in bringing this out into the open in order that he and they may discern whether it is true or false. The avowed point of his discussions with his young friends seems not to be the discovery of things useful for the "advancement of learning" in the modern sense of the term. Rather it appears to be the discovery of what is already contained in their understanding in order to lead them to a kind of self-knowledge. By explaining that many of them discover many fine things within themselves and by remaining silent as to whether any discover true things within themselves, Socrates leaves open the possibility that the discovery of false things within oneself is a fine thing.<sup>44</sup>

To return to the *Sophist*, it is precisely his complete lack of concern for what Socrates calls "noble discourse" that distinguishes the Stranger from Socrates. The Stranger says that while dialogical exchanges are easy with those who are patient and "cause no trouble", he prefers to give long, uninterrupted speeches in order to explain things rather than to ask questions (217c-d). When Socrates suggests that any of those present and Theaetetus, in particular, would respond to him gently (or meekly--*plaioi*) the Stranger makes his preference clearer. He says that the task he has taken upon himself--to explain what "the people there" consider the Sophist, philosopher and statesman to be--requires a long speech rather than brief replies to questions. However, given that he is a newcomer and that Socrates has spoken so well, the Stranger thinks it would be discourteous for him to deliver a long speech and refuse to grant Socrates and those present a favour, especially as his own prior discussion with Theaetetus has indicated that Theaetetus is as Socrates has described him (217d-218a).

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of another, he does not say.

<sup>44</sup>The "discovery of the knowledge of false things within oneself" is an equivalent way of referring to the discovery of the knowledge of one's ignorance.

Unlike Socrates, the Stranger prefers to deliver teachings in the form of long speeches. Courtesy alone is responsible for his agreeing, in this instance, to take Theaetetus as an interlocutor. His preference for a tractable interlocutor who will give him no trouble further indicates his lack of interest in bringing out what his interlocutor has in his own understanding.<sup>45</sup> The Stranger wishes to put forward a doctrine which he has in his possession and he wants a minimal degree of interference while explicating it. The object of his discussion with Theaetetus is not to improve Theaetetus but rather to unfold a teaching to all present. Theaetetus is a mere means to that end--and not necessarily the best means either. Indeed, as if to underscore his utter lack of concern with the gentle Theaetetus and to signal his irritation at having to take the longer way to reveal the doctrine, the Stranger curtly rebuffs Theaetetus when Theaetetus asks whether following Socrates' suggestion will be pleasing to the whole company: "It is likely that there is nothing more to be said about that, Theaetetus, but from now on, it seems, my speech will be to you. And should you become annoyed at having to suffer through its length, don't blame me but these companions of yours." (218a)

Socrates and the Stranger, in other words, are most at odds over the issue of teaching. At first glance, this would appear to be the mark of the Stranger's superiority over Socrates--that the former has a teaching to impart whereas the latter claims he does not. Indeed, Socrates' peculiar way of questioning his associates--by which he claims they make progress although they learn nothing positive from him--will turn out to be a form of Sophistry according to the Stranger's account (230b-231b). This is in keeping with another crucial difference between them. Socrates claims to have given birth to no true offspring in his understanding and claims to be ignorant of a

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<sup>45</sup>Compare, by way of contrast, Socrates' handling of the young Hippocrates near the beginning of the *Protagoras* (310d-314b). The two attempt to determine what the Sophists teach, a question closely related to the central question of the *Sophist*.

great many things which, according to the Stranger, a philosopher knows. As a result, the Stranger's teaching concerning the Sophist will be such as to identify Socrates as a Sophist.

What the *Sophist* does not tell us is Socrates' response to this indictment. After his short speech and exchange with the Stranger at the beginning, Socrates remains silent for the remainder of the dialogue. Is this because Plato thought that his character Socrates could have nothing to say to rebut the charges against him? An affirmative answer to this question would mean that, at the time of writing the *Sophist*, Plato rejected the Socratic way of life on the grounds that it was essentially Sophistic. It would also mean that Plato embraced the Stranger's understanding of philosophy as the having of knowledge of a great many things and the ability to impart this knowledge in the form of positive doctrines to others. In other words, it would mean that Plato had discovered a more satisfactory way to wisdom than the "noble discourse" praised by Socrates.

If the Stranger is regarded as Plato's new spokesman for a new understanding of philosophy this would account for the rather austere structure of the dialogue: the apparent absence of any significant dramatic detail; the presentation of what appears to be an unambiguous teaching and the absence of the "noble discourse" praised by Socrates.

### Plato *versus* Euclides

The problem with taking the *Sophist* as evidence of Plato's turning away from his character Socrates in favour of the Stranger is that this ignores an important, dramatic piece of information given to us by Plato himself: Plato did not "write" the *Sophist*; Euclides of Megara did. To be more exact and less paradoxical, Plato did write the *Sophist* but in the guise of Euclides of Megara, and he wrote the dialogue the way that Euclides would write it (see below). As I will show, this not only accounts for the dialogue's austere structure, it renders the "teaching" of the dialogue far more ambiguous and ironic than might otherwise appear.

How do we know that Euclides of Megara "wrote" the dialogue? Plato has his character Euclides himself tell us at the very beginning of the *Theaetetus*. Plato has Euclides make it clear that he, Euclides, is responsible for all but the introduction to the *Theaetetus* (for which Plato is responsible). The *Theaetetus*, however, is only the first of three dialogues which make up a trilogy. In the literary time-frame of the Platonic corpus, the *Theaetetus* takes place the morning of the day that Socrates was formally indicted for impiety and corrupting the youth. It ends with Socrates asking Theodorus to meet with him again the next morning. The *Sophist* opens with Theodorus explaining to Socrates that he, Theodorus, and Theaetetus have come just as they promised the day before. This dialogue ends with the Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus agreeing to what appears to be a satisfactory definition of the Sophist. It does not end with those present at the discussion each going his separate way. Rather, the *Statesman* simply continues the discussion begun in the *Sophist* and depicts those present as being treated to the Stranger's attempt to define the statesman as he had earlier promised. At the very outset of the *Statesman* the Stranger notes that Theaetetus (who has been asked to shoulder the question and answer work of both previous

dialogues) should be given a rest and that Theaetetus' companion, Young Socrates, should take his place (257c). Young Socrates has been present throughout the previous two dialogues<sup>46</sup> and requires no instruction as to what is required of him. As Jacob Klein notes (4), just after the Stranger suggests that Young Socrates take Theaetetus' place, "Old" Socrates says,

"Yesterday I myself joined in the discussion with Theaetetus and now I have been listening to his answers . . ." With the word "now", Old Socrates refers to what happened in the *Sophist* and the Stranger twice mentions something that had been considered in the *Sophist* and does so as if it were a part of one and the same lengthy conversation. (258a)<sup>47</sup>

The *Sophist* and *Statesman*, in other words, are to be taken as reports of one, long conversation which took place the day after Socrates' indictment. That long conversation, in turn, came about as the result of a promise made by Theodorus the day of Socrates' indictment. That promise comes at the end of the *Theaetetus* (210d) and is referred to at the beginning of the *Sophist* (216a). With the exception of the Stranger, who joins them on the second day, the participants in the three dialogues are the same. When these dramatic details are put together with the references by the Stranger and Socrates in the *Statesman* to the conversations of the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, it is clear that, as Klein puts it, ". . . the Platonic dialogues entitled *Theaetetus*, *The Sophist*, and *The Statesman*, are meant to be a 'trilogy', regardless of when they were written."<sup>(3)</sup> If one reads them as a literary trilogy, however, one must grant that the three dialogues have the same narrator and that narrator is not Plato.

In granting this, of course, one grants nothing unusual. Plato is never identified as the narrator of any of his dialogues. Strictly speaking, all of Plato's dialogues are imitations<sup>48</sup> or

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<sup>46</sup>See *Theaetetus*, 147c-d.; *Sophist*, 218b.; *Statesman*, 257c.

<sup>47</sup>The Stranger refers explicitly to the conversation in the *Sophist* at *Statesman*, 284b, 284c, 286b.

<sup>48</sup>See note 32 in Section II above. In what follows, I will use the terms "imitation" and "narration" as defined in the previous section on the Platonic dialogue.

dramas in so far as he never identifies himself as the person responsible for telling his stories but rather lets his characters speak on their own behalf to carry out the tale as he has seen fit. However, within the Platonic imitation constituted by this particular trilogy, not only is a narrator identified as telling the story but that narrator narrates the words of someone else who is very much responsible for the way in which this tale gets told. The narrator is a slave of Euclides who, in the course of the three dialogues, reads a book which Euclides has written. Euclides, in other words, is the "author" of all but the opening scene of the *Theaetetus* and is the "author" of the *Sophist* and *Statesman* in their entirety. How do we know this? Plato has his characters themselves tell us at the beginning of the *Theaetetus*. Indeed, the short, dramatic introduction to this dialogue raises a number of questions and tells us a great deal about the three dialogues which we would not know if we only had Euclides' work to read.

As the *Theaetetus* opens, we are introduced to Terpsion, a man from the countryside, who explains to Euclides that he had been searching for him in the marketplace. Euclides explains the reason that Terpsion did not find him there. As Euclides was heading towards the harbour, presumably in the early morning<sup>49</sup>, he met up with Theaetetus who was barely alive, wounded and suffering from dysentery, and being carried to Athens from the military camp at Corinth.<sup>50</sup> Euclides begged and advised Theaetetus to go no further but to remain with him at his home in Megara. When Theaetetus declined, Euclides walked with him to Erineum before turning back and

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<sup>49</sup>The distance he travelled, all told, was thirty miles. There is no suggestion that Euclides stayed the night before returning home.

<sup>50</sup>This piece of information gives us the likeliest, earliest date by which the *Theaetetus* could have been written. During Plato's lifetime, Athens had a military camp in Corinth only twice, in 387 B.C. and later in 369 B.C. In 387, Theaetetus would have been twenty-four--a little young to have achieved the reputation accredited to him by Euclides and Terpsion. Theaetetus died, however, in 369--the same year the Athenian camp at Corinth was attacked by Thebans. Euclides notes that Theaetetus is badly wounded and near death. The earliest date by which the *Theaetetus* was written is most likely to have been 369 B.C., when Plato was around sixty-years-old, thirty years after the death of Socrates. The *Sophist* and *Statesman*, presumably, were written later.

coming home. On the way back, Euclides was struck by the remembrance of a prophecy Socrates once made about Theaetetus when Theaetetus was still a boy. Shortly before Socrates died, Euclides explained, Socrates met Theaetetus and was impressed by the conversation he had with him. Socrates prophesied that the boy would become famous. Terpsion notes that Socrates was right and asks what their conversation was about.

As it turns out, the conversation that Socrates had with Theaetetus was not consigned only to the memories of those who took part. On one occasion when Euclides was visiting Athens, Socrates related the conversation to Euclides who, when he returned home to Megara, wrote down as much as he could remember.<sup>51</sup> He then made several trips to Athens and had Socrates supply details of the conversation that he had forgotten and which he then added to his manuscript when he got home. Terpsion says that he has heard about the book before and has always intended to ask Euclides to show it to him but has delayed until now. The two of them, who have spent most of the day walking, agree to rest while a slave reads the manuscript. But, just before the recital begins, Euclides explains:

Now this is the way I wrote the conversation. It was not narrated as Socrates narrating it to me but as Socrates conversing with those with whom he said he had conversed. He said they were the geometer Theodorus and Theaetetus.<sup>52</sup> Now,

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<sup>51</sup>Euclides must have been visiting Socrates in prison. Socrates' trial took place shortly after his indictment and, as I have noted, the conversation Euclides recorded in the *Theaetetus* took place on the day of Socrates' indictment.

<sup>52</sup>The fact that Euclides mentions only a conversation which Socrates had with Theodorus and Theaetetus might suggest that the introduction to the *Theaetetus* is intended for that dialogue alone and not for the others. Among other things, this would mean that Euclides is not necessarily the "author" of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. The difficulty with confining the introduction to the *Theaetetus* to the *Theaetetus* alone, however, is that the three dialogues do constitute a literary trilogy for reasons that I have outlined above. As there seems to be no reason to ignore those elements in the dialogues that make them a trilogy, so there is no reason to deny that Euclides is their "author". That Euclides seems to refer only to the *Theaetetus* is not really that surprising. The occasion for his mentioning his book at all is his recent encounter with Theaetetus and his recollection of Socrates' prophecy. His mention of these events encourages Terpsion to ask about the conversation that Socrates had with Theaetetus. When Euclides responds that he has the whole thing written down, this does not mean that this is the only part of the conversation that he



in order that the narrations between the speeches might not cause trouble (*pragmata*) in the writing, whenever Socrates spoke about himself, such as, "And I said" or "And I spoke", or in the case of whoever answered, "He agreed" or "He refused to agree", I removed things of this sort and wrote as if he himself were talking with them. (143b-c)

The most important thing to note about the introduction which Plato writes to his trilogy is that it is very clear that Plato is not to be taken as the author of the three dialogues. Plato is responsible for their introduction but he is not responsible for what follows. To be more precise, Plato is, of course, responsible for all three dialogues. But he has written the introduction as he saw fit and has seen fit to write the remainder as Euclides would have seen fit. While Plato is always "disguised" as an author to the extent that he never narrates a dialogue in his own voice but writes only poetic imitations, in these three dialogues, he is disguised in an additional sense. The *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman* are poetic imitations in which all but the introduction is an imitation written by an identified author who is not Plato.<sup>53</sup>

Plato, as it were, is the author of a poetic imitation which portrays a short conversation between Terpsion and Euclides and depicts why and how they spent an evening together. They spend that evening listening to a slave read a book of which Euclides is the author and which portrays a conversation which happened some years ago.<sup>54</sup> What is important to note is the

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has written down. It is simply that, under the circumstances, there is no need for him to mention the rest of his book at all.

<sup>53</sup>Only six other Platonic dialogues have this structure. The majority of the dialogues are simple imitations--no narrator is identified. Of the narrated dialogues, Socrates is usually the narrator. The remaining narrations are the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, the *Parmenides* and the three dialogues comprising the trilogy of the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*. Of these, only the *Phaedo* is narrated by someone (Phaedo) who actually witnessed the conversation which is narrated in the dialogue. The *Symposium* is narrated by Apollodorus who got the story from Aristodemus who was there when the conversation recorded took place. The *Parmenides* is narrated by Cephalus who got the story from Antiphon, who got it from Pythodorus, who got it from an unknown source. The trilogy is unique in this: it is the only set of dialogues whose source is Socrates but which is narrated, not by Socrates but by someone else, namely, Euclides who did his best to turn Socrates' narration into a straightforward imitation.

<sup>54</sup>See note 50, above.

extent to which the introduction to the trilogy indicates the distinction between Plato and Euclides with respect to the way in which they present their respective conversations. Euclides tells us that he got the conversation he recorded from Socrates but that he left out all the things between the speeches which Socrates said in his own voice. Euclides, in other words, in writing his book, turned a Socratic narration into a Euclidean imitation.<sup>55</sup> Plato, however, does not simply write the Euclidean version of this Socratic narration. Rather, he is responsible for an introduction which lets us know what Euclides has done and which is not to be found in Euclides' own text. Plato, in other words, finds it necessary to supplement Euclides' text in a way that his character Euclides does not. The supplement which Plato offers tells us a number of things that Euclides himself does not include in his own text. It tells us who wrote the text, its source and how it was written. It also supplies a context in which the text comes to be read to someone interested in hearing it.

Euclides of Megara and Terpsion are mentioned one other time in the Platonic corpus. Both were present at the death of Socrates (*Phaedo* 59c). Euclides, it appears, was a member of Socrates' intimate circle of companions. Diogenes Laertius includes Euclides among the ten most distinguished "Socratics" (II: 47) and reports that Plato and "the rest of the philosophers" stayed with him after the death of Socrates (II:106). It seems that Euclides was the author of six dialogues (II: 108). While he is not a familiar figure today, he was certainly well-known to many of Plato's audience. According to Diogenes Laertius: Euclides spent considerable time on the writings of Parmenides; believed "the good" to be one and denied that anything contradictory to "the good" existed; and, when he attacked a demonstration, he attacked its conclusion and not its premises (II: 106-107). Perhaps the last accounts for his reputation as a combative eristic. His argumentative style made him the target of at least one comic poet (II: 107-108).

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<sup>55</sup>For a discussion of the distinction between poetic imitation and narration, see p. 69 ff. above.

Another thing to note about Euclides is the extent to which he is akin to the Eleatic Stranger. Both are highly influenced by the writings of Parmenides and both have a positive doctrine. The Stranger is not so much interested in the way or even the extent to which Theaetetus comes to learn what he, the Stranger, has to teach him as he is in expounding his doctrine to an assembled company. So too, Euclides is not interested in recording what Socrates had to say about the extent to which Theaetetus really agreed with anything he was asked to agree with. Euclides feels that such observations interfere with what is really of interest, namely, the conclusions that those participating in the dialogue reach. Euclides, like the Stranger, is interested in expounding doctrines in speech. He is not interested in the *ad hominem* character of arguments. He is not interested in what Socrates calls "noble discourse".

According to Plato's introduction, when Socrates told his story to Euclides, Socrates mentioned a number of things that someone interested in "noble discourse" might mention, for instance, when someone being questioned agreed or refused to agree with something. Euclides does not say that he struggled to find a way to introduce such elements into his drama. Rather, he says that he simply removed them. What is important to note, therefore, is that not only does Euclides attempt to expunge from his drama "extraneous" details about the characters' behaviour, he attempts to expunge the voice of Socrates or to write the dialogue as if it had no original narrator. Euclides is not interested in Socrates' abilities as a narrator. Nor does he consider it of interest that Socrates may have crafted his story in a particular way given that he was reporting it to Euclides. What Euclides has attempted to do is to re-write a Socratic narration as if no one narrated it.

These considerations lead one to conclude that it is Euclides who is responsible for the austerity of the trilogy. The *Theaetetus* is the least austere of the three and perhaps more obviously inconclusive. But this is not due to the style in which it is written so much as to the fact that it is Socrates who leads the discussion. Euclides cannot completely suppress Socrates' voice

in this dialogue where he appears throughout as an active participant. In the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, however, Socrates speaks only briefly. The conversation in these dialogues is carried on by the Eleatic Stranger and Socrates is, for the most part, silent.

A Socratic narrative would have been very different from the Euclidean, imitative version. For one thing, Socrates might have indicated much more of his own response to the conversations he witnessed. Euclides finds such details irrelevant. While he did go back to Socrates a number of times to get the story straight, he was not interested in preserving Socrates' reflections on the conversation Socrates narrated.

Whether Socrates even knew that Euclides was in the process of transcribing his narration into a book or transcribing it as an imitation are questions raised by the introduction. According to Euclides, Socrates did not seek out a writer to immortalize his conversation with Theaetetus. While it is not unusual for Plato's Socrates to narrate conversations he has had with others<sup>56</sup>, and while Plato "immortalized" several, Socratic narrations by writing them<sup>57</sup>, this dialogue is unique in that we are told by the "writer" that he did not simply transcribe the narration he heard. In fact, Euclides appears to have gone about his writing in a clandestine fashion. The distance from Megara to Athens is about thirty miles. Presumably, when Euclides made his visits to see Socrates in order to correct his manuscript, he would have stayed at least one night before returning home. Why then did he not bring his manuscript with him and go over it with Socrates? Socrates was, at the time, in prison and certainly would have had the leisure to help Euclides with his writing.<sup>58</sup> Euclides makes a point of telling Terpsion that he went to Athens on a few occasions in order to

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<sup>56</sup>See note 48 above.

<sup>57</sup>In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that Plato simply recorded them as Socrates told them. He may have; he may have made them up. Unlike his character Euclides, however, Plato is not averse to imitating a Socratic narration.

<sup>58</sup>See note 51 above.

get the information needed to continue his writing. He also makes a point of telling him that he returned home to Megara in order to write that information down. Plato's introduction to the dialogue leaves one wondering whether or not Socrates was kept in the dark as to Euclides' intentions and whether Euclides suspected that Socrates would not be pleased to have his narration written at all, to have it written as an imitation, or to have it written by Euclides. One cannot help but wonder if Euclides deliberately concealed his dialogue from Socrates and, indeed, others close to Socrates. Terpsion, it will be remembered, has known about the dialogue for some time but has hesitated to ask to see it. When Euclides recounts his meeting with the ailing Theaetetus, he is led to mention the dialogue he wrote. This, in turn, provides Terpsion with a polite reason to ask to see it. Perhaps enough years have finally elapsed for Euclides to publicize his work and his encounter with the dying Theaetetus provides a fitting moment to do so.

The above are questions which Plato's introduction raises. While one is led to wonder whether the trilogy is to be taken as an unauthorised dialogue whose publication has been delayed for a number of years, one is not told directly that this is the case. The introduction, however, does tell of the peculiar way in which Euclides wrote his dialogue and its effect is to make one wonder what Socrates would have made of the Euclidean version of his tale. What Plato makes of the re-telling of a Socratic narrative in a Euclidean fashion is also unclear save for this much: he clearly thought the Euclidean re-telling was not sufficient but required a supplement. Among other things, the supplement adds an important injunction, as it were, to the reader to attempt to supply the Socrates which Euclides attempted to efface from his text-- to supply Socrates both as reflective narrator of and as reflective participant in the trilogy.

For this reason, the *Sophist*, in particular, cannot be regarded as Plato's turning away from his character Socrates in favour of the more dogmatic Eleatic Stranger who appears to have little interest in what Socrates calls "noble discourse". Socrates may be "absent" from the greater part of Euclides' dialogue, but he is very much present in Plato's, even if he says very little. The

Stranger appears to have little regard for "noble discourse" and has a complete doctrine that he intends to present. How the Stranger develops this difficult yet unambiguous doctrine is recorded by Euclides who doesn't allow "extraneous" reflections to clutter up the argument. Plato, however, would have us indulge in such "extraneous" reflections. As readers, we are not simply to take the Stranger's doctrine as Plato's own. We are to be highly critical as, no doubt, Socrates was as he listened to the Stranger question the easily led Theaetetus. Would Socrates have endorsed the Stranger's account of the Sophist? What would Socrates have made of the Stranger's way of presenting his doctrine? What would he have made of the Stranger's handling of Theaetetus? The Stranger ultimately defines the Sophist as someone who looks a great deal like Socrates. Would Socrates be forced to accept that judgement?

Plato's introduction to the *Theaetetus* would appear "extraneous" to a character like Euclides. It is, indeed, "extraneous" if Plato's purpose is to present a straight-forward doctrine which tells his readers what a Sophist is. If that is his purpose, his introduction is unnecessary. That he does supplement Euclides' text the way he does, however, indicates that the "teaching" of the dialogue is not necessarily identical with that of the Stranger. By enjoining his readers to supply the reflections of the absent Socrates, Plato indicates the need to take seriously and participate in Socratic questioning and not to mistake the Stranger's doctrine for Plato's own.

In the following discussion of the *Sophist*, I will not refer explicitly to the questions raised by the Platonic introduction to the trilogy. Rather, I will be concerned with examining the Stranger's "teaching" and subjecting it to Socratic criticism. I will be concerned to lay out the Stranger's doctrine and explore the ways in which it is deficient as an answer to the question raised by Socrates at the outset of the dialogue. In the conclusion, however, I will explicitly return to the questions provoked by Plato's introduction to the trilogy in order to reconsider the dialogue as a whole from a dramatic point of view. The Stranger's "teaching" will prove to be deficient and it is important to understand why. But the ways in which the *Sophist* is far more than a presentation

of a deficient answer to the question, "What is a Sophist?", will become clear once that deficient answer is seen together with a reconsideration of the dialogue in the light of Plato's introduction.

### The Stranger's "Method": Hunting and Angling

The Stranger, who has just now agreed to ignore his preference for giving his teaching concerning the Sophist in a monologue and to participate, instead in a dialogue, notes that it may be the case that both he and Theaetetus have only the name of their quarry--the Sophist--in common and that it is important that they come to an agreement not only about the name of their quarry but about the thing (*to ergon, ta pragma*) itself (218b-c). Yet rather than find out what they each mean by the word "Sophist" and whether the word means the same thing to both of them, the Stranger simply concludes that they both find the race of the Sophists "troublesome and hard to catch". He therefore suggests that they practice "hunting" something easier and that they take this "lesser" thing and use it as a paradigm for the "greater" (218c-d). The paradigm for hunting the Sophist will be the hunt for the angler (218e).<sup>59</sup> Without further ado, the Stranger and Theaetetus begin their hunt for the angler.

A word of caution is in order here. The hunt for the Sophist which begins at this point takes place in somewhat questionable circumstances. No Sophist, who might challenge or confirm the Stranger's analysis, is among the company.<sup>60</sup> Socrates remains silent though, in other dialogues, he can be counted on to raise questions when things strike him as requiring clarification. On the basis of both Socrates' and the Stranger's descriptions of him, we have reason to suspect that

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<sup>59</sup>The Stranger's remarks are somewhat ambiguous. It is not clear whether the hunt for the angler will provide a paradigm for hunting which can then be used to find the Sophist or whether the art of angling will turn out to be a paradigm for Sophistry. Both will turn out to be the case. The hunt for the Sophist will be conducted in the same manner as the hunt for the angler (221c) and the angler's art will serve, in some respects, as a model for the Sophist's in so far as both are defined as hunting arts (221d).

<sup>60</sup>Later on, the Stranger will be forced to conjure up the Sophist in order to raise questions Theaetetus does not see (239d, ff.).



Theaetetus will submit to follow the Stranger's lead where ever this may take him. Throughout the dialogue, therefore, the Stranger will not be under any great compulsion to explain the relevance of his approach to the question at hand; nor will he be compelled to answer for much of his argument. To repeat, this does not mean that we are entitled to assume that, as far as Plato is concerned, there are no questions to be asked of the Stranger's account. We would be entitled to such an assumption if it were clear that Plato considered Theaetetan meekness and a willingness to be led as ideal for a participant in or observer of a dialogue. As I argued earlier, the function of a Platonic dialogue and the implications of the Platonic introduction to the trilogy would suggest that Plato considers a much more active involvement on the part of his readers to be desirable. In any event, given that the Stranger's account results in an indictment of Socrates, it is important that we ascertain the extent to which *Socrates* is bound to accept the Stranger's account. That the meek Theaetetus accepts this account is to be expected. That we must be far more critical is indicated by the fact that not only Theaetetus but Socrates himself is a participant in the dialogue.<sup>61</sup>

While the Stranger suggests that they turn their attention away from defining the Sophist in order to practice on the less controversial angler, it is clear that the aim of the exercise is more than simply "practice". The Stranger expresses the hope that the angler will offer them a "method" for hunting the Sophist (219a). What follows, therefore, is not so much practice in a certain kind of hunting as Theaetetus' initiation into the method of arriving at definitions in general. What is not clear is the way in which the angler offers this method. That is, the origin and the relevance of the method of arriving at definitions is never fully explained by the Stranger.

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<sup>61</sup>Indeed, the whole discussion is for Socrates' benefit and in answer to his question. Theaetetus is, as I have noted, only an instrument used by the Stranger to display a doctrine. The doctrine is directed, above all, to Socrates.

Theaetetus and the Stranger quickly agree that the power (*dynamis*) of the angler is due to his possessing a certain art (*techne*). The Stranger insists that there are only two kinds of art (219d): the productive kind (*poietike*) which includes agriculture, tool-making and imitation (*mimetike*) and the acquisitive kind (*ktetike*) which includes learning, acquiring knowledge, money-making, fighting and hunting. The productive art brings something into being which did not previously exist. The acquisitive art, on the other hand, is not creative (*demiourgei*) but is the art of "coercing, by words and deeds, things which already are or which have come into being or preventing these things from being coerced." (219c) Theaetetus agrees that angling is an acquisitive art.

The Stranger then divides the acquisitive art in two: the art of voluntary exchange (which covers such things as gift-giving, wages, and purchases) and the rest of the art which is coercive either by word or deed. This coercive art, in turn, is said by the Stranger to have only two parts: fighting and the secret part called hunting. Hunting too has two parts, according to the Stranger: the hunting of lifeless things and the hunting of living things. The hunting of living things also has two parts: land-animal hunting and water-animal hunting. Swimming creatures, in turn, may be either winged or aquatic. Fishing is the name of the art concerned with the hunting of water-animals. Fishing that uses blows is called striking and it is distinguished from the other kind which employs nets and other enclosures. One kind of striking takes place at night by the light of a fire. The other kind takes place during the daytime and employs barbed spears and hooks. This daytime "barb-hunting" in turn, may involve either striking from above (tridentry) or striking from below and pulling upwards. The last, both Theaetetus and the Stranger agree, is the art of angling (221a-b).

The Stranger offers a summary of what they have discovered (221b-c). In his summary he describes the art of angling as the acquisitive kind; the kind of acquisition being coercive; the kind of coercion being hunting; the kind of hunting being animal hunting; the kind of animal hunting being water hunting; the kind of water hunting being fishing; the kind of fishing being striking; the

kind of striking being barb-hunting, and the kind of barb-hunting being pulling from below upwards. This, he says, is the art called angling which was the object of their search and he proposes to use what they have done as a paradigm to find out what the Sophist is.

A few remarks about the paradigm itself are in order here. I noted above that the Stranger expressed the hope that the angler would offer Theaetetus and himself a "method" for defining the Sophist. The method used for defining the angler will, indeed, be used as the method for defining the Sophist. But it is not clear that the angler, *qua* angler, offers the Stranger and Theaetetus the method for defining the angler. While a method is employed to define the angler, it is not at all clear that the nature of angling is such that a definition of angling can only be arrived at by following this method.

The method employed to define the angler is as follows. The Stranger and Theaetetus begin, not only with a name, but with some acquaintance with the object that is named.<sup>62</sup> While at the outset they share the name of the object in common, their goal is to discover a definition of the thing named which they also can share in common. They begin by agreeing about the more general things which can be said about this object and proceed to the more specific things. That is, the method leads them to be more and more precise about what can be said about the object in question. Each stage in the definition is arrived at by dividing the preceding stage into its two, mutually exclusive parts and determining to which part the object in question belongs. As the divisions proceed, the result is that the object in question is distinguished from everything else that is other than it. It appears that the divisions are complete when a stage is reached that cannot be further divided. At this point, the formulation of a definition becomes possible. All one has to do is collect or summarize the parts, beginning with the most general category and ending with the most specific category in which the object under investigation belongs. Followed correctly, it would

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<sup>62</sup>This "acquaintance" may only involve having some notion as to what the name means. It may also involve more direct experience of the kinds of objects in question.

appear that the method should result in a definition which distinguishes an object from everything else, is internally consistent, and to which nothing more can be added. Furthermore, each part of the definition must be necessary to the definition in so far as it follows directly as a part of what precedes it.

One of the most crucial things about this method is that it takes as its starting point the names and appearances of objects as they are found in ordinary human experience. Theaetetus and the Stranger already have the name of what they are investigating (the angler) in common and they have some notion of what angling entails. Nothing is to be "added" to this notion in their quest for the definition of angling. Rather, the method involves a series of refinements of this notion. This also applies to the terms that are used to define the object. They must already be entailed by the notion that the investigators have of the object. The investigators must already have some notion as to what these terms entail when thought of in conjunction with objects distinguishable from the object under investigation.

Two questions must be raised at this point. The reliability of the method as a means of generating a complete, internally consistent definition depends upon two things: the degree to which the object (or any of the terms which are used to define it) is of such a kind as to be clearly definable and the degree to which the investigators have a clear notion of the object (or any of the terms used to define it). Can the method provide a definition of an object if an investigator begins with a notion of the object which is already, implicitly or explicitly confused, internally inconsistent and/or includes irrelevant terms? It is not at all clear that the method itself can determine what is to count as a relevant term in the definition.<sup>63</sup> And, can the method provide a definition of an object whose constituent elements are confused or inconsistent with each other? These questions

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<sup>63</sup>Note that, in the summary which produces the definition of the angler, not all the terms arrived at in the divisions are included. The distinction between secret and open hunting is dropped. Whether or not this is a crucial omission cannot, I contend, be decided by employing the method.

are related to a third which is of critical interest for the dialogue. Given that the method begins with objects as they ordinarily appear to and are understood by human beings, can the method distinguish between the appearance of an object and its reality? In order to distinguish the *artful* angler from the person who only tells "fish tales" or who "imitates" an artful angler, perhaps one only has to observe their activities over a period of time. That is, one need simply take a closer, longer look. However, if being a philosopher means always appearing as something else, and if one of the characteristic appearances of the philosopher is the Sophist, it is not clear how the method could help to distinguish the philosopher from the Sophist. This difficulty would be compounded if it also turned out that the Sophist too never appeared as what he is and that his characteristic appearance was as a philosopher. By the end of the dialogue, the Stranger will define the Sophist as someone who, among other things, never appears as what he is and who appears to be a philosopher.<sup>64</sup>

Several other questions arise when the definition of the angler itself is considered. The angler is said to be someone who has an art (*technē*) as opposed to some other power (*dynamis*). An art appears to be relatively easy to define. It is in the nature of an art that it can be taught. Its object (e.g. to make or acquire a specific good) is easily defined and the means it employs for accomplishing its object are repeatable, hence capable of being formulated in terms of rules, and hence demonstrable to others. But what of the other "powers" possessed by human beings the objects of which may be unclear and which may not be repeatable and demonstrable to others? As Rosen points out, "We may accomplish something spontaneously or at random, by inspiration, and in other ways that do not follow rules." (*Plato's Sophist* 93)<sup>65</sup> There are, after all, unartful

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<sup>64</sup>For a general discussion of the problems surrounding this kind of method of division, see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 91b10-92b38. Aristotle is particularly interested in showing the extent to which such a method rests upon employing a great number of undefended assumptions.

<sup>65</sup>Socrates draws a distinction between an art and a "knack" in the *Gorgias* (463a-c) and claims that the so-called "art" of rhetoric is really a knack.

anglers who simply have a knack for catching fish. It is not clear that such "powers" or "knacks" can be precisely defined. Precisely because abilities grounded in inspiration or "knack" cannot be further divided according to specific elements, they resist definition.<sup>66</sup> Nor can the accomplishments which rest on such powers can be easily distinguished from artful accomplishments. Certainly, in order to distinguish the artful angler from the unartful angler, one would have to make reference to the knowledge possessed by the artful angler and compare it to the uncanny knack of the unartful angler. Theaetetus and the Stranger, however, make no reference in their definition of the artful angler to the knowledge presupposed by the *art* of angling. They do not give a definition of the *art*. What they offer is a definition which equally describes the artful and the unartful angler. That is, the ability or power (*dynamis*) to acquire water animals by the kind of coercive hunting known as fishing which spears water animals with barbs pulled upwards from below may or may not be an art (*techne*). The method does not establish that it must be. Rather, because angling appears to Theaetetus and the Stranger to be an art or perhaps because they have been told that it is an art, they assume it must be without offering an account of what makes it an art.

Both Theaetetus and the Stranger are silent about the knowledge required by the art of angling (Benardete, *Plato's Sophist* 78-79). Their definition of the angler is one that only someone who has no artful knowledge of how to catch fish might give--someone who has observed from a distance people deemed by convention to be "anglers" but who has no intimate acquaintance with how "artful" anglers do what they do. Whether an *art* of angling even exists could only be estab-

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<sup>66</sup>When trying to define the power by which the young Mozart composed his music, for example, we are usually left with nothing more to say than that his own "genius" enabled him to do what he did. A more precise account seems to elude us. What we seem to be saying is that he did what he did by a kind of unique power or inspiration which, by its nature, is not only not an art (repeatable and teachable) but is undefinable. The use of the word "genius" to describe Mozart's power is no more a definition of this power than an acknowledgement of our inability to define it.

lished by considering what the alleged, artful angler has to know in order to catch fish and whether such knowledge could be taught to another or could be used in a variety of circumstances. Because of their silence on the issue as to what makes artful angling an art, it is not clear that either Theaetetus or the Stranger knows anything about what the *art* of angling really involves save what it might appear to involve to an observer who has seen or heard about people who catch fish. Their silence raises the question as to whether there even is an art of angling or whether angling only appears to be artful to those who know nothing about it. At least in the case of the angler, the Stranger's method fails to distinguish the reality of artful angling (if indeed there is such a thing) from its appearance. The failure raises the question whether the method, as practised by Theaetetus and the Stranger, can lead us to knowledge of the arts as they really are as opposed to human practices which may only appear to be arts. Given that the Stranger has promised to define for his audience the real nature of the Sophist—who will be assumed to practice an art—as distinguished from what Socrates suggests is one of the appearances of the philosopher, the Stranger will have to do much better than this when he comes to define the artful Sophist.

Theaetetus and the Stranger, furthermore, are themselves engaged in a kind of hunting (218d) which, in turn, has been defined by them as an art. Are they themselves really engaged in a technical activity or do they arrive at their definitions by some other "power"?

Consider the following. The Stranger divides all art in two: art is either acquisitive or productive. He insists that all the arts fall into one or the other of these categories. The fact that the Stranger must offer examples in order to illustrate what he means by the acquisitive and productive arts<sup>67</sup>, however, should indicate that the division is not self-evident. If one reflects

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<sup>67</sup>As Rosen points out, in order to make the distinction clear, the Stranger is forced to engage in a division and summary of acquisition "within the same step of diaeresis that is designed solely to isolate acquisition" (*Plato's Sophist* 95).

upon the Stranger's examples, it is not at all clear that any of them is, in fact, a pure example of either.

The difficulty lies in how the Stranger defines the two. The productive art is directed to bringing something into being which did not exist. The acquisitive art is directed to "coercing, by words and deeds, things which already are or which have come into being or preventing these things from being coerced". The Stranger's examples of the first illustrate that the production in question is not creation *ex nihilo* but the production of something out of something else. His definition of the second illustrates that all artful acquisition is coercion. The element of coercion is what seems to distinguish artful from artless acquisition. According to the Stranger's definition, casually picking a nickel up off the street is not practising an acquisitive art.<sup>68</sup> The acquisitive art is an art of coercion. Or is it?

Immediately after distinguishing the acquisitive from the productive arts, the Stranger divides the art of acquisition in two. He distinguishes the "voluntary" arts of exchange from the *coercive* arts which include hunting. That is, within the class of acquisitive arts which, by definition, are coercive, the Stranger identifies a major sub-class which is non-coercive. To make matters even more confusing, the Stranger initially offered money-making as an example of the coercive art of acquisition. However, he offers wage-earning and selling as examples of the voluntary, non-coercive art of exchange. If the arts of exchange involve no coercion, by virtue of what does the Stranger consider them to be acquisitive arts?

Perhaps the Stranger can be forgiven a bad example or two. The problem, however, is that none of the examples he offers clearly illustrates what he means by acquisition or production. In fact, if one carefully considers his examples of the arts of production and acquisition (aside from

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<sup>68</sup>The Stranger's definition of the productive art is not so precise. Human reproduction brings something into being which did not previously exist. How the Stranger would distinguish between artful and artless production is not clear.



the already confusing art of money-making), these two arts become indistinguishable. Take the example of agriculture. One might be inclined to agree with the Stranger that it is a productive art for agriculture uses the productive capacities of nature to bring crops and livestock into being. Yet, is this any different than coercing the productive capacities of what already exists namely, seeds and animals, and preventing what already exists (plants and animals) from being coerced by the destructive capacities of nature? Tool-making (to cite another of the Stranger's examples) may seem more purely productive than agriculture. However, this is only because it is more coercive of the materials supplied by nature. Hunting appears to be a purely acquisitive art. Hunting is coercing animals on to one's dinner plate. It is also, however, the production of dead animals out of live ones.

The Stranger's own examples do not suggest that the acquisitive and productive arts are clearly distinguishable. Rather, they suggest that artful production is coercion of what already exists and that artful acquisition, because it is coercion, is productive. This is the case even when the acquisitive art in question is directed to preventing something from being coerced. A defensive fighter fights in order to prevent himself and/or his comrades from being coerced by his enemy. To do so, he must produce the death or injury of his opponent. The production of the death or injury of his opponent is, at the same time, the acquisition of his own victory.

It should be recalled that Theaetetus and the Stranger are engaged in hunting for the definition of the Sophist. Their "hunt" is for knowledge. They want to learn what the Sophist is. The Stranger uses hunting, learning and acquiring knowledge as examples of the acquisitive art. Are the Stranger and Theaetetus engaged in acquiring a definition of something which already exists? If their acquisition of the definition is artful, it must involve coercion. And, according to the Stranger, all hunting is coercive. If coercion and production cannot be distinguished, can their activity be distinguished from producing something which does not exist?

Leaving aside the question as to whether there is an *art* of learning or acquiring knowledge, how is the Stranger's and Theaetetus' hunt to be understood if we accept the Stranger's definition of their activity? The Stranger and Theaetetus engage in a series of divisions in order to acquire a definition of something which they assume exists. That is, they use words and notions to acquire what they seek. Through their divisions, they coerce the words and notions they have of the arts to yield up the constituent elements of those arts so that these elements may be collected into a definition of the art which interests them. They use their words and notions not to acquire real, live things such as Sophists and anglers but to acquire definitions of them. Can their coercion of the words and notions at their disposal be distinguished from production?

Recall that one of the Stranger's examples of the productive art is imitation (*mimetike*). Imitation is the production of copies and images. The Stranger and Theaetetus employ their divisions of words and notions to arrive at definitions. These definitions, however, are the same as images or copies. The definitions are useful to Theaetetus and the Stranger only if they represent or copy what the arts they are interested in really are. The coercive acquisition of definitions, therefore, is indistinguishable from the art of producing images. Not all images are copies or accurate images of their originals, and the differences between accurate and inaccurate images will be discussed later in the dialogue at great length. Does the coercion of words and notions employed by the Stranger and Theaetetus amount to twisting these things in such a way as to produce a false image? Later in the dialogue, the Stranger will discuss the power of discursive images and contend that the Sophist produces inaccurate, discursive images to convince inexperienced young people that he is wise (234b). If the Stranger's coercion of words and notions to acquire a definition cannot be distinguished from the production of inaccurate, discursive images which he convinces the young Theaetetus are true, can the Stranger be distinguished from the Sophist?

The accuracy of the Stranger's images is not the only issue here. Later, when the Stranger tries to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate images, he will attribute to the Sophist the claim that there are no originals but only images.<sup>69</sup> In effect, the Sophist will claim that all images are human productions and that there are no originals for images to copy. The Stranger's own inability to clearly distinguish between acquisition and production and the implications of this failure for the acquisitive arts of learning and acquiring knowledge lend some credence to the Sophist's claim.

That the Stranger's images/definitions are very much productions and not acquisitions is suggested by his own questionable distinction between the arts of production and acquisition, not to mention his silence concerning the "art" of the angler. The Stranger claims to be on a "hunt" for the Sophist. Whether this "hunting" is an art or some other "power", whether it is acquisitive or productive and whether, if productive, it does or can arrive at an accurate image of the Sophist are all questions which arise when the Stranger's activity of generating definitions is measured against what is suggested by those divisions.

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<sup>69</sup>In effect, this is what the claim attributed to the Sophist at 240a ff. amounts to. The Stranger says that the Sophist will feign ignorance of images. More precisely, he will question the possibility of images understood as something which makes manifest something else--an original. In denying the possibility of images, the Sophist in effect suggests that all we normally take to be images, including speech, are originals produced by human beings.

### The Many-Sided Sophist

Despite the many questions the definition of the angler's art raises for the Stranger's method, both Theaetetus and the Stranger agree to use this definition as a "paradigm" (*paradeigma*) for catching the Sophist.<sup>70</sup> The division of the angler's art will initially serve as a "paradigm" in two ways: as a model of the method of definition to be used and as a model of the kind of art the Sophist practices. That is, the Sophist will be defined according to the method used to define the angler and the art of the angler will prove to fall within the same class as the art of the Sophist. According to the Stranger, the angler and the Sophist are akin to one another (*suggene*) in so far as they both appear (*kataphainesthon*) as hunters (221d). It is because of this kinship that the art of the angler can serve as a paradigm for the art of the Sophist.<sup>71</sup>

This kinship, however, is never explained by the Stranger but is simply asserted. Even the easily led Theaetetus is puzzled enough by the assertion to inquire about the kind of hunting the Sophist practices (221e).<sup>72</sup> Theaetetus is not even sure that the Sophist practices an art. While

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<sup>70</sup>*Sophist*, 221c. For other treatments of the problems associated with the definition of angling which may be used to complement my account, see Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 91-99; Benardete, *Plato's Sophist* 77-83; Sallis, 464-468.

<sup>71</sup>It should not be forgotten that the Stranger has described his own search in the dialogue as a "hunt". To the extent that the angler and the Sophist are akin to one another by virtue of being hunters, one wonders the extent to which the Stranger and the Sophist are also akin to one another. The model of the Sophist as hunter is used only for the first of the seven definitions of the Sophist.

<sup>72</sup>In fact, only the first of the six Sophists defined by the Stranger will be said to be a hunter. The second, third and fourth Sophists are said to engage in the art of exchange (which, although an acquisitive art, unlike hunting it is not a coercive art) while the fifth is said to be engaged in a kind of fighting (which, unlike hunting, is carried out in the open). The sixth Sophist practices a "discriminatory" art and it is not at all clear that such an art can be classified under the Stranger's initial division of art as either productive or acquisitive.

he is willing to grant that the name "Sophist" suggests that the Sophist has some kind of wisdom (*sophia*) he thinks that the Stranger does not believe that the Sophist is really wise (221d). The Stranger does not deny this but he asserts that he and Theaetetus must assume that the Sophist practices an art. Further, because the Sophist *seems to the Stranger* to be akin to the angler in so far as he *appears* to be a sort of hunter, the Stranger asserts that the Sophist is a practitioner of the art of hunting.

To say the least, this makes for a rather specious beginning to the hunt for the Sophist. Never does the Stranger explain why he and Theaetetus must assume that the Sophist practices an art.<sup>73</sup> It is, however, likely, as I noted above, that Sophistry (like angling) cannot be defined using the Stranger's "method" unless it is an art. Yet if Sophistry is not in fact an art, the Stranger's own method of acquiring the knowledge of the definition of the Sophist (itself a kind of hunting) is a good example of, not acquisition, but production. That is, if Sophistry is not an art but the "method" demands that it be assumed to be an art, then the "method" is responsible for producing an inaccurate image which is then taken to be accurate. It is, therefore, questionable whether the Stranger's own art of hunting (the search for definitions) is really an acquisitive art (*techne*).

Indeed, it is questionable whether the Stranger's hunting is an art at all. Because the Stranger never explains how it is that the kinship he perceives between the angler and the Sophist can be taken as revealing something essential about the nature of the Sophist, one can not help

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<sup>73</sup>The fact that the Sophists claimed to be teachers is not sufficient reason for the Stranger to define the Sophist as the practitioner of an art. What exactly the Sophists did teach is not clear. More important, however, the fact that the Sophist or anyone else might claim to practice an art does not mean that he, in fact, does practice an art. If the Stranger is after a definition of the Sophist which reveals what the Sophist really is, he can not start by accepting the notion that the Sophist is what the Sophist claims to be. This is especially the case given that Socrates has pointed out that Sophists do not tend to appear as they are. The Stranger makes it clear, later in the dialogue, that his definitions are not intended to include untested claims made by practitioners of the arts concerning the nature of their arts (227b).

but wonder about the extent to which this "kinship" can be explained. The Stranger's method requires that one be able to make relevant distinctions among various classes of activities. In the case of the assumed "kinship" between the angler and the Sophist, the method also requires that one be able to perceive relevant connections between activities. The question is whether the "method" alone can be used to establish both the existence and the relevance of these distinctions and connections. If it cannot, the "method" cannot be taught. And this would be because the distinctions and connections upon which it depends are either idiosyncratic--dependent upon the way they appear to an individual (in this case, the Stranger and/or Theaetetus)--or based simply upon social conventions (how "the people there" are accustomed to name things). It is questionable, in other words, whether there really is any "method" to the Stranger's madness.

These considerations cast doubt upon the Stranger's enterprise. Though the Stranger may appear to Theaetetus and to readers of the dialogue to be practising a highly artful (or technical) method of hunting down definitions, it may well be that he is only appearing to do so. It may be that he is really engaged in an activity that is neither a kind of hunting nor technical but closer to a kind of production of images of the inexplicable way in which things appear to him and/or others like him. After following the paradigm of the angler to generate six different pictures<sup>74</sup> of the Sophist, the Stranger himself finally concedes that because the Sophist has appeared as so many things, he and Theaetetus have arrived at an inaccurate image (*phantasma*) of the Sophist, if indeed the Sophist practices an art (232a). The Stranger concedes that: 1. the Sophist may not be a practitioner of an art (*techne*), hence it is not clear that he can be defined at all and the Stranger and Theaetetus have been deceived into thinking he could be or 2. if the Sophist does practice an art, the Stranger and Theaetetus have only succeeded in producing false or inaccurate

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<sup>74</sup>As if to underline the imprecision of the divisions, Plato presents the young mathematician, Theaetetus, as mistaking just how many Sophists he and the Stranger have discovered (compare 225e and 231d-e). When one considers the peculiar ways in which the second, third and fourth Sophists are distinguished, it is no wonder that Theaetetus has difficulty counting them up.

images of what that art is. Either way, it follows from this concession that the hunt for the Sophist produces at least six inaccurate images of the Sophist.

Even a brief look at these first six definitions indicates that something has gone terribly awry with the Stranger's hunt.<sup>75</sup> Those definitions of the Sophist's art are as follows<sup>76</sup>:

1. The acquisitive, coercive art of hunting tame, land animals, namely humans, using persuasion in private regarding virtue, for pay (221d-223a).<sup>77</sup>
2. The acquisitive, non-coercive art of exchange through the sale of the work of others, in cities other than one's own, which concerns things pertaining to the soul namely, the knowledge of virtue (223c-224c).<sup>78</sup>
3. Identical to 2, save that the knowledge of virtue is sold in one's own city (224d-e).
4. Identical to 3, save that the knowledge sold is one's own and not the work of others.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>For more a more detailed analysis, see Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 100-118, 132-143.

<sup>76</sup>These summaries are based upon the definitions generated during the Stranger's divisions. The Stranger's own summaries which follow each definition are not, in every case, true summaries and it is worth wondering why Plato has him leave out the things he does. It is also important to note that the Stranger's final summary of the six definitions (231d-e) leaves out a great deal. In it, however, he counts the Sophists as six whereas in the course of the divisions, it is not clear that the third and fourth cases are to be distinguished (see 224d-e).

<sup>77</sup>In his summary, the Stranger drops all mention of persuasion and virtue and adds that the Sophist hunts after rich and promising young men to whom he promises an education (223b).

<sup>78</sup>The Stranger, in his summary, does not mention whether the knowledge sold is the Sophist's own or someone else's. Nor does he mention where the knowledge is sold. Of course, by the third and fourth definitions, these distinctions have become muddled.

<sup>79</sup>This definition is identified as the fourth only in the Stranger's final summary at 231d although it is implied at 224d by the third definition.

5. The acquisitive, coercive art of fighting in the open pugnaciously in contests of words among private persons, disputing (*antilogikon*) about such things as justice and injustice, for pay (225a-226a).<sup>80</sup>
6. The art of purifying the soul of the ignorance of believing one knows something when one does not through education conducted by cross-questioning. The Stranger calls this Sophist the Sophist of "well-born descent" (*genei gennaia*) (226b-231b).<sup>81</sup>

This short summary should indicate the extent to which following the paradigm of the angler fails Theaetetus and the Stranger not only because they have generated six images of supposedly one art but because these images are inconsistent with each other. In his definition of the angler, for instance, the Stranger had carefully distinguished the coercive arts of hunting from the voluntary arts of exchange. Yet, in his first definition, the Sophist is said to practice a coercive art (hunting) while the second, third and fourth definitions describe the Sophist as engaged in the voluntary art of exchange. Further, in his definition of the angler, the Stranger had carefully distinguished coercion in secret (i.e. hunting), from coercion which takes place in the open (i.e. fighting). And yet, the Stranger defines the first Sophist as a hunter, while the fifth is said to be a fighter. These kinds of inconsistency multiply as the hunt for the Sophist continues. A quick look at the second, third and fourth Sophists would suggest, for instance, that the Sophist does and does not sell his knowledge in cities other than his own and that he does and does not sell knowledge that is his own. By the time the Stranger offers his sixth definition, it becomes questionable whether the

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<sup>80</sup>In his summary of this division, the Stranger omits what the Sophist disputes about (justice and injustice) and the fact that he does so in private.

<sup>81</sup>I will discuss the sixth definition in greater detail below.



Sophist receives pay (the first five Sophists did receive pay) and, indeed, whether he practices an acquisitive art at all.<sup>82</sup>

A comparison of the six definitions, in other words, casts doubt upon the relevance of the many distinctions the Stranger makes. The Sophist appears to him as a hunter and not as a hunter, as engaged in the art of exchange and not engaged in the art of exchange, as a fighter and not as a fighter, as receiving pay for his services and as not necessarily receiving pay for his services, and so on. This is not to say that each of the images of the Sophist is not indicative of the ways in which a Sophist may appear to the Stranger and to others. It is to say that, in his first six definitions, the Stranger has not been able to capture the art of Sophistry, as he himself acknowledges (231c ff.). The difficulty is not that the Sophist has appeared as so many things but that the different appearances of the Sophist are inconsistent with each other.

One more general point. The sixth definition of the Sophist should be immediately recognizable as the philosopher, Socrates. It is virtually identical with the way Socrates himself likes to describe his own activity. In fact, the Stranger had very nearly ensnared Socrates in his hunt for the Sophist when he offered his fifth definition. There, the final division yielded, not only the disputing or contradicting (*antilogikon*) Sophist, but the person who neglects his own affairs to engage in disputation and who, rather than making money through this pursuit, wastes it (225d). According to the definitions, money-making is not necessarily an element of Sophistry. While the sixth Sophist may have a certain appeal--even the Stranger calls this Sophist the Sophist of *well born* (or noble) descent--we must not forget that this Sophist is said by the Stranger to be a Sophist and not a philosopher. Therefore, either the Stranger's method fails to distinguish between

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<sup>82</sup>Whether the art of discrimination, under which the art of purification falls, is an acquisitive or productive art is not discussed by the Stranger. Rather, the art of discrimination is arrived at by a collection of two kinds of arts which appear to be both productive and acquisitive at the same time (see 226b-226c).

the appearance and reality of the Sophist and so has erroneously ensnared the philosopher or the avowed philosopher, Socrates, is a Sophist despite his claims to the contrary.

### Socrates: Sophist of Noble Descent

The fact that the Stranger states that his first six definitions have failed to define the Sophist's art (if, indeed, the Sophist practices one) suggests that his apparent indictment of Socrates as a Sophist is not his final word on the matter. Nonetheless, it is worth considering how it comes about that the noble art of purifying the soul of the ignorance of thinking one knows something when one does not comes to be called a Sophistic art by the Stranger. The sixth definition is somewhat different from the first five in the degree of elaboration the Stranger offers as he proceeds. In particular, it gives the Stranger's account of the different kinds of ignorance alongside the different kinds of education which are directed to removing ignorance.<sup>83</sup> The Stranger also offers a passing comment on the nature of his own method of generating definitions. The ingredients of the sixth definition, therefore, call for a reader to reflect on at least three things: the Stranger's understanding of ignorance and education according to which Socrates is a Sophist; the Stranger's own method of arriving at definitions as a remedy for ignorance; and whether, in fact, the Stranger "practices what he preaches" in his attempt to educate Theaetetus and the assembled company as to what a Sophist is.

The first thing to note about the sixth definition is that the Stranger begins by collecting a number of verbs which describe a number of activities which he says are all concerned with the art of division or discrimination (*diakritike*). Among these activities are "sifting, straining, winnowing, separating and carding, combing, beating the web". The general class into which these activities

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<sup>83</sup>That this account is very much the Stranger's own and owes very little--if anything--to the contribution of Theaetetus is clear from the degree to which Theaetetus is at a complete loss as to the Stranger's meaning at every stage of the definition (see 226c, 226e, 228a, 229a, 229b, 229c, 229e, 230b, 231a).

fall is not something which the Stranger can simply begin to divide for it is not a self-evident class.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it is not obvious that such activities are in themselves artful. But, according to the Stranger, they are all concerned with dividing one thing from another and so, he concludes, one art underlies them all--the diacritical (or discriminatory) art (226b-c). The sixth definition of the Sophist thus begins quite differently from the previous five in two respects: it begins with a definition of an art which is not generally recognized as such and which must be generated through collecting various verbs; and it begins by examining an art (the diacritical art) which is neither obviously acquisitive nor obviously productive.

According to the Stranger, the diacritical art can be divided in two as indicated by the verbs used to define it: one kind of diacritics concerns the separation of worse from better, the other concerns the separation of like from like (226d). According to the Stranger, the second art has no name while the first is understood by everyone to be the art of purification (226d). After a slight digression by the Stranger,<sup>85</sup> during which he cautions Theaetetus against using their current method of argument in a non-neutral way to distinguish between better and worse arts, the two agree that purification can be divided into two arts--the one concerning the purification of bodies (which includes medicine, gymnastics, the bath-keeper's art and fulling) and the other concerning the purification of souls (226e-227d).

The latter art is concerned with the removal of badness (*kakia*)<sup>86</sup> in the soul of which the Stranger says there are two kinds. The one is comparable to disease in the body while the other is comparable to bodily deformity (227d). When Theaetetus does not understand this division the Stranger explains that disease and discord (the disagreement of those things which are naturally

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<sup>84</sup>Theaetetus, until told, has no idea as to what the examples are being used to show.

<sup>85</sup>For a discussion of this, see below.

<sup>86</sup>I deliberately avoid translating this as "wickedness" for, according to the Stranger's account, it is not clear that the two kinds of badness in the soul are both of a moral sort.

related) are the same thing whereas deformity is the same as ugliness or lack of proportion (*ametrion*). Disease or discord in the soul is found in people whose opinions are opposed to their desires, their anger to their pleasures, their reasoning to their pain, etc.<sup>87</sup> Deformity or ugliness in the soul on the other hand, is defined as follows:

Stranger: . . . But if things which participate in motion and which strive to hit some set mark go aside on each attempt and miss, will we say this happens through due proportion (*summetrias*) to each other or, on the contrary, through disproportion (*ametrias*)?

Theaetetus: Clearly, through disproportion. (228c)

According to the Stranger, no ignorant soul is willing to be ignorant, and being ignorant (*agnoien*) "is nothing else than a going-aside, a going-aside of the intelligence (*sunesseos*) when the soul attempts the truth." The Stranger concludes that the disease or discord of the soul is what most people call vice (*poneria*) and it includes cowardice, intemperance and injustice. The ugliness or deformity of the soul is ignorance which, the Stranger notes, is widespread. He also notes that most people are unwilling to call ignorance badness (*kakian*) (227e-228d).

The Stranger's definition of ignorance is obscure. It follows from the Stranger's account that because ignorance (*agnoien*) is a kind of ugliness or deformity, a missing of the mark at which the soul aims and a kind of disproportion or "unmeasuredness", the beauty of the soul must be a kind of knowledge or understanding (*noien*) and must also be what the soul becomes when it hits its mark or "measures" up to some standard to which it is meant to be in proportion. The confusion in the Stranger's account is due to the way he uses the terms "hitting the mark" and "due proportion". On the one hand, the mark at which the soul aims is said to be the truth. On the other hand, the Stranger explains that when the soul fails to hit the mark because it lacks due proportion, it is deformed or ugly. Can one be in a state of "due proportion" and fail to hit the

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<sup>87</sup>How these things are *naturally* related is never explained by the Stranger. That they are all found in humans, goes without saying. Any other relationship they share is not self-evident.

mark? The key to understanding the Stranger's claim here is to note that the measure (*metria*) to which the soul aspires is the "mark" itself or the truth. When the soul arrives at the same measure as the mark--in the Stranger's words--by being symmetrical or proportionate to one another (*hypo summetrias tes pros allela*), the soul becomes beautiful as it hits upon the truth. The "mark" or "measure" at which the soul aims, therefore, is not something external to it as an arrow is to its target. The "measure" or "mark" is more akin to an "internal" standard, like that of bodily beauty, but which can be spoken of as something external (until attained) to which the body (or, in this case, soul) aspires. That the soul naturally aspires to measure up or become proportionate to the truth is confirmed when the Stranger asserts that ignorant souls are ignorant against their will (228d).

What is not so clear, on the Stranger's account, is what prevents the soul which *naturally* aspires to the truth, from attaining it. This obscurity is not removed by the rest of what the Stranger says on the subject of education. And this is in large part due to the distinction the Stranger attempts to sustain between the moral and intellectual virtues.

According to the Stranger, the two bad conditions of the soul, vice (psychic disease) and ignorance (psychic ugliness/disproportion), are treated by two distinct arts. These in turn are said to be like the two distinct arts used to treat the two bad conditions of the body. A diseased body requires medicine while a disproportionate body requires gymnastics. Accordingly, vice (hubris, injustice and cowardice) requires a medicine of the soul. Theaetetus reluctantly agrees that the medicine of the soul which treats moral vice is punishment (*Dike*). It is clearer to Theaetetus that the gymnastics of the soul, that art needed to correct the disproportion of ignorance, is instruction (*didaskalike techne*) (228e-229a).

It appears, on the Stranger's account, that human beings require punishment and not instruction in order for them to be morally virtuous. While the soul naturally strives towards the beauty of measuring up to the truth, moral virtue is not something it naturally strives towards but

something which must be instilled through punishment. While the Stranger is quite insistent that no one is willingly ignorant, he is silent on the question as to whether humans can be willingly vicious. Moral virtue appears to be something for which humans are properly held to account such that to be morally vicious is to deserve punishment. For the Stranger, moral virtue does not appear to be a matter of knowledge. The Stranger may regard moral virtue as a necessary condition for attaining the truth and ridding oneself of ignorance just as it is helpful to be healthy if one is going to engage in gymnastics but he does not say. Perhaps being in a state of moral ill-health is what prevents the soul from attaining the proportion of truth to which it naturally aspires but, again, the Stranger does not say. What is clear is that while health may be desirable for one who is going to engage in gymnastics, it is not always necessary for other things and many a beautiful and well proportioned human body can be diseased. What is also clear is that the Stranger has no qualms about keeping separate what Socrates in other dialogues is at pains to connect, namely, the moral and intellectual virtues.<sup>88</sup>

In order to discover the various parts of the instructive art, the Stranger proposes that they cut ignorance in two. The Stranger claims that there is one kind of ignorance which is not only big and difficult but which balances all the other kinds. This is the ignorance of thinking one knows when one does not. The Stranger distinguishes this from ignorance in general (*agnoia*) and calls it stupidity (*amathia*).<sup>89</sup> Theaetetus and the Stranger agree that instruction in the crafts (*demiourgike technē*) does not remove this. Rather, it is removed by education (*paideia*) (229b-d).

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<sup>88</sup>Here one need only turn to the *Republic* to see that, for Socrates, punishment is not sufficient to instill moral virtue. Moral virtue, for Socrates, requires a long instruction in music and gymnastic. Furthermore, the same dialogue makes clear that, for Socrates, those humans who aspire above all to the truth are also the healthiest of human beings. See also Socrates' discussion of "psychic" medicine and gymnastics in the *Gorgias* 464a-465e.

<sup>89</sup>*Agnoia* is ignorance in the sense of not knowing. *Amathia* is ignorance in the sense of being uninstructed or unlearned.

However, whereas Theaetetus seems to think that all the other kinds of ignorance are removed by instruction in the crafts, the Stranger is silent on this question.

The Stranger then divides instruction in speeches (*logoi*) in two: the smoother and rougher. Presumably, "instruction in speeches" is another name for education (*paideia*). This suggests that neither instruction in crafts nor punishment (*Dike*) involves speeches as the primary instrument as far as the Stranger is concerned.<sup>90</sup> The rougher part of education is the art of admonition, usually practised by parents, and it involves displaying anger at young people when they err or sometimes gently exhorting them. Those people, however, who believe that all ignorance is involuntary and who also believe that no person is ever willing to learn anything about which he already thinks himself clever (*deinos*) do not put much stock in admonition (229e-230a). Rather, they practice the art of cross-questioning (*elenchos*). Here one should note that the Stranger himself cannot put much stock in admonition. He too believes that no one is willingly ignorant. He also believes that the greatest ugliness of the soul, which can only be removed by psychic gymnastics (according to his account thus far), is the belief that one knows when one does not. It should not be surprising that the Stranger has some sympathy for the art of cross-questioning and that he is reluctant to place the noble, cross-questioning Sophist on a par with the other Sophists he and Theaetetus have turned up (230e). His criticism of this art is difficult to discern.

According to the Stranger, the cross-questioning Sophist questions people who think they say something when they are saying nothing. Because such people wander, it is easy to examine their opinions. The Sophist examines them by putting their opinions side by side and, in so putting them, shows that their opinions are self-contradictory. Those who experience this kind of questioning grow harsh with themselves and gentle to others. In turn, they experience the pleasure of being freed from the opinions which entrapped them and they grow more stable (229b-c).

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<sup>90</sup>As a result, one cannot help but wonder where Theaetetus' own knowledge of mathematics falls in the Stranger's divisions.



The Stranger's explanation for the efficacy of this art should give one pause. He explains that, just as *physicians* believe that the body cannot receive nourishment until obstructions are removed, so the soul cannot benefit from teachings (*mathematon*) offered it until the opinions which obstruct learning are removed. Earlier, it will be recalled, the Stranger had maintained that ignorance is a kind of *ugliness*, a kind of psychic disproportion which finds a remedy in psychic *gymnastics*. Here, with no explanation, the Stranger suggests that ignorance requires the purgation of *medicine* or that ignorance is a psychic *disease*. He explains that by purging the soul of contradictory opinions, the Sophist is able to put a man in a state of believing he knows just those things that he knows and no more (230c-d). That is, cross-questioning is the "medical" remedy for a kind of ignorance. According to the Stranger, cross-questioning brings about the greatest of all purifications and anyone who is not cross-questioned is uneducated (*apaideuton*) and *ugly* in those things in which a happy man ought to be most pure and beautiful.<sup>91</sup>

The Stranger is reluctant to call the man who practices this art a Sophist, lest it confer too much honour upon Sophists in general. Theaetetus notes that they have described someone who bears a resemblance to a Sophist. The Stranger cautions Theaetetus: a wolf, the wildest of animals bears some relation to the dog, the tamest. He warns Theaetetus against the slippery class of resemblances but agrees that they have turned up yet another Sophist--the Sophist of noble descent (230e).

I have already noted that the sixth Sophist bears far more than a passing resemblance to Socrates. He also bears some resemblance to the Stranger in so far as both the Stranger and the sixth Sophist consider ignorance to be involuntary and consider that the belief that one knows something that one does not know prevents the soul from attaining the truth. Yet, as the Stranger

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<sup>91</sup>I emphasize the word "ugly" here to draw attention to the fact that, throughout the description of the art of the sixth Sophist, the Stranger brings together terms which he had earlier distinguished: disease and ugliness; medicine and gymnastics.

himself cautions, one must be on guard against resemblances. Whatever art the Stranger himself practices, it is not the art of cross-questioning. Recall his reluctance to engage in dialogue and his preference for long, uninterrupted speeches which convey a teaching. His practice so far in the dialogue bears little resemblance to cross-questioning. Rather, through leading questions and many promptings, he has been using the meek Theaetetus to expound a doctrine that he would rather have put in the form of a long speech.<sup>92</sup>

What does this doctrine tell us about the Stranger's criticism of the sixth Sophist and, by implication, of Socrates? First, note the Stranger's change in terminology when describing the art of cross-questioning. When discussing ignorance and its removal, the Stranger made it quite clear that he and Theaetetus were looking to define the art of psychic *gymnastics* which is concerned with removing ignorance (psychic ugliness) and bringing the soul to its natural *beauty*. This art, in turn, was distinguished quite carefully from psychic *medicine* which is concerned with remedying moral vice (psychic disease) and bringing the soul to a state of *health*. Curiously, when the Stranger finally gets to the cross-questioning art (which remedies a kind of ignorance) he explains its efficacy by analogy with medicine. The cross-questioning Sophist and, by implication, Socrates, are described as enabling the soul to rid itself of an obstruction to learning (namely, the opinion that one knows when one doesn't know) such that it comes to believe it knows no more than it does.

What neither the sixth Sophist nor Socrates provides, however, is learning for the soul once the obstruction has been removed. They have no teaching to offer. Neither the art of the sixth Sophist nor Socrates' qualifies as psychic *gymnastics*. While their art may remove the largest

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<sup>92</sup>A case in point is the fact that the Stranger in no way addresses Theaetetus' reluctance to agree that punishment is the necessary psychic medicine for moral vice. The Stranger is happy with any agreement, whether sincere or not, on the part of his interlocutor. He is not interested in the condition of Theaetetus' soul so much as he is interested in expounding his teaching. The Stranger, however, is forced to pay more attention to Theaetetus as the dialogue proceeds (see 234b-235a, 236d).

obstacle to learning, it does not thereby bring the soul from a state of ignorance to the truth save in one small, paradoxical respect: once the obstacle has been removed, the soul knows, in truth, just how ignorant it is. That is, once the soul has experienced the psychic *medicine* of Socrates and the sixth Sophist, it is ready for psychic *gymnastics* but only ready. It has not yet begun its flight towards that beauty and truth to which it naturally aspires.

There is, however, something peculiar about the psychic medicine practised by the sixth Sophist. It follows from the Stranger's account that psychic medicine is, itself, the inducement of a psychic disease. Earlier, the Stranger defined psychic disease as the opposition of what is naturally related (228a-b). His description of the art of cross-questioning makes it quite clear that its medicinal effect stems from putting a man's opinions together in such a way in the course of an argument as to show them to be in contradiction with each other. That is, the medicinal effect of cross-questioning stems from setting a man's several opinions in opposition to each other. This opposition must, in a sense, already be there. A man must already have the disease of opinions in opposition to each other before the cross-questioner has anything to treat. What the cross-questioner does is to bring this disease from latency into activity, as it were. He sets the disease in motion by asking the questions he does and then reveals to his interlocutor the state of his illness by showing him the extent to which he is in opposition to himself. A sick man who undergoes cross-questioning will discover that he is ill. He will not thereby find his cure.

On the Stranger's account, therefore, it seems that ignorance is *both* a medical and a gymnastic problem. Indeed, like the medical treatment of the other moral vices, the ignorance of thinking one knows when one does not is treated punitively. As the Stranger says, those who undergo cross-questioning become harsh with themselves. Cross-questioning is a treatment which induces self-punishment. This punishment is necessary for the soul if it is to attain its proper beauty and the truth. According to the Stranger, the medicine of the sixth Sophist and Socrates is an initial, but only an initial, step in the gymnastic training of the soul (230d). Hence the

Stranger's comment that he who has never undergone cross-questioning is uneducated (*apaideuton*) and ugly in those things in which a happy man ought to be most pure and beautiful.

If there is such an art of psychic gymnastics, then the behaviour of the sixth Sophist and Socrates, while laudable to a point, is also irresponsible. The cross-questioning Sophist, according to the Stranger, induces an illness without offering the proper cure. He brings a latent disease into full activity. And one must recall that, on the Stranger's account, this kind of psychic disease is equivalent to moral vice (228d-e). Someone who is cross-questioned discovers that his opinions are in opposition to each other. He is not shown how to resolve this opposition. He does not discover what opinions he should hold; nor is he shown a way of putting them together in a way that might make sense. Neither Socrates nor the sixth Sophist can make a soul more beautiful or aid it in its natural aspiration for the truth. Rather, what the Stranger suggests is that, despite their capacity to rid the soul of the opinion that it knows when it does not know, both Socrates and the sixth Sophist also have the capacity to bring a certain form of moral vice from latency into full activity. A decent person may unknowingly hold contradictory opinions about why it is good to be just. If this person is led to see the groundlessness of her opinions concerning the goodness of justice, there is a good chance that she will cease to be concerned with justice until she is given a satisfactory account as to why justice is good. According to the Stranger, neither Socrates nor the Sophist can offer the satisfactory account.

If there was no gymnastics of the soul, Sophistic medicine might be acceptable. That is, psychic medicine does at least treat one illness of the soul. But, on the Stranger's account, cross-questioning of itself has the effect of leaving a person high and dry with respect to his soul's natural inclination. It is also in no way clear that the psychic medicine of the sixth Sophist and Socrates has any effect on other moral vices. The Stranger says that the effect of cross-questioning is to make a man more gentle to others and stable. He does not say that through cross-questioning a man becomes more just, moderate or courageous. One cannot help but

wonder whether the psychic medicine of Sophistry, which throws opinions into question, does not also have the effect of throwing into question opinions about justice, moderation and courage which might otherwise constrain the behaviour of human beings. According to the Stranger, punishment is needed to instill moral virtue. For him, the moral virtues are not grounded in knowledge but are supported by the threat of family or social sanctions.<sup>93</sup> The self-punishment induced by Sophistic medicine is potentially destructive of moral virtue. It can expose the extent to which one's moral virtues rest upon contradictory opinions and hence undermine one's confidence in moral virtue in general. If Socrates is to escape the charge of Sophistry, he will have to learn to practice the art of psychic gymnastics and so have something positive to teach his fellow humans.

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<sup>93</sup>See p. 171 above.

## The Stranger: Psychic Gymnast

Presumably, the Stranger possesses the art of psychic gymnastics. Only from the point of view of something better and more complete can Sophistic medicine appear lesser and incomplete. What then is the art of psychic gymnastics? Does it live up to the Stranger's implicit contention that it is capable of satisfying the soul's aspiration to measure up to the truth?

I have noted that the Stranger, unlike Socrates and the sixth Sophist, claims to have a teaching to convey. It is his intention to convey this teaching through discussion with Theaetetus. This discussion has proceeded in a curious fashion, however, by means of a series of divisions intended to define the Sophist. Though engaged in a dialogue with Theaetetus, the Stranger has avoided employing the art of Sophistic medicine. His questions are not asked in order to set Theaetetus's opinions in opposition to each other. They are asked in such a way that Theaetetus and he can use the answers to get to the truth about the nature of the Sophist. The Stranger and Theaetetus, in other words, have been engaged in psychic gymnastics. But it is not until his discussion of the sixth Sophist, that the Stranger begins to shed some light on the method of division they have been practising.

In his initial division of the art of the sixth Sophist, the Stranger distinguishes the art that separates better from worse from the art which distinguishes like from like (226d). The first art has the name of purification while the second art, according to the Stranger, has no name. Shortly thereafter, when Theaetetus agrees that the many names and subdivisions of the art of cosmetics seem laughable, the Stranger cautions Theaetetus about their own method:

The method of argument does not care at all, either more or less, for the art of bath-sponging or the drinking of medicines, but is indifferent as to whether their purification benefits us a little or a lot. In order to acquire intelligence (*noun*), this pursuit tries to understand what is akin (*suggenes*) and not akin (*to me suggenes*)

in all of the arts and, in this respect (*pros touto*), honours them all equally. With respect to similarity, it does not consider some to be more laughable than others. And, it does not hold someone who displays the art of hunting through generalship to be more majestic than one who displays it through the art of lice-killing, but it holds him for the most part to be more pretentious. (227a-b)

The method the Stranger and Theaetetus have been practising is "value free". It is not a purifying art like Sophistic medicine. It is indifferent to benefits or harms conferred by the arts it has been investigating, as well as to their ridiculousness or seriousness. It is concerned only with the kinship and lack of kinship of these arts to other arts.<sup>94</sup> While acknowledging that the practitioners of various arts make grand claims concerning their seriousness and the benefits they have to offer, practitioners of the Stranger's method will regard these claims as pretensions only, which reveal nothing about the nature of the arts themselves. By disregarding the pretensions of the arts, one understands something of their essential nature: despite appearances, generalship and lice-killing are manifestations of the same art namely, hunting.

It should now be clear why so much of the Stranger's discussion of the Sophist has made no reference to the purposes or ends of Sophistry and or to the motives of the Sophist who practices this art.<sup>95</sup> Such things concern only the pretensions of artisans and tell us nothing of

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<sup>94</sup>It might be objected that the Stranger's method is not simply identical to the art of the psychic gymnast. The method is said to distinguish between what is "akin and not akin" while the discriminatory arts in general (including psychic gymnastics) are said to distinguish between "like and like". Yet, the examples the Stranger employs to illustrate what he means by the discriminatory art (sifting, straining, winnowing) are clearly examples of distinguishing what is "akin" from what is "not akin". And, an important component of the Stranger's own method is the consideration of the kinship of the various arts (e.g. angling and Sophistry). Distinguishing between "like and like" would seem to require, at the same time, that one distinguish between what is "akin and not akin" just as distinguishing between what is "akin and not akin" would seem to require, at the same time, that one distinguish between "like and like". I can see no distinction between arts which distinguish between "like and like" and those which distinguish between what is "akin and not akin".

<sup>95</sup>Reference to the purposes or ends of the Sophistic art do, however, play an important role in the definition of the sixth Sophist and the Stranger will refer to motive when defining the seventh Sophist. As I shall argue (below), Plato thereby reveals the inadequacy of psychic gymnastics as practised by the Stranger.

the nature of arts themselves. In order truly to understand an art, one must look to its essential kinship in practice with other arts.

If I practice the Stranger's method, I can suggest that the Stranger's method is essentially geometrical.<sup>96</sup> This is why the aspiring mathematician, Theaetetus, goes along so easily with the Stranger's divisions. Only the day before, Theaetetus himself gave an excellent display of the use of geometrical method to arrive at a difficult arithmetical definition (*Theaetetus* 147c-147b).<sup>97</sup> Like the geometer, the Stranger has been hunting for an essential definition of something generated from an intellectual apprehension of the relations among its essential elements. The geometer is capable of generating the definition of a pyramid, for example, by apprehending its composition of lines, planes and angles. The study of the essential kinships of all solid figures reveals that all solid figures are composed of different combinations of such elements. The geometer arrives at a more and more precise definition of the pyramid by specifying consistently, and as completely as possible, its unique composition of essential elements. The day before his conversation with the Stranger, Theaetetus explained how he had used the method of the geometers as well as one of their figures (the square) to initiate a series of divisions which define two kinds of numbers. While the Stranger dispenses with the figures of the geometers<sup>98</sup>, their method underlies his hunt

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<sup>96</sup>By geometry and the geometrical method I am referring to the geometry of the ancients and not the algebraic geometry of the moderns. Euclid's *Elements* is the foundational work in ancient geometry.

<sup>97</sup>Theaetetus offers this as an example of what he thinks Socrates requires for a definition. Socrates, however, while commending Theaetetus on his display, does not adopt the geometrical method for arriving at a definition of knowledge. For an excellent discussion of this passage, along with some penetrating commentary on geometrical method, see Benardete, *Plato's Theaetetus* 96-97.

<sup>98</sup>In the Stranger's first five divisions, the figure of the angler replaces the figure of the square as Theaetetus employed it in his definition of the two kinds of numbers. In the sixth definition, the figure of the household arts of carding and combing is used in the place of the square.



for the Sophist. The paradigm for psychic gymnastics is geometry. Later on, the Stranger will call this method "dialectic" and identify it as the method of the philosopher (253b-245a).<sup>99</sup>

But is a geometrical investigation of the arts in general or Sophistry in particular really viable? I have already noted many of the problems with the Stranger's method. Rather than arriving at the essential elements and relations of elements which define Sophistry, the Stranger has continued to generate definitions of the Sophist which begin from the unself-evident and undefended assumption that the Sophist practices an art. Not only do the various definitions of the Sophist raise serious questions as to whether any of the elements used to define Sophistry are essential, they are also mutually inconsistent. Why is this?

First, the Stranger's method is not "value free" only as to the issue of the benefits and seriousness of the various arts. It is also neutral as to the issue of whether the arts under investigation are real or only apparent. Now, this is not a problem for a geometer. When a geometer sets out to offer a definition of a geometrical figure, he is quite well aware of the difference between the figures he constructs and the figure he seeks to define. He knows that no particular, constructed circle or triangle is "circularity" or "triangularity" itself. The former are, as it were, images of the latter. The geometer uses his particular, constructed figures of circles and triangles to illustrate or make manifest the essential relationships of points and lines which define circularity or triangularity. But he knows the difference between the circle or triangle "as such" and

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<sup>99</sup>That the Stranger identifies this as "dialectic" does not mean Plato does. That the Stranger captures the philosopher, Socrates, in his cast for the Sophist suggests that there are two rival notions of "philosophy" at play in this dialogue. Indeed, the fact that the Stranger's implied criticism of Socrates cannot be supported suggests a partial vindication of the Socratic understanding of philosophy. It must be recalled that only in the light of psychic gymnastics does Socratic medicine look questionable. Psychic gymnastics, which the Stranger takes to be philosophy proper, will be shown to be untenable.

the circular or triangular figures he constructs. The former stand to the latter as an original stands to its images. The circle as such cannot be squared. Its image can be.<sup>100</sup>

The Stranger has approached the definition of the Sophist as a geometer approaches the definition of a circle. Each of the definitions offered should make manifest something essential about the Sophist "as such". The definitions do not succeed in doing this, however. Rather, they show that the elements used to define the Sophist are inessential. The question arises as to whether there is something like the "Sophist as such" of which any formal definition constructed by the Stranger could be an image. The Stranger has been proceeding as if the "Sophist as such" is knowable in the same fashion as the "circle as such" and this is to assume that the "Sophist as such" can be distinguished from its images in the same fashion that the circle as such can be distinguished from circular figures. Circles, however, always appear circular. If they do not appear circular, we do not call them circles. They appear circular to the degree that they measure up to the definition of a circle. A circle "as such" is such that that it is "a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one point among those lying within the figure are equal to one another;... and the point is called the centre of the circle." (Euclid, I: Definition 15,16) No drawn, plane figure will measure up to this definition precisely in all respects. To the extent that it approximates what is specified in this definition, however, it will be circular. The definition of the "circle as such" that is, allows us to determine a class of plane figures which are more or less accurate images of the "circle as such" or, to put it slightly differently, which are more or less circular. And, to the extent that these circular figures accurately replicate the "circle as

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<sup>100</sup>See Aristotle's discussion of the "pseudo-proofs" of Hippocrates, Antiphon and Bryson for squaring the circle in chapter 11 of *Sophistical Refutations*. In saying that the difference between a geometrical original and its image is not a problem for the geometer, I do not wish to imply that this difference is not worth philosophical attention or that it is a simple matter to comprehend. I only wish to say that it is not a problem for a geometer. Indeed, the point of this discussion is that the Stranger, so far, has not seen fit to explore the relationship between originals and their images or to explore the question as to whether there is something like "Sophistry as such" of which his six Sophists are images.

such", they will look alike. There is an element of stability in the way circular figures appear which is a result of the degree to which they approximate their original. In the case of the Sophist, no such stability is evident. The Sophist can appear as one thing and as its opposite. As the Stranger himself shortly makes clear, the Sophist is a maker of "inaccurate" images<sup>101</sup>, that is, he can appear as *anything* at all (234e-235a). While the images of the circle appear to be more or less like their original, this is not the case with the images of the Sophist. If there is such a thing as the "Sophist as such", it is the essential nature of the "Sophist as such" to appear to be what it is not. These appearances, in turn, are not consistent with each other. Is this because there is no self-identical and stable original which would confer sameness and stability upon these images?

Perhaps, more accurately, one should say that every image of the "Sophist as such" both does and does not manifest the essential nature of the "Sophist as such". Theaetetus and the Stranger come to find the first six definitions problematic on formal grounds alone. That is, they reject the definitions because there have been so many of them (231b-c).<sup>102</sup> Clearly, the generation of so many, inconsistent definitions does not measure up to the demands of their method. No definition, however, is rejected by either of them as being an inadequate image of the Sophist. And this is because the Sophist does appear to Theaetetus and the Stranger in the six guises in which he has been described. If the Sophist can appear as anything he chooses, any image of the Sophist will, indeed, be an adequate image of how the Sophist appears. Any image of the Sophist, however, will fail as a formal definition for no formal definition can make manifest what the "Sophist as such" *is*. The Sophist is such as to *appear* as what he *is not*. If there is such a thing

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<sup>101</sup>I will have more to say about this below.

<sup>102</sup>Neither the Stranger nor Theaetetus mentions the fact that the images are inconsistent with each other. According to the Stranger, the problem is that they have yet to discover the one art to which the six other arts of the Sophist "look" (*blepei*, 231a).

as the "Sophist as such", its essential nature cannot be defined formally in accordance with the method of geometry.

But is there such a thing as the "Sophist as such"? *The Stranger's* method certainly rests upon the assumption that there is and that it is something like the "circle as such". We have already seen one problem with this assumption and that is that the circle as such confers stability and sameness upon its images whereas the "Sophist as such" does not. Hence the essential nature of the former can be made manifest in both pictorial and discursive images (figures and definitions) whereas that of the latter cannot. But if the essential nature of the "Sophist as such" cannot be known by the geometrical method, then one has to wonder whether there is such a thing. Geometrical investigation defines things that allow themselves to be defined "as such". The Sophist is not of such a nature, hence it cannot be defined "as such". This must be because there is no such thing as the "Sophist as such".<sup>103</sup> *The Stranger* has been hunting for a non-existent animal.

There is another, serious difficulty with the *Stranger's* geometrical method or with psychic gymnastics. *The Stranger* insists that he and Theaetetus attempt to define the various arts with no reference to what he calls their "pretensions", that is, with no reference to the benefits or harms the arts are said to confer. His art, unlike the art of Sophistic medicine, is not devoted to separating the better from the worse. This neutrality is certainly appropriate in a geometrical investigation. Geometers are not interested in the beauty of circles; nor are they interested in how beneficial or harmful circles have been to the mass of mankind. Circles themselves have no such "pretensions". To attempt to define the circle in terms of its beauty or the benefits it confers might tell us something interesting about human beings but it would tell us *nothing* about the essential

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<sup>103</sup>At the very least, one would have to say that the "as suchness" of the "circle as such" and that of the "Sophist as such" are radically different. In the light of this radical difference, I am suggesting that the term "as such" becomes meaningless when used in conjunction with the "Sophist".

nature of the circle. This is because the circle as such can be thought to have an existence independent of how it is used, considered by or affects human beings. It is the goal of geometry to discover things about geometrical figures which are true of those figures independently of how they are considered in the world of human purposes and intentions. The question is whether the arts can be comprehended in this fashion.

Can one, for instance, arrive at an adequate understanding of medicine, engineering or even geometry without reference to the human purposes these arts are meant to serve? Can one comprehend the arts with no reference to the harms and benefits they are meant to confer? Despite his intentions, even the Stranger is unable to do this. In his definition of the sixth Sophist, the Stranger undertakes to define the non-neutral or value-laden art of Sophistic purification using his own neutral or value-free method. In this undertaking, he is forced to distinguish between disease and deformity in both body and soul. Without these distinctions, he would be unable to define Sophistic medicine which is concerned with the removal of psychic disease. Without these distinctions he would also be unable to say anything about the art of psychic gymnastics (his own art) which is concerned with bringing psychic beauty into being. Yet both the terms "disease" and "deformity" themselves rest upon a distinction between harm and benefit or better and worse. The Stranger cannot define the non-neutral arts without employing the very criteria used by the non-neutral arts to define themselves. He must make reference to the "pretensions" of the arts in order to understand them.<sup>104</sup>

There is a very good reason for this. Unlike circles, which exist independently of human intentions and purposes, the arts are generated in the realm of human intentions and purposes.

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<sup>104</sup>As if to underscore this difficulty, Plato has the Stranger call the sixth Sophist the Sophist of "noble birth" and to caution Theaetetus that this Sophist resembles the others only so much as the dog resembles the wolf. The Stranger, despite his insistence that Theaetetus be neutral in their investigation, ends up cautioning him against this very neutrality. At the same time, his mention of the resemblance between the dog and the wolf underscores the ambiguities surrounding non-neutral distinctions.

We encourage the art of medicine because we deem it harmful to be sick and it is part of the doctor's art to know the difference between sickness and health. The same is true of engineering. We deem it beneficial to be able to talk to people over telephone wires and to ford rivers, and it is part of the engineer's art to be able to develop contrivances of such benefit to us and to know the difference between safe and unsafe designs. Even ordinary geometry, like the Stranger's psychic gymnastics, cannot be understood without reference to its claim to be able to bring humans to knowledge of things which they desire to know. Indeed, the geometer has no doubt but that his neutral method is more beneficial for the study of figures than any non-neutral investigation. All of the arts rest upon a distinction between better and worse (or harm and benefit) and such a distinction is essential to their deployment.

For this reason, even the Stranger cannot avoid the distinction between harm and benefit or better and worse while practising his method. In order to define the arts of Sophistic medicine and psychic gymnastics (not to mention bodily medicine and bodily gymnastics), he must employ the distinctions between harm and benefit which these arts themselves use. For instance, in order to define the art of psychic medicine, the Stranger must accept that there really is a health of the soul with which psychic medicine is concerned. He cannot treat the claim that psychic medicine brings about health in the soul as a questionable claim or pretention. To do so would render questionable the notion that there is such a thing as the art of psychic medicine for, by definition, medicine in general is concerned with the attainment and preservation of health. Indeed, a neutral definition of any form of medicine, which studiously avoided reference to the value-laden goals of medicine would hardly serve as a definition of medicine at all.

If we are to investigate the arts in a neutral fashion then, as the Stranger points out, we will be forced to regard lice-killing and generalship as essentially the same in so far as they both are manifestations of the art of hunting. Indeed, we would also have to regard the Stranger's own art of hunting for definitions or psychic gymnastics as no more majestic than lice-killing. To do so,

however, would be to abstract from the world of human intentions and purposes in which the arts arise and to treat the arts as things, like circles, which have an existence that is independent of human beings and human purposes.<sup>105</sup> In attempting to comprehend the arts in a neutral fashion, the Stranger lands himself in a most laughable position. The majestic art of psychic gymnastics, whose end is to bring the soul to its appropriate beauty is, from the point of view of that self-same art, no more majestic than lice-killing.

The Stranger's implied criticism of Sophistic or Socratic medicine, therefore, cannot be supported. As I said above, that criticism is justified only to the extent that there is such a thing as psychic gymnastics--an art capable of bringing the soul to its proper beauty and the truth of all things it aspires to know. The Stranger identifies the art he and Theaetetus have been practising as the art of the philosopher.<sup>106</sup> The Stranger's employment of this art reveals, however, that it cannot bring the soul to all that it aspires to know. Geometers may be able to tell us many things about circles. The geometrical method, however, cannot tell us about the realm of human intentional activity. It cannot tell us why it might be better for us to be psychic gymnasts than Sophists. It can only offer us various images of the way these human activities look to an observer who attempts to be neutral. It can tell us no more. It certainly cannot tell us anything about what Sophistry is "as such" for there is no such thing. The definitions generated by the Stranger's method cannot capture the essential nature of Sophistry for it is not there to be captured. To the extent that Theaetetus or any reader of the dialogue has been led by the Stranger's psychic gymnastics into thinking that the Sophist has been or can be captured in an essential definition, the Stranger is guilty of having brought them to a false image of the true state of things. He has

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<sup>105</sup>By "independent" I am not referring to some strange metaphysical realm (though there may be such a thing . . .). I am only referring to the fact that circles appear to have a kind of being that is unmodified by human intentions and purposes.

<sup>106</sup>See note 99 above.

not brought them to the truth of that which they aspire to know. Rather, in accordance with his final understanding of the Sophist as a maker of false images he has become a Sophist himself. And the image-making Sophist is to be distinguished from the Socratic or Sophistic practitioner of psychic medicine who, according to the Stranger, is of noble descent.

Sophistry may or may not be unique in its resistance to essential definition. The repeatability and teachability of many of the arts suggest that they, like the circle, share a kind of identity and stability which can be comprehended by the Stranger's method.<sup>107</sup> Whether such human activities as philosophy and statesmanship can be at all comprehended in this way, however, is questionable. One ought not to forget Socrates' contention, at the beginning of the dialogue that not only Sophists, but philosophers (and by implication, statesmen), are such as to appear as what they are not. If Socrates is correct, then the Stranger's method can no more bring us to an adequate understanding of philosophy and statesmanship than it can bring us to an adequate understanding of Sophistry.

Does this mean, then, that no understanding of Sophistry is possible? Certainly no geometrical understanding of Sophistry is possible. Sophists are not like geometrical figures. Not only can they assume contradictory appearances, they are engaged in activities which can only be fully comprehended within the realm of human intentions and purposes. Even the Stranger is forced to abandon the purity of his method in his attempt to define the sixth Sophist. He is forced to make distinctions between "disease" and "health" as well as "beauty" and "deformity" in order to arrive at his definition. And he is forced to distinguish the sixth Sophist from other Sophists in terms of the former's "noble" descent in order that Theaetetus not mix this Sophist up with the others. The Stranger is forced to practice the art of distinguishing better from worse in arriving at

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<sup>107</sup>Perhaps this accounts for the various breakthroughs in cybernetics in this century. Those arts whose repeatability and teachability rest upon their geometrical/mathematical nature are most "detachable" from human beings and most able to be "practised" by computers.



his definition. Indeed, the ungeometrical distinction between better and worse is indispensable to his characterisation of psychic gymnastics and his implied criticism of Socratic/Sophistic medicine.

Sophistry and, arguably, philosophy and statesmanship, are not things "as such" like the circle but are rather activities informed by human intentions and purposes. The Stranger's failure to practice his method rigorously and his need to employ the distinction between better and worse to arrive at his sixth definition show more than the limits of psychic gymnastics. They suggest (but only suggest) a vindication of the art of Sophistic/Socratic medicine. Nowhere does the Stranger suggest that a knowledge of Sophistic/Socratic medicine depends upon the knowledge and practice of psychic gymnastics. Nonetheless, he grants that the practitioner of psychic medicine has a criterion by which to distinguish between better and worse opinions in a person's soul. While the practitioner of psychic medicine does not have a positive doctrine to impart, he does have the ability to show an individual, by way of cross-questioning, when his opinions are contradictory. This revelation of contradiction leads these individuals to realise that they do not know what they thought they knew and to believe they know no more than they do know. It is the practitioner of Sophistic/Socratic medicine who is capable of distinguishing "better" and "worse" in the human soul. The rigorous psychic gymnast will avoid these terms. In avoiding them, however, he will not be able to give an adequate account of any human activity. The practitioner of psychic medicine may not be able to give a full-fledged geometrical account of what the Sophist (or philosopher or statesman) is "as such". But, as we have seen, neither can the psychic gymnast. The practitioner of psychic medicine can help us evaluate the state of our own psychic health with respect to the opinions we hold about Sophists (or philosophers or statesmen).<sup>108</sup> One is tempted to say that

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<sup>108</sup>And a great number of other things. I do not mean to restrict the practice of this "art" to these questions alone. The Stranger suggests no restrictions to the opinions the cross-questioning, noble Sophist examines.

anyone who uses the geometrical method of psychic gymnastics to define the nature of Sophistry needs a good dose of Socratic/Sophistic medicine.<sup>109</sup>

Or does he? While one may be tempted to think so, one should note that the Stranger's account of Sophistic/Socratic medicine is extremely brief. This brevity is in no small part due to the fact that the Stranger offers no arguments for the evaluations he has made. We are told that psychic medicine is a noble art that removes sickness from the soul. We are not told why thinking one knows more than ones does or being in contradiction with oneself is an illness. The problems surrounding the Stranger's account of psychic gymnastics and his definition of Sophistic/Socratic medicine serve only to suggest, they do not provide, a vindication of the latter. If the dialogue has shown anything so far, however, it has shown that a vindication of Sophistic/Socratic medicine could not be supplied using the Stranger's geometric method.

It is, however, important for an understanding of the dialogue to keep in mind the fact that, no matter how the Stranger characterises him, Socrates does not consider himself to be a Sophist. He considers himself to be a philosopher. Socrates' silence throughout the great part of the dialogue should not lead the reader to forget his presence. The Stranger considers his geometrical art of psychic gymnastics to be philosophy.<sup>110</sup> It is this understanding of philosophy that creates the impression that Socrates is a Sophist and not a philosopher. Whatever Socrates' complete understanding of philosophy is, it is not the same as the Stranger's. This does not give us grounds

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<sup>109</sup>I have nowhere addressed the question as to whether Plato gives us any indications that the Stranger himself is aware of the problems with his method. It may be, for instance, that the Stranger is interested in seeing whether or not the young mathematician, Theaetetus, can recognise the limits of geometrical thinking. Or he may be interested in showing, via Theaetetus, the limits of this method. He may well have other things up his sleeve of which one can catch a glimpse now and again. In any event, answers to such questions would require much more detailed analyses of the drama (not only of the *Sophist* but of the *Theaetetus* and *Statesman*) than is feasible here. I have limited myself in order to focus on two things: that the Stranger does not answer the question put by Socrates and why he cannot. The Stranger may or may not be aware of his failure. The issue is whether or not we are.

<sup>110</sup>Again, see p. 182 above.

to conclude that Plato's understanding of the philosopher is more in accordance with the Stranger's. Perhaps if Plato had constructed his dialogue without the presence of Socrates one might have grounds to conclude this. The silent presence of Socrates listening in on this discussion after having set it in motion should force the reader to acknowledge that there is not just one understanding of philosophy which prevails in this dialogue. Rather, the dialogue presents two, rival notions of philosophy. One of those--the Stranger's--appears very problematic as the dialogue moves along. The other--Socrates'--while not explored at any length, appears more and more promising as the dialogue progresses.

As I have noted, the Stranger himself recognises that his first six definitions must be rejected. After offering a quick summary, he calls them a phantasm (*to phantasma*) or inaccurate image. According to him, when we call anyone who appears to know many things by the name of a single art, we have not beheld (*kateidon*) that to which all of his various kinds of learning (*mathemata*) look (*blepei*) (232a).<sup>111</sup> Arriving at many definitions of the circle is not a problem for the geometer, unless those definitions are inconsistent with each other. The Stranger makes no reference to the inconsistencies among his definitions. He refers only to their manyness as a problem. The manifold nature of the Sophist's knowledge itself presents a problem for beholding the Sophist.

The Stranger thus grants that he and Theaetetus have, indeed, spelled out accurately many things the Sophist appears to know. They have been able to give a series of not inaccurate descriptions of the many things a Sophist appears to have learned how to do. He acknowledges, however, that these descriptions cannot be taken as constituting either singly or collectively, a formal definition. Nothing prevents the Sophist from being a hunter and not a hunter, from being

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<sup>111</sup>For the definition of a phantasm as an inaccurate image, see 235e-236b. A phantasm, while not accurately replicating the relations (*ratios*) between the elements which constitute it may, nonetheless, give an accurate picture of its original if it is not looked at too closely.

engaged in the art of exchange and not engaged in the art of exchange, from being a fighter and not being a fighter, from receiving pay for his services and from not necessarily receiving pay for his services, and so on, as long as these are taken as descriptions of what the Sophist appears to know how to do. What a formal definition must supply, however, is an answer to the question as to what these various kinds of "know-how" look--what it is that unifies these various kinds of "know-how" such that we give the man who possesses them one name.

By and large, when we want to comprehend that to which a man's various kinds of "know-how" look, we attempt to comprehend the purpose these various kinds of "know-how" serve. To be a doctor, for instance, requires that one knows how to do many different kinds of things. One needs to know, for instance, human anatomy and pathology, the properties of a variety of medical tools and how to use them, and the various properties and kinds of drugs and how to use them. Simply offering a list of these kinds of "know-how", however, will not help us to define the doctor. We need to know to what all this "know-how" looks, its point or its purpose if we are to describe the art of medicine accurately. It is the purpose of medicine--to cure disease and maintain the physical health of human beings--that gives unity or direction to all that the doctor knows how to do. Someone who knows human anatomy, the properties of various drugs and the use of a mortar and pestle may or may not be a doctor. He may well be a poisoner. What he is depends upon whether he uses this know-how to secure a particular human benefit or harm. Generally speaking that is, if we want to comprehend an art, we must make reference to the end or purpose of that art within the scheme of human needs and desires--within the scheme of things that people take to be beneficial and/or harmful.

The Stranger will in no way attempt to define Sophistry in these terms anywhere in the dialogue. While he has been forced and will continue to be forced to make references to the pur-

poses and motives of the Sophist<sup>112</sup> in order to make relevant distinctions as he goes along, the Stranger will not offer an ultimate definition of the Sophist which spells out the end or purpose of his art in a scheme of human benefits and harms. What the Stranger will do, will be to offer an explanation of what unifies the various kinds of apparent "know-how" possessed by the Sophist in terms of another art--the art of image-making. The Stranger's method, while no longer rigorously geometrical, will remain geometrical.<sup>113</sup>

One further point. In so far as the Stranger attempts to define the arts without ultimate reference to their ends or purposes, the Stranger remains, throughout the dialogue, incapable of offering a sustainable distinction between the doctor and the poisoner. I have noted that the sixth Sophist is none other than the philosopher, Socrates. This should not be too surprising to Socrates who is part of the audience of the dialogue. After all, it is he who maintains that philosophers are indistinguishable from Sophists (except, perhaps, at those times when philosophers are indistinguishable from statesmen and madmen). One cannot ignore the possibility that the reason the Stranger captures Socrates in his hunt for the Sophist is because he refuses to distinguish the arts on the basis of the ends or purposes they serve. Sophists and philosophers, like doctors and poisoners may turn out to be distinguishable on this level only. The decisive difference between them may well turn out not to be so much a matter of technical "know-how" or art but rather a different understanding and pursuit of what is beneficial to human beings. The Stranger's seventh definition of the Sophist will fail. It should be kept in mind, however, that this does not mean that, for Plato, there is no way to hunt for the Sophist. It only means that the Stranger's way will not do.

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<sup>112</sup>See, for example 234c, where the Sophist's art of image-making serves the deceitful purpose of making the Sophist appear wise in all things.

<sup>113</sup>See 235d where the Stranger and Theaetetus return to their previous method of division.

## The Focal Art of the Sophist: Contradiction and Image-Making

The Stranger begins in a rather odd fashion the search for that to which the Sophist's various kinds of apparent learning "look". He says that, of all the statements they have made about the Sophist, one was particularly revealing: he and Theaetetus had agreed that the Sophist was a contradicter (*antilogikon*). What makes this statement more revealing than any of the other statements made about the Sophist is not explained by the Stranger. Theaetetus further agrees that they had said that the Sophist teaches this art to others (232b).

Now, this last statement is peculiar. In the fifth definition, the Sophist was, indeed, said to be a contradicter (225b). But he is never said to be a *teacher* of this art in any of the definitions. The closest thing to a teacher of contradiction is the sixth Sophist who educates someone through the art of cross-questioning. In the second, third and fourth definitions, he is said to be a teacher of virtue but that virtue is not said to be the art of contradiction. The Stranger is not as rigorous as he may appear. His memory has failed him. Or has it? The fifth Sophist, the pugnacious contradicter, would indeed be indistinguishable from the sixth, the cross-questioning healer of the soul, if the Stranger in fact attempted to define the latter with no reference to such value-laden terms as disease and deformity.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps the Stranger can say to Theaetetus that the contradicting Sophist was also said to be a teacher because he has finally taken a more neutral and geometrical look at the sixth Sophist.

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<sup>114</sup>See page 166, above. There I noted that the Stranger turns up the philosopher Socrates as a first cousin to the contradicting (fifth) Sophist.

Be this as it may, Theaetetus and the Stranger go on to list the things about which the Sophist contradicts. I have noted these above (232c-d).<sup>115</sup> They include: invisible or divine matters; visible matters including astronomy and "earthly" things; being and becoming in general (about which the Sophist speaks in private); laws and public affairs; and how technically skilled men ought to answer those who disagree with them (on which topic the Sophists write books). The Stranger observes that the art of contradiction is a complete capacity (*dynamis*) to dispute *all* things. *The Sophist, on this account, has shown himself to be the rival of the psychic gymnast.* The psychic gymnast strives to know all the things the soul aspires to know. The Sophist has a complete capacity to contradict all things the psychic gymnast claims to know.

In the course of this discussion, Theaetetus observes that what attracts pupils to the Sophist is, above all, his promise to teach people how to dispute about laws and public affairs. The Stranger lets this observation pass. That he does so is very much in keeping with his own understanding of psychic gymnastics. Debates about laws and public affairs are particularly concerned with what the Stranger has called "pretensions" namely, policies and actions which are put forward as being serious and of benefit to human beings. Debates about laws and human affairs arise out of questions concerning human purposes and desires. The psychic gymnast, when practising his geometrical method rigorously, has nothing to say about these things. The psychic gymnast is, in the broadest sense, apolitical. The Sophist is not. And it is because of his promise to make people able to debate about what most concerns human beings--the best way for them to live--that people pay attention to him. The Sophist and the psychic gymnast are rivals. Yet the psychic gymnast can say nothing about the best way of life for human beings and remain true to his art. The Sophist not only appears to offer more to his fellow humans than the psychic gymnast,

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<sup>115</sup>See p. 123.

the psychic gymnast has no grounds from which to contest this appearance. The psychic gymnast cannot say why his way of life is better than that of the Sophist.

This is decisive for understanding what Plato is up to in the dialogue. The Stranger's geometrical approach to satisfying the soul's aspiration to know the truth about things makes him a rival of the Sophist who can dispute all that the Stranger claims to know. The Stranger, however, cannot say why his way of life is superior to the Sophist's within the scheme of human desires and purposes. This is in marked contrast to the philosopher Socrates. Socrates, like the Stranger, consistently claims that the philosopher is superior to the Sophist. Unlike the Stranger, however, he understands that this superiority must be established on ethical and political grounds.<sup>116</sup> Leaving aside the question as to whether Socrates ever establishes this superiority, let us only note that Socrates is not restricted by an obsession with geometrical method.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, it is characteristic of him to plunge directly into questions concerning the virtues and the best way of life for human beings. Contrary to what the Stranger suggests, the fact that Socrates is not a psychic gymnast does not entail that he is a Sophist. His activities may look the same but his intentions and purposes are quite different--or so he claims. In encouraging us to think through the Stranger's inability to support his claim that the philosopher is superior to the Sophist, Plato encourages us to consider Socrates' approach to this matter more seriously.

To return to the dialogue, the Stranger asks Theaetetus whether it is possible for a man to know (*epistasthai*) all things. Theaetetus exclaims that if this were possible, ours would be a blessed race. He also agrees that someone who is ignorant about a matter cannot say anything

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<sup>116</sup>See for example, *Gorgias* 451a ff, where Socrates maintains that Sophistry is a species of flattery, and *Republic* 493a-b where Socrates focuses upon the ethical and political character of the Sophists.

<sup>117</sup>For an excellent discussion of geometrical thinking and its relationship to Sophistry see Planinc, 92-94.



sound while contradicting someone who knows about that matter.<sup>118</sup> The Stranger wants to know what the marvellous power of Sophistry is. Either the Sophist contradicts correctly or he only seems to. In any event, it is by appearing to contradict correctly that the Sophist is deemed to be wise in everything. The Stranger notes that he and Theaetetus have agreed that no one can be wise in everything. They conclude that the marvellous power of the Sophist lies in a sort of *doxastike* or art of opinion making about all things but that the Sophist does not have the truth about all things (233a-233d).<sup>119</sup>

No one, including the psychic gymnast, has knowledge of or is wise in everything. This is an important observation made by Theaetetus and the Stranger for, later on, they will agree that the Sophist only appears to know all those things which a wise man knows (268c). Yet, according to their account so far, the Sophist *appears* to know everything. If knowledge as opposed to opinion about the truth of things is to serve as a criterion for distinguishing between a wise man and a Sophist, it appears that it is possible for a human being to know all things. At this point in the dialogue, Theaetetus and the Stranger claim that it is not. They do seem, however, to accept the unlikely proposition that ignorance about everything is possible for human beings. The Sophist is said to know how to make opinions about everything but that he lacks knowledge of everything. They also claim that anyone who is ignorant about a matter cannot say anything sound while

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<sup>118</sup>This is a naive and exaggerated claim. Someone who is ignorant about a given matter may successfully contradict someone who knows about that matter. People who know about things are occasionally mistaken and people who are ignorant occasionally hit upon crucial objections.

<sup>119</sup>How one ought to translate the word "*doxastike*" is anything but obvious. The Stranger himself coins it. The suffix "-tike", when added to a substantive noun usually denotes "know-how" with respect to the thing referred to by the noun. The names of most of the arts mentioned by the Stranger thus far are coined this way in Greek. I have translated *doxastike* here as "opinion making" and not "opinionative science" or "know-how about opinion" because the context seems to require this. The Stranger is focusing upon the fact that the Stranger is capable of producing a certain opinion about himself and his arguments, to wit, that he is wise in *all* things.

contradicting someone who knows about that matter. If the Sophist, like everyone else, does in fact know some things but not all, Theaetetus and the Stranger do not say. Rather, the impression they give is that the Sophist knows *nothing* about the things he is capable of contradicting or that he is ignorant of everything. Not only is this unlikely (the Sophist, after all, is still said to have an art) but unless one knew everything it would be impossible to establish that the Sophist, in fact, knew nothing. Theaetetus and the Stranger explicitly reject the possibility of human omniscience. Yet much of their account will implicitly presuppose it.

After getting Theaetetus to agree that the Sophist possesses a kind of opinion-making art, the Stranger then suggests that he and Theaetetus try to get a clearer paradigm for him. He begins by examining an art which Theaetetus does not immediately understand. He asks about an art by which one not only contradicts all things but by which one makes and does all things (*pragmata*). Initially, this art appears to be the art of a creator god who makes plants, animals, earth, sea, gods and everything else. The practitioner of this art, however, makes these things quickly and sells them for very little. Theaetetus accuses the Stranger of telling a sort of joke. In the same way, says the Stranger, we must also consider to be joking the man who says he knows everything and can teach everything to others for a small price in a little time. After noting that the most artful and charming joke is the imitative kind, the Stranger makes it clear that the mysterious art of which he has been speaking, which will serve as the clearer paradigm for the Sophist's art, is the painter's art (233d-234b).

### The Central Problem for the Stranger: What is an Image?

The discussion of the painter's art is quite short and seems to be fairly straight-forward. It is intended to answer the question that the Stranger and Theaetetus ran into after offering their first six definitions of the Sophist. That question was, to what do all the various kinds of learning possessed by the Sophist "look"?<sup>120</sup> They have concluded that the Sophist possesses the art of appearing to know all things. The question now arises as to what kind of art this is. The Stranger will conclude that it is a branch of the art of imitation or image-making. His account of the painter's art is intended as an illustration of the kind of image-making the Sophist practices.

In what follows, I will first summarise the discussion in which the Stranger offers his account of the image-making art practised by the painter and its connection with that of the Sophist. I will then examine what this discussion is intended to reveal about both arts. Finally, I will address the ways in which the Stranger's apparently straight-forward account of painting and Sophistry raises more questions than it answers. Although the discussion of the painter's art and its connection with that of the Sophist is quite short, it is a critical passage for the dialogue. It introduces a number of terms and distinctions which will consume the Stranger's attention for the remainder of his attempt to define the Sophist. Those terms and distinctions include the terms "image", "phantasm" and "icon", the distinction between an image and its original and the distinction between accurate and inaccurate images. It is important that what the Stranger intends by these be adequately understood if one is to appreciate his account of the Sophist. It is equally important to understand the ways in which the Stranger's account of these things is deficient as he himself will recognise.

According to the Stranger, the painter produces imitations (*mimemata*) of real things (*ton*

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<sup>120</sup>See p. 192 above.

*onton*) which have the same name as the real things. By showing his pictures at a distance, the painter is able to deceive foolish children into thinking that he is able to accomplish whatever he wants to do. In the same way, says the Stranger, there is another art which has to do with speeches (*logous*) by virtue of which it is possible to:

. . . bewitch the young through their ears while they are still standing at a distance from the truth of things (*pragmata*) by displaying spoken images (*eidola legomena*) of all things, such that it makes it seem that these images are truly spoken and that the speaker is the wisest of all men in all things. (234c)

However, according to the Stranger, as most of these young listeners get older, they will be compelled to come closer to the real things (*tois ousi*) near at hand. Experience (*pathemata*) will compel them to lay hold of the real things in a manifest way. They will change the opinions they had when younger. What then appeared great will now appear small, and what appeared easy will appear difficult. All the inaccurate images (*phantasmata*) of the speeches they heard when they were young will be turned up-side-down by the deeds/works (*ergon*) that come upon them in their practical activities (*en tois praxesin*). (234d)

Theaetetus acknowledges that he is one of those people who stands at a distance from real things. The Stranger responds that all of those present will try to lead him as near as possible to things without his having to experience them. He reminds Theaetetus that it is now plain that the Sophist is a kind of enchanter and imitator of real things. This must be the case because they have agreed that the Sophist does not truly have knowledge of the things which he contradicts. The Stranger urges Theaetetus on--they have almost caught the Sophist and he will not be able to escape their conclusion that he is a member of the class of conjurors or wonder-workers (*thaumatopoion*). If the Sophist tries to hide anywhere within any section of the image-making art (*eidolopoiiken*), they will divide each section until he is caught. The Stranger promises Theaetetus that if they follow their previous method of division, the Sophist will not be able to boast that he has eluded capture (234e-235d).

The Stranger proceeds by dividing the art of imitation (*mimetikes*). One part he calls the art of "eikastics". This is the art of generating an imitation of a paradigm which is proportional to the paradigm in length, width and depth and which gives the appropriate colours to each part. The second kind of imitation is practised by sculptors and painters of large works. These imitators face a particular problem. If their imitations were proportional to their originals, the upper parts of these large works would appear smaller and the lower parts would appear bigger than they should. The reason is that the latter are closer to viewers of the work while the former are further away. The solution is that imitators of beautiful things who produce large works dispense with producing images which are proportional to their originals. Instead, these imitations are endowed with proportions that will appear beautiful to viewers (235d-236a).

The Stranger observes that when a thing is other than but like another we call it a likeness or icon (*eikon*). The part of imitation concerned with making icons is, as they called it before, eikastics. But that which is like a beautiful thing when not seen from a "beautiful position" but which is not like it if seen from such a position, the Stranger calls a phantasm (*phantasma*). The Stranger calls the art concerned with making phantasms, "phantastics" (*phantastike*), and says that these two arts, eikastics and phantastics, make up the art of image-making (*eidolopoiikes*). He is certain that the Sophist practices one of these two arts, but is unsure which one. After an extremely long digression, necessitated by the need to dispense with a number of difficulties surrounding this account, the Stranger will confidently place the Sophist within the art of phantastics.<sup>121</sup>

Now that I have summarised the Stranger's account of the image-making practised by the painter and its connection with Sophistry, let's examine it more closely. What does the Stranger

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<sup>121</sup>They return to the two kinds of image-making at 264c. The hunt for the Sophist within the class of phantastics begins at 267a. At 268d, the final summary of the seventh Sophist's art identifies him as a maker of phantasms.

mean by "proportion", "beautiful position" and "at a distance"? The word the Stranger uses for "proportion" is "*summetria*" from which we get the word "symmetry". It also means "commensurability". The Stranger's use of this term is technical and would be recognised as such by any geometer, painter or sculptor of his day. According to Euclidean geometry, a proportion is a relationship between two ratios. A ratio is defined as "a relation in respect of size between two magnitudes of the same kind." When the ratio of one magnitude to a second magnitude is the same as the ratio of a third to a fourth, the first and second magnitudes are proportional to the third and fourth.<sup>122</sup>

What this means can be illustrated by a simple example. If the ratio between the length of my left foot and my left hand is the same as the ratio between my right foot and my right hand, then my left foot and left hand are proportional to my right foot and right hand. In ancient painting and sculpture, the term "proportion" is used the same way it is used in geometry. If Napoleon's head is  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of his body and if my painting of him has his head  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of his body, my painting will be proportional to the original Napoleon in this respect. According to the Stranger, paintings which replicate the ratios of the magnitudes of their models or which are proportional to them are icons. A tiny painting of a large model (or original) is an icon if it replicates the spatial ratios which make up the model.

Understanding what the Stranger means by "proportion" clarifies what he means by a "phantasm". In his discussion of painting, the Stranger draws attention to a problem which was well-understood by ancient Greek painters and sculptors. This is the problem created when large works of art are viewed from the ground. The Greek sculptors and painters understood that, though Napoleon was a handsome man, if one tried to paint a large painting of him which was proportional to him, he would look silly. His head would look too small for his body. Napoleon's

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<sup>122</sup>Euclid, V: Definitions 4-6.

head may be  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of his body. If my sixty-foot high painting replicates this ratio, Napoleon's head will appear considerably smaller than  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of his body to a viewer on the ground. The ancient painters and sculptors solved this problem by devising geometrical rules for the construction of large images. These rules allowed one to calculate how much the ratios of original had to be altered in order for an image to appear to preserve the same ratios of the original to someone looking up at the image from the ground.<sup>123</sup> If I want my sixty-foot high painting of Napoleon to look like he has a head which is  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of his body, I will have to make his head larger than  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size of its body. Such a painting, according to the Stranger, is a phantasm. Though not proportional to its model (or original), it appears to be if viewed "at a distance". When a phantasm is viewed from "a beautiful position", however, it does not look like its model. What the Stranger means is that if one gets a close-up view of a phantasm, the fact that it does not actually replicate the proportions of its model is evident. Being in a "beautiful position" is being in a position to see that the spatial ratios which an image actually has are not the same as those it appears to have when viewed "from a distance".<sup>124</sup>

How are we to understand the Stranger's claim that Sophists practice the same art as sculptors and painters of large works? What the Stranger seems to be arguing is that they produce large, discursive, beautiful images. In so doing, they dispense with replicating the true ratios of that which they imitate and craft their images so that they appear beautiful to their listeners. Sophists, like sculptors and painters of large works, accommodate their images to the perspective of their audience. It is not simply that the Sophist offers spoken images of invisible or

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<sup>123</sup>The geometrical rules for the creation of the illusion of proportion were lost until the Renaissance. They then became known as the "rules of perspective".

<sup>124</sup>It is curious that the Stranger focuses his attention on painting when discussing icons and focuses it on sculpture and painting when discussing phantasms. According to his definition, all paintings are phantasms in so far as they are two dimensional representations of three dimensional originals. In order for them to appear to be three dimensional, they must misrepresent a number of the spatial ratios of the original. One does not have this problem with sculptures.

divine matters, visible matters including astronomy and "earthly" things, being and becoming in general, laws and public affairs, and how technically skilled men ought to answer those who disagree with them. On the Stranger's account, the Sophist is interested in making his spoken images appear beautiful to his listeners. Those listeners, however, who are convinced by the Sophist's speeches are those who stand at a distance from the things the Sophist presents through images. They do not stand in a "beautiful position" and hence, are not capable of apprehending the degree to which the Sophist's speeches are not, in fact, constructed in accord with the things they are about. The Sophist presents spoken images which are compelling or beautiful to those who have no experience of the originals of these images. His beautiful or compelling images of divine, metaphysical, political and ethical matters must, therefore, reflect only what those inexperienced with these things take to be beautiful or compelling. The Sophist is a flatterer of the opinions of inexperienced young men. Hence, they find what he says both captivating and wise.

So much the Stranger's discussion seems to suggest. Whether this account is coherent is another matter. First, one should note that the analogy<sup>125</sup> between painting and Sophistry obscures at least two things. Earlier, the Stranger had said that the Sophist was a contradicter. This suggests that the Sophist is dedicated not to making spoken images but to un-making the spoken images of others. How these two activities are to be reconciled is not immediately evident. The Stranger had also said that the Sophist was ignorant of those things about which he contradicts. The painter, however, must have access to the paradigm of which he makes an image. He must be able to see his image from a "beautiful position". If we followed the Stranger's own paradigm, we would have to say that the Sophist too knows the things of which he makes

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<sup>125</sup>I am calling this an analogy but, on the Stranger's account, it is much more. The painter is the paradigm for the Sophist and they belong to the same class. If the Stranger's speech is an icon and not a phantasm, within the art of Sophistry are replicated all of the "ratios" of painting. Only because this is not in fact the case, am I calling painting an analogy.



spoken images and is capable of seeing his images from a "beautiful position". Thus, the Sophist would not be ignorant.

But what does the term "beautiful position" mean in this context? In the context of painting, it refers to the position of the painter with respect to the original of which he paints. It is the position he finds himself in when he has apprehended the actual ratios among the spatial magnitudes which make up the object he wishes to paint. If the painter were to paint an icon of this object, he would simply transfer these ratios onto the material he had chosen to paint. If, however, he wanted to paint a large image of this object, he would have to alter these ratios in order to allow the actual ratios of his object to be manifest to his audience. Because the painter has apprehended the actual ratios of his object, he knows to what extent he must falsify those ratios in order that the audience share his experience of its actual ratios.

How this helps us understand the construction of spoken images concerning such non-geometrical things as divine, metaphysical, political and ethical matters is not clear. As the Stranger has been using it, the term "proportion" is a geometrical term referring to size relations among spatial magnitudes. How one would determine whether the spoken image of a non-geometrical original (like "goodness") was proportional to its original is not clear. The paradigm of the painter suggests that human beings have direct access to such matters--that they have access to the ratios obtaining among the various elements that make up such matters as Being, the divine, goodness and the soul. Without such access, it would be impossible for us to tell the difference between an icon and a phantasm.

It is likely that the Stranger believes this kind of intellectual apprehension of the ratios of such matters is not only possible but constitutes knowledge proper. This certainly would be in keeping with the geometrical method he has practised throughout the dialogue. Like the geometer, the Stranger has been trying to define something by identifying its constituent elements and the relations between these elements. Presumably, he believes such a method can be used to arrive

at icons not only of the arts but of the matters of which the Sophist speaks. But if we have access to the originals of which the Sophist's speeches are phantasms, how can the Sophist successfully deceive us? What clouds our intellectual apprehension of the true ratios of things? The Stranger is silent on this question. Rather, he says that experience of real things comes with time. But note that until such time as one has arrived at an intellectual apprehension of the true ratios of a matter, one will not be able to tell the difference between an icon and a phantasm of it. In order to distinguish between all possible icons and all possible phantasms, it would appear that one would have to be omniscient.

There are, however, deeper problems with the Stranger's account. The Stranger's distinction between icons and originals, and his distinction between icons and phantasms may appear straight-forward. They are not. According to the Stranger, icons are "other than" but "like" their originals. The reason is that, while not originals, icons replicate the actual ratios of their originals. Icons, in other words, replicate the *same* ratios as their originals. This is what it means to say that an icon is proportional to its original. Therefore, an icon allows us to see or apprehend its original while not being the original itself. What then makes an icon other than its original? On the Stranger's account, the only difference between an icon and its original seems to be in the medium in which the ratios are found. Can the medium of an icon distinguish it from its original?

If we accept the Stranger's definition of an icon, we could conclude that a real live Sophist differs from the spoken icon of the Sophist only in so far as the one exists in the medium of sound and the other in the medium of flesh and blood. But if it is essential to what a Sophist is that he be made of flesh and blood, then any spoken image of the Sophist is a phantasm and not an icon. My statue of Napoleon may replicate all the spatial ratios of his external body parts. Yet, the real Napoleon is a being with ratios which obtain among the hairs of his head, his skin cells, etc. He is also a being which can change the distance between his hand and feet as well as his position in space. If my stone sculpture falsifies these (and it must), my sculpture is a phantasm and not

an icon of the original. What then is an icon? It must be an image which replicates all of the essential ratios which make an original what it is. Such an image, however, would be the same as its original. How an icon can be both the same as and other than its original is a problem that will occupy the Stranger and Theaetetus for the better part of what remains of the dialogue.<sup>126</sup> Nowhere do they attempt to distinguish icons from their originals by the medium in which the ratios of each are replicated.<sup>127</sup>

If the distinction between icons and their originals is not clear, what about the distinction between icons and phantasms? Phantasms are said to look like they replicate the ratios of their originals although they actually do not. This is because a phantasm does not replicate the *same* ratios as its original. It replicates ratios which are *other* than the ratios of its original. But if it replicates other ratios, would it not then be an icon of some other original? By what right may I call a sixty-foot statue with an over-sized head a statue "of Napoleon"? Granted, it may look like Napoleon to a viewer on the ground but it is not actually an image of Napoleon. Given the ratios according to which it has been constructed, it is an image, not of Napoleon, but of somebody else.<sup>128</sup> It may look like Napoleon from a certain perspective but this is incidental to what it

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<sup>126</sup>The attempt to define images more precisely begins at 239d. Theaetetus quickly runs into the difficulty of not being able to say how icons are other than while being the same as their originals at 240a.

<sup>127</sup>It should not be forgotten that the Stranger has told Theaetetus that everyone present will try hard to bring knowledge of the Sophist without his having to experience one. The Stranger must regard his speech about the Sophist as an icon which will allow Theaetetus to apprehend the Sophist without having to meet one. If all images are phantasms, however, the Stranger's speech about the Sophist must misrepresent the Sophist in some fashion.

Yet, according to the Stranger, even if his speech about the Sophist is a phantasm, it may nonetheless allow Theaetetus to apprehend the true ratios of its original. I have noted that the Stranger's first six definitions of the Sophist fail as formal definitions. The Stranger himself calls them phantasms. And yet, as descriptions of the Sophist, these definitions may well be accurate. That is, though phantasms which present ratios that are other than the ratios of the Sophist, they may present the same ratios as the Sophist to Theaetetus, *given his point of view*.

<sup>128</sup>It may be an image of somebody other than Napoleon who actually exists or who is imaginary.

actually is. What it actually is, is not a peculiar kind of image whose inherent capacity is to be other than its original while looking like it is the same. What it is, is an accurate image of some original which, *because of the limits of human perception*, can look other than it is to human viewers. Even an accurately constructed, life-sized statue of Napoleon can look other than it actually is if it is viewed by someone lying on the ground. Accepting for the moment the Stranger's distinction between icons and their originals, one would have to conclude that there is no such thing as a distinct class of images which can be defined as "phantasms". One would have to conclude that all images are icons which can look other than what they actually are because of the limits of human perception.

Given that phantasms cannot be clearly distinguished from icons and that icons cannot be clearly distinguished from their originals the notion that there are things which are essentially "images" becomes problematic. The Stranger recognises that there are problems with his account. However, he will not abandon the distinctions he has made between originals and icons, and icons and phantasms. Instead, he will attempt to offer an account of what an "image" is which makes these distinctions coherent.

The Stranger himself says that his discussion of images has resulted in a grave problem and it is this problem that prevents him from confidently placing the Sophist in the class of phantasm-makers. As he explains to Theaetetus, the matter of appearing (*phainesthai*) and seeming (*dokein*) but not being (*einai de me*) and of saying things but not true things are matters that now and always have been very perplexing (236e). If we accept that there are such things as icons which are other than their originals and if we accept that icons can be distinguished from originals these issues are, indeed, perplexing. The problem the Stranger identifies of appearing and seeming but not being belongs to both icons and phantasms as he has defined them. If one accepts his definition, how can an icon or phantasm appear as its original without being its original? And, if phantasms are not icons and icons are not their originals, what are they?

The problem of "saying things but not true things" is, however, another matter. So far, the Stranger has attempted to define two kinds of images, icons and phantasms. He has done this in order to shed light on the art practised by the Sophist. His claim is that the Sophist is a producer of phantasms. He has also claimed that the Sophist "bewitches" young people who believe that the Sophist's discursive images are "truly spoken" although they are not. According to the Stranger, the Sophist is an image-maker whose images are discursive. They are phantasms and they are false. The Stranger will spell out in great detail the problems surrounding the claim that it is possible to say false things. Before looking at the problems he identifies, however, it is important to look at a problem he will not identify but which he will have to address. It concerns the question of whether the notion of a "false image" is intelligible given his account of what images are.

## False Images

If the Sophist is someone who speaks falsely, how would one characterise his discursive images according to what the Stranger has said about images? Another way to put this question is to ask, what might a false image be? So far, the Stranger has distinguished two kinds of images, icons and phantasms. He claims that the Sophist is a maker of phantasms. It is important to understand that the Stranger has not given an account of a false phantasm. He has given an account of an image which looks like its original although it actually replicates ratios which are other than those of its original. This is what the Stranger has defined as a phantasm. The phantasm is not, by definition, a false image.

According to the Stranger, a large statue of Napoleon which does not replicate the ratio between Napoleon's actual head and body but makes that ratio larger, is a phantasm. It is not, however, a false image. Such a phantasm, although it does not replicate the ratios of its original, nonetheless looks like it does. It does not present anything false about Napoleon. Quite the contrary. Because it does not accurately replicate the ratio between Napoleon's head and body, it offers an accurate image of the ratio between Napoleon's head and his body. A phantasm is not, according to the Stranger's definition, a false image. The Sophist's discursive images may be phantasms but it is not their phantastic character that makes them false.

What then might a false image be? So far, we have only one implicit account. An icon which accurately presented the actual ratios of its original, if large and beheld by people at a distance from the original, would not truly present the actual ratios of the original. If the original was beautiful, such an image would appear ugly. The Stranger has said that the Sophist is effective in bewitching the young because of their "distance" from the truth of the things about

which he speaks. This suggests that a "large" discursive icon which accurately presented such things as justice or goodness (about which the Sophists speak), if heard by the young who are at a distance from these things would be perceived as "ugly". Though a true or accurate account, such a speech would be falsely apprehended by the young. Phantasms appear to be more appropriate pedagogical images than icons. Icons can function as false images for people who have no experience of their originals.

But the Stranger never suggests that the Sophist presents icons to those incapable of apprehending them for what they are. Rather, he says that the Sophist is a maker of phantasms and that the phantasms of the Sophist bewitch young people. Not all phantasms have altered the ratios of their originals in such a way that the ratios of the original appear to be replicated accurately if they are looked at from a distance. Some phantasms deceive and this must be because they not only do not replicate the ratios of their original, they also do not look like they do. What then do they look like? If not their originals, must they not appear to look like something else? And would this "something else" not be *another* original? And, if so, would it make any sense to refer to the false phantasm as an image of the first original?

A return to visual imagery may help clarify this difficulty. A deceiving, visual phantasm of Napoleon, for instance, would be an image of Napoleon which did not accurately replicate the ratios between Napoleon's head and his body and which would not even appear to do so at a distance for those who had seen Napoleon "close up". What ratios would it appear to replicate? Perhaps those of Alexander or a monster of some kind. From the point of view of those who had seen Napoleon "close up", in other words, this phantasm would not be a phantasm of Napoleon. It would be an icon of somebody or something else. To those who had never seen Napoleon "close up", it is also the case that no deception would lie in the sculpture itself. The sculpture would be an image of somebody or something other than Napoleon. It would not be a false or inaccurate phantasm of Napoleon. If there is any deception to this image, the deception must lie

in a spoken or written image which accompanies the image. That is, if someone were to point to the image which is not Napoleon, and which doesn't look like him, and say, "That is a sculpture of Napoleon", only then would someone who had never seen Napoleon "close up" be deceived. In speech, it is possible to convince someone that something is and appears to be what it is not.

How is this possible? A visual image cannot, itself, deceive. Only through spoken images is deception possible.<sup>129</sup> In speech, something that is not an accurate image of Napoleon and which does not look like an accurate image of Napoleon can be put forward as an accurate image of Napoleon. Spoken images, therefore, have a capacity not possessed by visual images. The Stranger's use of the visual images created by painters and sculptors cannot illuminate what makes a false, discursive image false. If visual images can be made to deceive only when they are accompanied by a false speech, what makes a false speech false? If a false speech is a kind of image, what is it an image of and what kind of image is it?

Consider again a statue which does not replicate the physical ratios of Napoleon and which does not look like it does to anyone who has seen Napoleon. If someone were to point to this statue and say, "That is a statue of Napoleon", she would be speaking falsely. If her statement is an image, however, it must be an image of something. Is her statement an image of the statue? It refers to the statue but it captures neither what the statue actually is nor what it looks like. It says that the statue is what it is not. Can it be that a false speech is an image of "what is not" or of "nothing"? Or is it a peculiar kind of image of something? If it is an image of something, is that "something" the statue or something else?

It is difficult to see how the false statement, "That is a statue of Napoleon", could be an image of something. The statement amounts to the claim that the statue is proportional to Napoleon when it is not. The ratios between Napoleon's various body parts can be determined.

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<sup>129</sup>Thinking also produces deception, according to the Stranger. This is because he understands thought as the soul's "silent conversation with itself" (263e).



The statue does not replicate those, nor does it seem to to anyone who has met Napoleon. The statue may replicate or look like it replicates the ratios between Alexander's body parts but that is irrelevant. The false statement is not about the ratios among Alexander's body parts. It is a statement about the statue which says that the statue, to which the speaker is pointing, is proportional to Napoleon when it is not. It claims a relationship between that to which the speaker is pointing and Napoleon. There is no such relationship. The statement, therefore, does not replicate the ratios of any original. The original of which this statement is an image is a specific relationship between Napoleon and this statue. There is no such relationship. The statement has no original. It is an image of nothing.

This is a serious problem for the Stranger. He says that what makes it so problematic is that the claim that a person can think or speak falsely is bound to involve one in a contradiction. He explains that claiming that falsehood is possible rests upon the bold assumption that non-being (*to me on*) is. Implicit in this is the notion that to speak falsely is to say "nothing" or "what is not". He notes that the great Parmenides spent his entire life protesting against the assumption that non-being is and proceeds to show Theaetetus why (237a-239c).

A false statement seems to be a spoken image of "that which is not" or of "nothing". Can something "which is not" serve as an original for a spoken image? First, the Stranger observes that while we venture to use the phrase "absolute non-being" (*to medamos on*), the appellation "nothing" (*to me on*) cannot be given to anything that is. It cannot, therefore, be given to something. Speaking is always of something, and one cannot speak of "something" in abstraction from things that are. The word "something" signifies one thing, a "pair of somethings" signifies two things and "somethings" signifies many things. Someone who does not say something therefore, does not say even one thing. If Theaetetus finds this puzzling, the Stranger warns him that the biggest puzzle is yet to come. He notes that to "that which is", other things which are can be added (*prosgignesthai*). However, none of the things that are can be added to "that which is not". That

is, the Stranger suggests that "that which is not" cannot be counted as something added to a collection of "somethings". Number, therefore, can only be said of the things that are. It makes no sense to speak of "no thing" that is or of "things" that are not because, in doing so, we imply that what is not is numerable. If we cannot speak in this fashion, however, we have no way to speak of "nothing" and so, the Stranger concludes, it is not possible to say or to think "that which is not". But there is an even greater perplexity, according to the Stranger.<sup>130</sup> Even the person who tries to refute someone who claims that "that which is not" is, will find himself contradicting himself. The Stranger shows this by reflecting upon the argument he has just laid out which was itself a refutation of the possibility of thinking or speaking "that which is not". He himself had just said that "that which is not" *"is"* unspeakable and unthinkable. And, he had referred to "that which is not" in the singular. Indeed, according to the Stranger we cannot even refer to "that which is not" as "it" for this implies that "that which is not" is countable.

There seems to be no possible way either to maintain or refute the thesis that non-being is and the Stranger and Theaetetus give up their attempt. They will shortly be forced to return to the issue, however. As a result, the Stranger's digression from defining the Sophist will be very long. In the meantime, the Stranger notes that the Sophist has hidden himself in a place they cannot explore. Until such time as the Stranger can explain how spoken images of "what is not" are possible, the Sophist cannot be accounted for as one who deceives.

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<sup>130</sup>It is an interesting piece of irony that the Stranger says that he spoke falsely when he said the second difficulty was the greatest.

### *Sophistry versus Philosophy*

From within the deep recesses of where the Sophist has hidden, the Stranger makes the Sophist speak. According to the Stranger, if the Sophist is said to be a practitioner of the phantastic art, the Sophist will use this speech as a "handle" and "twist it back" upon the person who utters it. The Sophist will ask what, in general, Theaetetus and the Stranger mean by "image" (*eidolon*). Theaetetus offers a few examples. By "image", they mean such things as images in water and mirrors as well as those in paintings and sculptures. Rather than criticize Theaetetus for offering examples in place of a definition, the Stranger remarks that it is obvious that Theaetetus has never seen a Sophist.<sup>131</sup> The reason is that Theaetetus has made the mistake of addressing the Sophist as if the Sophist could see. A real Sophist would make Theaetetus think that his eyes were shut or that he had none at all. The Sophist will laugh at Theaetetus' examples and pretend that he is not familiar with "mirrors or bodies of water or sight altogether" and he will ask Theaetetus what he means by "image" on the basis of speech alone. On the basis of speech alone, the Sophist will want Theaetetus to explain what that one thing is which Theaetetus called an "image" and which he implied "went through" the many examples he gave (239c-240a).

The Stranger's images of the Sophist have failed. Theaetetus has not seen the Sophist in them. If he had, he would not have given the answer he did to the Sophist's question. Theaetetus can be forgiven, however, for the current discussion presented the Sophist as an image-maker or as someone who gives large speeches on a variety of topics. What Theaetetus has forgotten--precisely because it has been neglected in this discussion--is that the definition of Sophist as

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<sup>131</sup>That he has read the works of Protagoras, however, is evident from the conversation of the *Theaetetus*.

image-maker began with the definition of the Sophist as a contradicter or as someone who "un-makes" the verbal images of others. It is the contradicting Sophist who is conjured up by the Stranger to refute the notion that there are such things as images.

The contradicting Sophist, according to the Stranger, will close his eyes or feign blindness to the phenomena Theaetetus gave as examples of images and ask Theaetetus what he means by "image" in speech alone. As the Stranger makes clear, what the Sophist is interested in is not a definition of the word "image". What the Sophist wants is an account (*logos*) of the one thing which "goes through" all the examples given by Theaetetus such that Theaetetus calls them all "images". In other words, he wants an ontological account of "imagehood"--the one thing which unites all the instances given by Theaetetus into a particular class namely, the class of images. That is, the Sophist demands an account of what it is that makes something an image.

Given that this is what the Sophist wants, it is not simply out of place for him to "feign blindness" to the phenomena offered by Theaetetus as instances of images. By describing the Sophist as "feigning blindness" towards these things, the Stranger implies that the Sophist has indeed experienced the phenomena described by Theaetetus. The question, however, is not whether one has experienced certain phenomena but whether these phenomena are to be understood as belonging to a unified class, namely the class of images. The Sophist can ignore the fact that human beings, including himself, have experienced the appearance of things in water, mirrors, paintings and sculptures because what he is interested in is what human beings make of this experience or in the account (*logos*) they give of this experience. What he questions is the account suggested by Theaetetus: that a class of things exist which owe their being what they are to the fact that something like "imagehood" goes through them all.

The appropriateness of the Sophist's feigned blindness is more clearly understood if one considers the images he is said to make. These images are not visual but spoken. They are said to include metaphysical, political and ethical images--images of things which one does not see or

experience in a sensory way. To say that an account of justice, for example, is an image in the same way that the reflection of a stick in water is an image is an odd thing. In the case of the reflected stick, we can literally point to its original. In the case of justice, we cannot. The Sophist does not question the existence of the appearances of sticks in water or accounts of justice. What he questions is that we can account for them by calling them "images" as if something like "imagehood" went through both of them and gave them the same ontological status.

The Sophist's question to Theaetetus teaches us something important. The Sophist does not deny the experiences that humans have. Rather, he questions what we make of them or how we account for them. In particular, he questions the notion that "imagehood" can be an explanation of certain phenomena. This question clearly implies that the Sophist does not think that verbal accounts of such things as Being, the gods, justice and the good life can be understood as images. Such accounts cannot be understood as accurate or inaccurate re-presentations of some original in speech. But if a verbal account (*logos*) does not re-present some original, what then does it do? Stanley Rosen answers the question as follows: ". . . the sophist implies that discourse produces originals."<sup>132</sup>

The Sophist's question, in other words, suggests the possibility that what human beings make of things, or the accounts (*logoi*) they offer of such things as Being, the gods, justice and the good life are human inventions. It suggests that our accounts of Being, the gods, justice and the good life are not images of various originals. These things are simply what we say they are. At least, this would appear to follow if no account of images can be given. The Stranger does not say whether he thinks the Sophist has a doctrine to this effect, whether the Sophist takes this position in a contradicting spirit after being forced to defend his own art, or whether the Sophist is simply indifferent to the distinction between originals and images. This issue is very important, however.

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<sup>132</sup>Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 188.

By having the Sophist challenge the distinction between originals and images through a *question*, the Stranger does not help us to resolve it. Assuming, for the moment, however, that what lies behind the Sophist's question is a *doctrine* to the effect that there is no distinction between discursive images and their originals, a number of things become clearer.

First, to the extent that the Sophist subscribes to this doctrine, he is unconcerned as to whether his discourse is proportional to the ratios of some original he wishes to make present in speech. For him, discourse is not an image of something else. It cannot, therefore, be either accurate or inaccurate, true or false. All of the "large" accounts offered by the Sophist or by anyone else are themselves originals. Discussion, for the Sophist, is a matter of making some accounts of things prevail over others. The Sophist's art of contradiction and his art of giving large accounts go hand in hand. In order to make his verbal accounts prevail, he must be able to overturn all others.<sup>133</sup>

Second, it follows that the Sophist is extremely interested in the art of opinion-making or *doxastike*. His interests lie in the making and un-making of the accounts people give of experience. Although the Sophist may discuss certain things in private, he is very much a public figure as the descriptions of him so far have made clear. He is interested in cultivating the impression that he is in possession of the "large" accounts people need and find interesting. The "measure" to which his accounts "measure up", however, is not the truth of things. The "measure" of the Sophist's accounts is beauty or, more precisely, what people take to be beautiful. He is,

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<sup>133</sup>Wonderful examples of this are to be found in *Euthydemus*. The art of contradiction, practised by the two Sophists in the dialogue, is described by Socrates as a kind of fighting which rounds out and completes their ability to teach boxing, military strategy, and legal contests (271c-272b, 273c-274a). Consider also the opening remarks of the *Gorgias*, "As the saying goes, Socrates, it is allotted to you to join the war or battle." The first word of the dialogue is "*polemou*" or "war". The competitive nature of Sophistic discussion becomes clear also in the *Protagoras* at 335e, ff. Here, Socrates gives a playful account of one of Simonides' poems as an attempt to refute a saying of Pittacus'. Protagoras had, at the beginning, maintained that Simonides was a Sophist (316d). Socrates attributes Simonides' attempt to refute Pittacus to the desire for victory in contest stemming, in turn, from his desire to achieve a name for wisdom (343c).

therefore, a student of human opinion and the perspectives from which things can be made to appear pleasing. His art and the art of rhetoric are thus closely connected.

Third, to the extent that the Sophist has a doctrine which denies the distinction between originals and images, this sheds light on the purposes of his art. He is very much a public figure who is interested in having people think that he knows all the important things or that he is wise. According to the Sophist, however, actual knowledge or wisdom, as the Stranger understands these things is not given to human beings. If there are no discursive images, knowledge or wisdom is meaningless. The Sophist, therefore, cannot simply be understood as the Stranger seems to understand him--as someone in possession of "pseudo-knowledge" who knowingly tries to pass this knowledge off as genuine. If the Sophist truly denies the distinction between discursive images and their originals, for the Sophist, there is no such thing as either genuine or pseudo-knowledge. Rather than being someone who knowingly gives false accounts of "large" matters, the Sophist recognises that humans place a high premium on "large" accounts of things which they find pleasing and honour the people who offer such accounts with the title "wise". The Sophist is interested in obtaining this honour either for the influence it enables him to have or for the money it can bring him.

The Sophist's doctrine (again, supposing that he has one), in turn, helps us understand why the Stranger's divisions have turned up so many, apparently inconsistent, accounts of the Sophist. It is irrelevant to the Sophist whether he does or does not practice the arts of hunting, exchange, fighting or money-making and it is irrelevant to him as to whether he sells or does not sell his own doctrines or someone else's at home or away. He will or will not do any number of these things at various times as long as what he does fosters the opinion of others that he is wise. The Stranger has been gravely mistaken. Sophistry is not an art in any ordinary sense of the word. It is rather a way of life dedicated to the pursuit of the honour that attaches to the reputation for

wisdom (234c). Sophistry involves practising any number of arts and devices to accomplish this end but it is not reducible to them.<sup>134</sup>

It cannot be emphasized enough that the preceding account of Sophistry shows that the Sophist cannot be understood as a philosopher. Throughout the Platonic dialogues, the philosopher is consistently described as someone who seeks genuine wisdom and knowledge of the truth of things. This search presupposes a distinction between discursive images and their originals. When a philosopher gives an account of something, he attempts to have his discourse "measure up" to what it is he is talking about. Philosophers may fail in this attempt and may be accused of failure by other philosophers without thereby ceasing to be philosophers. Sophists, however, are not mistaken philosophers. Their interest does not lie in giving accounts which measure up to the truth of things. Their interest lies in being accorded the honour of being thought to be wise.

Yet Sophists, while not being mistaken philosophers are easily mistaken for philosophers. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, philosophers and Sophists tend to talk about the same sorts of things. And this should not be surprising. The Sophist talks about those things which will allow him to be thought to be wise. The philosopher talks about those things which, if he truly knew them, would make him wise. Both, therefore, are interested in the "large" accounts that human beings find so fascinating and necessary. The philosopher, however, shares with the majority of mankind a genuine fascination in and need for these accounts. The Sophist does not share this fascination or need; he uses it. Where the philosopher differs from the majority of mankind in his dedication to discerning the truth and falsity of "large" accounts, the Sophist differs from both in his lack of interest in this issue. The second thing, in fact the thing that makes the Sophist appear most like the philosopher, is that he does appear to offer a "large" account about the way things are, namely, that the distinction between originals and images is a human invention and hence that

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<sup>134</sup>This point is confirmed by Protagoras in the *Protagoras* (316d-317a).



any account of the way things are is a human production. I have already explored the possibility that the Sophist not only appears to offer such a "large" positive account, but that he, in fact, does. Indeed, the day before the discussion of the *Sophist*, Socrates and Theaetetus spent considerable time investigating one version of this account put forward by the Sophist Protagoras.<sup>135</sup>

Would the having of a doctrine about the way things are suggest that the Sophist shares the philosopher's interest in the way things are? It might, but this is an interest the Sophist would not acknowledge. The reason for this is that, while the Sophist's "doctrine" is certainly a justification for his "art", the "art" the "doctrine" justifies does not involve the quest for the truth of the way things are. On the contrary, the "doctrine" justifies the "art" of the production and demolition of discursive originals. In saying this, I realise that I have attributed to the Sophist an inconsistent position. I have attributed to him the discursive position that he has no discursive "positions".<sup>136</sup> But the Sophist, as we have seen, is a rather inconsistent character. As Rosen observes, "It is Socrates, or the philosopher, not the sophist, who values consistency."<sup>137</sup>

The reason for the apparent inconsistency in the Sophist is worth recalling. The source of his inconsistency is that he will use whatever tools he can in order to secure the honour that is accorded to those who are deemed wise. The Sophist, therefore, is not averse to picking up the tools of the philosopher now and again to further secure his reputation. To the extent that he is able to furnish a *persuasive* justification of his art using the language of the philosophers, he will. To the extent that he can use the tools of philosophy to deconstruct the philosopher's own distinction between original and discursive image, he will do that also. If he succeeds at both, the

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<sup>135</sup>The *Theaetetus* is largely a discussion of the work of Protagoras beginning at 152a. In discussing Protagoras' doctrine, Socrates calls Protagoras one of "the wise" (152e), and even "most wise" (160d); he never calls him a philosopher.

<sup>136</sup>This is one way of stating Socrates' more interesting and detailed "refutation" of Protagoras' doctrine (see *Theaetetus* 161c ff., 170d ff.)

<sup>137</sup>Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 139.

result will be much to his credit. In the light of this, it is most reasonable to conclude that the Sophist's "doctrine" that discursive accounts are originals should not be taken as a "doctrine" in the ordinary sense of the word.<sup>138</sup> It is a teaching meant to redound to the credit of the Sophist. It is meant to be persuasive; it is not intended to be true. Indeed, it is no more true or false than any other doctrine. However, if united with a deconstruction of the philosopher's distinction between discursive images and originals, it will be very persuasive. Perhaps the best way to describe the Sophist, therefore, is not as someone who denies the "truth" of the distinction between originals and discursive images or as someone who denies the importance of consistent thinking as if he thought that these things were "false". The best way to describe the Sophist is as someone who is indifferent to both save when the affirmation or denial of one or the other enhances his reputation for wisdom.<sup>139</sup>

The above may appear as a rather unflattering account of the Sophist. However, we must note the Sophist's implied "position" on the nature of discourse will be extremely persuasive if the distinction between discursive images and their originals cannot be shown. How do philosophers know when they have re-presented an original in speech? Do they have some kind of non-discursive access to originals? If they do, why do they need to construct discursive images of them? The philosopher's quest for knowledge of the way things are seems to presuppose the distinction

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<sup>138</sup>In his "refutation" of Protagoras' doctrine in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates suggests that one must assume that this "doctrine" is an instance of Protagoras' "popular speaking" and that it should be taken as a jest (161e-162a). Socrates himself suggests that in examining this "doctrine" they have failed to address the "whole" of Protagoras. He conjures up the picture of Protagoras' head popping up out of the grave to reprove him for not having dealt adequately with Protagoras' "doctrine" (171c-d).

<sup>139</sup>In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates successfully refutes Theaetetus' opinion that Protagoras' "doctrine" is true by showing that, in taking it to be true, Theaetetus would be forced to the conclusion that nothing was "true". Socrates does not thereby establish what needs to be shown namely, that a concern for "truth" and consistency is superior to a lack of concern for these things. Theaetetus, the aspiring mathematician, already believes this. By showing Protagoras to be inconsistent, Socrates does not refute Protagoras so much as he "refutes" Theaetetus' attachment to the writings of Protagoras.

between originals and discursive images and yet it is not at all clear that that distinction is intelligible. Philosophers want to be wise. Sophists want only to appear wise. Perhaps the Sophists are not only more reasonable than philosophers, perhaps they are also more useful. They need not be slaves to an unintelligible demand that their discourse "measure up" to something beyond the ken of men. They can earn money and influence by satisfying the needs people have for "large" accounts that are pleasing.

The seductiveness of Sophistic indifference to the distinction between originals and images is presented most powerfully in a passage by Simone Weil:

If all those whose profession it is to think--priests, pastors, philosophers, writers, savants, teachers of all kinds--were offered the choice, at this very instant, between two destinies: either to sink immediately and irrevocably into a state of idiocy, in the literal sense of the word, with all the humiliations attendant upon such a collapse, and retaining only just sufficient lucidity to be able to feel the full bitterness of their plight; or else a sudden and prodigious development of the intellectual faculties, such as to guarantee them immediate world-wide fame and after their death glory for thousands of years to come, but with this drawback, that their thought would always remain a little out of line with truth--is it possible to suppose that there would be many who in regard to such a choice would experience even a momentary hesitation? (249)<sup>140</sup>

My reason for quoting this lengthy passage is because of the powerful way in which it presents the seduction of Sophistry. Weil suggests it is extremely difficult to resist the promise of glory and honour for the reputation for wisdom regardless of whether one accepts the distinction between offering true as opposed to false accounts of things. That promise can easily lead one to become indifferent to a life devoted to offering what one takes to be true as opposed to what one takes to be false accounts. This can happen to the degree that one becomes interested in a life which one deems better than a life which, potentially, is without honour and recognition. This suggests that the Stranger has, to a great extent, missed the point. Even if he were to succeed in showing that there is a real distinction between discursive images and their originals, and even

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<sup>140</sup>Weil refers to the people who will make the choice without hesitation as the "savants" of the modern world.

if he were to succeed in demonstrating a distinction between true and false speech, he will not have shown what needs to be shown namely, that the philosophical life is better than the Sophistic life. He will not have shown that it is better to know what one does not know and get no recognition for it than to be perceived to know a great deal and receive the honour that comes from being believed to be wise. Even if the Stranger can show that the Sophist possesses a kind of "pseudo-knowledge" the Sophist is always free to say, "So what?". In so far as the Stranger cannot also show why the having of genuine knowledge is to be preferred to the having of "pseudo" knowledge, he will have nothing to say to the Sophist's rhetorical question.

A theoretical account which rendered intelligible the distinction between discursive images and their originals would not be enough to show that the rivalry between Sophistry and philosophy could be settled in favour of the philosopher. It would still leave open the fundamental question whether the Sophist does in fact possess the most important knowledge, namely, genuine knowledge of the best way of life. An account of "imagehood" might do a great deal to aid someone who is already a philosopher in dispelling any doubts as to whether what he seeks is intelligible. It would do little to convince either the Sophist or the philosopher who wonders whether the search for the truth is good. The fundamental difference between Sophistry and philosophy is the understanding of the best way of life which each embodies. This issue the Stranger studiously attempts to avoid.<sup>141</sup>

Again there are, in this dialogue, two rival notions of philosophy which I have called "Socratic/Sophistic medicine" and "psychic gymnastics". The second, practised by the Stranger, is incapable of addressing the fundamental problems posed by the Sophist due to its indifference to questions concerning the best way of life. The first, which is fundamentally concerned with the genuine health of the soul, appears far more capable of addressing the questions the Stranger

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<sup>141</sup>Although, as I have noted, the Stranger does not succeed in this attempt.

ignores. If the problems posed by the Sophist were to be addressed by the practitioner of "Socratic/Sophistic medicine" the result would be very different from the conversation of the *Sophist*, however. The practitioner of "Socratic/Sophistic medicine" would be interested in confronting a Sophist directly and in examining, with him, the extent to which what he thinks he knows about the good life he really thinks without contradictions that result in shame. The result would be more like the conversation of the *Gorgias* or the *Protagoras*.

## The Stranger's Return to the Problem of Images and Falsehood

In order to justify their claim that the Sophist is a maker of phantasms, the Stranger and Theaetetus must first defend and render intelligible the distinction between originals and images. Therefore, they set out to define what an image (*eidolon*) is. Theaetetus says that an image is "another of the sort that has been made similar to the simply true" where "another of the sort" "resembles" but is not "the simply true". "The simply true", he agrees, "really is" and "the not-true" is the opposite of the "true". But he does not want to say that "another of the same sort which resembles the simply true" is "not true" and hence "is not". Rather, he says that it really is a resemblance or likeness (*eikon*). The Stranger points out that Theaetetus has just said that a likeness really is and isn't. It is clear that they have landed themselves back in the quandary of non-being and false speech: they have just said that that which is like or resembles a being *is not* the being it resembles (240a-240c).

This definition of an image clarifies something important. On the Stranger's account, images and originals are not to be distinguished on the basis of the media in which they are found. While it is true that a painting of a dog is constructed out of materials different from the flesh-and-blood dog, this is not, on the Stranger's account, what makes the painting the image of the original. The key to understanding why this is the case is to recall what images are of: they are of the ratios of the original. What makes an accurate image an image is that it re-presents the ratios of an original without being itself the original ratio. As a replication, it makes present the same ratio as its original. As a replication, however, it is only a copy of a ratio--it is not the same. The image both is and is not, therefore, the same as its original in the same respect. This is the puzzle that stumps Theaetetus.

The Stranger also notes that, by virtue of their account of images, the Sophist has once again forced them to admit that non-being in some way is. He expresses the concern that they will not be able to define the Sophist's art without contradicting themselves. This is because, when defining the Sophist as someone who deceives through phantasms, they implied that the Sophist has the ability to get the soul to opine false things. And, to opine false things is to opine things that *are not*. It is to say of things that *are not* that they *are* or to say of things that *are* that they *are not*. The Stranger notes that the Sophist will deny this account of false speech, especially given the agreements that he and Theaetetus had reached earlier. The Sophist will point out that they are now saying that false things *are* and that they are often compelled to attach "that which is" to "that which is not" even though they had just concluded that this is impossible (240c-241a). It looks as if the Sophist cannot be caught. The Stranger decides that it is now necessary to test the theory of Parmenides and to contend that, in some fashion, non-being is, and being is not (241d).

The Stranger's argument to the effect that, in some way, non-being is, is both long and complicated, and the extent to which it constitutes a satisfying account is debatable.<sup>142</sup> Contrary to what I have done so far with the dialogue, it is not my intention to discuss critically the Stranger's ontology in any great detail. One reason is that the purpose of the long ontological digression in the *Sophist* is to show that false speech is possible and that the Sophist is a maker of phantasms. It is easy to lose sight of this purpose by attending too closely to the details of the Stranger's ontology as if this ontology should be considered independently of the purpose it is meant to serve. More importantly, even if the Stranger's ontology is coherent, it does not explain how the

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<sup>142</sup>The Stranger will, among other things: misrepresent the materialists (246c); beg the question as to whether there is such a thing as knowledge (249c); assume that however things are, they must correspond to the way we speak of them (259e). Each of these questionable maneuvers results in conclusions that are crucial to the Stranger's argument.

phantasms and false speech of the Sophist are possible. The Stranger's long digression does not accomplish what it is intended to do.

In order to see that this is the case, it is helpful to remember what the Stranger's account must show if, indeed, the Sophist is to be classed as a maker of phantasms. First of all, he must show that there is a class of beings whose being is defined by "imagehood" or whose being is such as to be and not to be in the same respect. Secondly, he must show that there is a sub-class of images namely, the class of phantasms whose being is such that while not being the same as their original in any respect, they nonetheless appear to be their originals. Thirdly, he must show that, of the class of phantasms, it is possible for some neither to be the same as their originals in any respect nor to resemble their originals in any respect and yet to appear as their originals. Finally, he must do all of this without landing himself in the contradictions which follow from assuming that non-being is.

Arguably, the Stranger will successfully offer an account of a way in which non-being is. The question, however, is whether or not his account allows one to understand the peculiar way in which images and phantasms both are and are not. What the Stranger will, in fact, do, is to offer an account of the ways in which things are and are not in *different* respects. What he will not do is show how it is possible for something both to be and not be in the *same* respect. He will not, in other words, give an account of the peculiar being and non-being of images and phantasms.



## Being

The Stranger approaches the question of the way in which non-being is by examining various accounts of the number and kinds of beings (242c). He and Theaetetus agree that the best way to proceed is to question the people responsible for these accounts as if they were present (243d). These people fall into two camps: those who discuss Being and non-being precisely and those who speak in another way (245e). The former are concerned with numbering or counting up the fundamental kinds of Being. They are very difficult to understand because they pay little heed to whether anyone can follow their arguments (242c-243b). The latter fall into two camps who fight like gods and giants continuously with one another (246a). One camp is that of the "friends of the ideas" and the other the camp of the materialists (246a, 248a). The issue dividing these two parties, which is of interest to the Stranger, is whether or not Being is in motion or at rest (246c). The materialists believe that all that is is in motion while the "friends of the ideas" believe that all that truly is is at rest and does not change (248a).<sup>143</sup>

The Stranger affects to cross-question each of these groups. Under cross-questioning, each is forced into a contradiction. This does not mean, however, that the Stranger simply brings these various accounts up in order to show that they are contradictory and that consideration of them is, in the end, fruitless. From his examination of them, the Stranger garners some clues as to what a satisfactory account of Being must be.

Those who speak precisely about Being and who say that Being is more than one--for instance, hot and cold (or strife and friendship)--run into the following difficulty (243d-e). It is said

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<sup>143</sup>They do not deny the existence of material reality. They refuse to identify it with "Being" referring to it, instead, as a kind of "becoming combined with motion" (246b-c).

of both hot and cold (or strife and friendship) that each *is*. The question arises as to how Being is to be attributed to both. Is Being a third thing in which both share and by virtue of which they *are*? If so, Being would be three--for example, hot, cold and Being. Of these three, one could further ask, by virtue of what do we say they *are*? In saying of hot and cold that each *is*, we imply that neither hot nor cold is, of itself, the same as Being. And yet, if Being is not a third thing, and if neither hot nor cold is of itself Being, then both hot and cold must equally be Being. In this case, however, hot and cold would not be two things, they would be one namely, Being. Presumably, these kinds of difficulties would beset any ontology which tried to account for Being as being more than one thing. Trying to add up the ways in which the various things called Being "are", one would be forced into recognising either an infinity of Beings or that Being is one.

But what if we say that Being is one? Similar problems arise (244b ff.). Those who say that Being is one, in effect, give the name "Being" to something namely, the "one". Is the "one" to which the name "Being" is given different from Being or the same? If different, then either it cannot be said of the "one" that it *is*, or Being must be two and not one. If, however, "Being" is said to be simply another name for the "one", further problems arise. What is the status of the name? Is *it* anything? If it *is* other than the thing it names, then Being must be at least two and not one. The Stranger continues this intricate line of questioning, exploring the consequences if Being is said to be the "whole" (244e ff.). "In effect", as John Sallis puts it, "[the Stranger] shows that . . . if being is assumed to be one, then it can be shown to be two; then it can be shown to be three; and presumably this 'duplication' could be reiterated without limit."(493)

The Stranger, therefore, turns to those accounts of Being which are "less precise". What makes these accounts "less precise" appears to be the fact that they do not "count" Being or its aspects as if what *is* is either an homogenous unity or composed of homogenous and hence

"countable" aspects.<sup>144</sup> What the materialists and the "friends of the ideas" have in common is that they both attempt to give a qualitative account of Being. On the face of it, these accounts look more promising than the ones the Stranger has just examined.

The materialists maintain that that alone *is* which can be touched or handled. They identify Being as body or matter (246a). According to the Stranger they will also admit that mortal creatures have souls and that souls are among the things that have being. Souls, on their account, are kinds of bodies (247b-c). They will further admit that souls are capable of becoming just or unjust by virtue of the presence of justice or injustice. They will also admit, however, that neither justice nor injustice, is visible to the eye (246e-247a).<sup>145</sup> The Stranger takes this as a recognition of incorporeal Being. The materialists are thereby led to dualism: Being is both corporeal and incorporeal (247d). If they hesitate to accept this conclusion, however, the Stranger suggests the following: anything which possesses the power (*dynamis*) of changing anything else or of being changed by another thing, is; beings (*ta onta*), therefore, are limited (or defined, *horizein*) by a boundary (*horon*) which is nothing other than power (*dynamis*).

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<sup>144</sup>Rosen points out that, when speaking of the "precise" accounts of Being, the Stranger refers to Being as "*to on*" and when speaking of the "less precise accounts" the Stranger refers to Being as "*ousia*". As he notes, ". . . *ousia* is a differentiated unity rather than a pure monad." (*Plato's Sophist* 213).

<sup>145</sup>It is doubtful, however, that a genuine materialist would admit this. The Stranger gets them to admit the non-material existence of justice and injustice by making the materialists "better" than they are. Indeed, he suggests that, without the admission that souls have existence, no dialogue with them is possible. This suggests that a genuine materialist would be wary of even granting the existence of a "material" soul. According to the Stranger, in making them "better" he is simply allowing the materialists to participate more fully in the discussion (246d). Indeed, it is only when the materialists admit that justice and injustice are not visible, that the Stranger points out that they have become "better". And, this admission will establish a common ground between them and the "friends of the ideas". Earlier, however, the Stranger had maintained that these two camps continuously fight a battle like that of the gods and the giants (246a). He also says that an "unimproved" materialist would not admit the existence of invisible things (247b-c). This suggests that, in fact, the Stranger knows that there is no common ground between the two camps which will allow them to resolve their differences and that, in making the materialists "better" he has really made them worse materialists.

The full implications of the Stranger's suggestion are anything but clear and this is not the place to indulge in a lengthy discussion of them. I only note that it is a suggestion which the Stranger believes the materialists will accept and, indeed, something like this view lies behind the materialists' admission that it is by the presence of justice that souls are made just.<sup>146</sup> While the materialists believe that all that is is corporeal, more fundamentally, they believe that whatever is, is such as to be able to affect or be affected by something else. To the extent that a materialist must admit that souls can become just, he does so because he believes that things do not change of their own accord but become what they become by virtue of their capacity to be affected by the power of other existing things. The Stranger makes his suggestion regarding the "boundary of beings" in response to the materialists' hesitancy to accept that they have been forced into a dualistic conception of Being. He does not go on to show how this suggestion should resolve their hesitancy. Rather, he leaves the materialists behind and turns to the "friends of the ideas". However, he takes with him his suggestion with which the materialists agree--that "power is the boundary which limits (or defines) the beings"--and uses it to refute the "friends of the ideas".

The "friends of the ideas" deny that the power of affecting and being affected by something else belongs to Being (248c). This power belongs, rather, to the process of becoming which is accessible to humans by way of sensory perception and in which they share by virtue of their bodies. Real Being (*ten ontos ousian*) however, is accessible to humans through reason (*logismos*) alone and it is the soul and not the body which shares in Being (248a). The "friends of the ideas" will say, according to the Stranger, that the soul knows and Being is known but they will deny that knowing or being known involves affecting or being affected by something else. The

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<sup>146</sup>Nothing, according to the materialists, has an intrinsic nature. Each thing comes to be what it is by virtue of the power exerted on it by other things and its own capacity to be affected by other things. While the materialists would not accept the notion of an incorporeal soul, to the extent that they believe that a human can be "just", they must believe that the "justice" of a human being is a limit placed upon its behaviour by the power of things external to it. This power could be called "justice" without thereby implying that it is an incorporeal, single agent.

reason is that, if knowing involved affecting something else, then Being would be affected and hence changed in the course of its being known. Being, according to the "friends of the ideas" does not change but is at rest (248d-e). Theaetetus is shocked by the implication that Being must be without motion, life (*zoon*), soul (*psyche*) and intelligence (*phronesis*). According to him, mind (*nous*) possesses soul and life and these are both characterised by motion. If what really is is unchanging and at rest, then mind--including the human mind--is not one of the things that truly *is* (249b). However, if we reject the thesis of the "friends of the ideas" and say that all things are in motion, we face a similar problem. In this case, nothing, including mind, would ever be the same as itself and there would be no stable relations between things, including mind and the things it apprehends. In such a case, neither mind nor anything else could even come into being in so far as the existence of a thing presupposes its self-identity and stable relations to other things (249b-c).

As the Stranger sums it up, the result is a puzzle. Mind neither *is*, in the sense of being stable, self-identical and at rest; nor is it becoming, in the sense of being in motion either through affecting or being affected by anything else (249c). "And yet", the Stranger says, "we must do battle, using every argument, against anyone who makes scientific knowledge (*epistemen*), practical intelligence (*phronesis*) or mind (*noun*) disappear and who then strongly maintains anything at all." In particular, the philosopher, who pays highest honour to these things must deny both that all is at rest and that everything is in motion. He must say that Being (*to on*) and the all (*to pan*) consist of both motion and rest (249d).

The real problem then, with both the materialists and the "friends of the ideas" is that their understanding of motion and rest is such as to destroy the possibility of knowledge. The materialists, whose account of Being rests upon the assumption that all that is is becoming cannot allow for the necessary stability that mind and the things it knows must have if knowledge is possible. Yet, they maintain strongly that they know about Being. The "friends of the ideas",

whose account of Being rests upon the assumption that what truly *is* is at rest, cannot account for the movement of mind as it comes to know various things it did not know before. Yet, they maintain strongly that, by virtue of the mind's participation in Being, they can give an account of Being. The upshot, according to the Stranger, is that anyone who attempts to know anything or to give any kind of account of things, must assume that both motion and rest are definitive of Being. The philosopher, above all, must make this assumption.

The assumption is problematic, however. As the Stranger points out, they seem to have landed themselves in the place where some of those who speak "precisely" about Being ended up (249e). They have, after all, just concluded that Being must be two, namely, motion and rest. Theaetetus agrees, motion is not the same as rest and yet, each of them *is*. He also agrees that neither rest nor motion taken individually nor both taken together are the same as Being. Being, therefore, appears to be some third thing in addition to rest and motion whether these are taken individually or together (249a-c).

The problem facing them is not only the problem faced by dualists in general. This problem is deepened by the Stranger's contention that the possibility of knowledge depends upon Being being both in motion and at rest. Unless motion can be shown to *be* truly and unless rest can be shown to *be* truly, then knowledge is not possible. But if to *be* truly is to be something *other than* being in motion or being at rest, then neither motion nor rest truly *is*. Neither the self-identity of the mind and its stable relations with other things nor the motion of the mind as it comes to know would have a share in Being. Given their commitment to the possibility of human knowledge, the Stranger and Theaetetus must hold fast to the notion that both motion and rest *are* despite the difficulties which they now confront.

The Stranger admits that they are at a point of complete perplexity. But he notes that both *that which is (to on)* and *that which is not (to me on)* participate equally in this perplexity and suggests that where either of them emerges dimly or clearly, so will the other. He suggests that

where neither emerges clearly, they will at least attempt to push through both (249e).<sup>147</sup> The problem they now face is clearly a problem as to *that which is*. But it is equally a problem concerning *that which is not*. Theaetetus and the Stranger want to say that *what is* is in motion or at rest. Equally, they want to be able to say that *motion and rest both are*. The difficulty they face, however, is that *that which is* cannot be shown to be in motion or at rest. *That which is* is some third thing in addition to motion and rest. But if motion and rest are not among *the things which are*, then it appears that they must be among *the things which are not*. The perplexity of non-being has once again reared its troublesome head.

The Stranger proceeds to give a clearer account of their perplexity by way of an example. We attribute to a man many things: colour, shape, size, virtue and vice. Indeed, everything of which we speak we assume to be one and yet we go on to speak of it as if it were many. The perplexity of Being when put together with the perplexity of non-being proves to be the perplexity of the one and the many. In terms of the question the Stranger and Theaetetus are pursuing, the problem of the one and the many cashes out this way: how can Being be one, namely, Being, and at the same time be many, namely, both motion and rest? How can motion and rest both *be* while being other than Being? The Stranger notes that both youngsters and old men whose learning has come late in life delight in pointing out the contradictions involved in saying of a thing that it is one while at the same time saying that it is many. He proposes to address himself to them (251b-c).

First, he asks whether Being and other things like motion and rest are such that they cannot mingle and participate with one another or whether they all mingle with one another or whether some mingle and some do not. He notes that if nothing can mingle with anything else, then neither motion nor rest can share in anything else. Neither motion nor rest then, together or individually,

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<sup>147</sup>What the Stranger means by an attempt to "push through both" is not clear. Perhaps he means something like, "try with all our might". He may also be hinting that the attempt to define *that which is* and *that which is not* will require a "forced" argument which, for that reason, may not be quite sound.

will have any share in Being. If neither motion nor rest can mingle with anything else then neither those who maintain that all that is is in motion nor those who maintain that all that is is at rest can be right. For the first maintain that motion *is* while the second maintain, on the contrary, that rest *is*. Both groups assume that Being mingles with either motion or rest. Furthermore, if there is no mingling of anything with anything else, then those who account for the generation of things out of such things as elements cannot be right either, for this is to assume that the elements mingle. More interesting, those who forbid anyone to speak of things as mingling would find their own mouths sewn up, for they refer to each and everything as being on its own and hence suppose that each and everything mingles with Being. The Stranger points out, however, that a rejection of the notion that nothing mingles with anything else should not lead one to conclude that everything mingles with everything else. If everything mingled with everything else, motion would mingle with rest and rest would mingle with motion. The result would be that motion and rest would be utterly mingled with and indistinguishable from each other. The conclusion that must be drawn, according to the Stranger, is that some things mingle with other things and some things do not just as, in the case of the alphabet, vowels mingle to a greater degree with one another and with consonants than do consonants (252d-253a).

Just as the task of the grammarian is to understand which letters co-mingle and which do not, and just as it takes a special art to know which sounds co-mingle to make harmonies, so the special art of the philosopher is to know which ones of the "kinds" (*gene*) co-mingle with others and which do not (253a-c). The Stranger defines the special art of the philosopher as the science (*episteme*) of the free man. The task of the philosopher is to divide things by kinds (*gene*) and to avoid assuming that things that are the same are other or that things that are other are the same. The Stranger calls this science, "dialectic", and adds that only the man who philosophizes purely and justly possesses it. According to the Stranger, the person who is capable of practising dialectic is the man who clearly perceives: how one form (or idea, *idea*) can be stretched through many



things though each thing is separate; how many forms which are other than one another can be comprehended by one form; and how one form can be bound into one through many wholes and how many forms are distinct from others in every way. On the Stranger's account, one is able to perceive these things if one knows the kinds (*gene*) of things and which of them are capable of co-mingling and which are not (253d-e).

The Stranger does not explain what he means by the form (*idea*) of something. As the discussion proceeds, he will develop an account of which of the various kinds/forms (*gene/ eide*) co-mingle with (*metechlein*) others and which do not. More specifically, he will develop an account of the "greatest kinds"--what they are and what their power of co-mingling is (254bc). It is the Stranger's account of the greatest kinds that is of interest here as it is upon this account of the greatest kinds that his distinction between originals and images rests. The Stranger does not offer a general definition of the terms, "form" (*idea*) and "kind" (*genos*) in general.<sup>148</sup> This much, however, is clear. By using the terms "*eide*" and "*gene*" interchangeably, the Stranger confirms what the use of his method has assumed all along--that the essential character of the way things are is mirrored in the ways in which humans apprehend the stable forms of things. It is helpful to keep in mind, however, that the Stranger understands any original which is re-presented in a discursive image to be an essential ratio or relationship among the elements of a thing. What the

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<sup>148</sup>The Stranger uses both terms--"kinds" as well as "forms"--interchangeably at 254 b-c. The question is what makes the "greatest kinds" the "greatest" or what distinguishes them from other forms or kinds. Recall that the Stranger set out to define a particular "kind", namely, the Sophist. The Sophist is not one of the "greatest kinds". Generally speaking, the distinction between the "greatest kinds" and the lesser "kinds" is as follows. The "greatest kinds" constitute the formal, fundamental elements which define *all* "lesser kinds" like the Sophist. The relationships among the "greatest kinds" govern the most fundamental relationships among *all* "lesser kinds". For a fuller discussion, see Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 246-249, 264.

Stranger will proceed to elaborate are the essential ratios or relationships among the greatest or universal *eide* or *gene*, or the formal and, hence, stable structure of *all* things.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Before doing so, the Stranger states that the philosopher, who pursues dialectic purely and justly is difficult to see, but not for the same reasons that the Sophist is difficult to see. The former, who devotes himself to reason (*logismon*) and the idea (*idea*) of Being, is hard to see because of the brightness of the place he inhabits. The Sophist, on the other hand, is hard to see, because he "runs into the darkness of non-being, feeling his way around by practice and is hard to see because of the darkness of the place" (254a). What the Stranger means, exactly, is hard to say. However, one should note the *ethical* demand that the philosopher pursue dialectic purely and justly as well as the fact that, according to the Stranger, the philosopher is just as difficult to apprehend clearly as the Sophist. This second claim should remind one of Socrates' assertion at the beginning of the dialogue to the effect that philosophers do not appear as they are.

## The Greatest Kinds

Without any further argument, the Stranger and Theaetetus agree that the greatest of the kinds are those they have just discussed, namely, *Being*, *motion* and *rest*. If no further argument is needed, this is because it is simply obvious that *all things are*, and are in motion or at rest. Of these three, the Stranger observes that two of them cannot co-mingle with (*metechlein*) one another but that *Being* can co-mingle with both. Further, of the three, each is other than the other two while remaining the same as itself. Here an interesting question arises. The Stranger asks Theaetetus what they mean by the terms, "same" and "other"? Are they two new kinds, other than the other three yet co-mingled with them? Is it necessary now to assume that there are five and not three kinds and to conduct their inquiry accordingly? Or is it the case that when we refer to "same" or "other" we are really referring to one of the already discovered three kinds? Theaetetus is not sure (254d-e). While it is clear to him that *motion* and *rest* must be two of the greatest kinds, he is less willing to grant that "same" and "other" have the same status.

The Stranger offers the following argument to show that "same" and "other" are not the same as *rest* and *motion*.<sup>150</sup> He notes that *motion* and *rest* are neither other nor the same. That

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<sup>150</sup>The following discussion may seem like a highly paradoxical play on words unless one considers that the subject of the Stranger's inquiry is the co-mingling of the greatest kinds. The questions which concern him are not whether things in general are both in motion and at rest or the same as themselves while being other than other things. That things in general are in motion or at rest and are the same as themselves while being other than other things will be one of the conclusions of his inquiry. Here he is interested in, as it were, the *source* of the way things are--the source of their being in motion and at rest and the source of their being the same as themselves while being other than other things. What this inquiry is intended to show is that *rest* cannot be the source of the sameness of things just as *motion* cannot be the source of the otherness of things but rather, that the greatest kinds of *sameness* and *otherness* must be the sources of the sameness and otherness of things. In order to distinguish the "greatest kinds" of Being, motion, rest, sameness and otherness from the non-technical use of the terms, the former will be italicised.

is, however one refers to *motion* and *rest*, neither of the pair can be the same as "sameness" or "otherness". If, for example, *rest* is identified with "sameness", then *motion*, which is other than *rest*, would not be the same as *motion*--it would, therefore, be *rest*.<sup>151</sup> To take another example, if *motion* is identified with "otherness", then *rest*, which is other than *motion*, would be the same as *motion*. While neither *motion* nor *rest* can be the same as "sameness" and "otherness", however, it is clear to both the Stranger and Theaetetus that both *motion* and *rest* must have some share in "sameness" and "otherness". Likewise, the Stranger argues that "sameness" is not the same as *Being*. If it were, then to say that both *motion* and *rest* "are", for example, would be to say that they are the same, and it has already been shown that they cannot be the same. *Sameness*, therefore, shows itself to be a forth greatest kind, alongside *Being*, *motion* and *rest* (255a-b). Again, recalling that the Stranger's interest is in explicating the universal ways in which things are, his point seems to be this. The form, *sameness*, cannot be understood as the forms *Being*, *motion* or *rest*. For something to be the same as itself, it is not enough that it be or that it be in *motion* or at *rest*.

The question remains as to whether "otherness" is to be considered a fifth greatest kind. The first thing the Stranger notes is that some of the "things that are" are spoken of by themselves and some are always spoken of in relation to different things. To be "other than" something is to

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<sup>151</sup>Rosen gives another example and notes that one could give many more (*Plato's Sophist* 267-268). I have followed Rosen here and elsewhere in taking *sameness* as being "self-identity". As Rosen explains, if *sameness* does not mean fundamental self-identity on the Stranger's account but rather means "being the same as a set of qualities" then *otherness* has crept into *sameness*. For, in order for a thing to be the same as a set of qualities, the qualities must first be detachable from or "other" than the thing in question. To say that "being the same" is the same as "being the same as a set of qualities" is to say that "being the same" is the same as "being the same as something else" where "something else" is a set of qualities. The fundamental, stable kind the Stranger is interested in here, must therefore be the fundamental, irreducible way a thing has of being the same as itself (see Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 272). This does not mean, however, that there are not problems surrounding the Stranger's account of *sameness*, see for example, Rosen, *Plato's Sophist* 279. As I mentioned above, however, my purpose is not to give a detailed analysis of the Stranger's account of the greatest kinds, but to assume for the sake of argument that it is satisfactory.

be in such a relation; it is to stand in a particular relation to something else. *Being* and *otherness*, therefore, cannot be the same, for some things "are" by themselves and some things are "other than" some things (255d).

To understand the Stranger's point one must consider, not what his observation entails for the way in which things in the world of sensory experience present themselves. One must consider what his observation entails for our understanding of the greatest kind, *otherness*, for this is what the Stranger wants Theaetetus to consider. His point seems to be this. *Being*, *motion*, *rest* and *sameness* are, of themselves, not "other than" each other. For anything to be "other than" something else, it must be in a certain relation to something else. *Otherness* is the stable, universal form of a certain kind of relation. According to the Stranger, *otherness* "runs through" the other four greatest kinds, for clearly each of them is other than the others (255e). *Being*, *motion*, *rest* and *sameness* are not "other than" each other by reason of what they are. They are "other than" each other because each co-mingles with (*metechein*) *otherness*. Its co-mingling with *otherness* makes each of the kinds other than the others.

The Stranger proceeds to spell out what follows from this discussion of the five greatest kinds. He and Theaetetus have already agreed that *Being* co-mingles with *motion* and *rest* and that *motion* and *rest* do not co-mingle with each other. The Stranger now points out that *motion* is entirely "other than" *rest*. It, therefore, "is not" *rest*. But that does not mean that *motion* "is not". Rather, it "is" in so far as it co-mingles with *Being*. *Motion* is also other than the *same*. It, therefore, is not the *same*. However, all things co-mingle with the *same* in so far as they are the same as themselves. *Motion* therefore, is the same with respect to itself by virtue of its co-mingling with the *same*. It is not the *same*, however, in so far as it co-mingles with *otherness* with respect to the *same*. *Motion*, in other words, co-mingles with the *same* which allows *motion* to be the same as itself. This does not mean that it is the same as the *same*, however. By virtue of the fact that it co-mingles with *otherness*, it is other than the *same*. The Stranger adds that, in the same way,

it would not be absurd to say that, if *motion* co-mingled with *rest*, then motion would be rest. He also observes that *motion* is other than *otherness* although it also shares in *otherness*. Finally, and most important for the Stranger's argument, the Stranger notes that *motion* both "is" and "is not" (255e-256c). On the one hand it co-mingles with *Being* and hence "is". On the other hand, by virtue of its co-mingling with *otherness*, it is other than *Being* and hence, it "is not".

The Stranger concludes that the nature of *otherness* is such as to make each of the four kinds other than *Being* or to make them so as to be what "is not". He goes further and adds that, with respect to the kinds they have been looking at, being or what is (*to on*) is many while non-being is unlimited in number. There is, in other words, a limited number of things which share in *Being*, while the number of things which are other than *Being* is infinite.<sup>152</sup> In turn, *Being* must be understood to be other than all other things.

The Stranger now points out to Theaetetus that when they speak of "that which is not" they do not refer to that which is opposed to *Being*, but to that which is other than *Being*. He offers an example to underscore the consequence of this. "Not to be big" is, in fact, to be something. It is to be other than big, namely, middle-sized or small. The "not" in the expression "not being" is not a negation of *Being*. The "not" in "not being" is an expression which means "other than". The Stranger explains that *otherness* is like knowledge. Although both are one, both are split up into little bits--there are many kinds of knowledge and there are many kinds of "otherness". He offers three examples: what is not beautiful is other than the beautiful and hence *is*; the not great, just

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<sup>152</sup>I am not entirely sure what the Stranger means by saying that non-being is unlimited. If the number of kinds are limited, then *otherness* can only have a limited number of relations with them (recalling that, on the Stranger's account, there is no such thing as *non-being*). Clearly, the Stranger wants to suggest that while there are limits to the way things are, there are not limits governing the relations of the way things are not. The difficulty is that the Stranger also wants to say that "the ways things are not" is to be understood in terms of *otherness*. I suggest that he is, on the one hand, torn by his account to the effect that non-being is to be accounted for by *otherness* and his ordinary understanding of things according to which there is an indefinite number of ways in which things "are not". As we shall see, the account of non-being as due to the operation of *otherness* simply cannot account for all the ordinary ways in which things "are not".

as the not beautiful, *is*; and the same is the case for the not just. The upshot, according to the Stranger, is this: just as *otherness* shares in *Being*, so too must its parts. That is, all things which share in *otherness*, by virtue of which they are not or are other than other things, are. "Not to be", therefore, must be understood as "to be some other" according to the Stranger (257b-258c).

The Stranger identifies this "not-being" as that for which they were looking. They have succeeded in doing what Parmenides said should not be done. They have constrained non-being to be (258b-d).<sup>153</sup> Non-being is *otherness* and to be other is to be. In addition, they have shown the ways in which things can be both other and the same without falling into contradiction (259c-d).

I said above that I am not interested in critically analyzing the details of the Stranger's account of the five greatest kinds. The crucial question for me is the extent to which the Stranger's account, even if it is assumed to be satisfactory, accomplishes what he has set out to do. His intent throughout his long discourse on the five greatest kinds has been to make creditable his claim that the Sophist is a maker of phantasms. As I have noted, that claim requires him to demonstrate at least four things. First, the Stranger has to show that there is a class of beings whose being is defined by "imagehood" or whose being is such as to be and not to be in the same respect. Second, he must show that there is a sub-class of images namely, the class of phantasms whose being is such that while not being the same as their original in any respect, they nonetheless look like their originals. Third, he must show that, of the class of phantasms, it is possible for some neither to be the same as their originals in any respect nor to look like their originals in any respect and yet to seem to be their originals. Finally, he must do all of this without landing himself in the contradictions which follow from assuming that non-being is.

The Stranger has, indeed, explained a sense in which non-being is. "Not to be", is to be something other. The crucial question for the Stranger's account is whether this is an adequate

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<sup>153</sup>The way in which they have done so has not resulted in a refutation of Parmenides, of course, for they have followed his edict in so far as *otherness* is.

explanation of the non-being of images in general and of false phantasms in particular. An accurate image, according to the Stranger, accurately replicates the same ratios as its original. In a fundamental respect, therefore, an accurate image is the *same* as its original. As a *copy* or replication of an original ratio, however, it is not the same, it is *other* than the original ratio. On the Stranger's account of the five greatest kinds, we can escape this difficulty by saying that when we speak of things being both the same and other, we do not say that they are the same and other in the same respect. By virtue of their sharing in *sameness*, things are the same as themselves. By virtue of their sharing in *otherness*, however, things are other than other things. All things share in *sameness* and *otherness* but not in the same respect. The problem with accurate images, however, is that they are both the same as and other than their originals in the same respect. An accurate image replicates an original ratio while not being that original ratio. The problem with the Stranger's account is that it cannot explain the way in which an image *is not* the original ratio. To say that it is "other than" that ratio is not helpful. For if it is other than the original ratio, it is not an image of that ratio, it must be an image of some other ratio. And, if it is an image of some other ratio, we face the same difficulty all over again. The way in which an accurate image is not its original is not at all explainable in terms of otherness as the Stranger understands it.

The problem with phantasms is doubly difficult. A phantasm is not constructed in accordance with the ratios of its original. Yet, it must make present the ratios of its original or it would not be an image of it. The phantasm does this but in a curious fashion. While it may look as if it replicates the ratios of its original, in fact, it does not. On the Stranger's account, it must replicate the ratios of some *other* original. The problem emerges again. If a phantasm is not the original it looks like in so far as it replicates the ratios of another original, by virtue of what is it a phantasm of the original it looks like? It would have to be an accurate image of an original which it does not look like. But a phantasm, on the Stranger's account, is not an *accurate* image of something it doesn't look like, it is an *inaccurate* image of an original it does look like. It is



inaccurate because it *is not* constructed in accordance with the ratios of its original. But if by "is not" we mean that it is constructed in accordance with ratios which are "other than" those of its original, we have a problem. We can no longer account for the way in which the phantasm is an image, not of the ratios of some other original, but of the ratios of an original which it inaccurately replicates.

The Stranger has attempted through his discussion of the greatest kinds to show that it is possible to speak about the way in which things are not, without contradiction. He has had to do this in order to render intelligible the distinction between images and originals or to show how it is possible for an image both to be and not be the same as its original. The Stranger's account of the way in which things are not concludes by showing non-being to be *otherness*. Whatever the merits of the Stranger's account on some levels, it has failed in terms of the purpose it was intended to serve. The way in which images both are and are not their originals cannot be explained in terms of *otherness*.

### The "Otherness" of Falsehood

The Stranger claims that he and Theaetetus have refuted those who would separate everything from everything else.<sup>154</sup> He notes that the separation of everything from everything else would lead to the end of all discourse, for the power of discourse comes from the co-mingling of the kinds or ideas (*eide*) with one another. According to the Stranger, they have just shown that the greatest kinds co-mingle with one another. When Theaetetus asks what their object was in showing this, the Stranger explains that they did so in order to show that discourse (*logos*) is one of the kinds of Being. He adds that if they were deprived of this, they would be deprived of philosophy (259e-260a).

Even Theaetetus, it seems, has trouble remembering the point of the Stranger's long digression. In reminding him, the Stranger refers to the difficulty they ran into when it appeared obvious to them that Being had to be both in motion and at rest. The difficulty they ran into was that those who would keep everything separate from everything else would point out the apparent absurdity of saying that Being, which is one, is also many (namely, motion and rest) or that Being is that which is not Being. It was in order to solve this problem that the Stranger and Theaetetus had to show how it is that, by co-mingling with *otherness*, the four greatest kinds--*Being*, *motion*, *rest* and *sameness* "are not" each other without thereby ceasing to be. What Theaetetus has forgotten is that it was necessary to show that *rest* and *motion* must also co-mingle with *Being* if knowledge is to be possible. For if *motion* and *rest* have no share in *Being* then neither the self-

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<sup>154</sup>Those who say that everything is separate from everything else were introduced into the discussion at 251b.

identity of the mind and its stable relations with other things nor the motion of the mind as it comes to know would share in *Being*.<sup>155</sup>

When the Stranger reminds Theaetetus of the object of their discussion, however, he does not say that their aim was to show the possibility of knowledge. Rather, he says that their aim was to show that discourse is one of the kinds (*genei*) of *Being*. When Theaetetus cannot understand why it is necessary to come to an agreement about discourse, the Stranger explains that they must discover whether non-being mixes (*mignutai*) with opinion and discourse in the same way that it mixes with everything that is. For, if it does not, then all discourse and opinion would be true and, if it does, then it is possible to speak and opine falsely (260b-c).

Theaetetus, it appears, has forgotten that their object was to catch the Sophist in the class of those who produce inaccurate and deceitful discursive images. The Stranger reminds him that the Sophist had denied the possibility of false speech on the grounds that what is not could be neither thought nor uttered. While the Sophist might now accept that non-being (as *otherness*) co-mingles with Being, the Stranger points out that the Sophist might not accept that non-being mingles with discourse and opinion and hence might deny that there are such things as the arts of making images and phantasms (260d-e). After exhorting Theaetetus to be courageous and to continue the search for the Sophist, the Stranger proceeds to examine the nature of speech and opinion to see whether non-being mingles with them (261d-264b).

He suggests that they examine names just as they looked at the alphabet when trying to understand whether some of the greatest kinds mingled with one another. He notes that, like letters, some names mingle with other names and some do not. While names are sounds which indicate beings, not all collections of names signify something. Some sounds, namely verbs, signify actions while other sounds, namely names, signify those things which perform actions. A

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<sup>155</sup>See p. 234 ff., above.

speech (*logos*) is never composed of a collection of names only or of verbs only. The smallest speech is rather the weaving together of a name and a verb. A speech clearly indicates something that is, is coming into being or is going to be by naming it, and it further "limits" the thing by weaving together a verb with the name. Furthermore, a speech must be about something, it cannot be about nothing.

The Stranger tells Theaetetus to pay close attention. He offers him a short speech: "Theaetetus sits." Theaetetus identifies the thing named by the speech as himself. The Stranger offers him another speech: "Theaetetus, with whom I am conversing now, flies." Theaetetus identifies the thing named in the speech as also himself. He further says that the first is true while the second is false. The second says "other things than the things that are". It "says the things that are not as the things that are". The Stranger notes that the second speech is, nonetheless, still about Theaetetus. It is certainly not about something else. It cannot, however, be a speech about nothing, for they have agreed that all speeches must be about something. What makes this speech a false speech, according to the Stranger, is that it says things about Theaetetus but it says things that are other than the things that are as being the same as the things that are, and things that are not as things that are.

According to the Stranger, now that they have shown that there is such a thing as false speech and what it is, Theaetetus should be able to see that thought, opinion and imagination (*phantasia*) can also be both true and false. Thought, after all, is the same as speech save that the one is the "silent conversation of the soul with itself" and the other is "the stream of noise produced by the mouth". Just as spoken discourse involves negation and affirmation, when silent thought affirms or denies, this is called opinion. When, however, the soul is led to affirm or deny something, not by itself but through perception, this is called imagination (*phantasia*). The Stranger adds up the results of this inquiry. Since speech is both true and false, since thought is the conversation of the soul with itself, since opinion is the completion of thought, since what is meant

by "it seems" (*phainetai*) is a mixture of thought and perception, since all these are akin to speech, some of them must be false. And, now that the Stranger and Theaetetus have established that there are such things as false speech, thought, opinion and imagination, they can now return to their previous divisions of the image-making art in order to find the Sophist (264c).

The easily led and often forgetful Theaetetus is convinced and raises no objection. What he fails to see is that the Stranger has in no way given an account of false speech that would at all give credence to the Stranger's claim that the Sophist is a maker of inaccurate discursive images. On the account he has just offered, the notion of an inaccurate discursive image is incomprehensible.

A false speech, on the Stranger's account is a speech that says something other as being the same or something which is not as being. It is important to keep in mind that, for the Stranger, these two expressions are equivalent. Not to be something is not to be nothing. It is to be something else. A false speech, therefore, does not literally say something that is not as if it were. More accurately, a false speech purports to say the same things as the things that are but, instead, says things that are other than the things that are. On the Stranger's account, all speech, including false speech, must refer to something that is.

How then is the falsehood in the statement, "Theaetetus, to whom I am now speaking, flies.", to be understood? The problem with the statement is not with the name "Theaetetus", for the statement is clearly about him. The problem is with the verb, "flies". "Flying", which is other than what Theaetetus is doing, is said to be the same as what he is doing. The statement presents a relationship between Theaetetus and the activity of flying as being the same as what he is doing when, in fact, it is other. It has presented a "ratio" or relation between things (Theaetetus and flying) which is other than and not the same as the way things are. But can it have presented a non-existent relation? Not according to the account of the five greatest kinds developed by the Stranger. On that account, there are no non-existent things, there are only other

things. The discursive image, "Theaetetus, to whom I am now speaking, flies" asserts a relation between Theaetetus and flying. Yet, it is not the relation which characterises its original (Theaetetus and sitting). On the Stranger's account, the relation presented in the image must be a relation which characterises some other original. The trouble is, even Theaetetus agrees that the statement is about him--it is certainly not about anybody else.

The Stranger cannot account for false speech. This is because *otherness* is not a sufficient explanation for the peculiar non-being of inaccurate discursive images. A discursive image which inaccurately presents the ratios of its original is not an accurate image of some other original ratio. It does, in fact, say "what is not".<sup>156</sup> The Stranger has tried to give an account of images which avoids the inherent contradictions that arise from assuming that absolute non-being is. While he succeeds in showing that non-being, in a way, is, he pays a high price. The result is to rob the distinction between images and originals of intelligibility.

This becomes even clearer if one considers what the Stranger's account of a true speech would be. Presumably, it would be an image which re-presented the same ratio or relation which characterised its original. In the case of objects of perception, it is obvious that originals are not the same as their discursive images. The statement, "Theaetetus sits" is very much other than the sitting Theaetetus at whom the Stranger is looking. On the Stranger's account, we can simply look at the sitting Theaetetus to know that the relation between "sitting" and "Theaetetus" is the same ratio replicated semantically by uniting the verb "sits" with the name "Theaetetus" in a speech. A direct look at the original confirms that the relation replicated in the discursive image is the same as the relation which characterises the original. This is what allows us to say that this true speech is true. But what about cases where the relation which characterises an original is not perceivable? What about discursive images of, for example, justice? To what does one look in

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<sup>156</sup>See p. 214 ff. above.

order to check to see if discursive images of justice replicate the same relations which characterise their originals?

By offering as an example of a true speech an accurate image of a perceivable original the Stranger side-steps a very important question. The Sophist, after all, does not go around telling people that what they see is other than what they see. The Sophist is concerned with matters to which we have no perceptual access. We cannot simply look at the Divine, Being, justice and the good life to check to see whether or not discursive images of them replicate the same relations which characterise their originals. If we have any access to these originals, that access comes not through sensory perception but through thought or understanding. The Stranger, however, understands thought to be the same as speech. That is, all of the things we understand are understood through discursive images.

This raises two very important questions. First, given that all discursive images, including the images of thought, can be false or true, to what original does one look for confirmation that the discursive image of a relation which characterises a non-perceivable original (of self-interest and justice, for example) is accurate? Surely one looks to something in one's understanding, but in one's understanding there are only other discursive images. Our thinking, on the Stranger's account, is conducted purely through images, not through their originals. While the Stranger wants to maintain that some of these images replicate accurately the relations which characterise their originals, because thinking is conducted purely through images, it appears that we have no non-imaginary access to originals. We thus have no way of checking the accuracy of the discursive images of thought. This brings me to the second question. Let us assume that we do, in fact, have access to the originals of thought, why then does our thinking proceed in terms of images? If thought has access to originals, images seem to be rather superfluous things. If we want to know whether justice truly is the pursuit of self-interest and we have immediate access to the original relations which characterise justice proper, we need only "look" at them--or think about

them--to know what justice is. We do not need a discursive image that replicates the same relations which characterise justice. Furthermore, if we do, in fact have direct access to originals, it is difficult to understand how the human mind could be deceived by inaccurate images. Any image could be easily checked against its original in order to see whether or not it replicates the same relations which characterise the original.

Throughout the dialogue, the Stranger has proceeded as if discursive images replicate the same ratios or relations as their originals. Hence his claim that Theaetetus can be spared the experience of dealing with the Sophist first-hand and come to understand him, rather, through the Stranger's discursive images. Likewise, the Stranger's discursive images of the five greatest kinds are meant to be accurate replications of the relations which characterise their originals. The Stranger's account of the dialectic practised by the philosopher, in turn, assumes, that the relations replicated by the philosopher in his attempt to understand things is a replication of relations which characterise the original way things are. On the one hand, therefore, the Stranger proceeds as if discursive images replicate the same relations as their originals and for this reason, can stand in their place. On the other hand, however, the Stranger wants to argue that all images are other than their originals. Unfortunately, the Stranger cannot have it both ways. Either the mind proceeds in its thinking through originals in which case it makes little sense to speak of it as doing so through images, or it does so through images in which case it has no immediate, direct access to originals. If the first is the case, then thinking and speaking cannot be false. If the second is the case, then thinking and speaking always involve the production of originals of which it makes little sense to ask whether they are true or false. For, in this case, even the notion that there are such things as non-discursive originals would be an image the accuracy of which cannot be checked.



### The Final Division

Now that they have shown the existence of false speech and false opinion, the Stranger says, they have also shown that it is possible for imitations (*mimemata*) of beings (*ton onton*) to exist and hence for an art of deception (*apatetiken*) to exist. He reminds Theaetetus that they had agreed that the Sophist was to be found in one of the divisions of the art of deception (the art of making phantasms) and suggests they try again to divide this class in order to find the Sophist (264d). In so doing, the Stranger says, they will clearly show the nature of the Sophist to themselves and to those who are most "akin" to their method. It appears that those who are not geometrical by nature and practice are not likely to be convinced of the Stranger's final division.

The Stranger, however, does not simply return to where he left off. He returns to their initial division of art into two kinds, acquisition and production.<sup>157</sup> The Stranger notes that all of their earlier attempts to find the Sophist found him "disguised" within a sub-division of the acquisitive art. Now, that he has shown himself to practice the art of imitation, however, he must be sought within the productive arts, for imitation-making is a kind of production (265a-b). The Sophist may be able to disguise himself as just about anything. He is, however, truly to be found in the class of imitation-makers. One wonders how one is to know that imitation-making is truly where the Sophist is to be found and that it is not just another of his disguises.

The Stranger and Theaetetus proceed to divide the productive art in two. They distinguish between divine and human production. The Stranger reminds Theaetetus that every power

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<sup>157</sup>This division is found at the beginning of the hunt for the angler at 219a-b.

(*dynamis*) which causes things to come into being which were not there before is productive.<sup>158</sup> All the plants, animals and material elements, those things which people call "natural", are produced by God who acts with intelligence.<sup>159</sup> God also produces images (*eidolona*) of the things he has produced--dreams, shadows and reflections of things in glass or water. Humans produce in a similar fashion. They produce things--houses, for example--but they also produce images of the things they make--paintings of houses, for example (266c-d). It is worth noting here that, for the Stranger, all image-making is a kind of production. Presumably, this would also include diagrams and figures used by geometers and mathematicians who attempt to understand the mathematical and geometrical properties of things. It would also include the discursive images employed by the philosopher.

The Stranger reminds Theaetetus that, earlier, they discovered that image-making could be divided in two: the art of making icons and the art of making phantasms. Now that they have established the existence of falsehood, there is no question that the art of making phantasms exists. This art can, in turn, be divided in two. One kind uses instruments and the other involves the producer of the phantasm putting himself forward as the instrument. The latter is called imitation and is found, for instance, when somebody imitates somebody else. The rest of the art of phantasm-making does not have a name and the Stranger says they will let somebody else unify and name it. The imitative art, however, can be divided in two. Some people imitate knowing the things they imitate and some people imitate knowing nothing of the things they imitate. The Stranger explains how this is possible in the following way. Someone who imitates somebody else must be acquainted with that person. When it comes to being just or being virtuous in general,

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<sup>158</sup>Not all production, therefore, is artful (consider, for example, biological reproduction). The question as to whether the Sophist really possesses an art is thus hinted at again.

<sup>159</sup>The Stranger is glad not to have to give an argument for this given that Theaetetus accepts it (265d-e).

however, most people have no knowledge of these things but only a sort of opinion. Such people are eager to make it appear that they really have this opinion within them and imitate it as best they can in both speech and deed. While none of these people is truly virtuous, they succeed in appearing to be virtuous (267a-c).

Acting and imitating other people, on the Stranger's account, belong to the class of phantasm-making or the making of inaccurate images because they allow a person to appear as what he is not or to appear to be somebody else. This kind of imitation requires knowledge of the thing imitated and such knowledge is readily available. In order to make myself appear to be other than I am and to appear to be another person, I need only look at and listen to the person (or kind of person) I wish to imitate and form my words and deeds accordingly. Acting or appearing to be virtuous is another matter, however. The virtues are not perceivable and hence not readily knowable. Most people, on the Stranger's account, are producers of phantasms of virtue. They have an opinion as to what virtue is. Given the Stranger's prior discussion, this must be understood to be an inaccurate image to which they have given assent and in accordance with which, in turn, they act and speak. In so doing, they create the inaccurate impression that they are other than they are. They create the impression that they are virtuous. The Stranger does not say so but it is important to note that they could not create this impression unless the people to whom they appeared to be virtuous shared the same opinion or inaccurate image of virtue as they have. They succeed in appearing to be virtuous because they have accommodated their appearance to the perspective of those around them. To be precise, one would characterise them this way: they accurately re-present the opinions the majority of people share about virtue. What makes their re-presentation inaccurate, however, is that it is presented as being an accurate re-presentation of virtue itself.

The Stranger coins new labels for the two arts which comprise the art of imitation. One he calls investigative (*historiken*) imitation which is based on knowledge and the other he calls

imitation which is based on opinion.<sup>160</sup> Opinion-imitators can, in turn, be divided into two classes. Some opinion-imitators believe they truly know that about which they have an opinion. The other kind, because of their experience in the "rough and tumble of arguments" suspect that they are ignorant of those things which they appear in public to know. The Stranger calls the first a simple imitator and the second the ironic imitator. The second class can also be divided in two. Some ironic imitators dissemble in long speeches in public before the many and others dissemble in private in short speeches and force the people with whom they converse to contradict themselves. The first of these is a public speaker, the second of these, according to Theaetetus, cannot be the wise man (*sophos*) due to the fact that the wise man is not ignorant. Theaetetus concludes that the second ironic imitator must be the Sophist. The Stranger summarizes their investigation as follows.<sup>161</sup> The Sophist is a contradicting, ironic, opinion-imitating maker of phantasms who has been defined as a juggler. According to the Stranger, "He who says that the real Sophist is of this race (*geneas*) and blood will, it seems, speak most truly." The dialogue closes with Theaetetus agreeing, "That's altogether so."

The first attempt made by the Stranger and Theaetetus to catch the Sophist within the class of phantasm-makers suggested that the Sophist is a producer of inaccurate images of a host of originals which included, divine matters, Being, justice and the laws. The second attempt in no way suggests that this is not the case. It does, however, supply the locus of the Sophist's art and hence invites us to re-think what it means to say that the Sophist is a producer of inaccurate images of the things about which he speaks. The fundamental shift in the second attempt to define

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<sup>160</sup>I have no idea why the Stranger makes a point of coining a new label for the first. Evidently, he is referring to acting. That he is not referring to the accurate imitation of virtue should be clear from the fact that his investigation is still within the art of making phantasms or inaccurate images. The new label certainly makes acting appear to be more philosophically interesting than it might appear and this, perhaps, is the Stranger's intent.

<sup>161</sup>And, as usual, leaves some things out.

the Sophist as a maker of phantasms is this. The Sophist is no longer said to be simply a producer of phantasms, he is a person whose public appearance is a phantasm. It is not simply that the things that the Sophist says are other than he makes them appear to be through his "large" accounts. The Sophist himself is other than he appears to be. What the Sophist appears to be is someone who knows or who is wise. But this is an image cultivated by the Sophist for, on the Stranger's account, the Sophist knows that he is not wise. The Sophist's appearance of being wise is an ironic posture; it is an inaccurate image, produced by the Sophist, of what he really is. To be a Sophist is, in fact, to be a phantasm. It is to be a phantasm of the wise man.

The Sophist's immediate "public" is small. It is not the multitude of the public speaker's "public" although both cultivate the appearance of wisdom before an audience. Presumably, the Sophist's public is a more select group than the public of the popular speaker. By targeting a more select group, the Sophist can allow himself to appear wise before people respected by the general public and hence further his appearance of wisdom with the general public. His primary tool in creating this appearance is the art of contradiction. He allows himself to appear wise by successfully showing all with whom he converses to be foolish by forcing them to contradict themselves. Presumably, it is in the "rough and tumble" of such exchanges that the Sophist, in turn, has come to suspect that he knows nothing of the things which his "public" thinks he knows.

It is not difficult to see that the Stranger has once again found Socrates in the class of the Sophist. Socrates is a man who claims not to know the things about which he shows others to be in contradiction. And yet he spends a great deal of time talking about these things anyway and has achieved a reputation for wisdom. On the Stranger's account, Socrates cannot be a philosopher, because he does not know the things of which he speaks. Sophistic/Socratic medicine, which earlier in the dialogue was said to be noble, now appears as something rather base. Forcing individuals to realise their ignorance does not result in health. It results only in a misplaced admiration for the person who brought such ignorance to light. But how is this possible?

How is it that the Sophist of "noble descent", the practitioner of Socratic "psychic medicine" is now, by the end of the dialogue, indistinguishable from the "contradicting, ironic, opinion-imitating maker of phantasms"?

It is Theaetetus who is largely responsible for this. When the final division of the dialogue produces the "contradicting, ironic, opinion-imitating maker of phantasms", the Stranger asks what name should be given to this man: wise man or Sophist. Theaetetus replies that such a person cannot be called wise since he is ignorant. He notes, however, that this man will have a name derived from the word "wise" (*sophos*) and concludes that he must be called the "really, complete Sophist."

The Stranger offers Theaetetus a false dilemma to resolve. Theaetetus, in turn, resolves this dilemma on questionable grounds. The Stranger's dilemma is false because it offers Theaetetus the choice between an alternative which they had previously agreed to be impossible and one which is possible. The Stranger excludes and Theaetetus ignores a third, more interesting alternative.

Earlier in the dialogue, they had agreed that it is impossible for a human being to know all things or to be wise (233a). Theaetetus, in resolving the dilemma put to him by the Stranger, appears to have forgotten this agreement. His conclusion rests upon the assumption that one who appears to be wise without actually being so must be a Sophist. Such an assumption is reasonable only if wisdom is humanly attainable. What Theaetetus has forgotten and yet, what is equally possible, is that the final division of the dialogue has defined the philosopher who, according to their earlier agreement, is also not wise. He has forgotten that it is not only the Sophist whose name derives from the word "wise" (*sophos*); so too does the philosopher's name (*philosophos*). If lack of knowledge or lack of wisdom is used as the principal criterion by which to identify the Sophist, then the Socratic practice of philosophy is indistinguishable from the practice

of Sophistry. Both Socrates and the Sophist appear to be wise without being so; both are equally phantasms of the wise man.

Socrates, according to the final definition of the *Sophist*, is a Sophist. But does this mean that, given that no man can be wise according to the Stranger and Theaetetus, all philosophy which is not wisdom is Sophistry? Not according to the account they have pursued throughout the dialogue. According to that account, philosophy is nothing other than psychic gymnastics: the art of bringing unwillingly ignorant or ugly souls to the beauty to which they aspire, namely, to knowledge of the truth.<sup>162</sup> It is the very method that the Stranger and Theaetetus have been practising: the value-free method of coming to understand what is related and unrelated in all the arts (266d). More generally, philosophy is psychic gymnastics which brings the soul to all it aspires to know. It is grounded in the science of "dialectic": the division of things by kinds which allows an individual to see clearly how one form (*idea*) extends through separate individuals, how many differing forms can be included in one form, how one form is made by the union of many wholes and how many forms are apart and separate (253b-254a). The philosopher, on this account, is a man who is not ignorant but who knows, if not everything, a great deal.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, one would have to say that the philosopher, according to the Stranger's account and, in spite of his earlier contention that no man can be wise, can be wise given enough time and effort. In principle, the method of the philosopher--his practice of dialectic--allows him to know everything the Sophist appears to know. And, the Sophist appears to know everything. Such a man, the philosopher, is not a phantasm of the wise man for he is not ignorant of those things which he appears to know. Rather, he is wise in those things which he appears to know or accurately imitates the wise man without necessarily being in possession of complete wisdom. According to the final definition of

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<sup>162</sup>See above p. 175 ff. for my discussion of 228a-229a.

<sup>163</sup>According to the Stranger, this is not a complete account of the philosopher. He promises a fuller account "hereafter". That promise is never fulfilled.

the *Sophist*, Socrates is a Sophist; the Stranger is not. Rather, the Stranger is the accurate image of that which Socrates inaccurately re-presents. If one accepts this argument then the Stranger, and not Socrates, is a philosopher.



... each of the private wage earners whom these men call sophists  
... , educates in nothing other than these convictions of the many,  
which they opine when they are gathered together, and he calls this  
wisdom. It is just like the case of a man who learns by heart the  
angers and desires of a great, strong beast he is rearing, how it  
should be approached and how taken hold of and when--and as a  
result of what--it becomes most difficult or most gentle, and,  
particularly, under what conditions it is accustomed to utter its  
several sounds, and, in turn, what sort of sounds uttered by another  
make it tame or angry. When he has learned all this from associat-  
ing and spending time with the beast, he calls it wisdom and,  
organising it as an art, turns to teaching. (*Republic* 493a-b)

#### IV: CONCLUSION

##### The Dialogue Reconsidered

Is the Stranger's final word Plato's final word on the matter? As I noted earlier, one way to read the *Sophist* is to regard it as Plato's turning away from the philosophical hero of his youth in favour of a more mature, dogmatic understanding of the philosophical enterprise. From this point of view, the *Sophist* represents Plato's underlying agreement with his new protagonist, the Eleatic Stranger, to the effect that genuine philosophy involves the discovery of knowledge based upon the use of a method of geometrical or analytical/synthetic reasoning. Arguably, the dialogue represents Plato's advance as a philosopher beyond the limited and sceptical philosophising of his teacher, Socrates. It represents his reassessment of Socrates in light of which Socrates appears to be a Sophist.

It is possible to read the dialogue in this fashion even if one concludes that the "teaching" of the dialogue is ultimately incoherent. It is possible to subject the Stranger's handling of

Theaetetus, the Stranger's "method", the Stranger's account of psychic gymnastics, and the Stranger's account of image-making and false speech to the kind of critical analysis which I have tried to offer and to conclude that it fails, but that the failure is Plato's. The *Sophist* can be read as Plato's attempt to advance beyond his teacher Socrates but as an attempt which is, in the final analysis, unsuccessful.

Both ways of approaching the dialogue, however, rest upon the same assumption and that is that the Eleatic Stranger is to be taken as Plato's spokesman for a "teaching" which, even the Stranger indicates (and would have preferred), could have been presented as a monologue or treatise. It is to read the dialogue as if Plato, at the time of writing the *Sophist*, employed the dialogue out of habit and not because what is presented in the dialogue could only have been presented in that form. There is, however, no compelling reason to make this assumption. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence within the dialogue which suggests that this assumption is not defensible.

It is important to remember that the *Sophist* is not a dialogue which stands on its own, independent of any other. Rather, it is the second dialogue of a trilogy, a trilogy "composed" by one of Plato's characters, Euclides of Megara.<sup>1</sup> Plato takes pains at the outset of this trilogy to make it clear that this is the case and to have Euclides tell us the principles according to which the trilogy was written. He has Euclides tell us that he made it a principle to expunge from his account of the conversation recorded in the trilogy the narrative voice of Socrates who recounted the conversation to Euclides in the first place. Euclides tells us that, when he wrote down the conversation recounted to him by Socrates, he left out all the remarks that Socrates made as a narrator of the conversation and presented him only as a participant in the conversation.

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<sup>1</sup>See p. 138 ff. above.

The result, as far as the *Sophist* is concerned, is intriguing, if not vexing. Socrates, who is presented as posing the initial question which is central to the dialogue, says nothing for the remainder of the dialogue even when he is implicitly identified as a Sophist. Given that Plato has Euclides expunge Socrates' narrative voice from the dialogue, one is left to wonder a number of things. What are we to make of Socrates' silence? Are we to think that Socrates regarded the Stranger's account as satisfactory? Are we to believe that he understood that one of the consequences of the Stranger's account was that he himself came to fall within the class of the Sophist? If he did, would this not have been a startling revelation to him and would he not have said so? Is Socrates' silence an indication that he realised that he could in no way rebut the Stranger's implied accusation of him?

Or is he silent for other reasons? If we are to believe that Socrates really is a Sophist, then why does Plato not have him behave like one? Despite the Stranger's claim that his method is indifferent to distinctions of better and worse or noble and base, the Stranger's account of Sophistry is such as to make Sophistry appear a very base pursuit indeed. A genuine Sophist, interested in preserving his reputation for wisdom, could hardly allow such an account to go unchallenged despite the fact that, as I have been at pains to show, it could be challenged at many points. Plato, however, does not have Socrates challenge the Stranger's account. Socrates does not behave as the Stranger suggests the Sophist ought to behave.

It is possible that, by the end of the dialogue, we are to believe that Socrates has become convinced that he is a Sophist. That is, despite the incoherencies in the Stranger's account, it may be that Socrates accepts that account. It is important to note, however, that if Socrates does come to accept the Stranger's account, he cannot be understood as a Sophist according to that account. The genuine Sophist, according to the Stranger, is uninterested in arriving at genuine wisdom and self-knowledge. He is interested only in appearing to be wise. What would motivate a genuine Sophist genuinely to consider the Stranger's account? Only a genuine concern to know what he

is and how he measures up with respect to genuine wisdom would prompt the genuine Sophist seriously to consider, let alone to accept, such an account. But the Sophist, according to the Stranger's definition of him, is not motivated by such concerns. If Socrates' silence throughout the dialogue stems from his acceptance of the Stranger's account, Socrates cannot be understood as a Sophist according to that account.

Socrates' silence in the dialogue, in other words, speaks volumes. The Stranger offers an account of Sophistry according to which Socrates is a Sophist. Yet, if Socrates has seriously considered and accepts this account, he cannot be understood to be a Sophist. On the other hand, if Socrates does not accept this account (and there is no reason why he should), according to that account, if, indeed he is a Sophist, he should speak out and show that account to be faulty. Plato does not have him do this. If Socrates' silence is based upon acceptance of the Stranger's account, he is not a Sophist. If Socrates rejects the Stranger's account, and yet says nothing to refute that account, it also follows that he is not a Sophist.

Of course, it is possible that Socrates simply accepts the Stranger's account but misses the most interesting implication of that account--that he himself is a Sophist. Not only is this extremely unlikely (the Socrates who could not see himself in the Stranger's account of the Sophist would hardly be the character Plato portrays in the other dialogues), it would also be highly uncharacteristic of a genuine Sophist to accept *any* account offered by the Stranger with no argument at all. As long as any account offered by the Stranger is allowed to stand, it is the Stranger who appears to be wise and not Socrates. If Socrates were a genuine Sophist, he would not allow the Stranger to get the better of him in this fashion.

Arguments from silence are peculiar things. The foregoing speculations into the reasons for Socrates' silence are not intended to resolve the issue as to why, exactly, Socrates says nothing for the greater part of the dialogue. Such speculations cannot resolve this question. However, these speculations do lead to a conclusion which is of some consequence for what one

takes to be the "teaching" of the dialogue. That is, what ever the reasons for Socrates' silence in the dialogue, it is his very silence that should convince one that Socrates is not a Sophist according to the account offered by the Stranger.

The *Sophist*, understood as a dialogue and not as a Platonic monologue delivered by the Eleatic Stranger, offers a perplexing "teaching". On the one hand, it offers an unchallenged account of the Sophist, according to which Socrates himself is a Sophist. On the other hand, it depicts the character Socrates as hearing this account through until the end without saying a word. It depicts Socrates, in other words, as behaving in a fashion which is utterly at odds with the way in which the account offered by the Stranger suggests a Sophist ought to behave. The most interesting "teaching" of the *Sophist* thus appears to be most paradoxical: Socrates both is and is not a Sophist.

This apparent paradox, however, can be resolved and resolved in such a way as to shed considerable light upon many of the issues raised in the dialogue. It is important to note that the *Sophist* "teaches" that Socrates is a Sophist only if one concludes that it "teaches" in the way that the Eleatic Stranger claims to be able to "teach" and if one concludes that it "teaches" the doctrine that the Stranger claims to "teach". The Stranger claims to be able to explain what the Sophist, statesman and philosopher are, regardless of how they appear. He also claims that it is possible to offer this explanation as a monologue. That is, he claims to have a positive teaching to advance on this matter. That he does not offer a monologue is due to courtesy alone. That he should have a teaching to impart is in keeping with his understanding of philosophy as *psychic gymnastics*. The Stranger advances the position that it is possible for a philosopher actually to know the truth about things and to impart this knowledge to others. He even claims to be able to impart his knowledge to someone who has little or no experience of that which he, the psychic gymnast, knows. The knowledge the philosopher can attain, in turn, comes from the value-free practice of the science of dialectic which he and Theaetetus have been practising as a method throughout the dialogue.

Using the method to develop a sophisticated account of "the greatest kinds", the Stranger is able to convince Theaetetus that there are such things as false images and that the Sophist practises the art of producing false images. The Stranger thereby both defines the Sophist and shows his superiority to him. The Sophist deals in falsehoods and has only the appearance of wisdom whereas the philosopher deals in the truth of things and possesses wisdom. On this account, a methodical definition of the Sophist is possible, as is an ontological refutation of Sophistry. And, on this account, Socrates is indistinguishable from the Sophist.

As a dialogue, however, the *Sophist* suggests that the Stranger's account is quite limited, if not incoherent. Of course, the *Sophist* is a *dialogue* and not a treatise or monologue. This in itself suggests that whatever the *Sophist* "teaches", that "teaching" cannot be imparted monologically to someone else. Plato and the Eleatic Stranger, that is, do not agree as to the best way to "teach". Given that the Stranger's preference for monologues stems from a certain understanding of the nature of philosophy, it is reasonable to assume that Plato does not share the Stranger's understanding of philosophy.

If Plato and the Stranger agreed as to the best way to "teach", certainly the *Sophist* would look very different from the way it does. It would simply be the presentation of the monologue the Stranger claimed to be able to offer at the outset of the dialogue. Gone would be Plato's introduction to the trilogy and with it an explanation of the principles according to which it is written--principles which are not Plato's but Plato's character, Euclides. We would not know that Socrates narrated the conversation in the dialogue to someone else who, in turn, wrote it as if this was not the case. Written as a monologue, there would be no dramatic setting: in which it becomes clear that the *Sophist* is part of a trilogy; in which the impending trial of Socrates--during which he will be accused of the practices of Sophistry--forms the backdrop; in which the mysterious Stranger and questions surrounding his identity are introduced; in which Theaetetus' "easily led" character is described and in which the opening question is posed by Socrates himself. Theaetetus would not

have a share in determining how the monologue turned out. The monologue would not have had to address, for example, his perplexities concerning the nature of the art of discrimination and the kinds of ignorance and their cures. That is, it would not have had to address questions surrounding the Stranger's own method and the nature of psychic gymnastics and psychic medicine. Finally, a monologue would not have invited its readers to assume a critical position towards its "teaching" in the same way that the presence of the silent Socrates in the dialogue invites one to assume such a position. By having Socrates pose the central question of the dialogue, the dialogue invites one to consider throughout whether or not Socrates need be satisfied with the Stranger's answer. By having Socrates remain silent throughout the conversation, the dialogue invites one to consider the reasons for this silence and the implications of this silence for the "teaching" the Stranger has put forward in the dialogue. All of these dramatic and dialogical elements, in other words, serve to raise questions about the "teaching" offered by the Stranger which a monological presentation of that "teaching" would not raise.

That the *Sophist* is a dialogue and not a monologue should cast serious doubts upon the notion that the Stranger is to be taken as Plato's spokesman or that the "teaching" of the dialogue is to be identified with that of the Stranger. That the Stranger succeeds in convincing the easily led and geometrically inclined Theaetetus of this "teaching" does not mean that he has succeeded in convincing Socrates. Euclides left out all of the observations which Socrates made when narrating the conversation to Euclides. In so far as the introduction to the trilogy makes this clear, the introduction invites the reader to wonder what Socrates' observations might have been. In so far as the dialogue takes place on the day that Socrates is indicted for impiety and corrupting the youth and is narrated to Euclides by Socrates from his prison cell and, in so far as the Stranger advances a "teaching" which suggests that Socrates is guilty as charged, the dialogue presents the issue of the distinction between Sophistry and philosophy as a most pressing one. The pressing nature of this issue and the Stranger's apparent indictment of Socrates render Socrates'

silence in the dialogue highly perplexing. The drama of the *Sophist*, in other words, invites the reader to read the dialogue through the critical eyes of Socrates, keeping in mind that the issue is no idle matter. The drama invites one not to accept the Stranger's "teaching" as *the* "teaching" of the dialogue but to subject the Stranger's "teaching" to careful, critical scrutiny.

When one scrutinizes the Stranger's "teaching", it becomes clear that the "teaching" is highly problematic. The Stranger employs a method to generate a definition of the Sophist. Not only does he offer no justification for the employment of the method as a way of defining the Sophist, the application of the method to the task of defining the Sophist presupposes a number of things: that the Sophist does practise an art; that the notion the Stranger and Theaetetus have of that "art" is sufficiently clear to allow them to analyze the "art" using the method; that the notion they have of the Sophist's "art" can be analyzed according to a series of mutually exclusive divisions and finally that the method of analysis, in order to generate an accurate definition, can and should be indifferent to questions concerning the goodness/badness or nobility/baseness of that art or indifferent to ethical considerations surrounding the "art".

By the end of the dialogue, the Sophist is defined as someone who practices the "art" of imitation but does not know that which he imitates. This is enough to cast doubt upon the assumption that the Sophist practices an art. Given that it is questionable whether the Stranger's method can be used to define that which is not an art, this is enough to cast doubt upon the process of division the Stranger has used to define that "art".

Indeed, the method, if practised appropriately upon a subject which allows itself to be defined by a series of divisions, should result in one definition of the thing defined. The Stranger is forced to offer seven definitions of the Sophist and these are not compatible with each other. The fact that the Stranger offers seven definitions, each according to a different series of divisions, casts doubt upon the relevance of any of the divisions used to define the Sophist. After the sixth definition, even the Stranger is led to wonder whether the Sophist practises an art (232a).



As I have been at pains to show, the Stranger's method is essentially geometrical. It rests upon the assumption that there is something like the "Sophist as such" which can be captured in a discursive image (or formal definition) according to the analytical/synthetic method of geometry. This method may be of use in defining a geometrical object such as the "circle as such" in so far as any discursive or pictorial image of a circle bears a resemblance to the "circle as such". Discursive and pictorial images of the "circle as such" have a kind of stability which is conferred on them by their original. They all, as it were, "point" to the same definition of the "circle as such". However, as the Stranger's definitions multiply and show themselves to be incompatible, it becomes clear that the Sophist is such as to appear as just about anything. The ways in which the Sophist appears do not resemble each other and do not "point" to a single definition of the "Sophist as such". Yet, all of the definitions of the Sophist offered in the dialogue are accurate images of the way in which the Sophist can appear. Indeed, if one accepts the final definition of the Sophist, one would have to say that the Sophist is such as to appear as what he is not. While the use of the method to define the Sophist presupposes that there is such a thing as the "Sophist as such" which can be captured in a single discursive image or formal definition, the method fails to produce such an image. One is tempted to conclude that this is because there is no such thing as the "Sophist as such".

The Stranger does not accept this conclusion but attempts to define the Sophist as a maker of false images. In order to sustain this definition, the Stranger must offer an account of images in general which explains how it is possible for images both to be and not to be their originals. He must also explain how it is possible for something to be a phantasm which shares nothing of its original while appearing to do so. He must also offer an explanation of the false image. That is, the Stranger must offer an account of images in general and false images in particular, and he must do so in such a way as to avoid the contradictions involved in arguing that non-being *is*. Theaetetus accepts the Stranger's account but there is no reason for Socrates or, indeed, the

reader of the dialogue to do so. The account offered by the Stranger, even if acceptable as an account of some of the ways in which non-being can be explained in terms of *otherness*, stops short of being a complete account which could explain the possibility of false images in such a way to avoid the paradoxes involved in maintaining that non-being *is*. The Stranger's definition and implied refutation of the Sophist at the end of the dialogue cannot, therefore, be sustained.

As a dialogue then, the *Sophist* invites one to be highly critical of the Stranger's teaching and not to mistake it as Plato's own. And, when one submits the Stranger's account of the Sophist to scrutiny, the Stranger's account fails. But that failure is instructive. It suggests a number of things: the arbitrary nature of the geometrical "method" when applied to non-geometrical objects; the great difficulties surrounding any attempt to distinguish between images (especially discursive images) and their originals; the limits of any attempt to explain the peculiar non-being of false images in terms of *otherness*; that, if one wants to account for false speech, one may be forced to assume that non-being in some sense, *is*; that, if humans have immediate access to originals, discursive images would appear to be superfluous; and that, if discourse simply involves the production of originals, then notions like true and false speech lack meaning.<sup>2</sup>

If one considers the reasons for and the implications of the Stranger's failure to define the Sophist, the Stranger's failure is highly instructive. The *Sophist*, in so far as it is a dialogue, offers a number of suggestions which do not amount to a "teaching" in the usual or the Stranger's sense of the word. The dramatic and dialogic elements of the dialogue invite the reader to engage in thinking through and assessing the Stranger's account in a critical fashion. When one assesses the Stranger's account, it fails but it does not simply fail. The reasons for and implications of that failure are themselves highly interesting and they are worth keeping in mind should the reader be inclined to attempt to offer a better account of image-making and false speech than the one offered

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<sup>2</sup>This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

by the Stranger. For one thing, the dialogue suggests that, should one attempt to offer such an account, one should beware of employing the Stranger's method.

But does the dialogue suggest anything else or are all of its instructive suggestions concerned only with the limits to the Stranger's method and the reasons for and implications of his inability to offer an account of image-making? Is the *Sophist* only a dialogue about the Stranger and his failed attempt to define Socrates as a Sophist? Does it have nothing instructive to offer on the question which Socrates posed at the beginning of the dialogue or nothing instructive to offer on the question which the Stranger set out to answer? The *Sophist* clearly shows us a way in which the Sophist cannot be defined and refuted. Does it show or even suggest a way in which the Sophist might be defined and refuted?

Throughout the dialogue, the Stranger attempts to define the Sophist using the value-free art of discrimination. That attempt culminates in an account of the "greatest kinds" which purports to show the possibility of the false images in which the Sophist is said to deal. Throughout the dialogue and even at the end, however, the Stranger fails to rid his account of ethical terms and distinctions. His practice of the art of discrimination has not been pure.

Nowhere is the "impure" practice of the method clearer than in the Stranger's discussion of the sixth Sophist, the Sophist of "noble descent". In order to define the sixth Sophist, the practitioner of psychic medicine who is engaged in the art of purifying the soul of the sickness of believing it knows when it does not know, the Stranger is forced to make use of a number of value-laden distinctions which practitioners of this art, themselves, presuppose. To define this art, for instance, the Stranger must suppose that the ignorance of believing one knows something when one does not is a kind of sickness and hence bad for human beings. Despite the fact that he cautions Theaetetus against using the value-laden pretensions of the arts concerning the nobility or goodness of their respective ends, he not only accepts but employs the pretensions of the art of psychic medicine in order to define it. Indeed, it is because he accepts the fact that the art of

psychic medicine really is engaged in bringing the soul to a state of good health that he is wont to call the practitioner of this art "noble".

Furthermore, when defining his own art, the art of the psychic gymnast, the Stranger is also forced to employ value-laden terms. The art of the psychic gymnast is said to remove deformity in the soul and to bring it to the beauty to which it aspires. It is because the art of psychic gymnastics takes the soul further than psychic medicine towards that to which it aspires that the latter remains the art of the Sophist as opposed to the more complete art of the philosopher.

The Stranger, however, is not warranted to make the ethical claims he makes according to the account he offers of his own method or the art of discrimination. To be true to his art and method, he should not accept and then employ the ethical claims made by either the art of psychic medicine or the art of psychic gymnastics in the course of defining them. That he does so indicates that, despite his warnings to Theaetetus that they be careful to practice the method of discrimination purely, they have not succeeded.

This failure to practice the art of discrimination purely is not confined to the Stranger's discussion of the arts of psychic medicine and gymnastics. Later, when attempting to distinguish phantasms and icons in an effort to define the seventh Sophist as a maker of phantasms, the Stranger argues that a phantasm is an image, like a large sculpture, which appears to replicate but which does not, in fact, replicate the ratios of its original and which appears beautiful only if it is not seen from a "beautiful position". A "beautiful position" is the position from which the true ratios of the original are visible. The Stranger, that is, identifies what is true with what is beautiful. This is, of course, in keeping with his account of psychic gymnastics according to which having genuine knowledge of all that the soul aspires to know constitutes the beauty of the soul.

The Stranger may be correct in identifying what is true with what is beautiful. The trouble is that his own account of his own art of discrimination gives no grounds for this identification. His art is supposed to be value-free. It is not supposed to distinguish things on the grounds of their

goodness, nobility or beauty. Value-laden distinctions are made by the purifying art of which the art of the Sophist of noble descent is a sub-class. Value-laden distinctions are not made by the discriminatory art. The Stranger wants to be able to say that the knowledge of originals of which the Sophist creates false images is a beautiful thing. He is not, however, entitled to do so.

The assumption that the knowledge of originals of which the Sophist creates false images is a beautiful thing underlies even the definition of the Sophist offered at the very end of the dialogue. The seventh Sophist is said to be ironic. He deceives his public into thinking that he knows that which even he suspects he does not know. He is shown to be interested, not in attaining wisdom or knowledge of those things of which he speaks or contradicts, but in attaining the appearance of wisdom. The seventh Sophist appears to have been "refuted" because the Stranger has appeared to demonstrate that the Sophist is a maker of false images. But even if the Stranger had offered a successful account of the false images in which the Sophist deals, he would not have successfully demonstrated the "ugly" character of Sophistry. Sophistry appears to be "ugly" only if one assumes that it is more beautiful to have attained wisdom than to cultivate the false appearance of it. In describing the Sophist as a deceiver, the Stranger suggests that Sophistry is base or "ugly". But the baseness or "ugliness" of deception presupposes the beauty of knowing and telling the truth. Psychic gymnastics presupposes that the attainment of wisdom is beautiful and that the intended, false appearance of wisdom is ugly. Psychic gymnastics, however, cannot demonstrate that this is the case.

The Stranger's attempt to avoid value-laden terms while distinguishing among the various arts is what makes much of his account of the arts in general and Sophistry in particular very odd. What is most peculiar about his account is the extent to which he studiously attempts to avoid any mention of the ultimate ends or purposes to which practitioners of the arts claim to be devoted. He avoids employing such terms to distinguish the arts from one another because employing them would entail accepting the value-laden pretensions of the arts as means by which they might be

distinguished. Someone who purely practices psychic gymnastics should avoid such discriminations in his attempts to understand things. However, to the extent that the practitioner of psychic gymnastics assumes that his art is capable of bringing the soul to the beauty to which it aspires, it may be difficult (if not impossible) for him to avoid presenting any art which deals in intentional deception as ugly.

This assumption lies at the heart of the Stranger's unflattering presentation of the seventh Sophist. In order to justify fully this presentation of the seventh Sophist, he would have to offer some kind of value-laden or ethical account which demonstrated that it is more beautiful to be wise, to know the originals of which one's words are images and to present these accurate images to others, than to pursue only the false appearance of wisdom. The Stranger does not do this. Rather, he allows his presentation of the seventh Sophist to rest upon an attempted refutation of the Sophist's contention that it is impossible to speak of images in general and false images in particular without contradicting oneself. The Stranger's final definition of the Sophist rests upon an attempted refutation of what the Stranger takes to be a Sophistic "doctrine" which denies the distinction between originals and discursive images. In refuting this "doctrine", the Stranger appears to pull the rug out from underneath the Sophist's "art". The problem, however, is that the Sophist does not have a "doctrine" to refute. The Sophist is not committed to finding out the truth of things. He has not engaged in a genuine inquiry which has resulted in the conclusion that things are such that the distinction between originals and discursive images cannot be maintained. The problem is that the Sophist is indifferent to the distinction between originals and discursive images. He is not interested in genuinely inquiring into the way things are. Hence, he is not interested in advancing "true doctrines" of the way things are. He is interested in gaining the reputation for wisdom which comes from contradicting potential rivals. It is not enough, therefore, for the Stranger to refute a doctrine which holds that a distinction between originals and discursive images cannot be maintained if his goal is to pull the rug out from under the Sophist's "art". The Stranger

must refute the Sophist's indifference to advancing true doctrines at all if he is to throw Sophistry into real question. This would require that the Stranger demonstrate what he has continued to assume: that the true beauty of the soul consists in coming to know all of that of which it is ignorant or that genuine wisdom is better than its appearance. To refute the Sophist, the Stranger would have to give up the value-free practice of psychic gymnastics until he could first demonstrate its value over Sophistry.

How might he do this? First, he would have to acknowledge what he has attempted to ignore: that the distinction between Sophistry and the genuine pursuit of wisdom is an ethical one. Even at the end of the dialogue, the Stranger attempts to ignore this distinction, despite the fact that his final definition of the Sophist depends upon it. While he takes pains to describe the Sophist as someone who, because of his experience in contradiction, suspects that he does not know that which his public thinks he knows and yet, who cultivates the appearance of "justice and the whole of virtue generally" (267c) by imitating what his public takes this to be, he makes no mention of this in his final summary of the "art" of Sophistry. His final summary omits all mention of the motivation behind and purpose of the Sophist's activities: the cultivation of the reputation for wisdom.

Acknowledging this is very important. It is only by ignoring the ethical distinction between the sixth Sophist (the practitioner of psychic medicine) and the seventh Sophist (the ironic, contradicting, phantasm-making, opinion-imitator) that they appear to be indistinguishable or that Socrates appears to be a Sophist. Both the sixth and the seventh Sophist are ignorant of those things of which they speak. Both appear to know those things which they do not know. Both practice the art of contradiction before small audiences. The ethical goals of these two Sophists, however, are quite different. The sixth Sophist is interested in fostering the psychic health of those *with* whom he converses. Among other things, this involves using the art of contradiction to get an individual to see when he does not know those things which he thinks he knows. The seventh

Sophist is not interested in the psychic health of those *with* whom he converses. The seventh Sophist is interested in appearing to be wise to those *before* whom he converses. He employs the art of contradiction in order to reveal the ignorance of others only as a means to enhancing his own reputation for wisdom in the eyes of those who see such ignorance revealed. If one considers only what these two Sophists "know" and the fact that they both use the art of contradiction to accomplish their ends, one would have to conclude that they are indistinguishable. Yet they are clearly distinguishable on ethical grounds--grounds which the Stranger explores and then sees fit to ignore. This is why Socrates' silence is so telling in the dialogue. His silence is what demonstrates that he is not a Sophist; he does not behave like someone primarily concerned to preserve his reputation for wisdom. From the ethical point of view assumed by the Stranger, Socrates and the Sophist are quite distinct.

Precisely because the practice of Sophistry rests upon an ethical decision and not upon an ontological doctrine concerning the impossibility of distinguishing between images and their originals, any attempt to show the "ugly" character of Sophistry (i.e. any attempt to refute the Sophist) must address this ethical decision. For the Stranger to demonstrate the "ugly" character of Sophistry he would have to show, not simply that there is a distinction between originals and images or genuine wisdom and its false appearance, but that it is more beautiful to know originals and pursue genuine wisdom than to content oneself with the production of false images and the false appearance of wisdom. To do this, however, would require that he demonstrate that which he has continued to presuppose; it would require that he forego the practise of his method and the practise of psychic gymnastics until he could demonstrate their ethical superiority over Sophistry.

Certainly, such a demonstration could not take the form of a monologue which purported to lay out a true doctrine which reveals the ethical superiority of the lover of genuine wisdom to the lover of the reputation for wisdom. To present any doctrine in the form of a monologue already presupposes that one's doctrine is an accurate image of some original and that it ought to be



considered seriously as such. The Sophist, given his ethical disposition, is free to challenge both presuppositions. Indeed, the very difficulties which surround the Stranger's own attempt to offer an account of the distinction between originals and discursive images in general, and originals and false images in particular, suggest that the Sophist would face no great difficulty in mounting such a challenge.

To show that it is better to pursue genuine wisdom as opposed to the false reputation for wisdom, the Stranger would have to engage in the Socratic practice of psychic medicine. He would have to engage a real, live Sophist in the process of examining the Sophist's ethical conviction that the reputation for wisdom is a genuinely desirable end. Such an examination would have to show that the Sophist's desire for the reputation for wisdom is at odds with his other desires, opinions, or pleasures. It would have to show, in other words, that the Sophist's soul is fundamentally discordant or diseased (228b) despite the Sophist's claim to be in good health. Such an examination would be difficult, to say the least. The Sophist is ironic. His very reputation for wisdom depends a great deal upon dissembling the fact that he does not know many of the things about which he converses and, indeed, that his reputation is parasitic upon the unexamined opinions most people have about many things. He needs to dissemble this fact because to have it revealed would undermine his reputation. The Sophist cannot look wise to others if others understand that he doesn't know those things about which he converses or if they understand that he knows no more than they. He must flatter his audience without appearing to do so. His most important tool is his ability to force others into contradicting themselves. Engaging a Sophist in a genuine examination of his commitment to the pursuit of the reputation for wisdom, therefore, will be extremely difficult for two reasons. First, the Sophist, by necessity a dissembler, will not tend to want to indulge in a frank examination of his own pursuit especially in front of an audience, however large or small. Second, the Sophist will have a tendency to regard anyone who tried to engage him in such an examination as a potential rival and hence tend to try to turn the process

of examination against that rival. The Sophist, that is, will attempt to force his examiner into contradictions rather than be forced into them himself. Because such an examination would require one to beat the Sophist on the Sophist's own ground, the attempt to lead the Sophist into such an examination would lead one to end up appearing as a Sophist oneself. Difficult as it may be, however, this is the kind of examination the Stranger would have to engage in if he were to demonstrate that the desire for the reputation for wisdom, if it governs one's life, makes one diseased.

The distinction between the Sophist and the philosopher cannot be understood using the Stranger's method or through the practice of psychic gymnastics. Nor can the superiority of philosophy to Sophistry be so demonstrated. The distinction between Sophistry and philosophy is an ethical one and hence can only be demonstrated by the practitioner of psychic medicine. But the practitioner of psychic medicine does not assume as part of his diagnostic understanding that Sophistry, *by definition*, is an illness. The practitioner of psychic medicine could only conclude that Sophistry is an illness to the extent that, upon examining a real-live Sophist, it became clear that the Sophist's primary, ethical commitment to the reputation for wisdom led the Sophist into deep disagreements with himself. Only then could the love of wisdom be shown to be superior to or more healthy than the love of the reputation for wisdom.

So much then, does the *Sophist* suggest about the nature of the Sophist and how he is to be distinguished from the philosopher, and so much does it suggest about the way in which the philosopher might be shown to be superior to the Sophist. The *Sophist* does not represent Plato's turning away from his character Socrates. It shows the limits of the Stranger's attempt to define and refute the Sophist. The *Sophist* offers a vindication of the Socratic practice of psychic medicine over the espoused psychic gymnastics of the Stranger at least when it comes to the capacity of the former to address pressing, ethical matters.

But the dialogue goes further than this. Both the practitioner of psychic gymnastics and the practitioner of psychic medicine are united in the search for genuine wisdom and knowledge. The Stranger, however, suggests that psychic gymnastics as opposed to psychic medicine is capable of bringing the soul to all that it aspires to know. He suggests that once the soul has been made healthy by psychic medicine, there is a gymnastic practice that will bring it to all that it desires to know. The dialogue, however, suggests that there is no practice that will bring the soul to all that it aspires to know and that the practice of psychic medicine cannot be dispensed with. It does so by inviting the reader to scrutinize critically the Stranger's account at every point. This scrutiny, which is nothing other than the practice of psychic medicine, reveals that the Stranger's own account of psychic gymnastics cannot be sustained; it is "unhealthy" or contradictory in important ways. It needs to be purified by the art of psychic medicine.

Perhaps the most important problem with the Stranger's account is this. The knowledge promised by the practice of psychic gymnastics is the knowledge of non-discursive originals of which, he says, speech is an image. The Stranger's account of the science of dialectic practised by the philosopher is based upon the assumption that the relations which characterise the way things are are accurately re-presented in the true speech of the psychic gymnast. However, the Stranger's account also presupposes that all images, including accurate images, are other than their originals and that it is this that allows for the possibility of false images or false speech. To repeat what I said earlier, the Stranger cannot have it both ways. Either the mind proceeds in its thinking through originals in which case it makes little sense to speak of it as proceeding in its thinking through images, or the mind proceeds in its thinking through images in which case it has no immediate, direct access to originals. If the first is the case, then thinking and speaking cannot be false and all humans are by nature wise. If the second is the case, then thinking and speaking always involve the production of originals of which it makes no sense to ask whether they are true or false. In such a case, even the notion that there are such things as non-discursive originals

would be an image the accuracy of which could not be checked. The implications of the Stranger's account of the distinction between discursive images and their non-discursive originals makes the notion of psychic gymnastics meaningless. On his account, it follows that either all humans are complete psychic gymnasts or that psychic gymnastics is the product of a pipe dream; either all humans are wise or the very notion of wisdom is a human invention.

In the light of the Stranger's failure to render a coherent notion of the distinction between originals and discursive images upon which the notion of psychic gymnastics stands or falls, the Socratic practice of psychic medicine receives a partial vindication. The practice of psychic medicine can at least reveal when one is not in agreement with oneself or when one does not know what one thinks one knows. It is this practice, for example, which reveals that the Stranger's account of psychic gymnastics is founded upon a deep disagreement within himself concerning the question whether immediate, direct access to originals is possible or whether all images are other than their originals. It reveals that, unless he resolves this disagreement, he cannot really know whether the practice of psychic gymnastics is all he thinks it is.

Psychic medicine rests upon the recognition that there is a kind of knowing which is not a product of human invention, namely, the realisation that one does not know what one thought one knew. When one realises that one is in deep contradiction with oneself, one knows that one does not know that which one thought one knew. The practitioner of psychic medicine can bring one to this kind of knowledge. What the practitioner of psychic medicine cannot do, however, is offer a resolution of one's deep disagreements with oneself or offer a cure for one's ignorance. The practitioner of psychic medicine, for instance, cannot resolve the deep disagreement the Stranger is found to be in. He cannot, in any final way, answer the question whether human thought has direct, immediate access to originals or whether human thought proceeds through images which are other than their originals. What he can do is recognise that the Stranger's commitment to the art of psychic gymnastics or to wisdom is incompatible with the account the Stranger thinks he can

offer of psychic gymnastics and wisdom. The difference between the practitioner of psychic medicine and the Stranger is that the practitioner of psychic medicine knows that the Stranger is ignorant of that which he claims to know. The practitioner of psychic medicine knows that the above question cannot be answered and that, because it cannot be answered, the notion of psychic gymnastics is meaningless.

Of course, any clever Sophist should be able to see in the Stranger's account the incoherencies that the practitioner of psychic medicine sees. The Sophist, after all, is the "look-alike" of the practitioner of psychic medicine. Neither he nor the practitioner of psychic medicine is wise concerning those things of which they speak and both practice the art of contradiction. Both the Sophist and the practitioner of psychic medicine are interested in and capable of pointing out the incoherencies in the Stranger's account without having a better account of their own to offer. The Sophist would be interested in pointing out the incoherencies in the Stranger's account in order to advance his own reputation for wisdom. The practitioner of psychic medicine would be interested in uncovering the incoherencies in the Stranger's account, first, in order to understand the extent to which the Stranger is not in good, psychic health and, second, to understand the extent to which he himself might be able to accept the Stranger's account and remain psychically healthy. As I discussed above, by having his Socrates remain silent throughout the *Sophist*, Plato allows us to see that despite the fact that Socrates--the practitioner of psychic medicine--and the Sophist look alike, they are, in fact, quite different.

Socrates is like the Stranger in so far as he is committed to the quest for genuine wisdom. But he is unlike the Stranger and closer to the Sophist in so far as he has no positive doctrine of his own to offer others. The Stranger, in turn, looks like the Sophist in so far as he has been shown to be a producer of a false image of the Sophist. Resemblances, however, can be deceiving. It is only from the point of view of the questionable practice of psychic gymnastics that the Stranger, because of his failure to account for the Sophist, looks like the Sophist. The Stranger

is committed to the quest for genuine wisdom. From the point of view of psychic medicine, he is a philosopher, albeit a philosopher who mistakenly believes that he knows what he does not know.

I said that the Stranger's failure to provide a coherent account of the practice of psychic gymnastics constitutes a partial vindication of the Socratic practice of psychic medicine. It is the art of psychic medicine and not the Stranger's method which is capable of bringing to light the distinction between philosophy and Sophistry. If it is possible to show the superiority of philosophy to Sophistry, it is psychic medicine and not psychic gymnastics which is capable of showing this. The art of psychic medicine shows the Stranger's lack of health and the incoherencies upon which the notion of the practice of psychic gymnastics rests. But a full vindication of psychic medicine would require more. In particular, it would have to address the Stranger's concern that psychic medicine is psychologically and politically dangerous in so far as it is not capable of curing the psychic illnesses it brings to light. Psychic medicine would have to show itself as being more than capable of showing its superiority to Sophistry *in principle*. It would have to show itself as actually superior.

Socrates' silence in the *Sophist* helps to underscore the extent to which the Stranger has failed to offer a satisfactory definition of the Sophist. It underscores the extent to which an adequate understanding of the Sophist requires that one consider the ethical disposition of the Sophist. But, because Socrates is silent in the dialogue, the reader is not offered Socrates' answer to the Stranger's concern that psychic medicine is politically and psychologically dangerous if not complemented by psychic gymnastics. Nor is the reader offered a presentation of the way in which Socrates might show himself to be superior to the Sophist.

Socrates' silence, however, does offer a few hints as to how these two issues might be addressed. As I have discussed, Socrates' silence indicates the extent to which he is concerned with genuine wisdom and does not share the Sophist's primary concern with the reputation for wisdom. Socrates' concern for genuine wisdom leads him to be more moderate than the Sophist.

His silence indicates that he feels no pressing need to establish his own reputation for wisdom in the eyes of the Stranger or in the eyes of the assembled company. As a consequence, Theaetetus is allowed to accept the Stranger's account of the Sophist without having the incoherencies in that account revealed to him. Socrates' practice of psychic medicine allows him to understand and reveal the contradictory character of accounts offered by others without being able to offer a resolution of those contradictions himself. In the *Sophist*, however, he does not practice psychic medicine as the Stranger understands it. He allows Theaetetus to accept an unhealthy account of the Sophist. Perhaps this is because, as a practitioner of psychic medicine, Socrates has concluded that it is healthier for Theaetetus to accept the Stranger's account of the Sophist than to be exposed to its incoherencies. Whatever the reason, Socrates' silence demonstrates that he is not above leaving unhealthy individuals alone and that he has no pressing urge to reveal to them their illnesses for which he lacks a cure.<sup>3</sup> The Stranger's account of psychic medicine suggests

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<sup>3</sup>An understanding of the effectiveness of Socrates' allowing Theaetetus to accept the Stranger's account could be had by considering Socrates' medical treatment of Theaetetus in the *Theaetetus* and whether Theaetetus' acceptance of the Stranger's account is healthier for Theaetetus than if he had not been allowed to accept that account. Much of the *Theaetetus* is taken up with Theaetetus' interest in the Sophist, Protagoras, whose work he has read but whom he has not met. Theaetetus has come to believe the relativistic account of knowledge offered by Protagoras. He does not understand that that account undermines his own pursuit of mathematical knowledge. Socrates attempts to "cure" Theaetetus of his fascination with Protagoras' account by examining what Theaetetus thinks knowledge is. They explore a number of possibilities, *all* of which are shown to be inadequate. While Socrates gets Theaetetus to understand the problems with Protagoras' account, in the end, he leaves Theaetetus without any satisfactory account of what knowledge is. Has Socrates done Theaetetus a favour? On the one hand, he has shown Theaetetus that he did not know what he thought he knew about knowledge. On the other hand, he has left Theaetetus with no foundation for his pursuit of mathematical knowledge.

The Stranger does not proceed as Socrates does. He does not attempt to get Theaetetus to see what he knows and does not know. Instead, he employs a method which is modelled on Theaetetus' own to convince him that there are such things as accurate and inaccurate, discursive images or that knowledge can be distinguished from pseudo-knowledge. He also convinces Theaetetus that Sophists possess the latter. While Theaetetus' confidence in the Stranger's account is misplaced, his confidence in it will support his pursuit of mathematical knowledge and put an end to his fascination with the Sophists. Challenging Theaetetus' confidence in this account would be to do Theaetetus a favour only if Theaetetus is the kind of person who is capable of living in a state of constant perplexity. He is, however, not this kind of person. He is tractable and easily swayed by the opinions of others and, at the same time, craves the certainty that comes with

that the Stranger is concerned about the immoderate zeal of the practitioner of psychic medicine to reveal illnesses for which the practitioner of psychic medicine lacks a cure. Socrates' silence in the *Sophist* indicates that the practitioner of psychic medicine is not so immoderate. To the extent that he is aware that he has no cure to offer the person who is in deep disagreement with himself and, to the extent that revealing such a disagreement to someone may result in deeper, more serious disagreements, the practitioner of psychic medicine has good reason to be moderate in the exercise of his "art".

The Sophist, on the other hand, will not be so moderate. The Sophist is not constrained by either a concern for the psychic health of individuals or some doctrine to which he subscribes to exercise moderation when exposing the fact that people are in contradiction with themselves. In principle, the Sophist will have no qualms about offering an unlimited number of challenges to the opinions and commitments expressed by others. Any successful challenge he can mount to the opinions and commitments of others will better secure his own reputation for wisdom. To the extent that the Sophist does operate under some constraints, these will come from what challenges public opinion will or will not tolerate. The clever Sophist will be wary of directly challenging any opinions or commitments deeply held by individuals if doing so would make him appear unjust, impious or ignorant. In some ways, therefore, he will appear more conservative than the practitioner of psychic medicine. The practitioner of psychic medicine who is not primarily concerned about his reputation will not allow public opinion to stand in the way of purifying the soul of an individual who can benefit from such purification. Generally, however, the Sophist will be less constrained than the practitioner of psychic medicine. First, the Sophist is not particularly

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mathematical knowledge (see 261a-261c for an example of Theaetetus' despair at being unable to answer the Sophist and for the way the Stranger reassures him). Arguably, Socrates, a practitioner of the art of psychic medicine recognises that it will benefit Theaetetus if he is allowed to retain his confidence in the Stranger's account. Seth Benardete follows this issue throughout his commentaries on the trilogy in *The Being of the Beautiful*.



interested in the psychic health of the individuals with whom he converses. Second, while the Sophist will be somewhat constrained by public opinion, he has no great commitment to reinforcing it. If he can successfully challenge it, he will. It is the Sophist and not the philosopher who has the greater inclination to be immoderate in bringing individuals into contradiction with themselves.

While the Stranger's concern about the immoderate nature of psychic medicine can thus be partially addressed, the question still remains as to whether psychic medicine can be regarded as at all healthy if, indeed, psychic medicine cannot cure the disease it diagnoses. This is closely connected to the second question which the dialogue raises but does not answer, namely, whether the philosopher can, in fact, show himself to be superior to the Sophist. The philosopher can only show himself to be superior to the Sophist if he can show that the recognition of an incurable psychic disease constitutes human wisdom and that the quest for human wisdom is superior to the Sophist's quest for the reputation for wisdom. As I have noted, the fact that Socrates remains silent throughout the conversation of the *Sophist*, shows that these questions, while they are raised, are not addressed.

The way in which they might be addressed is, however, suggested by the dialogue. First, the characterization of the Sophist which emerges in the dialogue makes it quite clear that the debate concerning the superiority of philosophy over Sophistry cannot take the form of a debate between *positions*. Rather, it must take the form of a debate between *persons*.<sup>4</sup> The reason, in the case of the Sophist, is that he is not a Sophist by virtue of certain positions which he holds. The Sophist is characterised by an indifference to taking or developing any "positions" whatsoever. He may take or develop a position "for the sake of argument" in order to further his reputation for wisdom. He will not, however, take or develop a position because he believes the position he takes or develops to be genuinely beautiful or true.

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Griswold employs this distinction. See "Plato's Metaphilosophy" 19-20.

The reason the Sophist is not interested in taking or developing positions stems in large part from his indifference to the possibility that there may be genuine, serious questions which beg to be answered. The Sophist does ask questions. There is no limit to the questions which he may put to the philosopher or anyone else. But again, he asks his questions "for the sake of argument" in order to further his reputation for wisdom. He does not ask questions out of a genuine urge to have them answered. He will tend to ask questions which he suspects his interlocutors are unable to answer precisely in order to show their ignorance. The second reason, therefore, that the debate between philosophy and Sophistry must be between persons and not positions is that only by showing that, despite appearances, the Sophist does have a genuine, large question which troubles him, can the philosopher show that the Sophist really has a commitment to wisdom over and above his commitment to the reputation for wisdom.

The important thing about the genuine, often large question(s) which the philosopher will attempt to show that the Sophist, in fact, has, is that this question not be invented by the philosopher. Such a question must be the Sophist's own and the role of the philosopher is simply to get the Sophist to acknowledge it as his own. Getting the Sophist to acknowledge such a question is part and parcel of psychic medicine. Psychic medicine is premised upon the observation that human beings are divided within themselves such that, as the Stranger puts it, "... opinions are opposed to desires, anger to pleasures, reason (*logos*) to pleasures and all such things to one another" (228b). As a result, the accounts humans offer of themselves and things in general are contradictory (230b-d). The philosopher is not responsible for engendering such oppositions and contradictions in the souls of those with whom he converses. Rather, he is responsible for bringing such oppositions and contradictions to light. The result is that the person with whom the philosopher converses comes to realise that he does not know that which he thought he knew. Put differently, the result is that the person with whom the philosopher converses realises that that which he thought he knew is, in fact, questionable or that such a person has a

genuine question where before he thought he had an answer. To the extent that the philosopher can get the Sophist to acknowledge the existence and pressing nature of such a question, the philosopher will have confirmed his superiority over the Sophist who will have been shown not to know himself.

Clearly, there can be no final, complete, philosophical refutation of Sophistry. The philosopher can only demonstrate his superiority to the Sophist one Sophist at a time. The very nature of the discussion he must have in order to show his superiority must be *ad hominem*--directed to the Sophist's person for Sophistry is not a "position". Given the ethical disposition of the Sophist, such a discussion will be very difficult for reasons I have discussed above. It will be characterised by subterfuge and deception for the Sophist will not readily be inclined to engage in a genuine discussion with a philosopher if he suspects that it will hurt his reputation. And, he will identify the philosopher as a rival in the pursuit for the reputation for wisdom. The last thing a Sophist will look forward to is being shown to be ignorant. These difficulties should certainly be born in mind when approaching any of the Platonic dialogues in which Sophists appear. In them, the sub-text will be essential to interpreting the surface conversation.

## Responding to the Challenge

Read critically, the *Sophist* suggests that Sophistry represents a serious challenge to the philosopher on two, important fronts. First, Sophistry throws into question the goodness of the quest for genuine wisdom. Sophistry is not philosophy but is rather rooted in an indifference to the quest of the philosopher. The philosopher must regard this Sophistic indifference as a challenge for it is, at heart, anti-philosophical. For the philosopher, the Sophist suggests the possibility that psychic health may not depend upon coming to recognise the fundamental disagreements one has within oneself or upon knowing one's ignorance. The Sophist suggests that the quest for wisdom is something which need not concern one at all. In order for the philosopher to know, therefore, whether he is ignorant or wise concerning his own psychic health, he must satisfy himself that recognising the deep disagreements within oneself or knowing one's ignorance is indispensable to psychic health. He must demonstrate, in other words, that what the Sophist suggests one need not be concerned about is, in fact, of the utmost concern.

Second, Sophistry represents a serious challenge to philosophy in so far as it is capable of generating virtually limitless challenges to any assumption or hypothesis the philosopher may be inclined to adopt in the course of his quest for wisdom. The Sophist, because he is indifferent to all dogma--including ethical dogma--can be directly restrained by neither. There is, therefore, no limit to the challenges the Sophist may throw at even the most tentative of conclusions reached by the philosopher if the Sophist believes that those challenges will enhance his reputation for wisdom. Because such challenges are, in principle, without limit, the philosopher cannot anticipate them all but must address each one as he encounters it. Indeed, it is precisely because the Sophist is capable of generating such limitless challenges to assertions made by human beings

that the Sophist's indifference to the quest for genuine wisdom can appear more reasonable than the philosopher's dedication to it.

The appropriate response to these challenges is not moral condemnation. Only if the philosopher knew, with certainty, that his way of life was superior to that of the Sophist and only if he could meet every challenge offered by the Sophist, could the philosopher respond in such a fashion. But the philosopher is not wise. As a result, he must consider the challenges put by the Sophist as an invitation to test his own self-knowledge and the extent of his own ignorance. The Sophist's challenges to the philosopher are such that the philosopher cannot meet them by putting forward a positive doctrine which attempts to lay them to rest by laying out "how things really are". The philosopher can only attempt to address the Sophist as a whole person in an attempt to discover whether the Sophist himself is, in fact, dedicated to the role he plays and whether the Sophist himself is open to the challenges he places before others.

For Plato, Sophistry represents a most serious and perennial challenge to the philosopher to which the philosopher can only respond in an *ad hominem* manner. Faced with the Sophistic challenge concerning the goodness of the philosophical life, the philosopher, it seems, has only one option: to examine, along with the Sophist, the Sophist's own, primary dedication to the quest for the reputation for wisdom in order to determine whether the Sophist is, in fact, in agreement with himself concerning the strength of this dedication. Such an examination might, for instance, involve probing the extent to which the Sophist must admit that he really is someone who mirrors the opinions held by most people concerning virtue despite his conviction that he is somehow deserving of his reputation for wisdom.<sup>5</sup> To the extent that the Sophist could be troubled by such an admission, the philosopher would have demonstrated to himself and the Sophist that the Sophist is in need of the psychic medicine practised by the philosopher or that the quest for

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<sup>5</sup>The *Protagoras* is an examination of this sort.

genuine wisdom is superior to the quest for the reputation for wisdom. But the philosopher would only have demonstrated his superiority to *this* Sophist who is responsive to certain arguments and modes of inquiry where other Sophists may not be. Before Sophistry, the philosophic life can only be defended negatively and in an *ad hominem* manner. The superiority of philosophy over Sophistry is, for Plato, a strong hypothesis but not a matter of demonstrable certainty.

And, even if, in the course of conversing with a Sophist, the philosopher can satisfy himself that his way of life is good, he will have to consider seriously the kinds of questions the Sophist is capable of generating about many other matters. The upshot of these kinds of encounters between philosophers and Sophists may be that the philosopher arrives at various tentative conclusions or hypotheses not only about the superiority of philosophy over Sophistry but also about the way things are in general. Both the Stranger and Socrates, for example, are committed to the hypothesis that it is possible for things to appear as other than they are or for images to inaccurately represent their originals.<sup>6</sup> As the Stranger notes, however, such an hypothesis rests upon the paradoxical notion that non-being somehow *is* (236e-240c). Indeed, this paradoxical notion is what underlies the assumption that false speech is possible (241a-b). The Stranger also notes that it is the Sophist who will point out most forcefully the paradoxes involved in maintaining that non-being in some sense *is* and, it is because the Stranger takes this challenge of the Sophist most seriously, that he spends a great deal of the dialogue trying to address it. Towards the end of his attempt to address the Sophist's challenge, the Stranger explains to Theaetetus just what is at stake if the challenge cannot be met.

Stranger: For certainly, my good man, the attempt to separate everything from everything is nothing other than to be out of tune and in every way unmusical and unphilosophical.

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<sup>6</sup>Socrates makes this clear at the beginning of the dialogue when he maintains that philosophers can appear as statesmen, Sophists and madmen. The Stranger maintains this hypothesis throughout his conversation with Theaetetus.

Theaetetus: Why so?

Stranger: The separation of each thing from all things is the completely final obliteration of all speech (*logos*), for the possibility of our speech comes from the intermingling of the ideas [greatest kinds] with each other. . . . [The point of our argument] was to show that speech is one of the kinds of beings. For if we were deprived of this, we would be deprived of philosophy, which would be the greatest deprivation. Still, for the present, we must come to an agreement about what [speech] is. But if we were robbed of it by its in every way not being, then we would no longer be able to speak . . . . (259e-260a)

The Stranger fails in his attempt to offer a complete account of the ontological conditions which make false speech possible. He does not fail, however, in outlining many of the things which the possibility of speech seems to entail although he and Theaetetus have not offered (and will not offer) a complete account of what speech is. The Stranger suggests that our ability to speak entails that the ideas or kinds re-presented in speech, including the paradoxical kind of "non-being", not only *are* but must have the capacity to intermingle, and that the relations in which they intermingle can be captured in speech. To suppose otherwise, the Stranger suggests, is to deprive oneself of a justification for speech. To suppose otherwise should lead one to silence.

The Stranger notes that without speech, we would be deprived of philosophy. What he suggests is that speech is necessary for philosophy and speech depends upon the intermingling of the "kinds" or "ideas". It is not, therefore, that the hypothesis of the intermingling of the "kinds" or "ideas" is needed to justify philosophy but that it is needed to explain the possibility of human speech. Philosophy, according to the Stranger, is not justified unless speech is possible and is of a certain nature.

As I have noted, the Stranger does not offer a complete account of what human speech is. I have also noted that his account of false speech as the intermingling of speech with non-being understood as *otherness* is deficient. The Stranger's failure suggests that a complete account of speech is not possible. However, his examination of the implications of the Sophistic challenge to the possibility of false speech are suggestive. He suggests that the denial of certain hypotheses

(for instance, that human speech requires the intermingling of ideas) is such as to rid speech of its justification and to lead one to silence.<sup>7</sup> The philosopher, in his attempt to meet the challenges put forward by the Sophist, may find himself led to accept certain hypotheses not so much to justify directly his own activity of philosophy but in order to make sense of the fact of human speech upon which philosophy, and not only philosophy, depends. The philosopher may be able to put forward various positive hypotheses about speech and things in general to the extent that the denial of such hypotheses leads to silence. That the philosopher can confidently advance beyond the formulation of such hypotheses to the satisfactory enunciation of complete, positive doctrines, however, is doubtful. There is no limit to what the Sophist may find questionable.<sup>8</sup>

For the philosopher, embarked upon a genuine quest for wisdom and self-knowledge, the Sophist poses two distinguishable challenges, both of which are very useful. On the one hand, the Sophist's anti-philosophical indifference to the quest for genuine wisdom has the potential to push the philosopher further in his own quest to understand himself. On the other hand, the Sophist's dedication to the pursuit of the reputation for wisdom leads the Sophist to pose limitless questions concerning the way things are. When taken seriously by the philosopher, these questions have the potential to push the philosopher to refine his hypothetical understanding of himself and the world. It may be that the Sophist is ethically inferior to the philosopher but the Sophist, nonetheless, stands as a guard against any possible self-complacency on the part of the philosopher.

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<sup>7</sup>While not concerned with an examination of the hypothesis of "the ideas", the *Euthydemus* affords a humorous example of Socrates' attempt to show two Sophists how their denial of the possibility of false speech leads to silence. See 286a-288a, 303e.

<sup>8</sup>To cite the *Euthydemus* again as an example, it is rich in Sophistic parodies and attacks on various hypotheses advanced in other Platonic dialogues. Plato was himself well aware of the limits of many of the hypotheses put forward in many of his writings.



Both the Sophist and the philosopher, however, have the capacity to be politically destructive. To the general public, philosophers and Sophists are indistinguishable. The kinds of challenges generated by the Sophist and taken seriously by the philosopher can be destructive of the ties which bind political communities together or which restrain individuals in their conduct towards one another. To the extent that Sophists exercise restraint in their challenges to public opinion, they do so only to protect their reputations. The political restraint of philosophers comes from at least two sources: their knowledge that they are not wise and hence not in a position confidently to replace the opinions held by the public;<sup>9</sup> and their concern for the good psychic health of their fellow humans. For Plato, as concerned as the philosopher is about the psychic health of human beings, he cannot be committed to grand, political reforms because he is not wise and knows that he is not wise. This recognition will also limit the degree of questioning he will engage in with individuals who, in the course of questioning, show themselves to be not philosophically inclined. It will also limit the degree of questioning the philosopher will engage in in public. The *Sophist* is itself a good example of this. On the one hand, it offers a politically salutary teaching to those who read uncritically. That teaching casts aspersion upon those individuals who are not wise but who dedicate themselves to questioning public opinion in order to secure a reputation for wisdom. On the other hand, read carefully as a dialogue, the *Sophist* invites one to consider seriously the importance of serious questioning for one's own psychic health.

For Plato, the Sophist can best be described as an anti-philosophical intellectual primarily dedicated to the pursuit of the reputation for wisdom. The Sophist is easily mistaken for the philosopher. The difference between them is not discerned by examining their words so much as

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<sup>9</sup>This statement is not contradicted by the kind of discussion Socrates carries on in the *Republic*. The city described there is not obviously put forward as a practical alternative to any existing city.

their deeds and how their deeds reveal their different ethical intentions. The Sophist will always speak to defend his reputation where the philosopher will, on occasion, remain silent. The Sophist poses a grave challenge to the pursuit of the philosopher, a challenge which Plato both understands and portrays in many of his dialogues. I have focused my attention on what might be learned about the Sophist from one dialogue alone. That dialogue, the *Sophist*, if read critically as a dialogue, reveals the extent of the challenge posed by the Sophist--a challenge which, for the philosopher, remains as personal as it is perennial. Plato's way of addressing this challenge is not the Stranger's. Indeed, the *Sophist*, among other things, is Plato's best illustration of why a dogmatic response to Sophistry based upon a geometric method of reasoning cannot furnish a convincing response to Sophistry. Plato's way of addressing the challenge of Sophistry is the dialogue. It is a written image of the words and deeds of the philosopher which invites one to participate in the philosopher's living words and deeds. Part of what it means to be a philosopher is to take up the challenge of Sophistry in a serious way. That requires understanding the extent to which the Sophist represents the demand that the philosopher justify his activity to himself as both possible and good. A serious understanding of the challenge of the Sophist, however, also shows why the demand of the Sophist cannot be met in any complete or final way. That does not mean that the philosopher must bow before the Sophist and give up philosophy. Plato does not present the noble discourse or psychic medicine espoused by Socrates as theories to be embraced as an answer to the challenge of the Sophist. Rather, he presents them as the highest philosophical practice which, if practised with the living persons who are Sophists, holds out the promise that philosophy can be vindicated. The "proof" however, is in the practice. The Platonic dialogue invites one to the practice and reflection upon the practice of noble discourse and psychic medicine.

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