

Table of contents

Introduction	1
Part I: Socrates and sophistry in the eyes of Socrates	7
Chapter one: The double-introduction to the <i>Theaetetus</i>	7
§1. <i>The conversation between Euclides and Terpsion (142a-143c8)</i>	7
§2. <i>Socrates' question (143d1-146c3)</i>	9
§3. <i>Theaetetus' first answer (146c4-148e10)</i>	13
§4. <i>The craft of the midwife (149a1-151d6)</i>	15
Chapter two: Theaetetus' second answer and Protagoras' defence speech	19
§5. <i>Knowledge is perception (151e-157c3)</i>	20
The measure-doctrine	21
The flux-doctrine	22
§6. <i>Emerging problems (157c4-165e5)</i>	24
§7. <i>Protagoras' defence speech (165e6-168c7)</i>	27
Chapter three: The refutation of Protagoras and the flux-doctrine	31
§8. <i>The logical refutation of Protagoras (168c8-172c2)</i>	32
§9. <i>The appearance of philosophy (172c3-177c5)</i>	35
§10. <i>The pragmatic refutation of Protagoras (177c6-179d1)</i>	38
§11. <i>The dismissal of the flux-ontology (179d2-184b2)</i>	40
Chapter four: the soul of Theaetetus	44
§12. <i>Socrates' renewed discussion with Theaetetus</i>	44
§13. <i>The activity of the soul and the notion of perception (184b3-186e12)</i>	45
1) The soul is what perceives through the sense-organs...	45
2) ...and certain common forms are reached by the soul itself, through itself...	46
3) ... and the way the soul reaches these is different from the way in which it perceives.	48
Chapter five: True opinions and the act of opining	53
§14. <i>Theaetetus' new definition</i>	56
§15. <i>The first three attempts to explain false opinions (187e5-190e4)</i>	58
Chapter six: Wax, pigeons and jurors	64
§16. <i>Of memory and perception (191a8-196c9)</i>	64
§17. <i>The shamelessness of Socrates (196d1-197a6)</i>	68
§18. <i>The pigeon coop (197a7-200d4)</i>	69
§19. <i>The jury (200d5-201c6)</i>	72
Chapter seven: How to account for accounts	76
§20. <i>Socrates' dream (201e1-202e2)</i>	77
§21. <i>Of parts and wholes (202e3-206b12)</i>	79
§22. <i>The logos of logos (206c1-210b3)</i>	82
§23. <i>Ignorance and wisdom (210b4-d4)</i>	86

Part II: Socrates and sophistry in the eyes of the stranger	88
Chapter one: The opening scene of the <i>Sophist</i>	88
§1. <i>The guiding question of the Sophist (216a1-217b4)</i>	88
§2. <i>The way of settling Socrates' problem (217b5-219a4)</i>	92
§3. <i>The traditional understanding of the method of divisions and its problems</i>	93
§4. <i>To move from a common name to a shared understanding through logos</i>	96
Chapter two: The angler and the first definitions of the sophist	98
§5. <i>The angler (219a4-221c5)</i>	99
§6. <i>Sophistry and expertise (221c6-d7)</i>	102
§7. <i>The first five definitions of the sophist (221d8-226a5)</i>	103
Chapter three: The sophist of noble lineage	109
§8. <i>The change of paradeigma (226a6-226d11)</i>	109
§9. <i>The normative stance of the stranger's way of inquiry (226e1-227c9)</i>	111
§10. <i>The stranger on psychē, excellence and vice (227c10-229a11)</i>	113
§11. <i>Elenchus as education (229b1-230e5)</i>	115
§12. <i>The refutation of Theaetetus' understanding of sophistry (230e6-232a)</i>	119
Chapter four: logos and mimesis	123
§13. <i>Why the art of debating in particular reveals the art of sophistry (232b1-b10)</i>	123
§14. <i>The sophist as a producer of opinions (232b11-233d2)</i>	124
§15. <i>Logos and the problem of imitation (233d3-237a2)</i>	126
Part III: An Eleatic defence of Socratic philosophy	133
Chapter one: Non-being and images	135
§1. <i>The problem of non-being 237a3-239c8</i>	136
§2. <i>Images, non-being and false speech (239c9-241c1)</i>	139
§3. <i>The stranger's change of attitude (241c2-242b5)</i>	142
Chapter two: The cross-examination of earlier thinkers	143
§4. <i>Questioning the notion of being (242b6-243d6)</i>	143
§5. <i>Questioning the first physiologoi (243d6-244b5)</i>	146
§6. <i>Parmenides and the one being (244b6-245e5)</i>	147
Chapter three: the <i>gigantomachia</i>	153
§7. <i>A dispute about being (246a8-e1)</i>	153
§8. <i>The somatists (246e5-248a3)</i>	156
§9. <i>The dynamis-proposal and the friends of Forms (248a4-248c9)</i>	159
§10. <i>The refutation of the friends (248c11-249d5)</i>	162

Chapter four: the problem of being and the power of dialectic	167
§11. <i>The new problem of being, the late learners and the mixing of beings (250c9-252e7)</i>	167
§12. <i>Dialectic and sophistry</i>	172
Chapter five: The dialectic of the great kinds and the clarification of non-being	177
§13. <i>Ontological letters (254d4-255e7)</i>	177
§14. <i>The combination of the Forms (255e8-257a12)</i>	180
§15. <i>Contrariety and otherness (257b1-259d8)</i>	183
Chapter 6: Nonbeing in thought and speech	188
§16. <i>Falsehood in speech and opinion, the possibility of deception, and the notion of logos</i>	189
§17. <i>Logos as statement: naming and speaking (261d1-262e3)</i>	191
§18. <i>False statements and the nature of dianoia, doxa and phantasia (262e4-264b10)</i>	196
Chapter 7: Imitation, sophistic and philosophic	202
Abstract	210
Resumé	211
Bibliography	212

Introduction

This study presents a full-length interpretation of two Platonic dialogues, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. The reading pursues a dramatic *motif* which I believe runs through these dialogues, namely the confrontation of Socratic philosophy, as it is understood by Plato, with the practise of sophistry. I shall argue that a major point for Plato in these two dialogues is to examine and defend his own Socratic or dialectical understanding of philosophy against the sophistic claim that false opinions and statements are impossible, a claim which undermines the point of Socratic conversation. As this claim in Plato's view rests on a certain understanding of Heraclitus and Parmenides, the confrontation with the sophists implies a confrontation with these two Presocratics as well. This defence of dialectical philosophy takes place, dramatically, at the crucial time when Socrates is publically accused of impiety and of corrupting the youth of Athens, the *Theaetetus* right before he first faces the accusation, the *Sophist* on the following day. I shall argue that this fact is important in understanding the argument of the two dialogues.¹

There is a longstanding tradition of reading the *Theaetetus* together with the *Sophist*. Indeed, in the 20th century, these two dialogues and the question how they are connected have stood at the centre of many philosophers' readings of Plato. Both J. Stenzel's groundbreaking work on the development of Plato's notion of dialectic and F. M. Cornford's classical commentary on the two dialogues helped cement their reputation as key in for understanding the later Plato's conception of philosophy.²

The texts have accordingly been subject of intense debate, perhaps nowhere as intensely as in the Anglo-American Plato-scholarship initiated by the arrival of analytic philosophy. For many scholars of the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, together with the *Parmenides*, became crucial in understanding the alleged development of the later Plato. Consequently, a large number of insightful and refined analyses of these dialogues have appeared in the last five decades, focusing especially on the discussion of false opinions and statements, on the question how *doxa* relates to *epistēmē*, and, finally, on the question what ontological status Plato assigns to the Forms, if any. In short, the majority of these works have focused on what may loosely be called epistemological and ontological questions.

¹ The importance of the trial-motif for our understanding of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* is pointed out by Sallis (1996), Miller (2004), Rosen (1983), Cropsey (1995), and Howland (1998). Additional studies that focus on the confrontation between Socratic philosophy and sophistry in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* include Rehn (1982), Gadamer (1982) and (1990), and McCabe (2000).

² Stenzel (1931), Cornford (1935). The tradition of reading the dialogues together is much older, apparently as old as the Platonic tradition itself, Cf. Sedley (1996), 89-90.

This intense discussion has no doubt advanced our understanding of many difficult passages in the dialogues. I believe, however, that focusing on a limited number of themes or questions comes at a price, since there are many aspects of these two dialogues that cannot be reduced to epistemological or ontological questions. The dominant picture of the dialogues is therefore rather one-sided,³ and the main purpose of my interpretation is to give a complementary reading. By interpreting both of them in their entirety, and by focusing, perhaps unusually, on the figure of Socrates and the confrontation with sophistry, I wish to highlight themes and questions I have not found addressed in the majority of works on the dialogues, in particular ethical and political themes. I hope to show that the epistemological and ontological questions discussed in the abovementioned literature are intimately connected with these themes, in particular those pertaining to education, the caretaking of the soul, expertise in political affairs and human happiness.

*

Since this is a full-length interpretation, most of the guiding assumptions are relatively straightforward. I shall assume, as most readers do, that the best way to read Platonic dialogues is to read them in their entirety (but not that this is necessarily the best way to write about them), and that one should pay attention to literary or dramatic as well as to argumentative features in order to fully appreciate the overall argument.

I shall furthermore assume that Platonic dialogues are not just collections of arguments for various philosophical views or doctrines, but are depictions of trains of thoughts, carried out by multiple interlocutors. In the *Theaetetus* (189e4-190a7, cf. also *Sph.* 263e3-5), Socrates describes the activity of discursive reasoning (*dianoesthai*) as a conversation which the soul carries out with itself, in silence, about what it investigates, where it asks itself questions and answers them, and I assume that a Platonic dialogue can, to a certain extent, be regarded as depicting such a “dialogue”.⁴ This means that it is the unfolding of a string of questions and answers which (sometimes) moves towards a gradually better understanding of what is being investigated,⁵ and this in turn means that

³ Already Friedländer (III), 139 complained about this; his complaint, however, was not directed against analytically inspired interpreters, but against the Neo-Kantians and, in particular, against J. Stenzel.

⁴ I say “to a certain extent” since one must not forget that Platonic dialogues are not “pure” dialectical investigations, in the sense Hegel understands this (cf. Hegel (1998), 26), but are carried out as conversations between different interlocutors that do not necessarily agree on what is being investigated. For a discussion of the relation and difference between Hegelian and Platonic dialectic, cf. Bubner (1992), 37-65 and Roochnik (2003), 147 ff.

⁵ In a similar manner D. Sedley has suggested that Plato’s dialogues should be regarded as Plato “thinking aloud”, and that his continued use of the dialogue form in the allegedly later dialogues reflects his belief that “conversation, in the

to evaluate an argument, one needs to consider where in the dialogue it is found. What at one point is said to be correct may turn out to be wrong at a later point in the dialogue.

Perhaps slightly more controversially, I shall take for granted that the now traditional ordering of dialogues into early, mature, and late at best has value as a classificatory principle for the distinction between different types of dialogues, and that speculation about Plato's development based on this ordering as well as apparent doctrinal differences between dialogues, is not well founded. As has been argued convincingly by a number of scholars, the chronology of the Platonic dialogues is far less certain than is often taken for granted, and doctrinal differences between dialogues may rather be the result of the dramatic peculiarities of a given dialogue than the result of any change in Plato's point of view.⁶ In particular, I do not share the conviction of some scholars that there is a specific set of Platonic dialogues which reflect – more or less accurately – the views of a historical Socrates. Consequently, all references to “Socrates” in this study are to the fictional character depicted by Plato.⁷

I shall finally assume that one can draw on other dialogues to gain a better understanding of the dialogue one interprets. This does not mean that I assume that difficulties encountered in a particular dialogue are to be explained away by referring to other dialogues,⁸ merely that I do not believe that one needs to read each dialogue in isolation. In particular, the assumption that the “Socratic” dialogues represent Platonic thinking just as much as the allegedly late dialogues, and that one can draw on them when reading the latter, will have an impact on my reading of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

*

I shall read the two dialogues in the order of the dramatic chronology, first the *Theaetetus*, then the *Sophist*. This has advantages, and also some disadvantages. The main disadvantage is that I will not be able to treat related discussions found in the two dialogues in a comparative, systematic manner. The main advantage is that I will be able to follow the particular development of the argument in each dialogue. This has the further advantage of making it harder to suppose that the *Sophist*

form of question and answer, is the structure of thought itself”, Sedley (2003), 1. A similar view is expressed by Stenzel (1931), 47, who draws on Hegel.

⁶ For criticism of chronological assumptions as guides for reading Plato, cf. Wieland (1982), 83-94, Thesleff (1982), Howland (1991), Nails (2000), cf. also Cooper (1997) xii-xviii.

⁷ For criticism of the notion of “Socratic” dialogues, cf. Kahn (1981) and (1996).

⁸ Though I think that one often can gain a better understanding of difficult passages in one dialogue if one compares them with other dialogues dealing with related problems.

contains all the answers to the problems raised in the *Theaetetus*, as some scholars have tended to assume.

The study falls into three main parts:

- I: Philosophy and sophistry in the eyes of Socrates
- II: Philosophy and sophistry in the eyes of the stranger
- III: An Eleatic defence of Socratic philosophy

The first part interprets the *Theaetetus*, the second part the “outer” part of the *Sophist* (216a-237a, excluding the passage 264b-268d), and the third part the “middle” and last part of the *sophist* (237a-264b, including the passage 264b-268d).

In the first part I will argue that the main point of the *Theaetetus* is Socrates’ prolonged attempt to refute Protagoras’ claim that man is the measure of the things that are, which at the same time is an attempt to show how philosophy differs from sophistry. I shall argue that Socrates’ main attack on Protagoras’ dictum that “man is the measure” is political in character. What Socrates finds most problematic is Protagoras’ notion that there are no objective standards for excellence (*aretē*) for *polis* or individual, and that sophistic education (*paideia*) is analogous to the treatment of a doctor, where the sophist uses speeches (*logoi*) to change the condition of the soul of his “patients” to a better, or more *profitable*, rather than a *true* condition. It is in the attempt to refute these claims, and in particular the underlying conviction that it is impossible to have false opinions, that Socrates attempts to dismantle the ontological foundation on which he claims it rests, presented as the teaching of Heraclitus. In doing so, he indirectly points to his own activity as a philosopher, highlighting how he believes philosophy, understood as dialogical inquiry, differs from sophistic argumentation. In the centre of the dialogue, I shall argue, Socrates attempts to show how both being (*ousia*) and the beneficial (*ōpheleia*) are matters or entities the soul reaches or grasps precisely through such dialogical or dialectical inquiry. I shall argue that the rest of the dialogue is an attempt to make Theaetetus understand what this activity, where the soul “occupies itself with the things that are”, is. A main point of this discussion, I believe, is to point out how the assumption that knowledge can be reduced to true opinions makes it impossible to account for both true and false opinions. In order to account for this crucial difference, on which Socratic dialectic depends, one has to differentiate between opinion and knowledge. I shall further argue that this part of the dialogue has much closer connections with the discussion of Protagoras found in the first part than is often assumed.

Socrates recedes from the discussion in the *Sophist* and an enigmatic stranger from Elea, a friend of the circle around Parmenides and Zeno, steps in as the main interlocutor. In the course of this discussion, the primary goal of which is to define sophistry in order to distinguish it from philosophy, the stranger apparently comes to identify Socrates as a sophist. This is significant, not only in light of Socrates' attempt to distinguish himself from sophistry in the *Theaetetus*, but also because a major point of the public accusation against Socrates is that he is a sophist. In the second part of the study I will examine in detail why this happens and also the dramatic effect it has in the discussion in the dialogue. I shall further argue that the search for the sophist, which is found in this part of the dialogue, gradually develops a number of ethical and political themes in connection with questions pertaining to the caretaking of the soul, the correct use of *logos* and ontology. I shall argue that these themes, often overlooked in the literature on the *Sophist*, are important for understanding the full significance of the arguments found in the middle of the dialogue.

In the last part of the study, the middle part of the *Sophist* is interpreted in detail. I will argue that the visitor, in attacking his own Eleatic tradition, is indirectly defending the Socratic understanding of philosophy. The discussion of how knowledge and opinions are related, which dominates the last half of the *Theaetetus*, is picked up by the stranger when he turns to investigate the Eleatic conception of being in the complex middle part of the *Sophist*. By doing so, he throws further light on how *logos* and discursive reasoning (*dianoia*) are related to opinion and appearance, notions which played a prominent part in the discussion of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. In addition, I shall argue that the middle part of the *Sophist*, contrary to what is often assumed, contains normative considerations, especially considerations on what excellence is and how it relates to our understanding of philosophy and sophistry. Finally, the stranger's attempt to understand sophistry as a kind of image-making (cf. 234c ff.) is brought to bear on his famous clarification that *logos* is always a *logos tinos*, i.e. that speech is always a speech *about* something (261-63), as well as on his ultimate attempt to define the sophist as an imitator of justice and excellence in general (267b ff.). I will argue that it is of great importance that the stranger's final analysis of sophistry does not culminate in his clarification of false statements, as is often claimed, but rather in a consideration of how imitation of justice with knowledge differs from imitation of it without knowledge.

*

It is a challenge in any interpretation of a text to sum up the treatment of a number of themes in a general conclusion. The problem gets aggravated, I think, when the texts in question are Platonic dialogues, since these are dramatic depictions of dialectical reasoning rather than mere presentations of philosophical arguments for doctrines. The present interpretation seeks to follow the complicated structure of the dialogues, its arguments and reversals, failed definitions and attempts at reformulations, in the belief that this structure captures the soul of what philosophical reasoning is, according to Plato. To try to distil this into a conclusion would go against my understanding of Plato.

As both dialogues reach some kind of conclusion, and as my interpretation attempts to sum up some of the main themes I have treated in the course of my interpretation, chapter 7 of part I and chapters 6 and 7 of part III may be regarded as a substitute for a conclusion. Apart from this, the interpretation of the dialogues speaks for itself.

*

Quotations from the *Theaetetus* are from J. Sachs' translation (Focus publishing, 2004), quotations from the *Sophist* are from S. Benardete's translation (The University of Chicago Press, 1986). I have sometimes modifies the translations slightly. Other translations consulted are listed in the bibliography. The Greek text used is the Oxford Classical Text (OCT) vol. I ed. Duke, Hicken, Nicoll, Robinson and Stracham (1995), and OCT, vol. II-V ed. Burnet.

Part I: Socrates and sophistry in the eyes of Socrates

Polymathiē noon echein ou didaskei

- Heraclitus

Chapter one: The double-introduction to the *Theaetetus*

The *Theaetetus* looks like the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Parmenides* in that its main conversation, a dialogue between Socrates and the two mathematicians Theodorus and Theaetetus, is not a direct drama, but rather a recounted dialogue, and because the one who recounts it is not Socrates. Like all the abovementioned dialogues, it is a dialogue devoted to the memory of Socrates. In contrast to the other three dialogues, however, this dialogue is not recalled from memory but rather read out aloud; for the conversation has been written down by Euclides, who has his slave read it to him and Terpsion. Before we reach the opening scene of the dialogue proper, a short introduction tells us how the recording of the dialogue came to happen. Attention to this introduction, as well as to the opening scene of the dialogue, reveals a number of motifs relevant for understanding the full scope of the main question of the *Theaetetus*: what is *epistēmē*?

§1. The conversation between Euclides and Terpsion (142a-143c8)

The *Theaetetus* begins when Euclides meets Terpsion at the *agora*. The year is most probably 391, i.e. 8 years after Socrates died.¹ As we know from the *Phaedo*, both Euclides and Terpsion were present at the death of Socrates (cf. *Phd.* 59c).² This opening scene, framing the dialogue proper of the *Theaetetus*, serves a number of purposes.³ First of all, it serves to introduce the two main interlocutors of the dialogue, Theaetetus and Socrates. We are told that Theaetetus, whom Euclides has just left at Erineum, has been wounded in the battle at Corinth and is dying from dysentery. According to Euclides and Terpsion, he is a real gentleman (*kalos te kai agathos*; 142b6), a fact they see confirmed by his brave conduct in the battle. The chance meeting with Theaetetus in turn leads Euclides to recall Socrates

¹ Cf. Nails (2002), 275-277 for a convincing argument why this date, and not the now traditional dating of 369, must be correct.

² Euclides is an historical character who was part of the Socratic circle; a number of Socratic dialogues have been attributed to him. According to Diogenes Laertius (2.106), Plato and other Socratics sought refuge in Megara with Euclides after Socrates had been executed. We know nothing about Terpsion except what we are told in the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedo*. Cf. Nails (2002), 144-145, 274.

³ Cf. in particular Howland (1998), 39-51, see also Friedländer (III), 131-133, Benardete (1986), 85-88 and Tschemplik (2008), 16-23.

and “how prophetically he spoke, both about other things and particularly about” this man (142c5). Socrates, we learn, met Theaetetus shortly before his own death, and in fact, as we learn at the very end of the dialogue (210d2-4), just before facing the indictment brought against him by Meletus for corrupting the youth of Athens. The short introduction thus also serves to set the dramatic date of the conversation between Socrates, Theaetetus, and Theodorus.

Socrates, Eucleides recalls, found great delight in his conversation with Theaetetus and predicted that he would become a great man, should he live to reach his prime (142c7-d3). This prediction, as well as Eucleides’ and Terpsion’s agreement that Theaetetus is a gentleman, gain in importance once we turn from the framing dialogue between Terpsion and Eucleides to the dialogue proper. So does the fact that Socrates is about to be accused of corrupting the youth of Athens.

The opening scene also serves to portray Eucleides and Terpsion themselves. Like Apollodorus of the *Symposium* (173b), Eucleides and Terpsion are depicted as followers of Socrates who delight in recalling his speeches (142d4-143a9). But whereas Apollodorus heard about the speeches in the *Symposium* from a third party, namely Aristodemus, Eucleides has heard about the conversation from Socrates himself. In fact, having heard Socrates’ account, he wrote down the entire conversation and revisited Socrates many times in prison in order to be sure that he got all the facts right (142d6-143a5). Nevertheless, this has not enabled him to learn the conversation by heart. It is perhaps not surprising that Eucleides was not able to memorize it the first time he heard it, given the complexity of the argument. But even after having gone through the conversation many times with Socrates (who *is* able to recall all of it) and having written it down, he is still not able to recall it (142d6). He seems to have become the victim of writing that Socrates warns against in the *Phaedrus* (274e-278b), confusing his written reminders (*hypomnemata*; *Tht.*143a1, compare with *Phdr.* 274a and 249c) with the real dialogue.⁴ This is not unimportant. The question of how memory and knowledge is related becomes a main issue in the dialogue proper. Moreover, Eucleides’ eagerness to get the story right, without this leaving him with a vivid memory of the conversation, seems to suggest that he is more interested in acquiring or “getting hold of” arguments than in engaging in real philosophical conversation. This foreshadows a theme that runs through both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

⁴ One may contrast Eucleides’ memory with Apollodorus’ in the *Symposium*, Phaedo’s in the *Phaedo*, and, most importantly, Antiphon’s and Cephalus’ in the *Parmenides*, who were able to learn the entire dialectical investigation found in that dialogue by heart.

A final point about the opening scene is worth noting. Eucleides is identified, in Diogenes Laertius (2.106-12), as the founder of the Megarian school of Socratics who, according to Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1046b29-47a7), denied that there is *dynamis*, i.e. that anything has potentiality or power “to become what it is not yet”.⁵ Whether Plato expected the reader to think of this or not, the notion of *dynamis* comes to play a central role in the *Theaetetus*⁶ as well as in the *Sophist*. Accidentally or not, the views attributed to the Megarians by Aristotle closely resemble views that both Socrates and the Eleatic stranger, the main interlocutor in the *Sophist*, connect with sophistry. The notion that everything is either fully real or nothing at all will prove to be a major motif in the dialogues, which will be elaborated in a number of variations.

§2. Socrates' question (143d1-146c3)

As is the case in most Platonic dialogues, the philosophical question which dominates the *Theaetetus* springs from a concrete situation, in this case Theodorus' praise of his young pupil Theaetetus for some remarkable character traits. The main dialogue of the *Theaetetus* begins, as does the *Charmides*, with Socrates asking whether any of the young Athenians show any particular talent for philosophy (143d1-6; *Chrm.* 153d2-5),⁷ and it is in response to this question that Theodorus delivers his praise of Theaetetus.⁸

Theodorus praises Theaetetus for being “wonderfully well off by nature”, since he is “quick at learning” but at the same time “surpassingly gentle, and on top of these things manly (*andreion*) beyond anyone” (144a3-5). It is this combination of character traits that impresses Theodorus so much. This looks like a parallel to the *Republic*, where Socrates claims that the combination of manliness and gentleness is most difficult to attain,⁹ since spiritedness and manliness often rule out modesty and gentleness, and where Socrates states that this combination is a requirement for anyone who is to be taught dialectic (485b-486d, 503c-d, 535a-c).¹⁰ Theodorus goes on to counterbalance his praise by assuring that Theaetetus is not physically attractive, but as ugly as Socrates, with bulging eyes and a snub nose (*Tht.* 143e8-9).

The latter remark makes Socrates suggest to Theaetetus that he wishes to examine him, in order to get the opportunity to take a closer look at himself to “see what sort of face I

⁵ Cf. Howland (1998), 41, Benardete (1986), I.86-87, Tschemplik (2008), 18 ff.

⁶ Cf. Sachs (2004), 7.

⁷ For a discussion of parallels between the *Charmides*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Lysis*, cf. Steiner (1992), 27-48.

⁸ Friedländer (III), 133, Sachs (2004), p. 2.

⁹ This problem becomes a major issue in the *Statesman*.

¹⁰ Cf. Campbell, (1861), 8, Friedländer (III), 134, Blondell (2002), 256.

have” (144d8-9). As he explains in the *Statesman*, Theaetetus and his friend, Socrates the younger, seem to have a certain kinship with him and he is “eager to gain an acquaintance with” such “kinsmen through speeches” (*Plt.* 257d2-258a3). Socrates, we may suggest, is not so much interested in examining whether Theaetetus resembles him in outer appearance as he is in finding out whether he resembles him in the soul.¹¹ And it is this interest in examining the soul of Theaetetus that leads to the central question of the dialogue: what is knowledge? It is worthwhile to pay close attention to how this question is raised as a result of Theodorus’ praise.

Since Theodorus has no expertise as regards the art of painting, Socrates suggests that his evaluation of the physical ugliness of Theaetetus and Socrates is not worth very much (144e8-145a5, 145a11-13). But is he not, Socrates wonders, an expert on the different mathematical sciences (geometry, astronomy, calculation, and music) “and as many things as have a bearing on education (*hosa paideias echesthai*; 145a6-9)?” This is certainly the opinion of Theaetetus. But if this is so, Theodorus’ praise carries special weight. In fact, his praise of Theaetetus as regards excellence and wisdom (*aretē kai sophia*) should, Socrates suggests, make Theaetetus eager to display himself, and Socrates eager to examine him (145b1-4).

Thus, in the short passage 144e1-145b5 two important themes or questions emerge. The first is the question whether the opinion of an expert carries more weight than the opinion of a layman. This problem becomes important in the subsequent discussion of Protagorean relativity (cf. 177c ff.). The second is the theme of how excellence, education and wisdom are related. Is the aged mathematician really an expert on education, as Theaetetus believes, and thus on the evaluation of souls, as Socrates suggest?

The latter theme connects with a feature which the opening scene of the *Theaetetus* shares with a number of the so-called early Socratic dialogues: one of the interlocutors is either likely to possess, claims to possess, or is reported to possess, a certain excellence, and Socrates then wants to examine whether this is true.¹² In light of Theodorus’ praise, it would seem that it is the excellence of philosophical wisdom that is to be the main theme of the dialogue. However, it is not only Theodorus who praises Theaetetus; Theaetetus also commends his teacher, by asserting that he is an expert on educational as well as mathematics, and the situation therefore becomes more complex: the double praise seems to demand a double examination, of the teacher’s expertise as well as of the pupil’s character.

¹¹ Cf. Rosen (1983), 21.

¹² Cf. *Chrm.*, 157d6-158c4, *Euthphr.* 4e4-5d7.

The procedure of testing both teacher and pupil is reflected in the way Socrates establishes the guiding question of the dialogue. He wants to know whether Theaetetus learns geometry, as well as astronomy, harmony, and calculation from Theodorus; Theaetetus confirms that he is learning the first and eager to learn the latter three. For a reader familiar with the *Republic*, it is difficult not to see yet another parallel to this dialogue here, more specifically to the curriculum of the philosopher kings (cf. *R.* 522c-531d). If we are allowed to draw this parallel, the implication is that Theaetetus is a boy who is learning all the mathematical sciences needed as a “prelude” (*prooimion*) to dialectic, and is thus “on the threshold of waking up”¹³ from the dream about being, characteristic of the mathematical sciences (533c), into a waking grasp of it.

On this background, Socrates’ question “about a little something” he is uncertain of (*Tht.* 145d6) gains a specific resonance. Socrates spells out his problem (*aporia*) in five questions (145d7-e7): Is learning (*manthanein*) the same as becoming wiser (*sophōteron*) about that which one learns? And is it not by wisdom (*sophia*) that the wise are wise? Theaetetus agrees to both suggestions. The next question, whether this is the same as expertise (*epistēmē*), makes Theaetetus uncertain, however. What is it Socrates claims is the same as expertise? Wisdom, Socrates continues; or aren’t the things people are knowledgeable (*epistēmones*) about also what they are wise about? When the case is stated this way, Theaetetus agrees. So when Socrates asks whether wisdom and expertise is the same, he confirms it without further ado. Now Socrates’ “little” problem is this: what is expertise?

The laborious way in which Socrates presents this question should make us pause to consider what it is Socrates is asking about. Is the main question of the dialogue only “what is expertise?”¹⁴ Theaetetus’ answer, that wisdom and expertise are really the same thing, seems to justify this claim. But is this identification correct? Even if it should be correct to say that if people are knowledgeable about something, they are also wise about it, does this justify the equation of expertise with wisdom?

A fact which speaks against this identification is that *sophia* and *epistēmē* meant slightly different things to 4th century Greeks. *Epistēmē* meant to have expert knowledge, to “stand on top of the matter”, in much the same way that *technē* meant the mastery of a subject

¹³ Blondell (2002), 258.

¹⁴ Cf. Friedländer (III), 132-33, 137, Dorter (1994), 68, Sedley (2004), 19, Sedley (2008), 323, Lisi (2008), 123.

matter,¹⁵ whereas *sophia*, although it originally shared the former terms' field of reference, had acquired a wider range of connotations much the same as the English word 'wisdom'. It had a more "spiritual" quality to it than *epistēmē* and *technē*, signifying a more profound type of knowledge.¹⁶

There are also other reasons for suspecting that Theaetetus' acceptance of Socrates' identification of wisdom with expertise is premature. In the *Apology*, Socrates states that he is sure that the artisans have expertise that he doesn't have and, as such, are wiser than he is (22d2-4). But he also believes that they are more ignorant than he is because they extend their confidence from the mastery of their craft (*technē*) into believing that they are wise about the most important (*ta megista*) matters (22d6-8). Because Socrates is well aware of his own ignorance as regards these matters, he claims to possess a human kind of wisdom (*anthrōpinē sophia*; 20d8) that others lack. The expertise which the artisans have seem to make them less wise, not about the subject matter of their *technē*, but about the matters important to living a good life. And in the *Republic*, Socrates carefully distinguishes between the knowledge (*epistēmē*) which the craftsmen in the ideal *polis* will possess and the knowledge which is wisdom. The latter is something only the guardians or the philosopher kings will have (428e-29a, cf. also 522b and 533d), a type of synoptic knowledge preoccupied with the good of the *whole* of the soul and the *polis*.

So even if it may be true that the identification of wisdom with knowledge is "authentically Socratic",¹⁷ this is not the same as to say that Socrates would claim that knowledge *simpliciter* is wisdom. In fact, the presence of Theodorus may be regarded as a reminder of this. Although he clearly has professional knowledge, it becomes clear in the course of the *Theaetetus* that he has no interest in philosophical inquiries. Socrates hopes to discuss (*dialegesthai*; 146a7) *epistēmē* in order to determine together with his interlocutors what it is, and this is, as Theodorus states at once, a kind of talk (*dialektos*) to which he is unaccustomed (*aēthēs*; 146b3) and which he finds himself too old to learn. If Socrates has a type of knowledge founded on philosophical inquiries and connected with reflections on the

¹⁵ Cf. Snell (1924), 87. In Plato the two terms are often used synonymously and they are used interchangeably throughout the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. I will translate *epistēmē* as 'expertise' or 'knowledge', according to the context, but it should be kept in mind that *epistēmē*, just as *technē*, implies expertise on, or understanding of, a subject matter, rather than what we would call propositional knowledge. Cf. Moravcsik (1992) 13-17.

¹⁶ Cf. Snell (1924), 7, Guthrie (1971), 27 ff. For a more recent discussion of how the notions of *sophia* and *technē/epistēmē* relate, see Roochnik (1996). That *sophia* often (but not always) means more than technical knowledge in Plato can be seen from the fact that it is described as what the God possesses but humans lack; cf. *Smp.* 203d ff, *Ly.* 218a, *Phdr.* 278d, *Ap.* 23a. Burkert (1960) argues that Plato was the first to laden the word *philo-sophia* with the notion of a striving for a wisdom humans do not possess, rather than merely a love of knowledge.

¹⁷ Sedley (2004), 19.

relationship between expert knowledge and knowledge about the good for man and *polis*,¹⁸ this is a knowledge of a different kind than the one possessed by Theodorus.

§3. *Theaetetus*' first answer (146c4-148e10)

As Theodorus feels uncomfortable with Socrates' question, he suggests that Socrates should discuss it with Theaetetus instead. Theaetetus, in turn, suggests that knowledge must be geometry and all the other things that one can learn from Theodorus, on the one hand, and "skill at leather-cutting and the arts of the other craftsmen" (*dēmiourgōn technai*), on the other; all these kinds of expertise are, he believes, nothing else than knowledge (146c7-d3). Before giving this answer, he says that he is certain that both Socrates and Theodorus will correct him if he should be mistaken (*hamartein*; 146c4-5). As we shall see, this remark foreshadows a theme that becomes central in the dialogue.

Theaetetus' answer to Socrates' question is, expressed in modern parlance, extensional, not intensional, a type of answer Socrates elsewhere objects to emphatically (cf. *Euthphr.* 5d7-6e2, *Men.* 72c8-e2). The *Theaetetus* is no exception; Socrates at once complains that he has been given examples of kinds of knowledge instead of the one definition that he asked for, and then goes on to describe in greater detail why he objects to this kind of answer (146d7-147c6). He sees three interrelated problems with it.

Firstly, the answer differentiates kinds of knowledge by the different objects they are *about*, but doesn't differentiate them *in so far* as they are knowledge. Secondly, if these kinds of knowledge are alike, in so far as they are knowledge, it does not matter how *many* kinds of knowledge there are, since what we want to know is what is common to them all, i.e. *what* knowledge is (*hoti pot' estin*; 146e9-10). Thirdly, since the names "leatherwork" and "geometry" really means "knowledge of how to work on leather", "expertise as regards lines and planes", Theaetetus seems to include the definiendum in the definiens (147a1-b3). If one does not know what expertise is, how will one be able to understand a name of something that is an expertise (147b2-3)?¹⁹

¹⁸ Kuhn (1959), 20-21.

¹⁹ Modern scholars have found the second and third points problematic. To some, the third point looks like an instance of what has come to be known as the "Socratic fallacy", cf. Geach (1966). This alleged fallacy consists in the belief that you cannot use a term unless you are able to define it, cf. McDowell, (1973), 114. Such a reading is, I believe, based on a refusal to differentiate between nominal and real definitions common to many philosophers of the 20th century; cf. Fine (1), 6. But Socrates is not saying that one is not able to understand the words "shoemaking" and "geometry", nominally, but rather that a real or essential understanding of what is meant by the words presupposes an understanding of what is meant by expertise. Against Socrates' second point, McDowell, *ibid.*, complains that "Socrates has not shown that a list of instances or kinds of knowledge cannot be of any use in answering the question 'what is knowledge?'" cf. also Burnyeat (1990), 4-5. The reply to this seems to me to be that Socrates doesn't show it because he doesn't claim it, as is pointed out by Hardy (2001),

In connection with these criteria for an adequate answer, D. Sedley has pointed out the following, relying on an ancient anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus*: the restraint that one cannot refer to the objects of knowledge in order to define knowledge seems to preclude a reading of the dialogue which regards it as an indirect proof of Platonic Forms. Such a reading, advanced by F. M. Cornford²⁰ and, as the anonymous commentator shows, some ancient Platonists, claims that if we do not assume Forms, the result will be that we cannot define knowledge. Therefore we must assume Forms, which, according to these readers, is exactly what happens in the sequel to the *Theaetetus*, namely the *Sophist*.²¹ Since I have some sympathy with this line of reading, a few comments on this objection may be in place.

If one believes, as Cornford seems to do, that there are different kinds of *objects* - on the one hand sensible objects, on the other intelligible Forms - and that one can only have knowledge of the latter, the objection surely carries weight. However, it is not conclusive, since one could argue that Socrates' first point is precisely the assumption that forces the entire discussion into *aporia* and hence not a point we are meant to accept. We cannot define knowledge if we are not allowed to refer to the objects we can have knowledge about.²²

Another possible way of meeting the objection which I find more attractive, is to say that Forms are not simply a type of objects in addition to sensible objects, in the way that shoes are one type of object in addition to, and different from, e.g. vases; Forms are rather the being (*ousia*) of the things that are (*ta onta*), or that in light of which we understand the things that are. On this interpretation the ancient commentator's objection to reading the *Theaetetus* as an indirect defence of the assumption of Forms rests on a misunderstanding of what Forms are, i.e. on a category mistake. To say that knowledge must be about what is intelligible and self-identical, i.e. about Forms, is not a claim about *which* things can be known, only about which aspect of things that can be known.

The question about the role the Forms play for an adequate understanding of *epistēmē* leads to another, related question. Assuming that we accept that Socrates wants to know *what*

24. Socrates is merely pointing out that a list of examples doesn't give us a definition or an explanation of what unites the instances on the list, and why it does, and is not saying that an adequate definition of *epistēmē* will not have to cover the instances of knowledge that actually exist, nor is he denying that knowledge of what kinds of expertise there are might serve as the phenomenological starting point for arriving at a definition. In fact, the preconception of *epistēmē* contained in *Theaetetus*' first answer is used as a touchstone to evaluate the quality of the different answers to Socrates' question at different points in the dialogue.

²⁰ Cf. Cornford (1935), 28. That the *Sophist* solves the problems of the *Theaetetus* is also the belief of Stenzel (1931), but Stenzel's interpretation differs from Cornford's in that Stenzel believes, like modern scholars who follow G. Vlastos and G. E.L. Owen, that Plato changes his conception of Forms in the allegedly late dialogues, due to a "crisis" in his thinking which is indicated in the first half of the *Parmenides*.

²¹ Sedley (1996), 90, 94, cf. the anonymous commentator (referred to as anon. in what follows) 2.39-45. A similar objection is advanced by McDowell (1973), 115.

²² This is in fact Sedley's suggested way of reading the dialogue, cf. Sedley (2004), 180.

expertise is in the sense that he is asking for the being (*ousia*) of knowledge, as the ancient commentator to the *Theaetetus* claims (cf. *anon.* 2.45), we may still ask ourselves what we should understand by such a being. Is Socrates asking for the definition of a Form? This seems to be implied at 148d5-7, where Socrates suggests that Theaetetus should state what the knowledge is by collecting all into one *eidos*. And in the *Sophist* there is a passage (257c7-d2) which seems to imply that knowledge *per se* is indeed a Form; we find similar passages in the *Parmenides* (134a ff) and the *Phaedrus* (247d).²³ If this is so, the main problem with Theaetetus' list is that it is a list, rather than a definition or explanation of the "essence" common to all kinds of knowledge.

However, there is a problem with this view that deserves some thought. The relation between Socrates' kind of human wisdom and actual existing kinds of expertise may make us wonder if it really is true that there is *one* being common to all kinds of knowledge. Is Socrates' knowledge like every other kind of knowledge? And what about the knowledge of the Good that Socrates in the *Republic* seems to believe is the only type of knowledge worthy of its name? These considerations seem to indicate an additional problem with Theaetetus' list: it only mentions the knowledge of artisans and mathematicians, but leaves out the kind of knowledge which is characteristic of the philosopher. Seen in this light, it is perhaps no coincidence that Socrates, having stated why he is not satisfied with Theaetetus' answer, proceeds to tell him about the kind of expertise he believes himself to possess.

§4. *The craft of the midwife (149a1-151d6)*

What has troubled modern scholars as well as many dramatic characters in Plato's dialogues, namely the conditions that an answer to a *ti estin* question must meet, poses no problem for Theaetetus. He immediately understands Socrates' complaint (147c7-d2) and goes on to describe how he has in fact just come up with a similar type of answer to a geometrical problem about square roots.²⁴ But despite his ready understanding of what Socrates is asking for, and despite the fact that he has asked himself the same question many times, he is unable to give an adequate answer. Nor does he believe he has heard anyone else give one (148e1-6).

The interest in Socrates' question, as well as the acknowledgement that he is not able to answer it, is, according to Socrates, a sign of intellectual fertility. Theaetetus is pregnant with thoughts, Socrates claims, and Socrates, being the son of a midwife, possesses a *technē*

²³ That knowledge is a Form is, however, one of the assumptions which generate the paradoxes in the first part of the *Parmenides*, cf. Dorter (1994), 42.

²⁴ A discussion of the significance of Theaetetus' mathematics can be found in Burnyeat (1978).

that will help Theaetetus to deliver (149a1-7), a kind of midwifery directed at men and souls, rather than at women and bodies (150b6-9).

Prior to letting Theaetetus in on what this art consists in, Socrates demands that Theaetetus must not reveal to others that he possesses a *technē*.²⁵ For most people simply regard him as strange or unsettling (*a-topos*), a man who drives other people into perplexity (*aporia*), because they have not noticed his expertise (149a6-9). In light of the upcoming trial against Socrates, this remark is significant. That Socrates brings others into perplexity, namely by asking them questions, is, according to what Socrates states in the *Apology*, the very foundation for the accusation against him of being a dangerous sophist (*Ap.* 21b ff., cf. also *Men.*, 80a-b). In the *Theaetetus*, as in the *Apology*, Socrates claims to be willing to reveal the cause (*to aition*) of his reputation (149b2, cf. *Ap.* 20d ff.). Since the *Theaetetus* takes place before the *Apology*, viewed in terms of dramatic chronology, we may regard Socrates' "letting Theaetetus in" on his secret as a kind of anticipatory defence speech.²⁶

What does his alleged *technē* consist in? In analogy to midwives, who according to Greek tradition had to be women no longer able to bear children, Socrates claims to be barren of wisdom, although he is able to help others to bring their intellectual offspring into the world (149b5-c3, 150c3-d2). And just as the midwife can discern more clearly than anyone which women are pregnant and which are not, so Socrates claims to be able, by scrutinizing people's souls, to decide which youngsters are intellectually pregnant and which are not (149c-8, 151b1-6). When a midwife perceives that someone is indeed pregnant, she is able, through the use of drugs (*pharmaka*) to "awaken labour pangs or...to make them milder" or, if someone is having trouble giving birth, to help them or, finally, if she believes a conception is ill-fated, to "cause an abortion" (149c9-d3). The Socratic *analogon* to this use of drugs becomes clear when Socrates contrasts his art to the art of traditional midwives. Socrates emphasises his ability to test (*basanizein*) whether the thinking or discursive reason (*dianoia*) of the youngster he is helping "is giving birth to something that is an image and false (*eidōlon kai pseudos*), or to something that is productive and true (*gonimon te kai alēthes*)" (150b9-c3), which differentiates his art from traditional midwifery, since children cannot be false or empty images (150a). The way Socrates performs this test is by asking questions and this, he informs Theaetetus, is what has given him his reputation as an unsettling person (150c5-6). It

²⁵ For a different and influential interpretation of the midwife metaphor, cf. Burnyeat (1977).

²⁶ Cf. Howland (1998), 3. In contrast, Socrates describes the discussion of death in the *Phaedo* as a kind of defence speech cf. *Phd.* 63b. This is a defence carried out *after* the legal defence speech.

takes little imagination to see that this questioning activity is the Socratic *analogon* to the midwives' use of drugs.²⁷

The picture we get of Socrates' art of midwifery is thus that it enables him 1) to see whether people are intellectually pregnant or not and, if they are pregnant, 2) to decide, through questioning, whether their thoughts are true and productive, or rather false and mere images and, finally 3) to help the first kind of thoughts to come to light and the second kind of thoughts to abort. Due to this ability Socrates claims that when he associates with young men, and "if the god permits them", they "improve to a wonderful extent, as it seems to them, and also to everyone else." (150d4-6) Some, he explains, leave him too early because they do not see that they owe their progress to Socrates; this results in them losing the insights they have gained in his company through taking up "bad company" (150d8-e8). This is what happened to Aristides and "very many others" (151a1-2).

If we regard this as a defence speech, it may be objected that Socrates paints a rather rosy picture of himself, which leaves out the more problematic aspects of his ironic conduct, aspects which enrage a Thrasymachus or a Callicles.²⁸ Moreover, Socrates only mentions Aristides, the relatively unknown son of Lysimachus, whom Socrates undertakes to educate at the end of the *Laches* (200c-201c), as a person who has not really benefited from his conversations. His silence about Alcibiades, Critias and Charmides, whose problematic involvement in the Peloponnesian war and its aftermath was probably a very real factor in the indictment brought forward against Socrates, may seem to cast shadows of doubt on his positive self-presentation. His claim that people improve in his company is simply a flat denial of what Meletus claims in the *Apology* (24d-25a), namely that Socrates, alone among all the Athenians, corrupts the young through his association with them.

Nevertheless, we need not say that Socrates is making his defence easy by forgetting the more problematic aspects of his philosophical conduct. If the *Apology* is directed against the claim that Socrates actually corrupts the youth of Athens, the *Theaetetus* is directed at a different and, philosophically more dangerous, "accusation", namely the accusation that Socrates cannot do what he claims to do. If it is impossible to be mistaken about the greatest matters (*Ap.* 22d6-8), as Meletus just about claims when he asserts that all Athenians except Socrates are able to improve the young, and as Socrates on behalf of Protagoras will assert in

²⁷ For the metaphor of drugs in connection with Socratic questions and with speech, compare *Tht.* 157c9-d1 with 167a5 ff and *Sph.* 230c4 ff, cf. also *Chrm.* 155 and, of course, the *Phaedrus*. More on this below, cf. part I, chap. 2, §§6-7, and part II, cha. 3, §11.

²⁸ Cf. Blondell (2002), 254-55.

the *Theaetetus*,²⁹ then intellectual midwifery is also impossible. Indeed, if intellectual mistakes are impossible, as the great sophist claims, even Theaetetus' hope of being corrected if his answers don't hit on the truth will prove groundless.

The claims that intellectual growth is possible and that the search for wisdom is all important for both individual happiness and the political community, central to the Socratic conception of philosophy as a caretaking of the soul, are thus put into relief in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* through a prolonged investigation into the possibility of mistakes. As a result of this, we shall see, both dialogues are, contrary to what many scholars seem to believe, permeated by political as well as ethical questions.

²⁹ For the connection between the traditionalists Meletus and Anytus and the sophists, see Steiner (1992), 17-18.

Chapter two: Theaetetus' second answer and Protagoras' defence speech

We now turn to Theaetetus' second answer. It is as follows: It seems (*dokein*) to Theaetetus that one who understands, perceives (*aisthanesthai*) what he understands (*touto ho epistatai*), wherefore it now appears (*phainesthai*) to him that knowledge is nothing else than *aisthēsis* (151e1-3).

Before I plunge into the investigation of the complex way Socrates undertakes to interpret this answer, a few remarks about the notion of *aisthēsis* are called for. If we translate the answer as the claim that knowledge is perception, it might look as if Theaetetus has given a traditional empiricist definition of knowledge; and in fact the first half of the *Theaetetus* is often treated as an investigation and refutation of empiricism.³⁰ One may then wonder how an accomplished mathematician should ever come to entertain the notion that knowledge is perception.³¹ But, although a basic meaning of *aisthanesthai* is undeniably “to sense” or “to perceive”, this does not mean that the notion of *aisthēsis* equals an empiricist understanding of perception. For *aisthanesthai* also means to understand or apprehend something, often a complex relation.³² It is a way of taking note of something, somewhat parallel to how *nous*, mind or intellect, in archaic times was understood as the apprehension of a situation.³³ According to Aristotle, *aisthēsis* is an awareness of the particular analogous to the way that *nous* is an awareness of the highest principles (cf. *EN* 1139a17-19), wherefore Aristotle compares practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), concerned with particular actions, with *aisthēsis* rather than with *epistēmē* (*EN* 1142a23-30).

In accordance with this, it would perhaps be better to render *aisthēsis* as “immediate awareness of” something³⁴ or as “direct apprehension of” something,³⁵ rather than as perception. Since these are relatively cumbersome translations, however, I shall keep to the traditional translation. The main thing to note is that Theaetetus is most probably proposing that to know something is to be aware of it, to have seen it and, thus, understood or apprehended it. That Socrates will eventually reduce *aisthēsis* to something “closely similar” to “sense-data”³⁶, namely in the passage 184b-186e, should not blind us to the fact that this cannot be what Theaetetus meant when he first gave his answer. And as we shall see, when Socrates reduces the meaning of *aisthēsis* in this way, he makes a parallel determination of

³⁰ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 10, and, especially 60.

³¹ Cf. Geach (1966), 154.

³² Cornford (1935), 30, note 1.

³³ v. Fritz (1943), 85 ff.

³⁴ Gadamer (1982), 297.

³⁵ Taylor (1929), 325, note 3.

³⁶ Burnyeat (1990), 10.

thinking that pulls it away from the intuitive connotations traditionally connected with the notion of *nous*. In this way, the detailed discussion of how and if *aisthēsis* can be identified with knowledge casts an interesting light on what discursive thinking is.

§5. *Knowledge is perception (151e-157c3)*

Theaetetus' answer that knowledge is perception is better than his previous answer in the sense that 1) it does not list types of expertise, 2) it does not refer to the objects about which we have knowledge and 3) it doesn't include the *definiendum* in the *definiens*. But what does the identification of knowledge with perception amount to? And can it account for the types of knowledge listed in the first answer? Socrates suggests that they should examine the quality of the definition together.

The examination at first seems a bit odd, however, since Socrates does not ask what Theaetetus means by the definition. Rather, he offers to interpret it himself. At 152c5-6 he specifies two formal conditions for knowledge, namely that it must be 1) about the things that are (*ta onta*) as well as 2) infallible or without falsity (*apseudos*). His interpretation of Theaetetus' answer can be seen as a two-staged strategy for meeting these formal conditions.³⁷ The second condition is met by relating the answer to Protagoras' doctrine that man is the measure, the first by developing an ontological theory according to which nothing is anything in itself but only in relation to something else. What is the point of this?

These two theses taken together can be regarded as an antithesis to what might be called a traditional Platonic notion of knowledge and ontology: there is nothing stable at which the mind can direct itself and every individual's perspective on reality is as good as any other's. If we regard what Parmenides says in the *Parmenides* (cf. 135e ff) about the testing of hypotheses as a general Platonic insight, namely that in order to investigate the strength of a given assumption (*hypothesis*), it is necessary to see, not only what follows from it, but also what follows from its negation, Socrates' way of interpreting Theaetetus' answer could be regarded as an investigation of the assumption of Forms *ex negativo*: can we account for knowledge if we deny that there are Forms?³⁸

³⁷ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 9-10.

³⁸ This is how Cornford (1935) reads the dialogue, cf. also Johansen (1994), 280, and Dorter (1994), 67. Burnyeat (1977), 9, in a similar spirit as Robinson (1950), objects to this; he believes that the dialogue shows "every sign that Plato intends to make a fresh start on fundamental questions in epistemology."

The measure-doctrine

The Protagorean doctrine, which Socrates claims that Theaetetus' answer is basically identical with (151e8-152a2), asserts that man is the measure (*metron*) of all things (*chrēmata*), for those that are, that (*hōs*)³⁹ they are, for those that are not, that they are not (152a2-4). Socrates then interprets this claim as follows: the way each thing appears (*phainesthai*) is how it is to the one to whom it appears.

We should note at once that the *panta chrēmata* of Protagoras' saying, translated as "all things", is not limited to what we, as post-Aristotelians, understand by things, i.e. substances. The notion of *chrēmata* has a much wider field of reference, covering everything that can somehow be said to be, including laws and practises.⁴⁰ This means that also commonly held opinions (*doxai*) are among the *chrēmata* for which man is the measure, and this in turn makes for a connection between the activities of perceiving (*aisthanesthai*) and of opining (*doxazein*).⁴¹ And this connection becomes important. Although it is not evident from Socrates' initial discussion, common opinions, especially about political matters, are the real issue of Protagoras' doctrine; this becomes clear in the passage 165e8-168c5, and will be a major point in the ensuing discussion.

In light of this, we may further note that the connection between appearing/perceiving and opining is already latent in Theaetetus' definition at 151e1-3: knowledge *seems* (*dokein*) to him to be ... and as it now *appears* (*phainesthai*) to him This also gives us a clue as to why Socrates comes up with the apparently arbitrary idea that Theaetetus' answer is connected with Protagoras;⁴² that this is more than mere playfulness on Socrates' part can be seen from the fact that Theaetetus, when questioned, confirms that he has read Protagoras' work "The Truth" many times (152a5). That he has done so is not surprising given that his teacher Theodorus was a close friend of the great sophist, as we learn later on, and, in fact, his pupil (cf. 179a10 and also 161b8-9, 164e2-165a3, 168c2-4, 171c8-9). Theaetetus is, we may

³⁹ *Hōs* can be translated as "that" as well as "in what way"; v. Fritz ("Protagoras"), 914 finds "that" the better translation, since "in what way", according to Fritz, doesn't make sense in the context. Socrates' goes on to interpret the *hōs* as meaning *hoios* which is one reason why some believe *hōs* in Protagoras' statement means "in what way", not "that". Since the conceptual articulation of the difference between the fact *that* something is and *what* it is, is a product of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, Protagoras would probably not have recognised the difference between the two interpretations of *hōs*; cf. Schiappa, 120-21.

⁴⁰ Cf. Schiappa (2003), 118.

⁴¹ Cf. Hardy (2001), 43. As regards the translation of *doxa* and *doxazein*, I usually translate them as opinion and opining, and sometimes as judgement and judging. I shall have more to say on this matter at the beginning of cha. 5 below.

⁴² The way Socrates connects Theaetetus' definition with Protagoras is, more technically described, as follows: It is assumed that one can equate "it appears" with "it is perceived" (152c1-2). The claim that man is the measure of everything, which on Socrates' interpretation means that whatever appears to me *is* so to me, then means that everything is as I perceive it. Therefore, when Theaetetus claims that knowledge is perception, Socrates contends that he agrees with Protagoras.

suggest, a potential follower of Protagoras,⁴³ and this I believe is the real reason why Socrates connects his definition of knowledge with Protagoras. If this is correct, his apparent philosophical nature praised by Theodorus, has not made him immune to sophistic influence.

To illustrate what he believes that Protagoras means by his claim, Socrates comes up with an example. To one person, a wind appears cold, and to another, warm. Should one then, he asks Theaetetus, claim that the wind in itself (*auto eph' heautou*) is cold or not cold, or should one “be persuaded by Protagoras that it’s cold for the one who’s shivering but not for the one who isn’t?” (152b6-7) Theaetetus finds the latter alternative more attractive.

The flux-doctrine

According to Socrates, the following view is implied in Theaetetus’ acceptance of Protagoras’ doctrine: “nothing ... is one thing itself by itself (*auto kath' hauto*), nor could you ... correctly call it (*proseipein*) anything whatever, but if you address (*prosagoreuein*) it as large it will also appear small, if heavy, light, ... since nothing is either any one thing or of any one sort, but it’s from rushing around and from motion and from blending into one another that all things come to be” (152d2-7). For the sake of simplicity this view can be termed the flux-doctrine. It is at first introduced as a secret doctrine of Protagoras (152c10), but eventually Theodorus will identify it as Heraclitean in origin (179d6-e7).

This doctrine gives the claim that everything is how it is perceived an ontological foundation. If Protagoras’ measure-doctrine satisfies the second formal condition noted above, that knowledge must be infallible (things are *always* as *I* perceive them to be, I am an infallible judge of what I perceive), the flux-doctrine satisfies the first formal condition that knowledge must be about what is (things *are* as I perceive them to be).⁴⁴ It explains why there is no wind in and by itself, but only the-wind-as-cold-for-me and the wind-as-warm-for-you.

Once this view is introduced, Socrates widens the perspective from the particular instance of the wind to a general statement about the things that are (*ta onta*): all the things we are used to say are (*phamen einai*; 152d8), *are* really nothing, but only *becomes*. That things are always in the way anyone perceives them to be is explained by reinterpreting *being* as *becoming*. This ontological view in turn has consequences for language. When we address (*proseipein, prosagoreuein*; 152d3-4) something *as* something and thus as having some stable being, this is not warranted by the way things are. Instead of saying that the wind *is* cold, we

⁴³ Cf. Gadamer (1982), 295 ff. and Lisi (2008), 123.

⁴⁴ Again, see Burnyeat (1990) 9 ff.

should be saying that it *becomes* cold. The way we speak should reflect the way things are, or rather, how they become.

The reinterpretation of being as becoming is spelled out in further detail in a refined and famous theory of the interrelation between perceived “object and perceiving “subject” (155e-160e). This is a theory which Socrates claims he has to “let” Theaetetus “in on”,⁴⁵ for, he explains, there are some people who have not been initiated into the mysteries of the theory, people “who believe that there is nothing other than what they have the power to hold ... in their hands, and do not accept actions or what becomes or anything invisible as having any part in being (*ousia*)” (155e4-7). The description of these uninitiated people, together with the fact that Theaetetus exclaims they are a horrible throng, becomes important later on (cf. part III, §7). The central point in this theory is the notion of motion. For the principle (*archē*) on which the doctrine that there is no being in and of itself depends, is this: “all is always motion and there’s nothing else besides this” (156a3-5).⁴⁶ In other words, Protagoras’ doctrine, and the claim on which it depends, that nothing *is* anything, in and by itself, is explained by the fact that all there *is*, is motion.

In order to explain the phenomenon of perception and that “things” are perceived, even though everything is motion, Socrates distinguishes two types of motion; one type, the perceived “object”, has the *power* (*dynamis*) to act upon (*poiein*) something else, while another, the perceiving sense organ, has the *power* to be affected (*paschein*; 156a6-7). The result of these two kinds of powers meeting each other is that offspring are generated, namely a perceiving and a perception. Exemplified as visual perception of colour, this amounts to the following: when the eye, one kind of motion, meets with an “object”, another kind of motion, they generate the twin pair of particular *perceiving* of colour and a *perceived* colour. Then “the eye becomes full of seeing and then just sees” and is “not in any way [sight] but a seeing eye”, while the “object” “that co-generated the colour is filled to overflowing with whiteness, and becomes in turn not whiteness but white” (156e2-6).

Socrates’ distinction between ‘sight’ and ‘a seeing’, between ‘whiteness’ and ‘white’ reflects the flux-doctrines implications for language. Since it denies that anything is something in and by itself, we are not allowed to talk about whiteness or sight. Qualities such as hardness, colour etc., are nothing in themselves, but a particular product of two motions or

⁴⁵ It is this explanation of the flux-ontology in particular that Theodorus later associates with Heraclitus, although it is most probably Plato’s invention; in any case the doctrine does not represent the actual view of Heraclitus, cf. v. Fritz (1945), 231.

⁴⁶ I limit myself to this very brief sketch of the theory. For a more detailed discussion, cf. Cornford (1935), 45-51 and Burnyeat (1990), 16-19.

powers meeting each other. Even these powers are nothing in themselves, since their ability to act or to be acted upon only exists in relation to what they act upon or are affected by. This is the real meaning of there being nothing in and by itself; everything is “becoming for someone and being must be rooted out” from our way of speaking about the world (157a8-b3).

Although this doctrine will soon be relentlessly criticised by Socrates, it is worth noting that the notion of motion as the power to act and to be acted upon will, as I shall argue below (see part III, chap. 3), return in a more dignified version in the *Sophist*, this time presented as a serious candidate for an answer to the question: what is being. Moreover, the doctrine’s focus on offspring connects it, as K. Dorter rightly emphasises,⁴⁷ with an overarching metaphor of the *Theaetetus* introduced in Socrates’ description of himself as a midwife, in which pregnancy and birth refer to intellectual growth, the attainment of knowledge, and the “production” of thoughts.

§6. *Emerging problems (157c4-165e5)*

When asked if he finds the claim that nothing is anything, in and by itself, a palatable doctrine, Theaetetus admits that he is uncertain of how he should take it. Does Socrates believe in it himself (157c4-6)? Socrates protests: he is only a midwife who chants incantations (*epaeidein*) in order to bring Theaetetus’ opinion or belief (*dogma*) into the light and test it (157c9-d3). The construction of the flux-doctrine is, we gather, a kind of verbal drug or formula meant to test what the young mathematician will find acceptable.

Socrates renews his question, but now in a slightly different manner: is Theaetetus “satisfied that there is not anything good and beautiful (*agathon kai kalon*; 157d7-9)”, but that everything is always becoming? Theaetetus accepts this. We see that Socrates has suddenly widened the horizon, from a narrow focus on the appearance of “things”, to normative notions such as the good and the beautiful. The prize to pay for making Theaetetus’ definition consistent, through accepting the flux-ontology, is, apparently, that there are no objective standards for good and bad.

This becomes a problem for the definition for the following reason: If a particular expertise can rightly be said to consist in knowledge of how to realise the excellence (*aretē*) of the subject matter the expertise deals with, expertise is (also) knowledge of the good of its

⁴⁷ Dorter (1994), 76-77. Cf. also Brisson (2008) for a discussion of this metaphor in relation to midwifery and recollection.

subject matter.⁴⁸ The denial that there is anything good and beautiful seems to make expertise impossible. In particular, it makes it difficult to understand how there can be knowledge about ethical-political matters, which, as we shall see, poses a problem for Protagoras no less than it does for Socrates.

These implications of the flux-doctrine have not yet become apparent to Theaetetus; to reveal them, Socrates poses a number of critical questions. They are specifically directed at the flux-doctrine and they are not, I believe, meant to discredit the doctrine so much as to bring out its full radicality. Socrates points out that what we perceive or opine⁴⁹ when we are asleep is normally called misperceptions (*paraithanesthai*; 157e3-4); this speaks against the claim that what anyone perceives also *is* the way he perceives it. The same holds when people are sick or insane. On the other hand, these objections are easy enough to answer, as Socrates also points out: if everything is as it appears to someone because nothing is anything in itself, but only becomes what it is in relation to someone, and if the person to whom something appears is also constantly becoming, the “same” person, e.g. as sick and as healthy, is actually not the same person. What appears to a sick person is true to the sick, and what appears to the healthy is true to the healthy (159b). Hence, these counterexamples can be dismissed, though at the price of denying constancy of both ‘subject’ and ‘object’.

In this way the flux-doctrine secures that there is nothing to which one might refer in order to discredit someone’s perception of a given situation; neither a constant object of perception, nor an enduring person who perceives.⁵⁰ Indeed, if things are as they appear to me-at-time-x, how should “I” be able to stumble or fail (*ptaiein*) in my thoughts (*en dianoiai*) as regards the things that are (*ta onta*)? “I” will be infallible (160d1-2). If the measure-doctrine and the flux-doctrine are correct, Theaetetus’ definition seems to be a true or, at least, a satisfying answer: perception is both about what is and infallible. Theaetetus’ first brainchild is born (160e2-4): through Socrates’ interpretation Theaetetus’ answer has been developed into a full-fledged definition.

⁴⁸ This seems to be a common Greek understanding of expertise which Plato often draws on, cf. *Grg.*, 479b, 504c, 506d, *R.* 335b, 353b, 518d, 601d, cf. also the opening chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See moreover Stenzel (1931), 9 and Kuhn (1959), 26ff.

⁴⁹ At 158b2 those who misperceive are said to opine falsely (*pseudē doxazein*) and at 158e2-3 opinions, *doxasmata*, are introduced into the discussion of *aisthēsis*. Entire discussions are given as examples of things that may appear to us at 158c. This shows that no sharp distinction is drawn between perceiving and opining before 184.

⁵⁰ Cf. Burnyeat (1976), 31. As Howland (1998), 41 rightly observes, the flux-doctrine thus denies change just as much as the Megarian doctrine does; for there is neither an object nor a subject that can change. Both views make education impossible.

Next, however, Socrates poses some more serious questions which are directed at the Protagorean strand in Theaetetus' newborn definition. The most important objection⁵¹ is that if each and everyone is the measure of the things that are, Protagoras' doctrine seems to do away with the notion of wisdom (cf. 161c2-162a3). For it denies the possibility of Socratic inquiry and makes the entire business of discourse (*hē tou dialegesthai pragmateia*; 161e4-7) meaningless: what is the point of discussing with someone whether his opinion (*doxa*) is right or not if all opinions and perceptions (the two are here used interchangeably, cf. 161e8) are true? Moreover, the doctrine also seems to contradict Protagoras' own position: If every human being is the measure of the truth and falsity of his own opinions, how can Protagoras claim to possess a wisdom that others lack? How can he claim to be a teacher of others if everyone is an "expert on how things are"? Protagoras' self-claimed title of sophist (cf. *Prt.* 317b) is thus a hypocritical title, since the measure-doctrine appears to make any kind of search for enlightenment through discourse, whether through a conversation with Socrates, Protagoras or even with oneself, meaningless.

Socrates thus begins to examine Protagoras, whether "the things" he believes are themselves "in harmony with each other or not in any way whatsoever (154e4-5)". If Socrates' criticism of Protagoras were not founded on Protagoras' own views, an answer to the objections could easily be found – one could for example deny that expertise existed. The criticism which follows is, however, internal to Protagoras' position. On the one hand, Protagoras claims that man is the measure, but on the other, he claims that he has a specific expertise that makes *him* the measure of the things pertaining to his specific expertise. Since these two beliefs appear to contradict each other, Protagoras will have to come up with an answer to these objections if his position is to be coherent.

Before we look at how Protagoras, in the guise of Socrates, meets these objections, it is worth noting a further problem with Theaetetus' identification of perception and expertise, which Socrates brings out in the 161a-165e passage. The problem is as follows: if one hears a foreign language that one does not understand, or if one sees a written text but does not know how to read, should one claim that one doesn't perceive the sounds or the letters or rather that one understands the language or the text? This question makes Theaetetus draw an important distinction which undermines his own answer. He thoughtfully answers that we know just what we see or hear, i.e. the sounds or the coloured letters, but that we do not know "what the reading teachers and language interpreters teach about them"; this "we neither perceive by

⁵¹ Again, I do not intend to deliver a detailed analysis of the passage 161a-165e. For an overview of the objections brought forward in this section, cf. Sedley (2004), 54-55.

sight or hearing nor know (163c1-4).” This is a point related to the one that Socrates eventually makes in the passage 184b-186e: to understand something, for instance a language, is not to perceive sounds or letters, but to have a more or less adequate grasp of a structure that is revealed *by* or *through* the sounds or letters. And the understanding of this structure is something that can be taught and requires intellectual work, whereas the perception of sounds comes to everyone naturally and is a kind of receptivity (cf. 186b11-c2). Therefore the answer Theaetetus gives is a condensed refutation of his identification of perception and knowledge. But since the discussion has not yet made clear why this is so, because no adequate distinction between *what* we perceive and what we *understand* about what we perceive has been drawn, Socrates simply commends Theaetetus for his answer and lets it go – for now.

§7. Protagoras’ defence speech (165e6-168c7)

How can Protagoras connect his measure-doctrine with a claim to possess an expertise that allows him to call himself a sophist?⁵² Socrates invites Theodorus, as a friend of Protagoras (164e4-5, cf. 162a4-8), to defend the now deceased sophist, but he refuses to enter into the conversation (164e2-165a3), as he has already done twice before (at 146b and 162a-b).⁵³ The reason he gives is that he turned away from “bare words (*psiloi logoi*)⁵⁴ to geometry” early on. Socrates therefore sees himself forced to present a defence speech on behalf of the great sophist.⁵⁵ Shortly stated, it goes as follows (cf. 166d4-167a3):⁵⁶ It is true that everything is to everyone as it appears. But since what appears depends on two things, namely the condition of the perceived “object” and the condition of the perceiving “subject”, a change in the condition of the “subject” will bring about a different appearance. The ability to cause such a change, not in order that *true*, but in order that *better* (*ameinōn*) things appear, i.e. in order that something worse, which appears to someone, is “swapped” for something better, is what Protagoras understands by wisdom (*sophia*). So, he claims, it is not impossible to talk about wisdom within the framework of the measure-doctrine. The specific wisdom that Protagoras believes to possess is set out in analogy with the expertise of the doctor (167a3-b4):⁵⁷ a doctor

⁵² Cf. *Cra.* 386c-d.

⁵³ Cf. Klein (1965), 29.

⁵⁴ *Psilos logos* is used as a description of philosophical or theoretical examination by Phaedrus in *Phdr.*, 262c8. In *Smp.* 215c, Alcibiades says that Socrates bewitches (*kēlein*) people with “bare speeches”.

⁵⁵ For ease of reference, I shall merely be saying “Protagoras” instead of “Socrates representing Protagoras” in what follows.

⁵⁶ Since I have not treated the (eristic) arguments Socrates brings forward against Protagoras in the passages 162c2-163a3 and 163d1-164b12, I leave out the part of Protagoras’ defence speech which addresses them. The main point of the latter arguments is to bring the notion of memory (*mnēmē*) into the discussion of knowledge. These problems are discussed in greater detail in the passage 191a8-196c9, cf. cha. 6, §16.

⁵⁷ Cf. Schiappa (2003), 108-109.

is able, through drugs (*pharmakoi*), to change the condition (*hexis*) of his patient's body so that more pleasant things appear, for instance a sweet-tasting wine instead of a sour-tasting wine. Analogously, the sophist, whose expertise is education (*paideia*), is able, through speeches (*logoi*), to change the condition of the soul (*psychē*), not so that one who opines falsely (*pseudē doxazein*) comes to opine truly, but so that better or more useful (*chrēstos*) ways of "perceiving" or opining replace worse ways of "perceiving" reality.

The notion that a distinction between false and true perceptions is impossible seems to follow from the flux-doctrine. Protagoras goes on to explain this further. On the one hand, he claims, it is impossible to opine that which is not. This is a view inherited from Parmenides, a view which becomes a major theme later on in the dialogue and particularly in the *Sophist*. On the other hand, Protagoras claims, one cannot opine "other things besides those one experiences, and the latter are always true" (167a7-8). This reveals that Protagoras' conception of opining is basically passive: Apparently building on the flux-doctrine's focus on motion and power (*dynamis*), Protagoras conceives of our ability to form opinions as a capacity for simply experiencing the constantly moving world.

At the moment, Protagoras seems to have vindicated his claim to be an expert on education. To be a sophist, i.e. an educator, is to have the expertise to influence the condition of the soul of the one the sophist educates, through speech, so that better things appear to him. Education is thus a way of making people more fit for, or successful in, life. The full implication of Protagoras' ideal of education is that the sophist is able to change people's way of thinking about justice and injustice, not into true, but into more useful ways of regarding these notions (167b7-c4). According to Protagoras, what is just and what is unjust is on the one hand simply what people hold as just or unjust. Justice is pure *nomos*, convention. On the other hand, he claims that what people regard as just or unjust can be more or less useful or life promoting (167c2-4). In this sense, he is a spokesman for a kind of pragmatism. To Socrates' question whether one should regard the good and the beautiful as forever changing, Protagoras' answer is that what is good or beautiful depends on what is useful, and, we must assume, that what is useful depends on the circumstances. This defence speech thus gives us a picture of Protagoras, not simply as a spokesman for epistemic relativism, as is often claimed, nor as a teacher of "rhetorical tricks", as Aristotle claims (*Rh.* 1402a), but as an advocate of a liberal-minded political and educational programme.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Cf. Ebert (1974), 28.

We may assume that Socrates has little sympathy for Protagoras' notion that there is nothing just and good in itself, nor with the idea that human beings are simply spectators of being, and he will soon reveal that Protagoras' defence is hopelessly inconsistent. Nevertheless, some of Protagoras' views, specifically that education is fundamental to how the condition (*hexis*) of a soul turns out and that this, in turn, decides, at least to a high degree, how one "sees" reality, are shared by Socrates. It may therefore be useful to reflect a bit longer on what (Socrates says that) Protagoras says, in contrast to what Socrates claims about himself in the *Theaetetus*, by looking at the notion of *logos* as a drug or incantation.

Both Socrates and Protagoras claim to be able to "do things with words"; *logoi* are, according to both, more than just arguments.⁵⁹ Socrates claims to be able, through his use of *logoi*, to bring people's convictions to light, probably also convictions people do not know they have, and then to test whether they are correct or not. Protagoras, on the other hand, denies that such convictions or opinions can be true or false. What he claims to be able to do is to make them more beneficial. But how, we may wonder, does Protagoras figure out what is better and what is worse? Where does he find his standard for the better if what is good is mere convention? He does not tell us. However, if Protagoras denies that there is an objective standard for good and bad, then, since these notions depend on convention, the standard Protagoras would be referring to in deciding what is better, is, it seems, the conventions sanctioned by the political community. If this is correct, Protagoras' notion of education is not particularly relativistic, nor very revolutionary; he simply claims to be able to make people more efficient or successful under the existing norms.⁶⁰ And this claim isn't so strange, given that Protagoras is a professional educator. He needs to give ambitious young men what they want, namely the ability to gain power in the society they are a part of; if he didn't, they wouldn't pay him. Socrates, in contrast, *is* a revolutionary, since he claims to be able to test individual as well as collective opinions, to see if they are true or not. A person who goes through a Socratic *elenchus* does not necessarily acquire opinions that are more beneficial – if by that one understands opinions which will give one political success; this is something which should be evident in light of the impending trial against Socrates.

As regards Protagoras' further claim that the good rhetorician or, generally, the wise man, is able to make "serviceable things, instead of burdensome ones, seem to cities to be just" (167c2-4), we may indeed wonder how the wise man decides what is serviceable to a

⁵⁹ One may compare what Protagoras states here with Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, 8-10, cf. Roochnik (1996), 71 ff. for a discussion of this.

⁶⁰ Again, see Steiner (1992), 18 ff., cf. also *R.* 492a ff.

community. This becomes a major point in Socrates' subsequent criticism of Protagoras' ideal of education. But the criticism Socrates launches is not only meant to bring out inconsistencies in Protagoras' teaching: it is also meant to bring out how these inconsistencies determine the difference between Socratic and Protagorean education.

The criticism begins with an amusing feat of ventriloquism on the part of Socrates. In the name of Protagoras he points out the fundamental difference between verbal fights and real conversations: For the one who claims to care about virtue (*aretē*), Protagoras states, it would be unjust not to differentiate the two, since verbal fights are mere pastimes, where one is allowed to do whatever one wants in order to win the argument, whereas in a genuine conversation one "should be serious and help the person" one is "conversing with ..., pointing out to him only those stumbles in which he himself has been knocked off his feet" (167e1-168a2). It is the latter kind of discourse that Protagoras entreats the interlocutors to use when examining his doctrine.

In other words, Protagoras, through Socrates, invokes the ideals of dialectical inquiry in order that his doctrine get a fair trial.⁶¹ The criticism which follows, we may therefore assume, is meant to go to the heart of the matter; and it is not, as we shall soon see, brought forth for the sake of Protagoras, but rather for the sake of Theodorus and, in particular, Theaetetus.

⁶¹ Cf. Klein (1965), 29-31 for some interesting reflections pertaining to how Socrates' imitation of Protagoras affects the argument of the *Theaetetus*. Cf. also McCabe (2000), 37-40.

Chapter three: The refutation of Protagoras and the flux-doctrine

Protagoras' defence rests on two assumptions: 1) No objective criteria can be established as a point of reference when discussing how things appear. Therefore one cannot distinguish between true and false perceptions or opinions. 2) Nevertheless, the expert is able to change what appears, so that better or more useful things appear.

Before we see how Socrates' criticism of this unfolds, however, we should note that it is carried out in conversation, not with Theaetetus, but with Theodorus. Having evaded Socrates' continued attempts at getting him into the conversation, at 168c8-169c7 Theodorus is finally forced to "enter the ring". In fact, Theodorus remains the main interlocutor up until 184b, where the Protagorean measure-doctrine is finally dismissed together with the flux-ontology on which Socrates claims it rests. What does this change of interlocutor imply?

As noted above, Theodorus seems to be a mathematician devoid of any real interest in philosophical discourse. At 164e8-165a3, when Socrates asked him to defend Protagoras, he declined to do so; as he explained, he "turned away ...from bare words to geometry" at an early age. Apparently, Theodorus never bothered to investigate what kind of *logoi* Protagoras built his fame on. Now that he has been forced into the dialogue, he likens Socrates, first to Scirion and then to Antaeus (169a9-b4), the first a mythical highway man "who liked to push his victims off a cliff",⁶² the second a giant who forced "all strangers to wrestle with him".⁶³ Theodorus clearly does not like to be forced into philosophical dialogue, the lust for which Socrates, in contrast, admits possesses him like a disease (*nosos*; 169b5). Seen in conjunction with what Socrates has just had Protagoras say about discourse and eristic contest, the point of the change of interlocutor could be, on the dramatic level, that Socrates wants to demonstrate to Theodorus what the difference between Protagoras' way of speaking and the Socratic ideal of philosophical conversation is.

At the same time, we should ask what Plato wants to point out to the reader by displaying Theodorus as a loyal follower of the great sophist. How can a mathematician, i.e. an expert on the unchanging relations between ideal numbers and figures, be a follower of Protagoras, a spokesman for relativism? As I see it, two explanations are likely. First of all, I would suggest that Plato wants to point out that the possession of expertise, even a knowledge as exact as mathematics, does not necessarily imply the ability to understand *what* it is he possesses: there is a difference between the possession of an expertise and the ability to deliver a philosophical analysis of what this expertise consists in and what it, ontologically

⁶² Sachs (2004), 58, note.

⁶³ Der Kleine Pauly, 1.365.

speaking, presupposes.⁶⁴ A second point could be that Plato wants to make clear that the possession of expertise does not necessarily make one knowledgeable about political matters; for Theodorus is practically speaking blind to political matters, as becomes clear later on in the dialogue. If political and ethical matters are bound up with ontology, as Plato seems to assume, these two points may be regarded as different sides of the same problem.

If we return to the dramatic level, we may suggest a final point of the change of interlocutor: as Theodorus is Theaetetus' teacher, a point in refuting Protagoras through a discussion with Theodorus could be that Socrates wants to demonstrate to Theaetetus the theoretical limits of his teacher.

The refutation of Protagoras' position is carried out as a fictive dialogue with Protagoras, where Theodorus' function is to safeguard that the answers to the questions follow from the Protagorean position. The refutation falls in two distinct parts, a logical refutation culminating in 171d and a pragmatic refutation culminating in 179d. Between these we find the famous "digression" about the philosopher.

§8. The logical refutation of Protagoras (168c8-172c2)

The natural starting point for the refutation of Protagoras is the notion of wisdom, since what Socrates found problematic about the measure-doctrine was that it seemed to eliminate this notion,⁶⁵ as Socrates now puts it, it seems to make everyone self-sufficient as regards intelligence (*autarkēs eis phronēsin*, 169d5-6).

In the defence speech Socrates has just given on behalf of Protagoras, where wisdom was seen as analogous to the doctor's expertise, Protagoras was apparently able to meet this objection: there *are* differences between people, and some are wiser than others, even though all opinions and perceptions are true for the ones who hold them. But Socrates now points out that this does not necessarily represent what Protagoras actually meant (169d10-e2), since this defence was formulated by Socrates in order to make Protagoras' position coherent. If Socrates and Theodorus are to take the demand for dialectical investigation of the position of Protagoras seriously, they will have to show that Protagoras is committed to the view that wisdom exists and that this view actually follows from the measure-doctrine itself. The goal of Socrates' questions to Theodorus is hence to get Protagoras to agree to the fact that people differ as regards wisdom "out of his own statement ... by the briefest possible means" (169e8-170a).

⁶⁴ Cf. Gadamer (1982), 298, Howland (1998), 57.

⁶⁵ Cf. McCabe (2000), 33.

The first part of the argument goes as follows. Protagoras claims that things are as they appear to each and everyone. It appears to Socrates (and to most people) that everybody consider themselves “wiser than others in some respects and other people wiser” than them in other respects (170a8-9), which is why they seek expert counsel as well as teachers. In short, it appears to Socrates that “human beings themselves consider there to be wisdom (*sophia*) and lack of understanding (*amathia*) among them” (170b6-7). And in contrast to Protagoras, who denies that some opinions are true, others false, people in general mean “truthful thinking” (*alēthē dianoia*) when they say “wisdom” and “false opinions” (*pseudē doxa*) when they say “lack of understanding”. In other words, people in general regard opinions as subordinate to the bivalence principle of truth and falsity. As this is the way it appears to most people, this is, according to Protagoras’ own doctrine, the way it *is* to these people.

So from Protagoras’ own doctrine it follows that for most people there is a difference between wisdom and ignorance. Therefore Protagoras’ doctrine is false for most people. Moreover, according to Socrates Protagoras’ doctrine forces him to claim that his doctrine is false, not simply for most people, *but also for himself*.⁶⁶ Since most people believe that there is a difference between false and true beliefs, one can ask Protagoras whether he will admit that people always “hold true opinions, or sometimes true ones and sometimes false?” (170c3-4) Whichever way one answers this, it follows that people sometimes hold true and sometimes false beliefs. For if all opinions are true, the opinion stated by most people, that false opinions exist, is true. And if one denies this, one has already accepted that false and true opinions exist.

To deny that false opinions exist, the defender of Protagoras’ doctrine would therefore have to show that no-one believes that other people have false beliefs.⁶⁷ But as a matter of fact, not even Protagoras himself is able to claim that no-one has false beliefs, although this is what his doctrine states. Since everything is as it appears to each, according to Protagoras, he “goes along with the belief about his own belief of those who hold the opposite opinion” of himself (171a6-9), according to Socrates. On the one hand, Protagoras will have to agree with his opponents that his own belief is false *for them*. On the other hand, the same is not true the other way around:⁶⁸ since his opponents do not agree with his relativistic doctrine, they will

⁶⁶ This part of the dialogue has generated a vast amount of discussion in the scholarly literature. I limit myself to giving a very brief sketch of the steps of the argument without discussing in detail the validity of steps being taken.

⁶⁷ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 28-29.

⁶⁸ It is this part of the argument that is the centre of scholarly controversy, since it seems as if Socrates suddenly denies Protagoras the possibility of making the claims of his opponents relative by insisting that his truth may be

not grant him that this is merely true for them, but not for him. And since Protagoras believes that things are as they appear to each, he will also have to agree to this point, that it is true when his opponents refuse to allow that their view of his doctrine is merely true for them but not for him. So on the basis of his own doctrine Protagoras will have to accept that his own belief is false, not merely for his opponents, but also for himself. In other words, Protagoras is forced to accept that there exist wisdom and lack of understanding and that this implies that opinions are subordinate to the principle of bivalence.

This provides a reason to differentiate between opining and perceiving, a distinction Protagoras fails to appreciate. At 167a7-8 Protagoras seemed to assume that opinions are analogous to perceptions; opinions are a direct representation of reality, of what is, wherefore they cannot be false. But most people deny this, believing that the principle of bivalence applies to opinions, and hence that there are both false and true opinions. It follows that opinions cannot be a mere representation of reality. We can note, however, that an adequate notion of what it is to opine has by no means come to light through this refutation.

The notion of opining is brought to greater clarity in the pragmatic argument against Protagoras which follows. It begins at 171d9 but is then interrupted at 172c3, only to be resumed at 177c6. It is assumed that Protagoras now accepts that there is a difference between ignorance and wisdom. The argument focuses on the notion of expertise which Protagoras should in any case want to defend as a sophist. Protagoras might be able to persuade people that his doctrine is true as regards “things that are hot, dry, sweet and everything of that type” (171e1-3) and, in political matters, that what different cities regard as “beautiful or shameful, just or unjust, pious and not” (172a1-3) are that way to each *polis*, since these are the areas where most people would probably agree to a certain relativism. However, Protagoras should be willing to agree, as most people do, that as regards “what’s healthy and diseased, ... not every woman and child ... is competent to cure itself” (171e3-7) and, more importantly, as regards what is advantageous to the city, “that one advisor surpasses another and that the opinion of one city surpasses that of another in relation to truth” (172a6-8). For if Protagoras should not accept that the doctor’s or the political advisor’s opinion is of greater value than that of “the man on the street”, he would saw off the branch he is sitting on: he couldn’t claim to be a teacher of anything.

false for them, but still true for himself, cf. Burnyeat (1976a). I here rely on Emilsson (1994), for further discussion, cf. McCabe (2000), 40-46, and Castagnoli (2004).

Before this is examined in greater detail, however, Socrates suddenly informs Theodorus that their discussion of these political implications of the measure-doctrine has made “an argument coming out of an argument” catch up with them (172b8-c1).

§9. *The appearance of philosophy (172c3-177c5)*

The argument which has caught up with Theodorus and Socrates is described, at 177b7-8, as a digression (*parerga legomena*). Its explicit content is a comparison between the rhetorical and the philosophical way of life, and many commentators see it as a rhetorical intermezzo,⁶⁹ not as a real part of the argument of the dialogue.

N. Notomi points out, however, that digressions are a literary device employed by Plato in many dialogues “when the speakers confront a certain difficulty in the course of inquiry, and need argument of another dimension or new perspective, in order to solve that difficulty.”⁷⁰ In a similar spirit, R. S. Brumbaugh suggests that “a digression may digress to a higher dialectical level, from which one better understands the original lower level.”⁷¹ I think these observations are correct. Friedländer⁷² observes that the digression in the *Theaetetus* is situated at the very point where the discussion moves upwards from practical expertise to the political domain. At this level, notions such as beautiful, just, and pious come to the fore, notions whose objective being has been denied by Protagoras. The interpretation of the digression is made difficult, however, by the fact that it mixes elements of comic poetry, in particular elements of Aristophanean comedy,⁷³ with what looks like genuinely Socratic views. In what follows I limit myself to commenting on the points of the digression that pertain directly to the *motif* I am following in the dialogue.⁷⁴

The comparison between the philosophical and the rhetorical life is, as most commentators agree, motivated by the discussion of the Protagorean measure-doctrine. Socrates likens the ideal philosophers he describes in the digression to a chorus (173b4); in light of the Aristophanean motifs which emerge in the digression, we may suggest that it is meant as an *antistrophē* which counterbalances the defence speech (*strophē*) of Protagoras. Whereas Protagoras is a wage-earner who teaches political excellence to his pupils, and in this sense is a slave of the society in which he teaches, the philosopher is a free man who has

⁶⁹ Cf. Howland (1998), 297, note 7 for an overview.

⁷⁰ Notomi (1999), 40.

⁷¹ Brumbaugh (1988), 86.

⁷² Friedländer (III), 151. For similar observations, see Dorter (1994), 86-87

⁷³ Cf. Howland (1998), 59 ff.

⁷⁴ For interesting discussions, see Rue (1993), Howland (1998), 57-64, Sedley (1999), Sedley (2004), 65-86.

leisure (*scholē*; 172c2).⁷⁵ There is, however, also another important motivation for the digression. For at 172b3-5, in connection with the discussion in what areas of life Protagoras might still be able to convince people that his measure-doctrine was valid, Socrates suggested that as regards the just or unjust, the pious and impious, most people would be willing to insist strongly that “there are not any such things by nature, having their own being (*ousia*)”; a point of the digression is to challenge this claim.

The digression can, roughly speaking, be divided into two parts, the first part dealing with the difference between the philosophical and the rhetorical life (172d4-176a4), the second with the question what the just and the pious, the unjust and the impious are (176a5-177c5). As the description of the philosopher’s life is antithetical to the description of the life of the sophist, so are Socrates’ claims about the just antithetical to what most people claim about it. These latter claims are not, I believe, issues which Socrates merely brings up *en passant*, as something that cannot be dealt with adequately here since that “would take us away from general epistemology”;⁷⁶ rather, they are claims which show that it is misguided to read the *Theatetus* as a treatise in general epistemology in the first place.

The first part of the digression serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it brings the forthcoming trial against Socrates to the fore. When Socrates compares the life of the rhetorically trained law court speakers with the life of the real philosophers who become laughingstocks because they, like Thales (cf. 174a4 ff.), are unable to see what is in front of them, and are thus untrained in the ways one should speak to an assembly (174c2 ff.), this clearly foreshadows what Socrates will claim at the beginning of his actual defence speech (cf. *Ap.* 17c ff.). On the other hand, what Socrates has to say about these “top notch” philosophers, from 173c7 onwards, obviously stands in stark contrast to the picture Plato gives us of Socrates in his dialogues. As S. Benardete observes, “Socrates... cannot possibly be the philosopher whom Socrates describes to Theodorus”.⁷⁷ In fact, the philosopher described by Socrates, who is only present in the *polis* with his body “while his thinking ... deems” all things pertaining to life in the *polis* “worthless and takes flight ... underneath the earth and above the heavens” (173e2-6), is the kind of wise person Socrates explicitly claims *not* to be in the *Apology* (*Ap.* 19b ff.), i.e. the kind of intellectual he is represented as in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.

⁷⁵ At least according to Theodorus; we may wonder how much time Socrates actually has, given the upcoming trial. Cf. also *Phdrs* 229e-230a.

⁷⁶ Burnyeat (1990), 34.

⁷⁷ Benardete (2000), 298.

This may be the reason why Socrates, when he begins his description of the topmost philosophers, says that they should disregard “those who pass their time in philosophy poorly” (173c8-9). As Socrates will later refer to himself as one who conducts philosophical inquiry poorly (cf. 197a1-4, and *Sph.* 216b5-6), this, we may suggest with J. Howland,⁷⁸ refers to himself. The picture of the philosophers which Socrates paints is later said to correspond to those whom Theodorus calls philosophers (*Tht.* 175e1). It is a picture of the pure theoretical scientist who disregards the political to the extent that he does not know his “way to the market place or where the courthouse or council chamber is” (as Socrates surely does), nor does he know the family relations of any of his native citizens (173c9-d9).⁷⁹ In fact, he hardly knows whether his neighbour is a human being at all, preoccupied as he is with the question what a human is (174b3-6). This all makes perfect sense to Theodorus (174b8).⁸⁰ The ‘ideal’ philosophers described here look like Socratic philosophers who have forgotten that their reason for posing *ti estin*-questions is a wish to understand the phenomena that the beings (*ousiai*) asked about are meant to explain.⁸¹

However, rather than seeing the philosophers described in the digression as a mere parody I suggest, in light of what Socrates says at the beginning of the *Sophist*, namely that philosophers appear in different guises due to the ignorance of others (216c4-5), that what Socrates gives is a distorted perspective of the philosopher, meant to cater to the limited understanding of the mathematician Theodorus. But as one-sided as the description is, it serves a purpose, namely to point to the difference between being a slave of the norms dominating one’s society, as law court speakers by necessity are, and being a free man, only interested in whether one’s thoughts actually ‘hit upon’ being (*Tht.* 172d9). In fact, the claim that this is the only thing the philosopher is interested in is, I believe, a clue to understanding the second part of the digression which, although surely somewhat otherworldly, contains a most serious message.

This part begins at 176a5, at the pinnacle of Theodorus’ enthusiasm, just after he claims to have been completely persuaded by Socrates. In reply to Theodorus’ claim that there would be “peace and fewer evils” if everyone could be persuaded in the way he has just been, Socrates points out that this is nevertheless impossible that the evils should ever disappear,

⁷⁸ Cf. Howland (1998), 60.

⁷⁹ This recalls the opening scene where Theodorus admits not to know who the father of Theaetetus is, in contrast to Socrates, cf. 144b7-c8.

⁸⁰ Tschemplik (2008), 27 remarks that “it is ... the mathematician who is exposed in the ... caricature of the “true” philosopher.”

⁸¹ This gives them a certain resemblance to the friends of forms criticised by the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist* (cf. part III, cha. 3 below). One may also compare what Socrates here claims about the philosopher with what Callicles states in the *Gorgias* (cf. 485d).

since there must be something opposed to the good, which haunts the region (*topos*) “here” and our mortal nature (176a5-8). Therefore man should try to flee away from this region to the region of the gods as quickly as possible. Such flight, Socrates explains, in fact means “becoming like a god (*homoiōsis theōi*) as far as is in one’s power”; to attempt to escape the mortal region thus means to attempt to become, as much as possible, “just and pious with intelligent judgement (*phronēsis*)” (176b1-2).⁸²

To recognise that one should pursue virtue in this way, in order to become as godly as one can, and not just in order to seem good,⁸³ is what Socrates understands by true wisdom and excellence (*sophia kai aretē*), whereas the ignorance of this is thoughtlessness and vice (*amathia kai kakia*; 176c4-5). A man’s ultimate happiness or unhappiness, he further claims, depends on the model or pattern (*paradeigma*) to which he strives to liken himself through his actions (176e3-177a2). For there are two patterns for man, the godly and most happy, and the ungodly and most miserable, and the man who acts unjustly imitates the model of godlessness and, unbeknownst to himself, thus becomes unhappy since he leads a life resembling the unjust and most miserable model.

Socrates here brings in a notion of ethical imitation which is not only well-known from the so-called middle period dialogues,⁸⁴ but, as we shall see, also comes to play an important role in the *Sophist*. His account of wisdom and ignorance thus stands in stark contrast to what Protagoras understands by wisdom and lack of learning (cf. 166d4 ff). It also clearly goes beyond most people’s views of stupidity and wisdom; their claim that wisdom is true thinking and stupidity false opinion (cf. 170b9-10) does not in itself entail that true thinking leads to justice and excellence. The sketched ideal of godlikeness gives depth to the postulated difference between the *rhetor* and the philosopher; the philosopher is “free”, in contrast to the sophist, because his standard of what is good and bad is drawn from beyond the standard of the political community.

§10. *The pragmatic refutation of Protagoras (177c6-179d1)*

The discussion of the difference between what appears *beautiful*, *just*, and *pious* to each city and what appears *advantageous* to each, which initiated the digression, is resumed once it

⁸² In contrast to Rue (1993), 89 and Howland (1998), 63, I do not see the motif of god-assimilation as standing in radical contrast to the human-political virtues Socrates claims are attained through this assimilation, nor do I believe that this motif is meant to be read as absurd. The notion of Gods and/or God in Plato is primarily, I believe, a philosophical notion of perfection which directs the philosopher’s attention beyond the standards of the *polis*. It is in this sense a transcendent ideal. I thus agree with Sedley (1999), 309 that the notion is “a pivotal feature of Plato’s thought”. See also Sedley (2004), 81-86.

⁸³ This of course recalls the entire argument of the *Republic*; cf. also *Phd.* 82b ff.

⁸⁴ Cf. *R.* 500d10-e4, a passage Sedley (2004), 77 rightly points to as relevant for understanding the digression.

ends, apparently unaffected by what has been said in the digression.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, these questions have taken on a new contour; for they now emerge in light of the forthcoming trial against Socrates and in light of a notion of wisdom radically different from the one discussed in Protagoras' defence speech. This may also be the reason why Socrates now, when he resumes the argument, focuses on the fact that people who are adherers to relativism would insist most strongly that what is just is relative (177c9).

In contrast, Socrates claims, no one will want to assert that the same holds "in the case of what's good (*agathon*)", since "no one would ... fight it out that whatever a city sets down supposing it to be advantageous (*ōphelima*) for itself also is advantageous" (177c9-d5). What is advantageous, or useful, is thus connected with the good, which, as we shall see, will prove important. Socrates' claim seems to be somewhat similar to what he suggests in the *Republic*, that whereas people may be satisfied with what appears to be just, even if it is not just, no one is satisfied with having what merely appears good; as regards the good, everyone wants "the real thing" (cf. *R.* 505d). The goal of any *polis*, when laws are established, is to make advantageous laws; this is what the *polis* looks toward (*blepein*) when it makes the laws (*Tht.* 177e7-7). Socrates' point now is that the notion of advantage or good, however one conceives of it, implies that there is a specific knowledge not possessed by everyone. That it requires competence to actually achieve what is advantageous and good can be seen negatively from the fact that a city does not "always hit (*tygchanein*) what" it aim at, but "each city also often completely misses (*diamatanein*) its target", as Theodorus readily admits (178a2-3). What appears advantageous at the moment of establishing a law or practise is not the same as what will *turn out* to be actually advantageous, wherefore the *polis* or legislator must have knowledge of the latter if the laws are to be successful. The notion of the advantageous (and the good) is thus bound up with the notion of temporality, with the notion of the future (178a8). Even if each *polis* is the measure of what is just, at the moment, it requires knowledge to decide what will turn out to be good or advantageous.

The same is true of the doctor, the musician or the cook (178b9-e3). Even if each of us is the measure of our present well-being, our present appreciation of a song or a meal, it is the expert in these fields who knows which treatments, which combinations of tones and which recipes will make us feel well and make us enjoy the music and the food. In other words, as regards "how things *will* seem (*doxein*) and how they *are going to be* (*esesthai*) for each"

⁸⁵ Dorter (1994), 87 points out that the digression thus resembles the content of the central books of the *Republic*, since it too is found at the middle of the dialogue, and "breaks into the beginning of the discussion of a political question, which is subsequently resumed as if the digression had never taken place."

(178e3; my emphasis), the expert has a better or more correct opinion than the layman. Even Protagoras must claim to have a better judgement of “what is going to be persuasive” in the future (178e4-6) than the layman: If he did not, he wouldn’t have any pupils.⁸⁶

Whereas the logical refutation of Protagoras shows that people are able to make judgements about his opinions, namely that they are wrong, this pragmatic argument shows that expertise implies (among other things) the ability to judge how things will appear to and be for others in the future. Logically, the measure-doctrine forces Protagoras to accept other people’s opinion or judgement of his opinion. Pragmatically, Protagoras has to accept that the expert’s judgement about future appearances is better than the layman’s judgement.⁸⁷ On both accounts it has become clear that Protagoras’ merging of opinions with perceptions is untenable. Perceptions may be unerring, opinions are not. Rather, as the pragmatic argument has pointed out, when we form opinions or beliefs about the future, we quite often fail to “hit what we aim at”. The activity of opining, however, has still not been adequately determined. Nor has the ontology on which Protagoras’ measure-doctrine rests been dismissed.

§11. The dismissal of the flux-ontology (179d2-184b2)

Following the pragmatic argument against Protagoras, the flux-doctrine’s notion of being which is “swept along” (*pheromenē ousia*) is to be examined in order to see whether it “has a solid ring to it or sounds cracked” (179d2-4). In other words, the discussion of the measure-doctrine changes into a discussion of its ontological foundation. The explicit turn to the flux-ontology is accompanied by the following remark by Socrates: there are (as he already mentioned in 152e2) those who claim the opposite of the flux-believers, namely “many a Melissus and Parmenides” who believe that everything or the all (*ta panta*) is unmoved (*akinēton*) and one (180e1-2). These people oppose those who claim that being is moving in a battle (*machē*) about being (179d4-5). For a reason which is not immediately apparent, Socrates claims that he and his interlocutors have somehow “fallen into the middle (*eis to meson*) between both sides” (180e6-181a1). The full implication of this remark does not emerge before we turn to the *Sophist* (cf. below part III, §7), but as we shall see, the consequence of accepting either party’s conception of being is a denial of the possibility of learning, and this may explain Socrates’ claim that they have fallen into the middle. Socrates

⁸⁶ The point of the discussion is only whether Protagoras’ or the cook’s judgement is more authoritative about what will happen or not, and we need not infer, I think, that Socrates believes that cooking and rhetoric deserves to be called *technai*, in contrast to what he claims in the *Gorgias* (Grg. 462a ff.). *Empeiria* and *tribē* may make one more authoritative than a person without any experience.

⁸⁷ I agree with Chappell (2004), 131 (and with Theodorus, cf. 179b6-9) that this is the more devastating argument against Protagoras.

the midwife must find a way between the Scylla of “Heracliteanism” and the Charybdis of “Parmenidianism” in order to defend his claim that learning and progress is possible.⁸⁸ The reason why the full implications of this only emerge in the *Sophist* is that Socrates, at 183c8-184b2, postpones the discussion of the Parmenidean conception of being. In the *Theaetetus*, only the flux-ontology is discussed in detail, although, as we shall see, the problems emerging from Parmenides do in fact come to play a role in the next part of the dialogue.

During the discussion of this ontology, we are suddenly presented with a different side of Theodorus. He is the one who identifies the followers of the flux-doctrine as Heracliteans (179d7, e4-5), and he paints a less than flattering picture of them. According to him, they are in a state of total war⁸⁹ against anything static or stable, be that in their souls or in speech (180a7-b3), and, rather than being a school of philosophers, they “sprout up spontaneously” like weeds (180b9-c3). The claim that these people are all autodidact seems consistent enough: if everything is in constant change, if nothing is stable, neither in the world, nor in speech and soul, teaching seems impossible. Nevertheless, we may wonder why Theodorus objects so violently to the proponents of the flux-doctrine (whom Socrates states explicitly are “no friends” of Theodorus, cf. 180b5-6) while still being a close friend of Protagoras who teaches that each is the measure of his own truth?

I think this is again a character description meant to pinpoint the limits of Theodorus’ intellectual capacity. If Protagoras’ doctrine is really just “applied flux-doctrine”, as Socrates suggests, Theodorus should object to Protagoras no less than to the Heraclitian ontology. As a mathematician, he probably sees that the doctrine of being as constant change is incompatible with his own expertise, but he fails to see that the political and educational programme taught by his friend Protagoras rests on the same ontology. Worse, he fails to see the problems with this programme: initially he will not help in criticising it, then he states that if Socrates could help his old friend, he would be grateful, and when he is finally forced to take part in the refutation, he complains that they are too harsh with Protagoras (cf. 162a4-6, 165a3, 171c8-9). Thus he seems to have sympathy with Protagoras’ teaching, though it is, in reality, a potentially dangerous political doctrine in the sense that it claims that it is impossible to reason about ends, since there is nothing objective to them, wherefore *paideia* only consists in learning how to reason about *means* to ends, regardless of what these ends are.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Cf. Howland (1998), 42.

⁸⁹ A pun on Heraclitus’ claim that war is the origin of everything? Cf. DK B53, B80.

⁹⁰ In contrast, we may note, a “pure theoretician” like Cratylus, who ended up living out his convictions by refusing to speak (*Metaph.* 1010a10-15), at least did no harm to anyone else.

The examination of the flux-ontology is conducted in basically the same way as the examination of Protagoras' doctrine, as a dialogue, with Socrates in the role of questioner and Theodorus as the answerer. Socrates begins by pointing out that it is possible to distinguish between two kinds of movement, on the one hand change of place and on the other qualitative change (181c1-d7). If asked whether they will claim that everything changes in only one way or in both ways, the Heracliteans will be forced to admit that everything is changing in both respects simultaneously. Otherwise, as Socrates points out, it "will appear to them that things are both moving and standing still, and it will be no more correct to say that all things are in motion than that all things are standing still" (181e5-7). In other words, by introducing the distinction between these two kinds of motion, Socrates forces the flux-followers to admit that everything changes both spatially and qualitatively, or, as Socrates puts it afterwards, that everything also changes as regards its "sortness" (*poiotēs*; 182a8-9).

If this is so, it means that no matter how we address something, be that as of a certain kind, quality, height etc., what we address it as is in constant change. Although language seems to imply stable "predicates" through which we can identify the things which surround us, this has, according to the flux-ontology, no foundation in reality.⁹¹ But this denial has the unfortunate consequence that the Heracliteans will not even be able to identify *what* it is that is changing, since it isn't possible to address (*prosagoreuein*, *proseipein*) it correctly (182d4-5). Every statement one can make is per se false since it falsely ascribes some kind of stability to a constantly changing world.

Moreover, since the full-blown flux-ontology made clear that the senses are also in constant movement, the doctrine implies that seeing and hearing are in constant change as regards what "type of things" they are. Therefore it is just as false to speak of seeing as such as it is to speak of white as such. They are also "not-seeing" and "not-white". So if knowledge is perception, and if perception is no more perception than not perception, knowledge is no more knowledge than not knowledge. The flux-doctrine, which was supposed to secure Theaetetus' answer by establishing that perceptions are always about "what is", thus undermines the very point of giving an answer, since on this ontology "every answer, no matter what one is answering about, is equally correct" (183a2-4). If the terms we use do not point out or reveal anything about the beings (*ta onta*) we speak about, statements are not subject to the principle of bivalence and hence all are true (or false). From the idea that one must change language in order to fit reality, as the Heraclitean doctrine first proposed, we end

⁹¹ This is just spelling out in detail what was implied at 152d2-5.

up with the claim that the Heraclitean view of reality makes language impossible. Just as the Protagorean dictum that each is the measure of the truth of his own opinions makes the Socratic (or any) search for wisdom meaningless (cf. 161e), so the Heraclitean flux-doctrine makes any kind of discourse and hence search for knowledge impossible.⁹²

If the flux-ontology is what lends the Protagorean doctrine its plausibility, the Protagorean doctrine falls together with the flux-doctrine. This is spelled out in 183b7-c3, where Socrates “bids farewell” to both Protagoras and the notion of being as constant flux; it is not every man that is a measure, but only a man of good sense (*phronimos tis*), and the notion of being as constant movement gives no foundation to the answer that knowledge is perception.

Before we turn to Socrates’ final dismissal of Theaetetus’ answer, it is worth pointing out that his final argument against the flux-ontology, that it makes *logos* impossible, is very similar to a point spelled out in the *Parmenides* at 135b-c, after Parmenides has delivered his fierce criticism of the young Socrates’ assumption of Forms: “if someone, in turn, Socrates, after focusing on all these problems ... shall deny that there are Forms (*eidē*) of the beings ..., he will not have anywhere to turn his mind (*dianoia*) And so he will entirely destroy the power of dialogue.”⁹³ The references to Melissus and Parmenides mentioned above, especially the reference at 183e5 ff., where Socrates postpones the discussion of the Eleatics out of a certain reverence for Parmenides, whom he “mixed in with” when he was very young and Parmenides quite old (183e7-184a1), looks very much like a dramatic reference to the *Parmenides*. The mentioning of the Eleatic “school” could thus be regarded, not only as a foreshadowing of the discussion to come, but also as an indirect reminder of Parmenides’ warning and thus as an indirect reminder of the assumption of Forms.⁹⁴ As we shall see, the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* will make a similar point (cf. *Soph.* 249b8-c4). Moreover, just as the digression pointed to the connection between ontology and normative issues, what the stranger has to say about Forms makes it clear that Forms are not concepts, but metaphysical entities which the soul strives toward. This is also strongly hinted at in the section of the *Theaetetus* to which we now turn.

⁹² As R. Rehn (1982), 56 puts it, “Plato fights and refutes the Heraclitean position by means of a specific concept of *logos* – an important aspect of this concept is the insight that, without anything that rests and asserts itself as identical, language becomes impossible – however he doesn’t use language only as a means in the critique of the Heracliteans, he rather carries out this critique – at least partly – in the name of language, since the flux-doctrine of the Heracliteans casts doubt about language and hence threatens the foundation of philosophy”, my translation.

⁹³ Translation by Whitaker (1996) slightly modified.

⁹⁴ Cf. Dorter (1994), 91.

Chapter four: the soul of Theaetetus

§12. Socrates' renewed discussion with Theaetetus

According to what M. Burnyeat has labelled his B-reading of the *Theaetetus*, the refutation of the measure-doctrine and the flux-ontology is at the same time a refutation of Theaetetus' answer that knowledge is perception, since these two teachings are not merely sufficient conditions for that answer, according to Burnyeat, but also "the only sufficient conditions that could reasonably be devised", wherefore they "are necessary conditions ... as well as sufficient".⁹⁵ As Burnyeat points out, however, his reading faces a problem, namely that Socrates delivers a second refutation of Theaetetus' answer in the passage we now turn to, 184b3-186e12. This seems to be somewhat redundant if the answer has already been dismissed at 183b7-c3. According to Burnyeat, however, one can explain the fact that there are two refutations by their difference in style. The first refutation is conducted as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, where the theses under consideration deliver the material to their own refutation, whereas the second refutation is a "direct proof" where the material used in the refutation comes from "premises Plato himself accepts as true".⁹⁶

No doubt Burnyeat is right in pointing out that the refutations differ in style. But if the difference between them is merely stylistic, we seem justified in asking why Plato undertook the *reductio* argument in the first place. Why not simply start from the direct proof, with accepted Platonic principles? A focus on the *dramatis personae* of the dialogue may give us a slightly different way of looking at the connection between the two refutations.

As we have seen, what Burnyeat describes as the indirect proof is carried out in two stages, with Theaetetus as main respondent in the section 151e-168c and with Theodorus as main respondent in the passage 168c-184b. Whereas the first stage develops the Protagorean position in detail, the second stage is where the real refutation of Protagoras takes place, first through the logical and pragmatic refutations of the measure-doctrine, then through the dismissal of the Heraclitean notion of being. As I suggested above, the point of the change of interlocutor was to show 1) that there is a difference between having knowledge and the ability to understand the implications of having it, as well as 2) the limits of the political-normative knowledge of Theodorus, his mathematical knowledge notwithstanding. Indeed, we may suggest that Theodorus represents the kind of mathematician who is not interested in the principles on which his science rests, but only in the deduction his science enables him to make (cf. *R.* 510b), i.e. a geometer to whom "geometry is anything but a propaedeutic to

⁹⁵ Burnyeat (1990), 10, see also 46.

⁹⁶ Burnyeat (1990), 53.

philosophy”, to quote M. Miller.⁹⁷ Theodorus’ positive attitude towards Protagoras, moreover, combined with the fact that this attitude is somewhat superficial, since he does not really know what his old friend meant, demonstrates that he has no serious interest in the notions of wisdom and education. Theaetetus’ initial claim that Theodorus was, in addition to an excellent mathematician, an expert on all matters pertaining to education, is shown to be groundless – Theodorus has never considered the questions that are the main concern of Socrates.⁹⁸ Thus, as suggested, by refuting the Protagorean doctrine Socrates demonstrates to Theaetetus the limits, not only of Protagoras, but also of his teacher Theodorus which, I would suggest, is the reason why the change of interlocutor at 184b, from Theodorus back to Theaetetus, is coupled with a change of style in argumentation. The demonstration that Protagoras’ notions of knowledge and wisdom are wrong clears the way for a new discussion of Theaetetus’ answer. It is helpful to break this discussion down into three parts, 184b7-184d6, 184d7-186a1, and 186a2-186e12.

§13. The activity of the soul and the notion of perception (184b3-186e12)

At 184b4-5 Socrates asks Theaetetus, as if the discussion was beginning again from the start, to confirm that his claim is that knowledge is perception. However, the discussion does not simply start over again. The way Protagoras was refuted plays an important role in the answers Theaetetus gives in the ensuing discussion. The “direct” refutation draws on the indirect refutation.

1) The soul is what perceives through the sense-organs...

The refutation of Theaetetus’ answer begins with Socrates posing a question: would he claim that a human being sees colours and hears sounds with the eyes and the ears? Theaetetus affirms that he would. But is it more correct, Socrates continues, to say that it is *with* (*hōi*) the eyes or ears or rather *through* (*di’ hou*) them that we see and hear? Confronted with this alternative, Theaetetus prefers the latter answer.

Socrates at once agrees that this is a better answer; for it would be terrible if the senses “were sitting in us as in wooden horses, but they didn’t all converge into some one look (*idea*), whether it’s the soul (*psychē*) or whatever one ought to call it with which we perceive whatever is perceived, through these as though they’re implements or tools (*organa*)” (184d1-5). If the different sense organs did the sensing, i.e. if our perceptions didn’t converge into a

⁹⁷ Cf. Miller (2004), 4.

⁹⁸ Cf. Howland (1998), 74-75.

single something, our sensations would not be *our* sensations, but rather a bundle of sensations, merely superficially unified, by being part of the same body. To put it differently: If the eye was what saw and the ear was what heard, there would be no one who did the seeing and hearing, or rather, the perceiving person would be split into multiple perceiving “subjects”, into the different senses, without any connection between what was seen or heard.⁹⁹ Since it is in fact a single person who both sees and hears, tastes and touches, there must a single form “behind” the senses that does the sensing, into which the different perceptions converge.

It thus becomes clear that perception is a more complex phenomenon than the discussion hitherto has suggested, since it involves sense organs as well as a soul actively using the sense organs. So far, however, this does not discredit Theaetetus’ answer. The fact that *aisthēsis* relies on two different “components”, sense-organs and soul, does not, I believe, in itself refute the suggestion that perception and knowledge are identical.

2) ...and certain common notions are reached by the soul itself, through itself...

Socrates next gains Theaetetus’ acceptance that the different sense-organs have different “fields of objects”. What we perceive through one power (*dynamis*) of perception cannot be perceived through another power, i.e. the powers of hearing, sight and smell all perceive different things. The crux of the second part of the refutation is a distinction Socrates draws from this concession: if we are able to think (*dianoēin*) something about that which we, for instance, see and hear, i.e. about both of them together, this must be done through something different from the power of sight and of hearing, since each sense is restricted to its own “objects” (185a4-6).

Evidently, we *are* able to think a number of different things about what we perceive, as Theaetetus readily agrees when asked. Of two “things” perceived we are able to say that both of them *are* (*amphoterō eston*), that they are different (*heteron*) from each other, but identical (*tauton*) with themselves, that they together are two, but each of them one, and we can examine whether they are unlike or like each other (185a8-b5).

The ability to make such determinations, we may note, looks a lot like the basic activity of reason, the “primary and “simple” business of *διάνοια*”,¹⁰⁰ which Socrates describes in the *Republic* book VII (R. 523a-525). A similar activity will play an important role in what the Eleatic stranger in the *Sophist* will describe as a key ability of the dialectician,

⁹⁹ Cf. Burnyeat (1976), 33.

¹⁰⁰ Klein (1965), 115.

namely the ability to divide according to kinds and not to confuse Forms with one another (253d1-3). We may suggest that Socrates, by pointing to the ability to make such distinctions, attempts to make Theaetetus use it in order to understand that the suggested definition, that knowledge is perception, in fact confuses two things which are different, claiming that they are identical.

Let us return to the way Socrates is leading Theaetetus to understand this. There exists a number of common notions that apply equally well to anything we perceive, and since each of the sense organs is limited to perceiving the “things” it is set over, what these notions signify cannot be perceived by any of the sense organs. For the moment, we can let the question of what ontological status these notions have rest, since Socrates’ interest is directed at the “subjective” side of knowledge; the only question Socrates poses is if there is something analogous to the perceptive organs *through which* we think all this, i.e. if there is a specific organ that enables us to grasp (*lambanein*) what is common (*to koinon*) to what we perceive (185b7-9). Is there some kind of bodily organ through which the soul perceives (*aisthanesthai*) the being (*ousia*) of the different perceptions, as well as their non-being (*mē einai*), their likeness etc. (185c9-d3)? Theaetetus concedes that he is unable to “see” any such organ – it must be the soul which itself, through itself (*autē di’ hautēs*) observes (*episkopein*) the common notions, he suggests.

But does this prove that the common notions are not perceived? Could there be a non-corporal kind of perception which reveal or “see” these notions?¹⁰¹ If Theaetetus’ identification of knowledge with perception is to be altogether dismissed, it has to be shown not only that knowledge depends on these common notions which are reached by the soul, but also, I believe, that it makes no sense to claim that we reach them through a kind of direct apprehension. Theaetetus’ choice of words, however, that the soul “observes” the common notions, might seem to identify the thinking activity of the soul with a kind of (intellectual) perception; *episkopein* basically means “to behold” or “to contemplate”.

However, *episkopein* also has another meaning, namely “to examine” or “to consider”. The answer that the soul “observes” the common notions thus seems to contain an ambiguity. This is, I believe, reflected in Socrates’ response. On the one hand he exclaims that Theaetetus is beautiful and not ugly, as Theodorus initially claimed, since the one who speaks beautifully is both beautiful and good (*kalos te kai agathos*; 185e3-5). The concession that the soul is something which has power, not only to use the sense-organs when perceiving, but

¹⁰¹ Aristotle, for instance, claims that notions such as motion, rest, number, shape and size are a kind of common perceptibles (*koina aisthēta*), cf. *de An.* 418a10-20, 425a14.

also to perform an activity on its own, in isolation from the sense organs, is important. It goes directly against Protagoras' understanding of perceiving and opining (cf. 167a7-8). On the other hand, however, Theaetetus' answer leaves it undetermined what it means to say that the soul itself, *through* itself, observes being, identity etc. Does this "through" imply that the soul is its own organ, so to say, when inspecting the common notions? And if so, could one not still call this a kind of perception? This seeming lack of precision in Theaetetus' answer is, I believe, the reason why Socrates, with a hint of irony, says that he has been spared "a very long speech" if it now appears (*phainesthai*) to Theaetetus "that there are some things the soul itself observes through itself" (185e5-7). To paraphrase H.-G. Gadamer, Theaetetus' concession that the soul is active "alone by itself" comes a bit too quickly;¹⁰² he has still not fully grasped the radical difference between thinking and perception. This difference becomes clearer through the following discussion about the good and the advantageous; it remains the task of the rest of the dialogue to clarify it further.

3) ... and the way the soul reaches these is different from the way in which it perceives.

Since the soul examines certain things by itself, Socrates wants to know where Theaetetus would place being (*ousia*), which "most of all follows along (*parepesthai*) with everything else". Among the things that the soul examines by itself, Theaetetus asserts; and likewise likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference (186a2-8). All of these are "things" that the soul observes "through itself".

This looks like a mere repetition of what he has already agreed upon at 185b7-e2. However, at 186a9 Socrates asks what Theaetetus thinks about a number of notions that were not mentioned at 185b7-e2, the notions of the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad (186a9). Are they also something the soul observes, itself by itself?

As we have seen, these notions played a central role in the previous discussion with Theodorus, more precisely in the digression about the philosopher and, in particular, in the pragmatic refutation of Protagoras. Furthermore, we saw that Socrates specifically asked Theaetetus whether he was satisfied with the conclusion that the flux-doctrine turned the good and the beautiful into something without stable being, into something that was always becoming (157d7-9).

So what does the soul's observing by and through itself consist in, more precisely? I believe it is significant that an important clarification of which activity the soul has in addition

¹⁰² Gadamer (1982), 303.

to perceiving through the bodily organs follows directly upon Socrates' question about these notions. Theaetetus suggests that the soul looks (*skopeisthai*) to the being (*ousia*) of the good and the beautiful, in addition to the other common notions, on its own. More specifically, he suggests that the soul regards their being in relation (*pros allēla*) to each other, calculating or considering (*analogizesthai*), in itself, the past and present things in relation to the future things (186a10-b1).

This thoughtful answer shows, I believe, that Theaetetus has paid close attention to the discussion between his teacher and Socrates about the expert's ability to predict what will appear better in the future.¹⁰³ That the notion of the good or the better is intimately connected with temporality, a point which Theodorus was forced to accept, is now reaffirmed by his pupil. Moreover, the answer gives a much needed specification of what it means that the soul observes (*episkopein*) the common notions on its own. The soul's observation, at least as regards the *ousia* of the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, is a kind of calculation; and calculation requires intellectual work, therefore it is not the same as perception.¹⁰⁴ This is a serious objection to Theaetetus' proposed definition of knowledge, however one chooses to conceive of perception. Theaetetus' answer to the question concerning the being of the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, is thus a turning point in the dialogue.

The importance of this can further be seen from Socrates' immediate response to it: "Hold it (*eche dē*)!" he exclaims at 186b2. He then asks if it isn't the case that the hardness of what is hard, as well as the softness of what is soft, is perceived (*aisthēsesthai*) through touch, whereas their being (*ousia*), as well as the fact that they are (*hoti einai*), and their oppositeness, as well as the being (*ousia*) of oppositeness itself, is something that the soul itself tries to judge for us by "going back over them and comparing them to one another" (186b6-9).

How should we understand this passage? McDowell suggests that Socrates, in exclaiming "hold it!", intends to warn Theaetetus not to bring the former consideration about the useful and the good into the present discussion. For that discussion left it open whether our immediate perceptions of what we experience might qualify as knowledge, and this is what Socrates now intends to refute, according to McDowell.¹⁰⁵ I suggest a different interpretation. I think, on the contrary, that Socrates wants to make sure that Theaetetus

¹⁰³ Cf. Campbell (1861), 143 and Sedley (2004), 109.

¹⁰⁴ There is surely some irony in the fact that it is a mathematician who finally makes the inference that knowledge cannot simply be perception, but includes active "calculations".

¹⁰⁵ McDowell (1973), 190. This is also the preferred reading of Burnyeat (1990), 49 ff.

understands the importance of what he is saying. This is, I suggest, why he begins by asking him about “trivial” matters such as hardness and softness.

We perceive such matters through touch, whereas we do not perceive that *they* are, just as we do not perceive that they are opposite, nor the being of oppositeness. In my view, Socrates claims that we perceive softness and hardness with the soul, but *through* the senses. This surely requires some activity of the soul, since the soul uses the sense-organs, and this means that the understanding of perception advanced by Protagoras, which seems to imply passivity, is wrong. But I do not think that Socrates is claiming that it involves any specific use of concepts or “the predicative use of the verb being”, i.e. that he is claiming that perception is a kind judgement where we classify something *as* something, as many modern commentators, following Burnyeat and McDowell, believe. Whereas a quasi-Kantian model of perception would regard perception as an act of judgement, where the soul applies a category, hardness, to some sense-data, thereby determining it as something hard, what Socrates is suggesting is, I believe, simpler. His claim is that we perceive soft things and hard things, just as animals do (cf. 186b11-c2); this is something perception can tell us. However, that soft and hard things are, or exist,¹⁰⁶ is not something we perceive, nor is the being of softness and hardness, their what-ness, perceived. Likewise, that they are opposite, as well as the being of oppositeness, is something that we cannot perceive. These are things the soul tries to decide for us on its own, by “going back over them and comparing them to one another” (186b7-9).

At the risk of oversimplifying matters, I would suggest that whereas the quasi-Kantian model that seems to be underlying many modern readings of this part of the *Theaetetus* regards perception as already involving judgement (“x is F”) and sees the philosopher’s job as consisting in distinguishing the elements that come from passive sensation from those that are due to active judgement, Socrates’ interest lies elsewhere, in the fact that the soul can ask itself, and investigate on its own, without the senses, the question: “what is F?”.

In my view, the statement Socrates makes next, at 186b11-c5, speaks in favour of a reading more in line with that of F. M. Cornford¹⁰⁷ and not in favour of M. Burnyeat’s B-reading, according to which no traditional Platonic metaphysics emerges from the *Theaetetus*.¹⁰⁸ Let us look at the passage in question. In light of the distinction between the qualities we perceive and that which the soul can investigate about them on its own, Socrates

¹⁰⁶ I thus take the the “*hoti eston*” at 186b6 to mean “that they exist”, not “that they are ...”, i.e. soft or hard. For the opposite view, cf. Frede (1999), 382.

¹⁰⁷ So also Dorter (1994), 92 ff., Chappell (2004), 146 ff. Sedley (2004), 110.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 59-60.

asks if it isn't the case, then, that "some things are present by nature for both human beings and animals to perceive right from birth", namely the experiences (*pathēmata*) stretching through the body to the soul, whereas other things that result from considerations (*analogismata*) regarding (their) being and usefulness (*te ousia kai ōpheleia*) "come to be present with difficulty and over time, through many troubles and through education (*paideias*), to those to whom they come to be present at all" (186b11-c5).

Here the notion of usefulness, which, we should remember, itself implies goodness,¹⁰⁹ comes quite explicitly to the fore and is brought into connection with the notion of being. This indicates, I believe, that the notion of being (*ousia*), which in the first part of the argument (cf. 185c5 and 185c9) seemed to have a rather slim meaning or, to quote D. Sedley, an "ontologically innocent sense",¹¹⁰ here gains a much richer meaning. Although it is not necessarily the Platonic notion of *ousia*, understood as the "essence" or "real being" of something, it seems to me that it clearly points in that direction.¹¹¹ The claim that what results from considerations about the usefulness and being of what we perceive only comes to people through hard work and education is, I think, much easier to understand if we take Socrates to be directing Theaetetus to the conclusion that it takes time to understand the being of something, i.e. that a "substantial" understanding of something requires intellectual work, rather than to the idea that it takes time to learn to use a predicate or a concept correctly about something, as M. Frede suggests.¹¹² In fact, the entire discussion about *epistēmē* carried out in the *Theaetetus* seems to me to illustrate this. The problem the dialogue is addressing is not to know how to apply the concept "*epistēmē*" correctly, but to gain a real understanding of what *epistēmē* is. This point brings me to the final dismissal of Theaetetus' claim that knowledge is perception.

The argument for this conclusion is simple, given what has by now been agreed to by Theaetetus. For to reach truth, one must reach being, Socrates now suggest (186c7), and if one does not reach truth, one does not have expertise or knowledge (186c9-10; cf. 152c5-6). Therefore, Socrates claims, knowledge is not to be found in our experiences (*pathēmasin*), but rather in our considerations regarding these (*en de tōi peri ekeinōn syllogismōi*), "for in the latter, as it seems, there is a power to come in touch (*hapsasthai*) with being (*ousia*) and truth,

¹⁰⁹ I am not suggesting that the passage indicates that goodness here implies the Form of the good, only that goodness enters into the discussion through the notion of usefulness and that this is essential to the refutation of Theaetetus' definition; cf. Campbell (1861), 143.

¹¹⁰ Sedley (2004), 110.

¹¹¹ Cf. again Sedley (2004), *ibid.* For the opposite view, cf. Kahn (1981), 120.

¹¹² Frede (1999), 382. Cf. Sedley (2004), 110 who rightly insists, I believe, that the noun *analogismata* "clearly suggests a reference to the work of the expert" so that "these "calculations" suggests something more than the ability to entertain everyday propositional thoughts".

but in the former there is no power (186d2-5).” As there is a radical difference between an experience of something and an active consideration of the being of what one has experienced, it is natural to call them different things. And as our experiences such as hearing and sight is what would naturally be called perception (*aisthēsis*), the activity by which the soul reaches being, and hence truth, and thereby gains knowledge, cannot rightfully be termed perception. With this final distinction, Theaetetus’ answer is dismissed. Knowledge and perception are, contrary to what Theaetetus thought, not the same (186e9-12).

The readings of Burnyeat, McDowell and Frede suggests that this means, simply, that truth is not to be found in perceptions, but rather in propositions or judgements about that which we perceive. According to Burnyeat, when Socrates claims that perceptions do not reach being, and hence not truth, the “term ‘being’ ... is no high-flown abstraction: it is simply the general notion corresponding to the ordinary, everyday use of ‘is’. Any judgement, even the most minimal” makes “explicit or implicit use of the verb ‘to be’.”¹¹³ According to such a reading, the purpose of the rest of the dialogue is to decide how true beliefs or judgements, the locus of truth, can be turned into knowledge.¹¹⁴

On the reading which I am suggesting here, Socrates claims that expertise or knowledge depends on our thoughts’ reaching the being or “essence” of something; he regards truth as an ontological notion, in so far as truth is dependent on our thought “hitting upon” being, wherefore he is not committed to the view that true judgement or opinion (*alethes doxa*) is somehow identical with, or can be changed into, knowledge. This is rather the next identity-mistake the young mathematician makes. The goal of the next part of the dialogue is thus, on my reading, not to find out how true beliefs, opinions or judgements can be changed into knowledge, but to make clear that they never can.

¹¹³ Burnyeat (1990), 59.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Frede (1999), 380.

Chapter five: True opinions and the act of opining

Since it has turned out that perception and knowledge are not the same, but different, Theaetetus proposes a new definition at 187b6: knowledge is *alēthēs doxa*. This leaves us with some delicate problems pertaining to the translation of the pair of terms *doxa/doxazein* which must be faced before we take a closer look at the definition.

In light of the refutation we have just witnessed, one might suppose that Theaetetus' new definition centres on *doxa* as the activity of forming opinions, judgements or beliefs. For whereas perceptions are “things” we simply experience, opinions or judgements, it seems, are the result of the soul's activity, “whatever it is, ... when it occupies itself, by itself, with the things that are” (187a5-6). The doctor's prediction of the future condition of his patient, for instance, is the result of such an activity, of his “calculations” (*analogizesthai*) concerning what will happen; it is in such activity, Socrates suggests, that knowledge now ought to be sought. But the supposition that Theaetetus focuses on our activity of forming *doxai*, although partly correct, is too simple. Since Theaetetus' definition of knowledge is that it is true *doxa*, in contrast to false *doxa*, his primary focus seems to be on the “product” of to the activity of forming *doxai*, not on this activity itself; an activity is not true or false, but opinions, beliefs, and judgements are. This does not mean that the activity plays no role in Theaetetus' new answer; in the lines preceding his definition (187a7-8), he suggests that the activity mentioned by Socrates should be termed *doxazein*. Rather, it means that there is a tension in his answer, between a focus on the activity on the one hand, and the resulting *doxai* on the other.

At 190a4-5, Socrates suggests that the activity of *doxazein* may be regarded as a silent conversation, whereas a *doxa* is the result of such a conversation. Since the result of such an “inner” conversation may be something instantaneous, something that a person merely accepts for the moment (“yes, this seems so to me”), it would, according to M. Burnyeat, be unfortunate to translate *doxa* as “belief” since “‘belief’ ... stands for a continuing state of mind or ... a disposition.”¹¹⁵ “Opinion” would likewise seem to be a bad translation, he claims, since it “imports a *contrast* with ‘knowledge’ and would make Theaetetus' second definition seem absurd rather than merely false”.¹¹⁶ For these reasons, he, as well as many other commentators, prefers to translate *doxa* with “judgement” and *doxazein* with “judging”.

As can be seen from Burnyeat's remarks, the question how one should translate *doxa* is not just a question of translation, but also a question of philosophical interpretation. The suggested definition, that knowledge is *alēthēs doxa*, looks like an interesting candidate for an

¹¹⁵ Burnyeat (1990), 69.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

answer if it means “true judgement”. A true judgement about something (“the cat is on the mat”) might reasonably be regarded as an instance of knowledge – if, that is, *epistēmē* can be understood as propositional knowledge. Indeed, according to revisionist readers of the *Theaetetus* the dialogue reflects a change in Plato’s conception of knowledge,¹¹⁷ a change which, it is often suggested, revolves around his new appraisal of the act of judging.¹¹⁸

A reason for thinking that such a change can be found in the *Theaetetus* is that Socrates, at 187a9-b3, states that Theaetetus is correct in supposing that the activity they are looking for should be termed *doxazein*. This seems to rule out that the notion of *doxa* in the *Theaetetus* is the same as the one found in the *Republic*.¹¹⁹ For whereas *doxa* is there defined as a *capacity* which stands in explicit contrast to the *capacity* of *epistēmē* (cf. 477e), a true *doxa* in the *Theaetetus* seems to be regarded as the result of an activity and is (at least initially) treated as a plausible candidate for an answer to the main question of the dialogue. This might also seem to speak in favour of translating *doxa* with “judgement”.

However, although I believe that there is a difference between how *doxa* is discussed in the *Republic* and in the *Theaetetus*, I do not think that this indicates that Plato has a more positive understanding of *doxa* understood as the result of *doxazein* in the latter dialogue. As I see it, it is only the *activity* of forming *doxai* which is viewed in a more positive light in the *Theaetetus* (and the *Sophist*) than in the *Republic*. And this, I believe, is not because Plato here believes that *doxai*, the results of this activity, may count as knowledge, but simply because the picture of the soul presented in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* differs from that of the *Republic*. Whereas Socrates in the *Republic* at 477e describes two capacities, one for forming beliefs or opinions, another for gaining knowledge,¹²⁰ the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* only operate with *one* activity, the ability to reason,¹²¹ termed *doxazein*, *dianoesthai*, as well as *dialegesthai*, which may result in perceptions, *doxai* and – knowledge. Whereas *doxazein* is viewed positively in the *Theaetetus*, a true *doxa* is, I believe, firmly dismissed as an answer to the question what knowledge is.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Stenzel (1931), 39 ff. and Prauss, (1966), 26, n. 28, 139 ff.

¹¹⁸ Burnyeat (1990), 59-61 suggests an alternative reading, according to which one could read the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* in light of the *Theaetetus*. In that case, they too could be read as to argue that “even in the sensible world it takes the abstract judgemental capacities ... to be aware of anything as anything”.

¹¹⁹ Stenzel (1931), 22, 25 ff.; for further discussion of how to translate *doxa*, cf. McDowell (1973), 193, Sedley (2004), 118, Chappell (2004), 154.

¹²⁰ It should be noted that it is not so clear in any case that Plato makes a sharp distinction between a capacity, the activity the capacity is for, and the result of the activity, in the *Republic*. *Doxa* and *epistēmē* are called *dynamis* at 477e, but the terms also seem to be used of the results of the corresponding activities. Likewise, justice is referred to as a *dynamis*, and right afterwards as an activity (443b).

¹²¹ Cf. Burnyeat (1976), 35ff.

Apart from the question whether Plato has changed his notion of *doxa* or not, I find Burnyeat's suggested translation of *doxazein* as judging somewhat problematic. One might argue that the outcome of a conversation can be described as a judgement, as he does (though the outcome might also be a belief or opinion, as I see it), but I find it a lot more awkward to regard the activity of carrying out a conversation as the activity of judging, *precisely* because judging is something instantaneous, whereas a conversation might contain many judgements and is better described as a train of thoughts or a deliberation.¹²² Additionally, at 201a9, *doxazein* is said to be what people do when they have been persuaded by someone. It seems somewhat strained to claim that persuasion makes other people judge that something is the case:¹²³ to judge is to perform an activity, to be persuaded seems to be the opposite of, or at least not necessarily to involve any, active thoughts on the part of the persuaded. It seems that *doxazein* may mean merely to hold as well as to form *doxai*.

For these reasons I prefer to translate *doxazein* with "opining", rather than with "believing" or "judging", although this term is merely chosen in lack of an English term that would encompass the activities of deliberation, argumentation, the forming of as well as the holding of a *doxa*.¹²⁴ As regards *doxa* it is likewise difficult to find a single term that will easily encompass the different meanings of this notion in the *Theaetetus*; any translation will thus be a compromise and the result of an interpretation. However, I believe that "opinion" captures the dual aspect that a *doxa* may be something one arrives at through deliberations, as well as something one may acquire as the result of persuasion, better than "judgement" does. Additionally, it corresponds to "opining" as *doxa* to *doxazein*.¹²⁵ Theaetetus' new definition suggests, on this suggested translation, that knowledge or expertise is true opinion.

¹²² Szaif (1996), 358, who translates *doxa* with "Urteil" for similar reasons that Burnyeat translates it with judgement, points out that "urteilen" is not a satisfying translation of the verb *doxazein*. Szaif suggests that "denken" (thinking,) would be a better translation.

¹²³ This is also observed by Burnyeat (1990), 69-70.

¹²⁴ Apart from this, there is, as I see it, an additional benefit to be gained if one does not translate *doxazein* with judging: it becomes less easy to fall into a Neo-Kantian reading of Plato, a type of reading to which I think M. Burnyeat at times come dangerously close. Cf. for instance Burnyeat (1976), 35-36 and, in particular, 50, n. 61. Cf. also Kahn (1981), 120 who claims that the refutation of the notion that perception can be knowledge "bears a strong analogy to Kant's critique of empiricism".

¹²⁵ Another reason why I prefer to translate *doxa* with opinion is that I think it is easier to connect this term with what I take to be a major point in Plato's controversy with sophistry. A sophist is someone who hands over opinions or induces them into others, whereas Socrates critically examines them. In the end, it is perhaps a question of whether one takes Plato's main interest to be epistemological or ethico-political which decides how one translates *doxa*.

§14. *Theaetetus*' new definition

The question how to translate *doxa/doxazein* aside, we may ask what the motivation for Theaetetus' new definition is. The part of the *Theaetetus* which begins with this definition is by some regarded as somewhat loosely attached to the first part. It may seem as if, when Socrates tells Theaetetus to begin again, from the start (187a9-b1), the investigation of perception is forgotten and an entirely different discussion begins, focusing on opinions. This is, however, a wrong impression. The rejection of Theaetetus' previous answer made it clear that perception does not reach being. It is this conclusion that is summarized by Socrates at 187a4-6 when he states that knowledge must from now on be looked for in the activity where the soul "occupies (*pragmateuētai*) itself, by itself, with the things that are (*peri ta onta*)". This is the activity that Theaetetus suggested should be called opining, and his new definition thus springs from the refutation of the previous one. Likewise, Theaetetus' focus on *true* opinion can be seen as a result of the refutation of Protagoras, since it was the principle of bivalence that was invoked against the Protagorean identification of opinions with perceptions. If what differentiates the expert from the layman is, among other things, his ability to form true opinions about the future, it seems natural to focus on the notion of true opinions in order to clarify expertise.

Finally we may note that when Socrates begins the discussion of Theaetetus' new answer, he does not start by investigating what true opinions are, as one might expect, but rather by discussing how one can account for the possibility of false opinions.¹²⁶ If we see Theaetetus' answer as a continuation of the previous discussion, rather than as a completely new answer initiating a wholly different discussion, this is not as strange as it may seem at first. It may rather be regarded as a consequence of Protagoras' view that false opinions are impossible. As we have seen, this claim was founded on his conviction (cf. 167a7-8) that 1) opinions are always about the things that are and 2) they are a result of how these things affect us. The refutation of Protagoras in the first part of the dialogue made it clear why this understanding of opinions is wrong, but the ontological foundation of this understanding was not, I believe, adequately investigated.

This latter suggestion deserves some further explanation, since it will become important in the treatment of the *Sophist*. In the previous part of the dialogue, Protagoras'

¹²⁶ The discussion of false opinions (or judgements) in the section 187-201 has generated an enormous amount of scholarly debate. Much of this debate revolves around questions pertaining to modern epistemology in the tradition after Frege and Russell, a tradition I must admit that I am not adequately familiar with. For this reason, and also for the reason that my own perspective on this part of the dialogue differs significantly from that of many of the participants in the debate, I cannot go into a detailed discussion of them here.

position was connected with the ontological flux-doctrine which Theodorus identified as Heraclitean. From the *Sophist* (cf. 237 ff), however, we learn that another Pre-Socratic “school” gives Protagoras’ denial of the possibility of false opinions or beliefs just as good an ontological backing, namely the Eleatic tradition. More specifically, it is Parmenides’ claim that one cannot think what is not that lends Protagoras’ view that false opinions are impossible credibility. This claim, I believe, lies behind many of the paradoxes we meet in the following part of the *Theaetetus*. When Socrates now focuses on false opinions, it can be regarded as a second take on the problem posed by Protagoras, taking as its starting point his support in the Eleatic tradition. In this sense Friedländer is right in pointing out that Socrates’ claim at 183e5, namely that he will not discuss the Eleatics, is somewhat ironic, since the second part of the dialogue is directed against the rigid Parmenidean dichotomy between “being and nonbeing, knowledge and ignorance, error and truth”.¹²⁷ When Socrates, at 186d6-8, suggests that they must turn to the problem of false opinions “in a different manner than we did a little while before”, I believe this signals the beginning of the confrontation with Parmenides.¹²⁸ This discussion ultimately carries over into the heart of the *Sophist*, as has been emphasised by many scholars.

But let us turn to Theaetetus’ new answer. As pointed out, the answer contains a tension between a focus on the soul’s activity and the result of this activity, a tension which is reflected in a comment Theaetetus makes at 187b7-8: If his answer shows itself as incorrect in the following discussion, they will have to try to come up with a different answer. This recalls the passage 146c4-5, where Theaetetus also stated that Socrates and Theodorus should correct him if what he was suggesting was wrong. It is this problem, that opinions may be false, that becomes the main theme of the following part of the dialogue. Here Socrates argues, or at least seems to argue, that it is impossible to have false opinions. Paradoxically, if this is correct, Theaetetus’ new opinion about knowledge must be true, but, unfortunately, the same holds for his previous opinion about knowledge, which has been dismissed. Moreover, if false opinions are impossible, the investigation of Theaetetus’ former answer would be pointless, as would Socrates’ claim to be an intellectual midwife.¹²⁹

On the other hand, if there is a point in investigating whether an opinion is true or not, as Socrates surely believes, Theaetetus’ new answer seems to be ruled out from the start. For if “knowledge were true opinion, Theaetetus would now know (have the true opinion) that

¹²⁷ Friedländer (III), 158.

¹²⁸ Cf. Sedley (1996), 81 and Sedley (2004), 119.

¹²⁹ Benardete (2000), 299. Cf. also Burnyeat (1990), 66.

this was the case”,¹³⁰ and this would make the following examination of his opinion superfluous. Again slightly paradoxically, if Theaetetus and Socrates need to examine whether Theaetetus’ new opinion about knowledge is true, in order to find out and hence know what knowledge is, the investigation of the opinion shows that it is false: since one doesn’t know whether an opinion is true before it has been tested, a true opinion cannot in itself be knowledge.¹³¹

These problems seems to be highlighted at 187c1-3 where Socrates states that the investigation of Theaetetus’ new answer can have two possible outcomes: “either we’ll discover the thing we’re advancing on, or we’ll be less apt to suppose we know what we don’t know at all, and even that sort of reward is nothing to complain about”. Are these two things as mutually exclusive as Socrates suggests? The investigation will show that Theaetetus’ new opinion, that true opinion is knowledge, is false, whereby Theaetetus learns that true opinion cannot be knowledge. This negative result seems to constitute, if not a discovery of what knowledge is, at least an advance towards getting an adequate grasp of it.

§15. The first three attempts to explain false opinions (187e5-190e4)

At 187b9 ff. Socrates welcomes Theaetetus’ new definition. But, he suggests, if knowledge is true opinion it might seem necessary to investigate how false opinions are possible. As I have argued, this is motivated by the previous discussion of the Protagorean position. In contrast to what Protagoras claimed, Theaetetus’ new definition of knowledge rests on the assumption that there are false and true opinions in people “as if they were that way by nature (*hōs physei houtōs echein*)” (187e5-7). Socrates now asks Theaetetus whether he agrees that his definition implies the following (188a1-b1):

- 1) One can only either know (*eidenai*) or not know (*mē eidenai*) something; any intermediate (*metaxy*) state pertaining to something, such as learning (*manthanein*) and forgetting (*epilanthanesthai*), is to be excluded from the following discussion.
- 2) One who opines must opine (*doxazein*) something he knows or doesn’t know.
- 3) It is impossible not to know what one knows or to know what one doesn’t know.

The second and third premises follow from the first, the second since to opine is to opine *about* something, the third since there are no intermediate states between knowing and not knowing. All three premises seem to rest on a conception of knowledge as direct

¹³⁰ Benardete (1986), I.148.

¹³¹ Some modern philosophers would disagree and claim that true beliefs can be justified “externally”. I think Sedley (2004), 176, n. 36 is right in pointing out that “it would be anachronistic to treat Plato as allowing for any such possibility.”

acquaintance,¹³² and they are what generates the paradoxes pertaining to the possibility of false opinions.

It is therefore important to stress that the premises are stated as questions by Socrates, and that Theaetetus is the one who accepts them. For we may ask how we should understand these premises; do they express Plato's own view, at the time of writing the *Theaetetus* or at an earlier time?¹³³ I do not think they do. In particular, the first premise looks strange: why are the intermediate states of learning and forgetting left out? Are these not key notions to Socrates' conception of philosophy as intellectual inquiry, in the *Theaetetus* as well as in allegedly earlier dialogues?

We may note that Socrates claims that these intermediate states mean nothing to them now with regard to, or according to (*pros*), the *logos* (188a4), without explaining why this is so. What *logos* is he referring to, we may wonder. If he is referring to Theaetetus' new *logos*, or definition, of knowledge, which I think is possible, Socrates is claiming that this definition excludes learning and forgetting from the discussion. Why should it do that? I suggest the following reason:¹³⁴ if knowledge is true opinion, and if opinions can only be either true or false,¹³⁵ there can only be one thing opposed to knowledge (i.e. true opinion), namely false opinion. Therefore no intermediaries between knowing and not knowing are possible: you either know or do not know something. Hence to learn something, gradually coming to understand something, is ruled out.

Whether this is correct or not, we may at least note that it was a question about learning that initiated the entire discussion about wisdom and knowledge ("isn't learning becoming wiser about that which one learns?" 145d). Moreover, in the celebrated images of the faculty of memory as a wax tablet and as a pigeon coop, which Socrates will introduce in order to tackle the problem of false opinions, learning gradually becomes an explicit theme, the discussion of which culminates in the dismissal of Theaetetus' new definition. And the definition seems in the end to be rejected because there is a difference between having a correct opinion as a result of mere persuasion and having a real understanding, obtained through learning (cf. 201a7-10). It seems reasonable to suggest that the attentive reader is

¹³² Cf. Sedley (2004), 120-22 for a different suggestion as regards what kind of knowledge the premises rest on.

¹³³ Robinson (1950) claims the premises are held by Plato in the *Theaetetus*, whereas Prauss (1965), 13 and 139 ff. and Johansen (1994), 286 claim that the premises represent Plato's earlier, quasi-Parmenidean conception of knowledge as direct apprehension of true being.

¹³⁴ Cf. Sachs (2004), 88, n. 45.

¹³⁵ The bivalence principle seems to be accepted by Theaetetus at 187b4-5 and to be implied by Socrates at 187e5-7.

supposed to see that Theaetetus is wrong in accepting the first premise.¹³⁶ And if the first premise is wrong, the other premises are called into question, since they follow from it.

But Theaetetus accepts that all three premises follow from his definition. From this concession, Socrates is able to argue that it is impossible to have false opinions. Before he introduces the images of the wax tablet and the pigeon coop, he presents three attempts at explaining false opinions which in effect are demonstrations that false opinions are impossible. A basic premise for the explanations is that to opine is to opine something *about* something and that a false opinion comes about when what one opines about something is something else than what it is.

The first argument goes as follows (188b3-c9): If things are either known or not known, and if to opine is to opine that something is something else, there are only four possible ways (cf. 188c5-8) one can opine that one thing (x) is another thing (y) (the numbers represent the order in which Socrates list the examples):¹³⁷

	I know x	I don't know x
I know y	1	4
I don't know y	3	2

Theaetetus agrees that all four cases are impossible: one cannot mistake one known thing for another (case 1; cf. 188b6)¹³⁸ nor an unknown thing for another unknown thing (case 2; cf.188c1), just as it is impossible to opine that a known thing is an unknown thing or an unknown thing a known thing (cases 3 and 4; cf. 188c4).

It is not spelled out in any detail why all four cases are impossible; this simply appears evident to Theaetetus. It seems to follow from the all-or-nothing conception of knowledge, which I have suggested is due to the identification of knowledge with true opinion. If I know something, period, how could it be possible to opine that it is something else, whether known (case 1) or not known (case 3)? On the other hand, if I don't know something, period, how should I even be able to entertain an opinion about it, either that it is something else, that I know (case 4) or do not know (case 2). It thus seems impossible to opine falsely.

This is clearly not a satisfying result. Socrates therefore suggests that they should examine the problem again, not from the perspective of the one who opines, but from the perspective of *what* he opines. In the same way that the distinction between knowing and not knowing something was drawn, a distinction between being and non-being (188d1) is now

¹³⁶ Cf. Hardy (2001), 160-161.

¹³⁷ This diagram is taken from Hardy (2001), 164.

¹³⁸ It has been a matter of controversy why Theaetetus agrees (at 188b6) that misidentifications (case 1) are impossible. For a discussion of this, see Burnyeat (1990), 70-77.

drawn. False opinions, Socrates suggests, arise when one opines something that is not. This is in fact a common Greek conception of falsehood: to opine or state something false is to state or opine that things that are not, are, or that things that are, are not.¹³⁹

This looks like a flat contradiction of Protagoras' statement at 167a7-8, that one must always opine the things that are. When Socrates at 188d8-10 suggests that a critical cross-examiner might ask whether this is at all possible, this cross-examiner can therefore be regarded as Protagoras or at least as someone sharing his convictions. The problem with opining what is not has its roots in Parmenides' claim that you cannot know or think that which is not (DK B2.7-8), as can be seen from the *Sophist* (236e ff). It gains some of its thrust from an analogy between thinking and sensing, as becomes clear in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates asks if it isn't the case that to see, to hear, or to touch is to see, hear or touch "one thing", i.e. "one of the thing that are", whereas if one doesn't see, hear, or touch *anything*, one in fact does not see, hear or touch at all (188e6-189a5). If opining is analogous to sensing, it seems to follow that if one opines that which is not, one does not opine at all, and the attempted explanation of false opinion fails.

This ontological side of the problem of false opinion is not discussed in further detail in the *Theaetetus*. However, since it is discussed in the *Sophist*, a few remarks are in place. The notion that opinions must be about something that is, is, I believe, a genuine Platonic notion which he inherits from Parmenides and never lets go. Whoever entertains opinions must entertain them about a being. But is this the same as to have a direct apprehension of it? A major point in the discussion at 184b-186e seemed to be a criticism of this idea; to opine is to opine something *about* something, not to "see" it. This distinction will indeed prove pivotal in the solution to the problem of how false opinions are possible, as we shall see when we turn to the *Sophist* (cf. part III, §18 below). We may therefore note that a hint to this solution is already given in the *Theaetetus*. In the role of the imagined critical examiner, Socrates asks (at 188d9-10) whether one can opine "something that is not, whether it's about a being (*peri tōn ontōn*) or whether it's something itself by itself (*auto kath' hauto*)", and at 189b1-2 he concludes that one cannot opine what is not, "neither about the beings nor itself by itself". As we shall see, this distinction, between a non-being itself, by itself, and a non-being which is about, or stands in relation to, another being, becomes crucial in the vindication of the claim that false opinions and statements are possible. In a way, this solution is also foreshadowed by Socrates' next attempt to explain how false opinions may come about.

¹³⁹ Cf. Frede (1992), 400, O'Brien (2000), 87. Cf. also *Metaph.* 1011b26-27.

For at present, Theaetetus is left with the perplexing result that it seems to be impossible to opine falsely. As a third way of trying to solve the problem, Socrates suggests that a false opinion can be understood as a kind of otherwise-opinion (*allogoxia*; 189b12), i.e. that a false opinion arises when someone exchanges one of the things that are for another of the things that are in his mind (*dianoia*), and claims that the one is the other.

This seems to be an elaboration of an aspect of the first attempt to explain false opinions, that to opine is to opine something about something, with the second attempt's focus on the *objects* of opinion. According to the third explanation, a false opinion arises when one mistakes one being for another being; the notion of otherwise-opinion thus seems to allow for mistakes made in identifying one thing as another. In other words, the notion of otherwise-opining seems to make room for mistakes made in case 1 in the diagram above. Such mistakes are described by Socrates as similar to what happens when someone misses (*hamartanein*) the target he aims at (*hou eskopein*; 189c3).

This looks like a promising way of explaining false opinions since a major point in the pragmatic refutation of Protagoras was that a legislator quite often misses (*diamartanein*; 178a2) what he aims at (*stochazesthai*; 177e4-5), namely what is useful or beneficial. Perhaps such a mistake could be regarded as a kind of mis-identification, where the lawmaker mistakes what is harmful for what is beneficial?

But if *allogoxia* is the result of someone confusing one thing with another in the soul when opining, we would want to know more precisely what the activity of opining consists in. In order to clarify this Socrates makes his the suggestion mentioned above that opining, or rather discursive reasoning (*dianoesthai*; 189e2) as he now terms it, may be regarded as a kind of internal speech: it is a “speech (*logos*) that the soul itself goes through with itself about whatever it considers” (189e6-7). This is obviously, as most scholars agree, a clarification of the activity of the soul which was discussed at 186a ff. Since this was determined as the activity of performing calculations about being and usefulness, we can say that the activity of calculations regarding these matters is now determined as the activity of carrying out a conversation (*dialegesthai*), where the soul asks itself questions and answers them through affirmation or denial (189e8-190a2). And if thinking is adequately described as an internal dialogue performed by the soul, talking silently to itself, an opinion can be described as the result of a series of questions, where the soul makes “a determination ... and asserts the same thing”, i.e. as a statement that has been made (*logos eirēmenos*; 190a5). On this account, a false opinion would be a case of a person saying to himself that one thing is another (*to heteron heteron einai*; 190a9-10).

But although the notion of *doxazein* as a kind of internal dialogue seems promising, it is not able to solve the problem of how false opinions are possible as long as the three premises that Socrates listed at 188a1-b1 are in play. If to know is to know *simpliciter*, i.e. if one cannot have understood something more or less adequately, if one cannot differentiate between just knowing *about* something and having a real *insight* into something, it is ridiculous to suggest that someone would ever say that something known is something else that he knows. Has Theaetetus ever said to himself that the beautiful is ugly or the just unjust, Socrates asks, or is it not rather the case that he never has said anything like this, or that, for instance, the odd is even? Theaetetus agrees that this is impossible (190b2-9). The examples are, of course, provocative; the failure of the legislator or *polis* when making laws, discussed at 177e1 ff., presupposes that it is possible to misunderstand what the good is and hence to mistake it for something else; and the discussion carried out in the dialogue has given us ample examples that someone is able to say, mistakenly, to himself that something is something else – for example that knowledge is perception. But according to their argument this appears to be impossible.

Socrates sums up the paradox as follows: if opining “is speaking to oneself, no one in speaking or forming an opinion about two things, and touching on both of them with his soul, could say and have the opinion that one thing is another” (190c5-8). We may wonder what is meant by this “touching” (*ephaptein*). In light of the *Phaedo* and *Republic* (cf. *Phd.* 79d1-7, *R.* 519c-d, 532a-b), one might suppose that to “touch” a being, or rather, a Form, is what is meant by knowledge or insight, which stands in contrast to the state of just having an opinion where one has still not “hit upon” what one aims at understanding. Such a differentiation could explain the possibility of mistakes. But since a true opinion is supposed to be knowledge, no such differentiation is possible at present. We are left with the result that misidentifications are impossible so that, once again, it turns out that false opinions are impossible.

Chapter six: Wax, pigeons and jurors

§16. Of memory and perception (191a8-196c9)

Evidently, something in the present discussion has been wrong, as Socrates exclaims at 190e5-191a6. Since the notion of *allodoxia* has failed to explain false opinions, and since this notion tried to explain false opinions as the result of mistaking one known thing for another, Socrates suggests, at 191a8-b1, that it must, after all, be possible for someone who knows something to mistake it for something he doesn't know. To explain how this is possible, Socrates further suggests to Theaetetus that they might, after all, have to concede that it is "possible for someone who didn't know something earlier to understand it later", to which Theaetetus emphatically agrees (191c3-5). The left out intermediaries between knowing and not knowing, forgetting and learning, will, Socrates seems to suggest, enable us to explain how false opinions arise.

It is apparently in order to explain the phenomenon of learning, or that one can come to know what one did not know previously, that Socrates introduces the image of the mind as a wax tablet. More precisely, what the wax tablet is meant to illustrate is the power of the faculty of memory (*mnēmosynē*), a gift (*dōron*) from the mother of the Muses (191d4-5).¹⁴⁰ At 191c9-d7, Socrates informs Theaetetus of how he is to conceive of this wax tablet. It is bigger in some, but smaller in others, of a finer kind of wax in some, but of a more filthy kind in others and of a more flexible kind in some, of a harder type of wax in others. This is meant to explain how it is that some people have better capacities of memory than others. As a specific memory is explained as a stamp of some present experience into memory, like that of a signet ring into wax, the quality of the "wax" will determine how long the impression lasts and how easily and well an impression is made. What can be stamped into the tablet is at 191d6-7 described as something we "see or hear or think to ourselves (*autoi ennoēsesthai*)".

The attempt to use the image of the wax tablet to explain false opinions may be regarded as an elaboration on the previous notion of *allodoxia*, now extended by the notion of memory. This extension has the result that "to know something" is now understood so as to mean "to have a memory of it". We might seem justified in expecting that the goal of the present discussion is to clarify the soul's activity by which it, itself, by or through itself, without the use of the senses, reaches being and the usefulness of something, since this was the activity Socrates said that they were after. We could therefore expect that sight and

¹⁴⁰ The paradoxes discussed at 163d1-164b12 are thus resumed here.

hearing were left out of the present discussion as irrelevant, in order to focus on what we “think to ourselves” (191d6-7). Surprisingly, the opposite happens. At 191e4, Socrates limits the discussion to deal with opinions we have about things we have seen or heard.¹⁴¹ In other words, when Socrates tries to elaborate on the notion of *allodoxia* or, as he now terms it (at 190e2 and 193d), crosswise-opining, *heterodoxia*, it is only as the relating of a memory of what we have seen or heard (which is now regarded as knowledge) to a perception. The inner dialogue of the soul discussed above is thus interpreted as something like telling oneself: “this thing that I see there is identical with this thing that I remember or know.” According to the image of the wax tablet, to opine falsely is to misidentify a present perception of something with a known “memory image”.

Before we take a closer look at the image of the wax tablet, it is therefore worth emphasising that it does very little to clear up the problem of false opinions or, perhaps better, that it only explains some rather trivial instances of it, a fact emphasised by Socrates at 195c ff. Nevertheless, Socrates elaborates the image with such technical rigour that one can easily become absorbed in trying to figure out how the image works.¹⁴² Socrates begins by listing, in quick succession and completely abstractly, 17 possible ways in which one can combine memory images with perceptions (192a-d1). This leaves poor Theaetetus’ completely at a loss, and Socrates then explains what he means by elaborating in greater detail on the first 3 of the 17 cases (192d3-193b7), only to conclude that only the last three cases have any relevance for the question at hand. The cases where false opinion is possible are as follows:

- I mistake B, whom I know and perceive for A, whom I know (i.e. remember), but do not perceive.
- I mistake B, whom I do not know, but perceive for A, whom I know, but do not perceive.
- I mistake B, whom I know and perceive for A, whom I know and perceive.

As can be seen, according to the image of the wax tablet it is a prerequisite *that I know* (i.e. remember) A, whether I see or do not see A, and *that I see* B, whether I know or do not know B, for false opinions to arise. I opine falsely when I believe that the person whom I see is another person whom I know (remember). This is, Socrates explains, analogous to what happens when “a low-grade bowman shoots an arrow” which “swerves past the target (*skopos*) and misses (*hamartein*) it” (194a2-4). The image not only proves that we can

¹⁴¹ Cf. Sedley (2004), 135-36 for a different reading.

¹⁴² One might wonder whether Plato is not mocking a kind of thinking which puts a lot of emphasis on being very precise about matters that do not necessarily help clarify the matter in question.

mistake a known thing for a thing we do not know, which was its declared purpose, but also that we can mistake known things for other things we know (which the notion of *allogodoxia* seemed incapable of explaining), due to a lack of accuracy when we relate a perception to a memory image. Theaetetus is exhilarated by this explanation (cf. 193d3-4, 194b7).

But is the misidentification of something perceived really all there is to say about false opinions? After all, if I mistake someone (or something) I see for someone else, I only need to take a better look in order to correct my mistake. In light of the fact that Socrates has again, for the third time (cf. 177e1ff, 189c3), invoked the metaphor of someone shooting past his target, in order to illustrate the notion of false opinions, we might wonder how the new image is able to explain the problem of the *polis* which misidentifies what is good for it, which was the problem that gave rise to the metaphor. That problem surely does not reduce to a mistake in identifying a particular perceived thing due to a deficient memory. That is a mistake made in our thoughts, since the good is not something we can perceive. As the pragmatic refutation of Protagoras revolved around this kind of mistake, we would expect that a clarification of false opinions should allow for it.¹⁴³ But as it turns out, this is ruled out according to the present image. If false opinions are to be possible at all, they can only occur as a mismatch between a memory of something and an actual perception.

That the image is not meant to be an adequate or, better, exhaustive, explanation of false opinions is already indicated by the way Socrates explains how wisdom should be conceived of according to the image. People who have a good piece of wax and hence have long lasting memory images, Socrates declares, are, as people say (*phasin*, 194c5), “quick to learn in the first place, and ... good at remembering, so that they don’t get the imprints of their perceptions mixed up, but do have true opinions”. These people “quickly sort out, each into its own mold, the things that are called beings (*onta kaleitai*), and so it’s they who are called wise (*sophoi kalountai*)” (194d3-7), whereas the people who have bad memories and mistake what they see and hear are “in turn ... said (*kalountai*) to be wrong about the beings

¹⁴³ I thus agree with Cornford (1935), 127 that the image only explains a small class of false opinions, namely opinions about what I perceive, which proves that Protagoras is wrong in claiming that false opinions, pertaining to what we perceive are impossible, but which nevertheless cannot account for the “immense class of judgements true and false, about things I do not perceive.” Of course, more interesting mistakes of the first kind can be envisaged if one leaves the narrow perception-bound conception of memory that is implied by the image and includes “concepts” into it, as Sedley (2004), 135 suggests we should do. If one does that, misidentifications could include cases where one misapplies a “concept” or Form to a particular phenomenon. One can easily imagine cases where such a misapplication is neither easy to recognise nor has harmless results, for instance if one believes a completely just man is unjust or that a midwife of young men is a sophist.

and to be without understanding (*amathēs*)” (195a8-9). Again we may note that Theaetetus endorses this explanation of wisdom and ignorance with enthusiasm (195b1, 195b8).¹⁴⁴

This enthusiasm notwithstanding, we should note that Socrates qualifies everything said here with a “what people say”, “what is called...” etc. In fact, his explanation of wisdom here closely resembles what is identified as wisdom at the lowest level of the cave, described in the allegory of the cave in the *Republic* (*R.* 516c-d).¹⁴⁵ According to the image of the wax tablet, learning, understanding and wisdom merely consists in the ability to correctly identify something seen or heard as something else we have previously seen or heard, an ability which only depends on how good a memory nature has bestowed upon us.

With this in mind, it can hardly be surprising that Socrates declares that he is not content with what they have now agreed upon, a result, he suggest, of the fact that he is a chatterbox (*adoleschēs*; 195b9-10), and cannot let things rest where they are. For he sees a problem the image is not able to explain, a problem which in fact illustrates the kinds of intellectual mistakes we are interested in. Socrates asks Theaetetus how their image is able to account for the possibility of making mistakes about what we only think, without perception (195d6-7, e1-3), for instance the sum of seven and five, where we are mistaken about the sum, not of five and seven particular apples that we look at, but the sum of “five and seven themselves” (196a2)? According to the image, this would amount to claiming that eleven was twelve,¹⁴⁶ i.e. that a miscalculation takes place when I mistake two remembered, that is known, numbers. But this leads us back to where we started (196b8): how can someone mistake what he knows for something else he knows? False opinions must therefore at least be more than a mismatch between what we perceive and what we remember if we are to be able to explain that we can “be wrong in the thoughts themselves” (*en tois dianoēmasin epseudesthai*; 196c6-7). Theaetetus and Socrates are therefore forced to choose between claiming that false opinions do not exist about such matters,¹⁴⁷ or saying that it is possible not to know what one knows in the sense that we make mistakes, in our thoughts, about the things that we know.

¹⁴⁴ It is possible that Theaetetus’ enthusiasm is meant to reflect his earlier claim, at 187e6-7, that true and false opinions are in people as if they were so by nature. This could be taken so as to mean that some people by nature opine correctly, others falsely, which, we may note, would give us an additional explanation of why learning is irrelevant for the present discussion: Wisdom and knowledge come to people by nature.

¹⁴⁵ This is emphasised by Sachs (2004), 100, note 50.

¹⁴⁶ The argument does not, I believe, take the activity of calculation into real consideration, but only focuses on our actual knowledge of the numbers twelve and eleven. See Sedley (2004), 137 for a different reading.

¹⁴⁷ Socrates in fact seems to suggest, at 196c4-8, that a false identification of something perceived cannot be called a false opinion at all, i.e. that it is only intellectual mistakes that can rightfully be called false opinions. Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 102-103 for a discussion of this.

§17. *The shamelessness of Socrates (196d1-197a6)*

As a consequence of this problem Socrates at 196d2-3 suggests that they should attempt something shameless, namely to say what it means to know (*ti pot' esti to epistasthai*; 196d5-6).¹⁴⁸ We may wonder, no less than Theaetetus does, why this should be a shameless thing to do. Is this not what the entire discussion up to now has tried to do?

That this is the case is something Socrates at once admits: “the whole discussion... from the start has been a search (*zētēsis*) for knowledge on the assumption that we don't know what it is” (196d8-9). In fact, being a nobody or a lowly (*phaulos*) person rather than a man “who makes a practise of contradicting”, Socrates admits that this is the only way he knows of in which one can have a conversation (*dialogos*) about anything (196e8-197a4). Why should this be shameless? An explanation might be that this is so because it stands in radical conflict with the second definition of knowledge Theaetetus has suggested. To propose a definition of something that one admits one does not know, and investigate whether the definition is correct, i.e. to search for something that one doesn't know, seems impossible on Theaetetus' account of knowledge. For if searching is learning and learning is excluded from the discussion of knowledge, we end up with some variant of the paradox that is stated in the *Meno*: How can one search for something, when one doesn't know at all what it is (*Men.* 80d)?¹⁴⁹

If this is Socrates' point, the man bent on contradiction with whom Socrates contrasts himself at 197a1, who would deny them the possibility of discussing in this way, i.e. using words that are not fully understood, is a proponent of the same eristic or sophistic (cf. *Men.* 80e) argument which *Meno* levels against Socrates. The present passage would further show us that the man who practises contradiction is a proponent of the very premises that Socrates listed at 188a1-b1. Since Theaetetus was the one who accepted these premises, we may suggest that Socrates is showing him why his acceptance of them is, in fact, a denial of the possibility of the search for knowledge that they are conducting (cf. 196e8 ff.).¹⁵⁰ This means

¹⁴⁸ Sedley (2004), 140 points out that Socrates is not trying to define *what* knowledge is but only what “*kind* of thing it is”, namely whether it is a “potentiality word or an actuality word”. This is supported by the present passage and by the fact that Socrates, at 196d11-12, claims that it is shameful to try to state what it is *to know* when one doesn't know knowledge, not that it is shameful to state what *knowledge* is. Indeed, Socrates continues to assume, up until 200a11, that Theaetetus is right in defining knowledge as true opinion. But this doesn't mean that the attempt to state what *kind* of thing knowledge is, has implications for *what* knowledge is.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Klein (1965), 84-85.

¹⁵⁰ He would, in other words, if sticking to these premises, be a proponent of the ‘Socratic Fallacy’ referred to above (see above, note 19) which Socrates is not. For the opposite view, namely that Socrates (or perhaps only the “earlier” Socrates) is himself the contradictor, cf. Burnyeat (1990), 105-106.

that, no less than the Heraclitean ontology rejected earlier, the present conception of knowledge makes Socratic search for knowledge through discourse, i.e. dialectic, impossible. If this is right, we may regard the paradoxes Socrates generates throughout this part of the dialogue as an illustration of why this conception of knowledge is wrong.

§18. *The pigeon coop (197a7-200d4)*

In the attempt to define what it means to know, Socrates asks Theaetetus whether he has heard what people generally claim it is. But at the moment, Theaetetus' memory isn't the best: he does not remember whether he has heard it or not. Socrates explains to him that most people claim that it is the "having" (*hexis*) of knowledge (197b1).

Socrates' new attempt at explaining what it is to know consists in making a small adjustment to this claim: it is "the possession (*ktesis*) of knowledge" (197b3-4). More precisely, it is by playing out the notions of having and possessing knowledge against each other that Socrates now tries to give an explanation of how the phenomenon of false opinion, understood as a kind of misidentification carried out in pure thought, is possible.

Socrates begins by comparing the possession of knowledge (which, we should note, on Theaetetus' definition means true opinions) with the possession of birds, and the faculty of memory with a pigeon coop (*peristereōn*; 197c4).¹⁵¹ If one likens the faculty of memory to a pigeon coop and the true opinions contained in it to caught birds, one can differentiate between two different activities of hunting, one kind where one catches a bird, i.e. acquire a true opinion, for the first time, putting it into the coop, and another where one tries to re-catch that bird, i.e. to remember the opinion. The first hunt is then, according to Socrates, the same as learning or discovering the "thing" (*to pragma*) that one learns (197e5-6), whereby one comes to *possess* a piece of knowledge or an opinion. Once it is placed in memory, one no longer *has* (*echein*) the opinion, ready at hand so to speak, but one only has a certain power over it (197c7-8). The second hunt is analogous to the activity of grabbing or getting hold of the knowledge one possesses. It is, so to say, the act of re-collecting one's previously acquired knowledge. On the basis of this image Socrates suggests that false opinions can be explained in the following way: a false opinion arises when a piece of knowledge one possesses is somehow misidentified in the process of getting hold of it.

¹⁵¹ Socrates claims, at 197e2-3, that the pigeon coop should be conceived of as empty when we are born. To some this is a clear indication that the image cannot be Platonic, to others that Plato has given up his (earlier) view of knowledge as recollection. Cf. Burnyeat (1977), Sedley (2004), 29, 144-45, Brisson (2008).

This is elaborated by applying the imagery of the two types of hunt to the art of arithmetic. The learning of this art (*technē*) is explained as the activity of “hunting for pieces of knowledge about everything that’s even or odd” (198a7-8), whereby the arithmetician “keeps at hand the pieces of knowledge about numbers” and is able to hand “them over to someone else” (198a10-b2). In other words, the art of arithmetic is described as consisting both in the actual acquisition of knowledge (i.e. true opinions) about numbers, which makes the arithmetician know (*epistasthai*), and in the ability to teach (*didaskēin*) others, whereby others learn (*manthanein*) arithmetic (198b4-6).

This brings the initial question about learning and teaching forcefully back into the dialogue. Socrates’ new image tells us something important about professional knowledge, which the previous image of the wax tablet did not: expertise involves, in addition to the possession of knowledge, the ability to “reactivate” this knowledge and the ability to pass it on to others. Nevertheless, the new image also has some radical deficiencies.

The first deficiency is that the conception of knowledge as direct acquaintance, operating in all the previous examples, seems to be kept in play, at least to a certain degree, also in the present discussion. This can be seen from the fact that to be knowledgeable is described as to possess pieces of knowledge (“I know this number and this and this..., I know how big each number is”), a possession which enables one to bring these pieces back to mind, so to say, and to hand them over to others.¹⁵² To have complete mastery of arithmetic does not “mean anything else than” to know “all numbers” (198b8-9).

This conception of knowledge is, I believe, the reason why Socrates in the end claims that the image of the pigeon coop cannot explain how false opinions arise after all. This conception dictates that the mistakes of the arithmetician is explained as a confusion of one of the numbers he has previously acquired knowledge about, say twelve, with one he is now trying to bring to mind, say eleven. It is basically the same conception of false opinion as the one that was in play in the image of the wax tablet, i.e. a conception of false opinion as believing that one thing is another, which is here in operation again in the explanation of false opinions. The difference is that now the mismatch is not between a perceived thing and a memory of it, but rather between a remembered piece of knowledge and an attempt to rearticulate this piece of knowledge. The possessed piece of knowledge about the number twelve is mistaken for another, previously acquired piece of knowledge (199a7-b1), so that true and false opinions are defined as the result of correctly or falsely identifying what one

¹⁵² For a similar reading, cf. Chappell (2004), 189-190.

already knows when trying to rearticulate this knowledge. If I correctly identify my knowledge, I have a true opinion, whereas if I misidentify it, I have a false opinion.

Unfortunately, this explanation entails that one person, when knowing a number, seems to become ignorant about something *due to* his knowledge (199d1-8). When one “gets hold of” one’s piece of knowledge about the number twelve, this piece of knowledge seems to be responsible for one’s being ignorant about what one is now trying to bring to mind, the number eleven, which is, as Socrates puts it, “a load of nonsense” (199d3-4).¹⁵³ Again, the new image does not seem able to explain how false opinions are possible.

If we reflect on the imagery of hunt employed in the image of the pigeon coop, we can see that this problem is connected with some further deficiencies of the image, namely that it leaves out of consideration the very activities we might expect the image to explain, the activities of *learning*, of *recollecting* knowledge already acquired and *teaching* this knowledge to others. If to know is to possess pieces of knowledge acquired through one kind of hunting, and to recollect this knowledge to the benefit of oneself and of others is another kind of hunting, it is thought-provoking that nothing is said about how these activities are actually carried out. How does the arithmetician acquire his knowledge? First, we might assume, by learning numbers, just as a child learns letters. But just as the ability to read consists in more than just knowing letters, so arithmetic consists in much more than knowing numbers. One must also know how to calculate, which one presumably learns by – calculating. And how does the teacher teach? According to the image of the pigeon coop, he merely hands over true opinions to his pupils. But, obviously, no-one learns to solve a mathematical puzzle by being told the correct result, by being given a true opinion. Nor can the image explain the intellectual creativity of the one who has expertise. If to become knowledgeable is only to acquire knowledge from a teacher, how can one explain that Theaetetus is able to solve a mathematical puzzle which Theodorus can not (cf. 147d4 ff.)? Finally, if one has “gotten hold of” some piece of knowledge about an arithmetical problem earlier, and now tries to reactivate that knowledge in connection with a problem one is facing at present, this hardly amounts to the simple act of remembering what the correct solution to the previous problem was.

¹⁵³ We may wonder if this is just nonsense. In the *Apology* (22d; see p. 12 above) Socrates claims that the artisans, who actually know, at the same time are ignorant because they extend their confidence in their own craft into believing that they are wise about the most important matters. The expertise which the artisans have thus seems to make them less wise about the matters pertaining to living a good life. We may wonder if this not also true of Theodorus and, initially, of Theaetetus. Cf. Howland (1998), 56-57.

There are at least three possible ways of dealing with the problems connected with the image of the pigeon coop. We may suppose that Plato thought that expertise consists merely in knowing the “pieces of knowledge” or “elements” which make up the field of an *epistēmē* or *technē*. As a result, he had difficulties explaining how to account for false opinions. However, the whole idea of regarding teaching as passing on “pieces of knowledge” and learning as receiving them is, I believe, sophistic, rather than Platonic in origin.¹⁵⁴ Therefore we might assume that Plato intends us to fill in the blanks in the image ourselves. One could for example apply the previous picture of thinking as internal dialogue to it in order to account for how we learn and re-learn something, a strategy which seems more interesting than ascribing to Plato a very unattractive view of expertise.¹⁵⁵ But this does not seem satisfactory either, since Socrates in fact claims that the image cannot explain what it is meant to explain. Finally, we may assume that the problem is meant to reflect Theaetetus’ identification of knowledge with true opinions. For such opinions can be acquired without any real activity on the part of the one who acquires them. If learning merely consists in acquiring true opinions, and knowledge in having them, how do we know how to differentiate between false and true opinions among the opinions that are handed over to us?¹⁵⁶ It is at least this problem which becomes the downfall of Theaetetus’ definition when Socrates finally musters an example to show Theaetetus why his opinion that true opinion is knowledge is, in fact, nothing other than a false opinion.

§19. *The jury (200d5-201c6)*

The five attempts at explaining false opinion have all failed to shed sufficient light on it, leaving Theaetetus’ new definition meaningless. If false opinions are impossible or cannot be accounted for, there is no point in defining knowledge as differentiated from ignorance by the truth of one’s opinion. Socrates therefore bids Theaetetus to state what knowledge is once again, from the beginning (*palin ex archēs*; 200d5). But Theaetetus has nothing better to offer than what he has already said. Knowledge appears to him to be true opinion since a true

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Roochnik (1996), 63-71.

¹⁵⁵ This is the strategy of Sedley (2004), 145. I have avoided discussing the many different ways scholars have tried to save the image, since I take it to be unsatisfying, and as meant to be taken as such.

¹⁵⁶ This problem is perhaps reflected in Theaetetus’ spirited attempt to save the image of the pigeon coop by including pieces of ignorance, i.e. false opinions, into it (199e1ff.). This may indeed point to a relevant problem, as Klein (1965), 164 observes, for we live “from childhood on, in the medium of accepted opinions” which we cannot help but receive from others, some of which may happen to be true, others which may happen to be false. The problem is to know, that is, find out, which ones are true and which ones are not. Cf. also Cornford (1935), 138.

opinion “is surely something safe from error at least, and all the things that come from it are beautiful and good.” (200e4-6)

This seems to be an explanation of the motivation behind Theaetetus’ proposed definition. True opinions are not false, and, as opinions, they must be about something. The answer thus seems to satisfy the two criteria for knowledge listed at the beginning of the dialogue (cf. 152c5-6): that it must be without error and about the things that are. In his response, Socrates does not dispute that true opinions may be good, but he does claim that it is easy to demonstrate that they are knowledge (201a4-5). The demonstration is quite simple. It takes as its starting point the art (*technē*) of rhetoricians and lawyers,¹⁵⁷ whom Socrates ironically claims belong to “those who are greatest in wisdom” (201a7-8), the point of which is to persuade (*peithein*) people and to make them entertain certain opinions (*doxazein poiein*) without teaching (*didaskein*) them (201a7-10). Socrates gives two very brief explanations as to why this refutes Theaetetus’ answer.

On the one hand, Socrates suggests that the limited amount of time allowed the speaker in a law-court makes teaching impossible. The point that teaching and learning takes time has already been made by Socrates twice; at the beginning of the “digression” where he contrasted law court speakers with philosophers, the latter having leisure (*scholē*), as opposed to the limited time dictated by the water clock (cf. 172d4 ff.), as well as at the end of his refutation of the answer that knowledge is perception (cf. 186c2-5). On the other hand, Socrates suggests that what lawyers persuade about is what has happened, which the jurors have not seen themselves. If the jurors were not present, but “are justly persuaded about things it’s possible to know only by seeing them and in no other way” (201b8-9), they may be said to have a true opinion (since what they think happened in fact happened), but they cannot possibly be said to know.

Apparently, this leaves us with a dilemma.¹⁵⁸ On the one hand, Socrates claims that there is a problem with the identification of knowledge with true opinion since rhetoric does not teach but merely persuades. On the other hand, there is a problem with the identification since a jury cannot have knowledge, but at best true opinion. This seems to be two different lines of reasoning. The first suggests that knowledge is gained through the activity of teaching which could, in principle, be carried out in a law-court if there was more time. The second suggests that the only way to know is to have seen something oneself. Is the point that there is a difference between merely having been persuaded about something and having been taught,

¹⁵⁷ Literally: people well versed in the laws, trained in making appeals at court.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 124-127, Chappell (2004), 194-196.

or is it that knowledge can only be attained through direct contact with the object of knowledge, analogous to seeing? I suggest that the two lines are not necessarily in conflict, but may be regarded as supplementing each other.

We may begin by noting that Socrates' first observation that rhetoric cannot teach, since teaching requires more time than what the rhetorician or the lawyer has available,¹⁵⁹ merely points out that one can receive true and false opinions without being taught. In the second line of reasoning Socrates claims that if knowledge of a crime presupposes that one has seen the crime – and this is taken for granted – and if one identifies knowledge with true opinions – which Theaetetus does – it follows that jurors can never have true opinions about the cases they judge (201b8-c2 list the premises, 201c4-5 states the conclusion). What he argues here thus seems to be that Theaetetus' identification of true opinion with knowledge would preclude jurors from having true opinions. The problem is not that jurors cannot have true opinions, i.e. that the proceedings of a trial can never be fair (which they can, if the jury has been persuaded justly (cf. 201b8)), but that the identification of true opinions with knowledge would make it impossible for them to have true opinions. Perhaps the example of the eyewitness is just meant to spell out the difference between teaching and persuasion: teaching may give knowledge, whereas persuasion at best gives true opinions, and the difference between knowledge and true opinion is as great as the difference between having seen a crime and merely forming an opinion about it, on the basis of what one is told.¹⁶⁰

If these observations are correct, we get an interesting relation between the discussion of false beliefs preceding the juror example and the juror example itself. For one might wonder why Socrates did not bring out the juror example at once? Why go through all the falsity puzzles if it is so easy to prove that true opinion and knowledge are not the same?¹⁶¹

The falsity puzzles, I suggest, show us that the identification of true opinion with knowledge makes it impossible to account for false opinions. The example of the jurors, on the other hand, demonstrates that this identification also makes it impossible to account for true opinions. It thus seems that Socrates wants to point out that, if we are to give any credit to true beliefs or opinions at all, which are what most of us are left with at most times in our lives, we must be able to distinguish between knowledge and true opinion. The passage 187-

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Grg.* 454d-455a.

¹⁶⁰ It is a matter of controversy whether Plato here indicates a change in his notion of knowledge, since he apparently claims that one can have knowledge about particular events. I cannot enter the discussion here, but it seems to me to rest on a misunderstanding of what Plato understands by knowledge. I doubt that Plato would say that one can never *know* anything particular, for instance that a particular man was murdered by a particular other man etc., just that this could never amount to *epistēmē*, expertise, since it does not relate to what is universal or essential, but merely to what is contingent.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Burnyeat (1990), 66 and 119 ff.

201 is then not a condemnation of mere opinions as opposed to real knowledge, in the way Parmenides dismisses mere “mortal beliefs” (*brotōn doxa*, cf. DK 1.30). It is rather a sort of defense for beliefs or opinions, a way of rescuing true opinions from being reduced to nothing due to the bright light of knowledge.

Chapter seven: How to account for accounts

As it has become clear that knowledge is different from true opinion, Theaetetus suggests that knowledge might be true opinion in company with a *logos* (201c6-d3). This seems to be a well-motivated suggestion. Although the word *logos* has many meanings, at least two basic meanings, namely ‘account’ and ‘speech’, has been implicit topics of the conversation since Theaetetus suggested that the soul reaches being through calculations (*syl-* or *ana-logozesthai*) i.e. by accounting for the being of what it investigates, and since Socrates suggested that the activity of *doxazein* might be regarded the soul conversing (*dia-legesthai*) with itself. Moreover, Theaetetus’ second definition can be said to have been dismissed through a conversation where Socrates, when trying to “help” Theaetetus to give an account (*logon didonai*) of his new definition, in fact showed him why it was wrong. We might therefore expect that what Theaetetus is suggesting is that knowledge cannot *simply* be a true opinion, but rather must be a true opinion which is arrived at through dialectical or discursive reasoning, an activity which will enable one to give an account of why one’s opinion is true.¹⁶²

However, the way Theaetetus introduces his new definition should make us suspect that all is not well. For Theaetetus claims that his suggested definition is something that he has heard from someone else (201c7 ff.), a definition he had forgotten but now remembers.¹⁶³ When Socrates asks him to elaborate on what was meant by this definition (201d4-5), he explains that he doesn’t really remember. His new definition is thus nothing more than an opinion he has heard from someone, without remembering the account for it.¹⁶⁴ So what does Theaetetus’ suggested definition amount to?

The first thing to note is that the definition has two parts. The first part (201c8-d2) states that a true opinion with (*meta*) a *logos* is knowledge, whereas true opinions that are *alogon* are outside (*ektos*) knowledge. The second part (d2-3) elaborates what is meant by *meta logou* and *alogon*. It states that the things for which there are no *logos* cannot be known (*ouk epistēta*), they are not intelligible, whereas those which have a *logos* can and are. The point of these two parts is not the same, as Socrates will later point out (cf. 202c8-e2).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² I cannot here go into any detailed discussion of the scholarly literature dealing with the question how the present attempt to define knowledge relates to the definitions we find in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Republic*, for which see Chappell (2004), 199-200 for a helpful overview. Nor can I go into the many debates concerning where the dream-theory reported by Socrates, which we are about to encounter, is supposed to come from. As a consequence, I will not try to discuss all the questions the passage raises. For a detailed treatment of the passage, see Burnyeat (1990), 128-234.

¹⁶³ One may compare this with *Chrm.* 161b ff.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Klein (1965), 159, Burnyeat (1990), 129.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. McDowell (1973), 231.

Since Theaetetus doesn't remember what the man who gave him the definition meant by it, Socrates proposes to explain it to him, by giving him "a dream in return for a dream" (201d8). What is this dream? And, we may wonder, who has Theaetetus heard his new definition from? As to the latter question, a possible answer is that he has heard it from one of Socrates' many followers: At least, it can hardly be denied that Theaetetus' proposed answer has a definite Socratic ring to it. This suggestion at least gains some support from the fact that Theaetetus at the beginning of the dialogue says that he has already tried to answer Socrates' question about knowledge, having heard of the questions that are "carried of from Socrates" (148e1-3). How about the dream Socrates is about to give in return to Theaetetus? Is it Socrates' own dream?¹⁶⁶

§20. Socrates' dream (201e1-202e2)

The content of Socrates' dream is spelled out in the passage 201e1-202c5. Like Theaetetus' definition, the dream is something Socrates claims to have heard from "some other people" (201d8-e1). This at least speaks against identifying the content of the dream too readily with Socrates' own views; he rather seems to suggest that there are a number of other people who believe in it. On the other hand, it is a habit of Socrates to present "doctrinal" claims about important matters as something he has heard from someone else.

According to the "theory" Socrates presents in the dream, there are some primary things (*ta prōta*), much like elements (*stoicheia*),¹⁶⁷ out of which everything is composed. These elements have no account (*logos*), they cannot be articulated, taken on their own (*kath' hauto*), but can only be named (*onomazein*). We cannot even say that they are or are not, since this would connect them with being (*ousia*) and non-being (*mē ousia*), which is not allowed if one is speaking about them on their own. In general we are not allowed, when speaking about the elements, to attach any general notions such as 'itself', 'that', 'each', 'alone' or 'this' (202a2-4) to them, for "these things run around and get attached to everything, though they're different from the things they are connected with" (202a4-5).

In contrast to these elements, the things made out of the elements are compound (*syngkeimai*) and, as they themselves are "twined" (*plekein*) together of the elements, one can produce a *logos*, an account or definition, for them by "intertwining" (*symplekein*) the names

¹⁶⁶ Prauss (1966), 161 ff., for instance, suggests that the dream represent Plato's earlier understanding of knowledge. Cf. Dorter (1994), 108, n. 48 for an overview of different responses.

¹⁶⁷ *Stoicheia* has a colloquial use, according to which it means letters, as well a more technical use (found for instance in the writings of the atomists), according to which it means elements. As we shall see, Socrates exploits this double meaning to the full in the ensuing argument.

of the elements (202b3-5). Indeed, according to this dream, the intertwining of names is the very being (*ousia*) of *logos*. The elements are therefore unknowable (*agnōsta*), although perceptible (*aisthēta*), whereas their compounds (*ta syllaba*) can be known, uttered and can be the objects of true opinions (202b5-6). If someone gets hold of such a true opinion without the account, “his soul tells the truth (*alētheuein*) about it without recognizing” it; for in order to know a thing, one must be able to give or accept an account of the thing (202b8-c3).

As should be clear from this paraphrase, the dream-theory is anything but simple to understand.¹⁶⁸ The focus on the ability to give or receive accounts as a distinguishing mark between mere opinion and knowledge looks Socratic in character. On the other hand, the focus on elements out of which we and everything are composed looks Democritean or at least “Presocratic” in character. And the view of *logos* and naming has reminded more than one scholar of Antisthenes; it seems related to a theory expounded by the so-called late learners, whom we encounter in the *Sophist* (see part III, chap. 4 below), according to which one is only allowed to make identity statements,¹⁶⁹ a theory many scholars also believe reflects the views of Antisthenes.¹⁷⁰ A further point of interest in the dream-theory is its focus on the question how wholes and parts are related, and how *logoi* arise through combination, which becomes a major theme in the *Sophist*.

I cannot possibly address all these questions here; and in any case I think it best not to try to decide who the proponents of the theory may be. In my view, it is in all likelihood some kind of mixture of different doctrines which Socrates brings together into a theory, a theory which I think D. Sedley is right in claiming is “an essentially reductionist one, whereby things are understood by analysing them into their irreducible material components”.¹⁷¹ If this is correct, it loosely represents the kind of philosophy that Socrates in the *Phaedo* (96a-99d) claims to have turned his back on at an early age.¹⁷² In particular, the fact that the elements are said to be perceptible speaks strongly for the view that a *logos* according to the theory

¹⁶⁸ To quote Burnyeat, (1990), 128: “The more you think about the theory, the more questions you discover that it leaves unanswered, the more explanations you feel the want of.”

¹⁶⁹ However, whereas the late learners claim that the only possible *logos* is an identity statement, the people who are adherers of the dream-theory claim the opposite. Naming is never a *logos*, only the connection of names is. I thank L. Brown for pointing out this difference to me.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Frede (1992), 400; the view that the dream-theory is meant to represent Antisthenes is rejected in Burnyeat (1970) but treated with more sympathy in Burnyeat (1990), 164-73.

¹⁷¹ Sedley (2004), 158.

¹⁷² This is argued convincingly in Sedley (2004), 159-163. See also Chappell (2004), 203-211.

should be understood as an account of the material components which a thing is made out of, in much the same way that the Presocratic philosophers tried to analyse things.¹⁷³

Instead of going into a detailed discussion of the content of the dream-theory, I limit myself here to looking at the way Socrates refutes it. It is important that this refutation falls into two main parts, corresponding to the two parts of Theaetetus' proposed definition. The first part of the refutation, found in the passage 202e3-206b12, investigates the second half of Theaetetus proposed definition, that there are things that have a *logos* and things that do not. The second part, found in the passage 206c1-210b3, is occupied with the first half of the definition, that a true opinion together with an account is knowledge.

§21. *Of parts and wholes (202e3-206b12)*

The refutation of the notion that there are things that cannot be known, and compounds, made up of such things, which can be known, is fascinating but quite difficult to follow. Or rather, the refutation itself is not so difficult, but its implications are difficult to understand. As most scholars will agree, these implications seem to have a bearing on how we should understand the middle part of the *Sophist*, where the Eleatic stranger undertakes to investigate how Forms intertwine.¹⁷⁴ I shall have to limit myself to giving a sketch of the refutation and will only discuss some of the implications.

Socrates begins the refutation by focusing on the way we learn letters (203a2). This move is motivated, probably, by the dream-theory's focus on elements, *stoicheia* the word for which can also mean 'letter', and the compounds made up of these elements, *syllaba*, the word for which can also mean 'syllable'.¹⁷⁵ The relation between letters and syllables thus come to illustrate the dream-theory's notion of how elements and compounds are related.

The focus on the learning of letters implicitly brings up the problem encountered at 163b8-c4, namely that there is a difference between seeing letters and understanding what these letters mean. The latter, Theaetetus there claimed, is a different kind of understanding, one that we are taught by people with expertise.

The assumption guiding the discussion, which is taken from the dream-theory, is that letters have no account, and are thus unknowable whereas syllables have an account and are knowable. Socrates asks Theaetetus to give an account of the first syllable in Socrates' name,

¹⁷³ Cf. Sedley (2004), 156. Sedley further suggests (*ibid.* 161, n. 15) that the main reason why modern scholars have not read the dream-theory in this way is the fact that Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 21) claimed to see a relation between the dream-theory and his own logical atomism found in the *Tractatus*.

¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, I became aware of Verity Harte *Plato on Parts and Wholes*, (Oxford: OUP, 2002) too late to take it into consideration here.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Sedley (2004), 163.

“So-”. It is a sigma and an omega, Theaetetus states (203a9). But what about the letters themselves, Socrates then asks. Here something strange happens. Theaetetus claims that there is no account to be given for letters, since they cannot be analysed further; they do not consist of elements themselves. This is of course in keeping with the dream-theory, which stipulates that to account for something is to state what elements it is composed of, by weaving them together. However, having said that there is no account, Theaetetus proceeds to give a refined account of letters.¹⁷⁶ Here is what he says:

“...in particular, Socrates, the sigma is one of the unvoiced ones, only a sound, as of the tongue hissing; and for beta, in turn, there’s neither voice nor sound, nor is there for most of the letters. So it holds up quite well for them to be called inarticulate, when the most distinct of them are the seven that have voice only, and no articulation whatever.”

(203b2-8)

Socrates does not comment further on this answer, but we may at least note that Theaetetus surely remembers how he learned his letters. He demonstrates that to know the letters is to know the system of letters, how they stand in relation to each other and differ from one another. I emphasise this because it becomes a point of great importance in the *Sophist* (cf. part III, §12-13), where the knowledge of letters is used to illustrate the ability of the dialectician to distinguish between Forms. For the time being, however, Theaetetus and Socrates agree that letters have no account, whereas syllables have. But, as we shall see, Socrates is in fact about to argue for the exact opposite conclusion.

This is done in a number of interrelated arguments. The first argument goes as follows. Socrates asks if a syllable is the combination of letters, all of them together (*ta panta*) or whether it is rather one look (*idea*) that comes into being when they are combined. Theaetetus suggests that the first alternative is correct. But then, Socrates points out, absurdity follows. For when one recognises (*gignōskein*) the syllable, which is nothing but its letters, one simply recognises the letters. How can it be that one who is ignorant (*agnoein*) of the letters is able to know (*eidein*) them taken together? It would rather seem that a precondition for knowing the syllable is that one has already obtained knowledge of the letters, and the dream-theory thus seems to have been refuted (203d7-10). Socrates therefore suggests that they should adopt the second alternative which Theaetetus rejected, that the syllable is one form (*eidōs*) which arises out of the elements (203e2-5).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Gadamer (1982), 308. See also Sedley (2004), 157 and Chappell (2004), 218.

The fact that Socrates has now mentioned “look” (*idea, eidos*) twice might seem to be a reference to what Socrates “never stops talking about” (*Phd.* 100b2-3), the Forms. In the *Theaetetus*, however, any such reference, if it is a reference, remains indirect. Here the “look” of the syllable is treated as nothing more than a “natural” phenomenon, something that either “supervenes” on the letters or elements or else can be reduced to them. In fact, it is the question how one might conceive of it as supervening on the elements that is the next point in the discussion.

If the syllable is a single something which arises out of the combination of the elements, Socrates claims, it cannot have parts (*merē*; 204a5). This fact is what Socrates will use to refute the dream-theory: if the whole has no parts, it is, according to the theory, just as impossible to know the whole as to know the parts, since to know something is to be able to state its parts. Hence, we get a dilemma; we can neither know the compound of elements if it reduces to its parts, since they are unknowable, nor the whole itself, if it is a certain something without parts (cf. 205c-e8). The dream-theory’s distinction between knowable compounds and unknowable elements thus collapses.

Before this conclusion is reached, however, an interesting discussion intersects the main line of argument. Theaetetus exclaims, at 204a6, that he does not understand why the whole cannot have parts, and Socrates goes on to demonstrate why this is so at some length (the argument runs from 204a6-205b13). Socrates first states that for anything which has parts, the whole (*holon*) is its parts, i.e. it reduces to its parts. That is, unless one should claim that the whole is something different from all (*panta*) the parts. This is something Theaetetus in fact believes is the case (204a10). Does this mean, Socrates asks, that he distinguishes between the whole and the all (*pan*; 204a11-b1)? We should note that Socrates here substitutes “all the things” (*panta*) with “the all” (*pan*). We may also note that Theaetetus has changed his mind rather quickly, since he claimed the opposite at 203c7 when asked about the syllable. This suggests that he has not really grasped the connection between whole and part, a fact he admits at 204b2: “I have nothing clear about the matter”.¹⁷⁷ I point this out since Socrates’ refutation of Theaetetus’ suggestion, that the whole must be different from and more than its parts, may seem rather strange: and indeed, why should Plato not accept that the whole is more than its parts, as something different from them, but nevertheless consisting of its parts by uniting them? At least this is the moral that Aristotle drew from this discussion.¹⁷⁸ We may further note that in the *Sophist* the Eleatic stranger will explicitly point out that

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Gadamer (1982), 309.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Sedley (2004), 166-67.

Theaetetus does not understand what “the all” means (233e2-3), which, I shall argue, at that point in the dialogue indicates that Theaetetus does not have a full understanding of how sophistry and philosophy are related (cf. part II, §13). Moreover, the problem how we should conceive of the relation between the whole and the all becomes crucial to the stranger’s criticism of Parmenides later in the dialogue (245a1-d10cf. part III, §6). But let us restrict ourselves at the moment to looking at how Socrates refutes Theaetetus’ suggested definition.

The whole is now supposed to be different from the all. But how about the totality of things (*ta panta*) and the all (*to pan*), are they also different (*Tht.* 204b10-c2)? That this is not the case is illustrated in the following way. As regards a number, such as six, the different ways one may add the units into that number, such as two units added to four, or three added to three etc. is irrelevant; here the number of units added, however they are added, are the same as “the all” of the number six. two added to four is no less six than three added to three. So the totality of things and the all are the same, “at least for whatever is made of number” (204d1-2). Likewise, Socrates now suggests, a *plethron*, i.e.100 feet, is nothing but the number of feet it designates, just as a *stadion*, i.e. 600 feet, is. We may here begin to wonder what Socrates means to suggest; for whereas it seems unproblematic to say that “the all” of the *plethron* is the same as 100 feet, this is not so clear about “the all” of the *stadion*. A *stadion* need not only be “a quantitative aggregate”, since the word can also designate “the race track at the Olympic games”.¹⁷⁹ Taken in this sense, is it really true that this is just the same as the number of feet? There seems to be a great difference between running any distance of 600 feet and running the specific 600 feet that constitute the race track at the Olympic games. The difference between a quantitative and a qualitative perspective on things seems to be – indirectly – pointed out also in Socrates’ next example. Is not an army, he asks, and the number of the army the same thing (204d9-11)? It surely is not? Should a number of soldiers on the run and a number of soldiers in formation be the same thing?¹⁸⁰ It is – as long as to account for something means merely to enumerate the material components of the thing, as the dream-theory dictates.¹⁸¹

It follows from Socrates’ examples that the totality of the parts (*panta*) and the all (*pan*) are the same. But then the whole cannot be made up of parts, for if it were, it would reduce to the all, which it was assumed that it did not (204e8-9, compare with 204a11-b1). Next Socrates asks if a part can be a part of anything else than the whole. Theaetetus’

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Sachs (2004), 118, n. 60.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Gadamer (1982), 309.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Sedley (2004), 167.

answers, apparently in order to save his suggestion that the whole is different from, or something more than, its parts, that a part could be a part of the all, which he perhaps believes could be the foundation of the whole. Whether this is the explanation of Theaetetus' answer or not, his answer is to no avail. Socrates asks whether it is not so that the all is that which lacks no parts (205a1-2)? And is this not also what the whole is? If so, is not the whole and the all the same? Theaetetus finally agrees (205a7). This leads back to the previous dilemma: if the distinction between the whole or compound and its elements, the parts, collapses, and if we assume that the elements cannot be known, since they are elements, we cannot know the whole anymore than the elements (205b2-3).

On the other hand, if the elements (*stoicheia*) are not parts (*merē*) of the whole, and if there are no other parts of it (and which parts could that be, if not even the elements out of which the compound is composed are parts?), then one cannot enumerate *any* parts of the whole and the whole will be as unknowable as its elements (205b8-d6). Socrates therefore proposes that they should dismiss the asymmetrical relation, that elements cannot be known, whereas the compound can (205e6-7), and suggests the following instead; when one learns the letters, one begins by learning how to distinguish each letter from the others “by sight and by hearing” (206a5-9) just as one who learns the different notes in order to be able to play the harp does. These matters are left to rest. We may remember, however, Theaetetus' earlier claim that the ability to understand, in contrast to merely recognize letters, depends on teaching from an expert. The simple fact that different languages may use the same letters shows that recognition of letters does not give one the ability to read. The relation between knowledge of elements and knowledge of how to combine elements is more complicated than what is ever spelled out in the *Theaetetus*, and this relation becomes an important theme in the *Sophist*.

§22. *The logos of logos* (206c1-210b3)

The notion that elements cannot be known, whereas compounds can, has been dismissed. The notion that to give an account (*logos*) consists in an analysis of compounds into elements has not, so this part of the dream-theory still needs to be refuted.¹⁸² Nor has the first half of Theaetetus' definition, that knowledge is true belief with a *logos*, been refuted yet. It is in order to follow up on this that Socrates next proposes three definitions of what a *logos* may mean. I will here limit myself to some very brief observations on each of these proposals, how

¹⁸² Cf. Sedley (2004), 169.

they connect with the dream-theory, and how one may look at them in conjunction in light of the *Sophist*.

Before Socrates presents his three proposals, he restates Theaetetus' definition in what I take to be a slightly ironic manner: when an account *becomes present* (*prosgignesthai*) with, or is added to, a true opinion, the “most complete knowledge (*teleōtatē epistēmē*) comes about” (206c4-5).¹⁸³ It is the truth of this claim that needs to be investigated. Through his reformulation Socrates seems to suggest that what Theaetetus' definition actually implies is that if we happen to have a true opinion, and an account somehow gets connected with it, one way or another, knowledge arises. The mention of *complete* knowledge may not only make us wonder if this really is possible, it also may remind us of Socrates' initial question, whether wisdom and knowledge are the same. Can wisdom or complete knowledge be a true opinion which is simply connected with an account? We might expect, if there is something correct in the definition, that the account should be what led to the opinion or at least that the connection between the account and the opinion should be stronger than what Socrates seems to suggest here.

Socrates' proposed accounts of *logos* are as follows:

- 1) A *logos* is “making one's thinking (*dianoia*) apparent” in articulated speech with *rhemata* and *onomata*,¹⁸⁴ which amounts to moulding one's opinion (*doxa*) “as if into a mirror or water” (206d1-4).
- 2) A *logos* is an account of the being (*ousia*; cf. 207c1, c3) of something, which enumerates all its elements (206e7-207a1).
- 3) To have a *logos*, an account of something, is, according to what “the many” (*hoi polloi*) would say, to be able to say by what sign (*sēmeion*) that which one is asked to give an account for, differs from everything else (208c7-8).

Each of these accounts is in turn dismissed:

- The first because anyone who is able to express himself verbally would be able to give an account.
- The second, to put it very simple, because knowledge of which elements constitute a thing does not secure that one will know how to fit the elements together (we might suspect that the being of something cannot simply be expressed by an enumeration of its elements, but this is not spelled out).

¹⁸³ The irony in this sentence becomes even clearer, I think, if one compares it with what Socrates said at 202d1-3, that they have suddenly, with Theaetetus' suggested definition, “gotten hold... of something that wise men also sought after long ago and grew old before discovering”, cf. Gadamer (1982), 304.

¹⁸⁴ I shall discuss how we should translate these words below.

- The third, again to put it very simple, because, in order to entertain a true opinion about something, you already need to be able to differentiate it from everything else, so that adding an account of how the thing differs from everything else does not add anything new.

Why these three proposals are dismissed, and to what extent they really are dismissed, has been discussed in detail by others. I cannot enter into that debate here, and I will merely take for granted that Socrates does not take any of them to be adequate. What I would like to do is to draw attention to some points I have not seen commented on by others.

It is often suggested that the first account of *logos* is obviously inadequate, since anyone can speak; that the second is better, since it is more refined; and that the third is almost correct, since it points in the direction of the solution we get in the *Sophist*, where, according to such readings, the correct account of *logos* is given, namely that a *logos* stating the *ousia* of something is an account which determines it *per genus proximum et differentiam specificam*.¹⁸⁵ As will become clear in the next part of this study, I doubt that the *Sophist* is meant to give us an answer to the problems left open in the *Theaetetus* in *that way*. However, I suspect that the three accounts offered by Socrates do tell us something important about *logos* and in fact do point in the direction of the *Sophist*. I believe an interesting picture emerges when one connects the three accounts of *logos*, leaving out some of their problematic aspects, into one account.

The first account states that a *logos* is what makes one's opinion, i.e. the result of one's thinking, apparent to others through a combination of *onoma* and *rhēma*, which in this context perhaps means nothing more than stating something in words and phrases. It is what the interlocutors have done throughout the dialogue. We may note, however, that the combination of *onoma* and *rhēma* will take on a new meaning when we reach the end of the *Sophist*. *Onoma* may mean 'noun' as well as 'word', and *rhēma* may mean 'verb' as well as 'phrase' or 'description'. In the *Sophist*, both words are taken in their former meaning: Here we learn that a *logos* is an intertwining, not of elements, as the dream-theory suggests, but of verbs and nouns, which indicates action or activity and the one who performs the activity (see part III, §17). The first account of *logos* suggested by Socrates may be trivial, but I believe it points to something that is not trivial.

As regards his second proposal, the idea that one can account for the being of something by listing its elements sounds rather un-Platonic. However, the idea that, if you are

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Sedley (2004), 168-178. This view ultimately goes back to Stenzel (1931).

asked what something is (*ti pot estin*), you have to account for its being (*ousia*) seems genuinely Platonic. Below (part III, §§17-18) I shall suggest a reading of the *Sophist* according to which this idea may be regarded as intimately connected with the idea that *logos*, understood as the intertwining of nouns with words, points out *actions* as well as *those who act*.

Finally, as regards the third proposal, I agree with most commentators that Plato seems to believe (since many of his interlocutors suggest it) that to state what the being of something is, you minimally need to be able to see how that something differs from other things which look like it. I will argue that in the *Sophist* the ability to discern something from something else is regarded as intimately connected with the ability to give an account of the being of that something, which again involves the ability to determine what its activity, or its *dynamis*, is.

All these aspects of *logos* become important in the *Sophist* – as they have indeed been in the *Theaetetus*. Has the question about *epistēmē* not unfolded itself as a continued attempt to articulate the opinions of Theaetetus about it, in order to test if these opinions articulated the being of *epistēmē*? And has Theaetetus not learnt that *epistēmē* differs from perception, true opinion and – now – from true opinion plus an account, at least if conceived of in the way that it has been here?

§23. Ignorance and wisdom (210b4-d4)

In the *Theaetetus*, the dialogue ends in apparent *aporia*. Theaetetus has nothing more to suggest and he admits that he does not know what knowledge is (210b4-10). Or rather, this is almost where the dialogue ends. For Theaetetus' admission of ignorance leads Socrates to make one further remark, just before he leaves, to go to face the indictment brought forward against him by Meletus (210d3): Theaetetus is now in a better state than before if he should try to become intellectually pregnant again and, moreover, he is in a more *sōphrōn*, modest or moderate, state of mind, since he readily acknowledges that he does not know what he does not know (210c1-4).

In this way, the opening question about wisdom and knowledge is brought back into the discussion. Not to believe to know what one does not know – is that not precisely the mere human wisdom Socrates prides himself of possessing in the *Apology*? And is this not a different kind of knowledge than the mathematical expertise that Theaetetus no doubt possesses?

If we make a brief comparison with the *Charmides*, we get an interesting picture: the *Charmides* begins with an investigation into *sōphrosynē*, because the young Charmides is

claimed to possess that virtue, but the dialogue ends up in an abstract discussion of whether knowledge of knowledge is possible, in the course of which it is demonstrated that neither Charmides nor Critias have self-control or modesty.¹⁸⁶ The *Theaetetus*, in contrast, begins with an investigation into knowledge because Theaetetus is praised for his great intellect, courage and modesty, and ends without an answer to the question what knowledge is. On the way to that negative result, however, the argument displays the young man's courage in intellectual inquiry¹⁸⁷ as well as his modesty.¹⁸⁸ The failure of the *Charmides*, it seems, is mirrored by the paradoxical success of the *Theaetetus*. For the praise of Theaetetus' excellent character, found both in the opening discussion between Eucleides and Terpsion (142b7), and in Theodorus' initial description of the boy (143e4-144b6), seems confirmed by the drama of the dialogue. In the course of the dialogue, the courage and modesty of Theaetetus are shown to be not only excellences of character but in fact intellectual excellences as well.

This positive result should be seen in light of a further comment made by Socrates, namely that all his art of midwifery can do is to incur this state of modesty in others (210c4-5). Socrates the midwife thus claims to have given Theaetetus, through his dialectical inquiry, the sound-minded state which Socrates in the *Apology* claims is the only kind of wisdom worth having as a human being. This is a kind of education which differs radically from the one Theaetetus receives from his teacher Theodorus and also from the type of education Theodorus' friend Protagoras claimed to be an expert in. Although Theaetetus has not been able to find an answer to the question what knowledge is, it seems that he has gained some measure of wisdom through his attempt to define it.

¹⁸⁶ Plato's original readers could hardly have failed to be reminded of the fact that the historical Critias and Charmides both became leaders in the tyrannical rule in Athens 404-403, Critias as a member of the thirty, Charmides as a member of the ten appointed by the thirty to govern the Piraeus, cf. Nails (2002), 90-94, 108-111.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Dorter (1994), 70-71.

¹⁸⁸ Both Steiner (1992), 43-47, and Sedley (2008), 327-330 point to this connection and to the implications it has for how we should understand the *Theaetetus*.

Part II: Socrates and sophistry in the eyes of the stranger

The *Theaetetus* ends when Socrates breaks off the discussion and states that he has to go to “the courtyard of the king-archon, in response to the indictment” brought forward against him by Meletus, whereupon he adds, just before going: “at dawn (*heōthen*), Theodorus, let’s meet here again.”(210d2-4) The first utterances in the *Sophist*, made by Theodorus, are “it’s in accordance with yesterday’s agreement, Socrates, that we ourselves have come in due order”. The *Sophist*, it appears, is to be a continuation of the discussion of the *Theaetetus*.¹

Chapter one: The opening scene of the *Sophist*

Since the conversation that takes place in the *Sophist* seems to pick up the one that takes place in the *Theaetetus*, one might expect that the discussion of that dialogue is to be continued in the *Sophist*. Is it to continue the discussion of knowledge that Socrates suggested that Theodorus and his pupils should meet with him the following day? If so, Socrates apparently gives up the question for another question. While Socrates has heard the accusation brought forward against him by Anytos of corrupting the youth of Athens, Theodorus has met a stranger² from Elea whom he now brings with him. This somehow changes the conditions of the company’s meeting. More specifically, the fact that Theodorus claims that the Eleatic stranger is very philosophical as well as a friend of the people around Parmenides and Zeno (216a3-4), makes Socrates pose a number of questions to the stranger. Close attention to these questions will reveal a web of themes underlying them which shows that the *Sophist*, although the question about knowledge seems to be postponed, is indeed connected with *Theaetetus*, and that in multiple ways.

§1: The guiding question of the *Sophist* (216a1-217b4)

At least since F. D. E. Schleiermacher wrote the introductions to his translations of the Platonic dialogues, it has been customary to regard the *Sophist* as consisting of two parts, a core part (237b-264b) and an outer part (219a-237b ; 264b-268d).³ Most commentators agree that the stated issue of the *Sophist* is to deliver a definition (*ti pot’ estin*, 217b4) of the sophist, a subject treated in the outer part, and that the effort to do so eventually leads to questions about being and non-being, as well as about how false statements are possible, treated in the

¹ Dramatically, the *Eutyphro* and, most probably, the *Cratylus* takes place between the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, cf. Cropsey (1995), ix and Howland (1998), 3.

² I follow the tradition of translating *xenos* with “stranger”. “Guest friend” is another possible translation.

³ Schleiermacher (1996), 244. Cf. Notomi (1999), 27.

core part of the dialogue. But what the function of each part is, and how they are connected, are complicated questions. Here scholarly consensus ends.

To some commentators, the real issue of the dialogue is to launch a new method of definition, namely the so-called *diairesis*-method,⁴ a method exemplified in the outer part of the dialogue in the attempt at defining the sophist, and grounded in the central part of the dialogue, in a passage defining the science of dialectic (253b-254b). To others this very “method” is nothing more than a parody; they regard the problems pertaining to being and non-being as the real issue of the dialogue. To some commentators these problems are primarily linguistic in nature,⁵ to others they are ontological problems pertaining to the status of the Platonic Forms.⁶ In light of these controversies,⁷ it seems prudent to pay close attention to how the question which the dialogue is supposed to answer is actually stated. A close reading of the opening scene of the dialogue shows, I believe, that this question is more complicated than the above summary suggests.

As a response to Theodorus’ claim that the stranger he is bringing with him is a philosopher, Socrates suggests that he may be something else; a refuting god (*theos elengtikos*) who has come to refute them, since they are poor (*phaulos*) in speeches (*en tois logois*; 216b5-6). It is this suggestion that initiates the entire discussion of the *Sophist*. It can, I believe, be understood in two ways.

On the one hand, Socrates has just been accused of impiety, which, according to his own defence, is really due to his activity of questioning his fellow citizens (*Ap.*, 20d2). As this kind of questioning is carried out in conversations, Socrates may be asking whether the stranger is a kind of judge who has come to refute him. This suggestion draws support from the fact that Socrates links his initial suggestion about the stranger’s identity with two quotes from the *Odyssey*⁸ according to which Zeus, the god of strangers, “looks down on the acts of outrage (*hybris*) and of lawful conduct (*eunomia*)”. As has been pointed out by S. Rosen and S. Benardete,⁹ the two quotes, seen in relation to the stranger and Socrates, implies that Socrates is either like Polyphemus or Antinous, whereas the stranger is like Zeus or Odysseus; both quotes thus imply that Socrates is a man who deserves to be punished and that the stranger is the person to conduct this punishment.

⁴ E.g. Stenzel (1931).

⁵ E.g. G. E. Owen (1999), M. Frede (1992).

⁶ E.g. Cornford (1935) de Rijk (1986).

⁷ As can be seen from the Neoplatonic commentators, the controversy about the subject of the dialogue is by no means a new one. Cf. Notomi (1999), 10-19.

⁸ *Od.* IX, 269 ff., XVII, 485 ff.

⁹ Rosen (1983), 62-65, Benardete (1986), 69, cf. also Howland (1998), 170.

On the other hand, in the *Theaetetus* Socrates told Theaetetus that, as regards the subject matter of knowledge and wisdom, the two of them were no more than laymen (*idiōtēs*) as opposed to the terribly wise sophists (*Tht.* 154d-e), and, being such lowly (*phaulos*) people, they were forced to use impure talk in their investigation. This kind of talk would never be accepted by a man skilled in contradiction (197a1-4). Perhaps Socrates worries that the stranger is such a man, a contradictor and a sophist? He is, after all, from Elea, the birthplace of the Megarian tradition of eristic disputation.¹⁰

Theodorus takes Socrates' meaning to be the latter, for he at once assures him that the stranger is not one of those who take strife (*eris*) seriously. He thereby tacitly identifies refutation with strife.¹¹ From Theodorus' perspective, apparently, the one who tests or refutes others is no better than a quarreller, a view which fits nicely with his contempt for Socrates' habit of forcing his interlocutors to "strip down and wrestle in speeches" (cf. *Tht.* 169a-b) as well as his dislike of abstract arguments in general (165a).

The problem of differentiating between strife and elenctic test will soon enough become a real problem of the dialogue. It connects directly with the first suggested reading of Socrates' remark. If Socratic elenchus is no more than eristic disputation, it is reasonable to see Socrates as a man who corrupts the youth of the *Polis* by turning them into sceptics. If all Socrates does is to teach people to question their inherited beliefs, and if he additionally is a role model for the young, so that they start questioning their elders, is his practice not simply sophistry?¹² The question what differentiates Socratic dialogue from a sophist's use of *logos* is thus brought into focus at the very beginning of the *Sophist*.¹³

Theodorus denies that the stranger is a god of refutation. He nevertheless claims that the stranger is, as a philosopher, divine (*theios*; 216b9). This assurance leads Socrates to say that it may be right to regard philosophers as divine; and, he suggests, they are probably no easier to discern (*diakrinein*; 216c3) than gods are. The reason he gives is that the real (*ontōs*) philosophers, the ones who look down upon human life from on high, appear (*phantazesthai*; 216c4-5) in many different guises due to the ignorance of others. Some people regard (*dokein*; 216c7) them as being of no value, others believe they are worth everything. To some they appear as statesmen, to others as sophists and sometimes they give the impression (*doxa*; 216d2) of being crazy.

¹⁰ Cf. Cornford (1935), 169, Heidegger (1992), 241.

¹¹ Cf. Klein (1977), 7, Rosen (1983), 64.

¹² Cf. *Apo.* 23c and *Resp.* 537e ff.

¹³ Cf. Gadamer (1990), 346, Sallis (1996), 461-62.

The question how one should evaluate Socrates' activity thereby changes into a general question how one should discriminate the philosopher. This question is introduced as a problem of appearance as opposed to reality, of opinion as opposed to knowledge. The way philosophers appear depend on the opinions people have of them, opinions which are mostly a result of people's ignorance about philosophy.

This problem leads Socrates to ask the stranger what people in Elea are accustomed to believe about these things and how they name them (217a1-2). From his previous remark, we might suppose that he is asking how people in Elea regard the relationship between philosophy and the different appearances of the philosopher, i.e. madman, sophist and statesman. But when Theodorus asks Socrates to elaborate what it is he wants to know (217a5-6), Socrates reformulates his question, asking whether people in Elea regard sophist, statesman and philosopher as "one or two, or, just as their names are three ... divide (*diairein*) their genera (*genē*) into three" (217a7-9).¹⁴ In doing so, he substitutes the appearance of the philosopher as a madman with the philosopher himself. The stranger replies that it is easy enough to state what people in Elea believe, namely that they are three different kinds. He does not say that he agrees with them,¹⁵ however, only that it is no small or easy task to distinguish (*diorizein*) with clarity what each of them are (217b2-4).

Within the passage 216c2-217b4 we are thus presented with two versions of the same question.¹⁶ The first asks how the different appearances of the philosopher are related to philosophy, as well as how people's opinion of the philosopher determines these appearances. The second asks whether philosopher, sophist and statesman are one and the same kind or two or three different kinds. And whereas the first version is about how one can discern (*diakrinein*) the nature of the philosopher, the second pertains to how one should divide (*diairein*) philosopher, statesman and sophist from each other. So the first version implies that the philosopher is the original, the other three (sophist, statesman and madman) only appearances, whereas the second implies that sophist and statesman are as much originals or "tribes" (*genē*)¹⁷ as the philosopher is. The main problem encountered in the opening scene thus seems to be about the philosopher, not about the sophist or, alternatively, about how the

¹⁴ At 217b5-9 we learn that Theodorus has already asked a similar question to the stranger. Benardete (2000), suggests that he has asked the stranger since he is far from sure that Socrates is not a sophist.

¹⁵ Cf. Sallis (1996), 462.

¹⁶ For a slightly different view of this, see Benardete (1986), II, 73-75, Rosen (1983), 64-66.

¹⁷ It should be noted that, just as *technē* and *epistēmē* are often used interchangeably in the dialogue, so is *eidos* and *genos*. Moreover, as in other Platonic dialogues, *eidos* and *genos* often means no more than a type of thing (a "look" or a "tribe"), i.e. these terms do not necessarily refer to Platonic Forms. Cf. Guthrie (1978), 159.

philosopher relates to sophist and statesman.¹⁸ By turning to how the stranger goes about his task of answering Socrates' question, we shall see why an awareness of the complexity of this question is important for understanding what is examined in the *Sophist*.

§2. *The way of settling Socrates' problem (217b5-219a4)*

Before the stranger can tell Socrates how he would go about defining sophist, statesman and philosopher, Socrates asks whether he prefers to answer this question by going through a long speech, all by himself, in order to make clear what he understands by these terms, or whether he is willing to proceed through questioning (217c3-5). So Socrates is asking whether the stranger prefers to "show off" by giving a lecture on the issue at hand, like Gorgias or Protagoras, or whether he is willing to conduct a philosophical inquiry the way Socrates does. The stranger chooses the second option but at once qualifies this by saying that he is only willing to converse with someone who "submits to guidance easily and painlessly" (217d1-2); otherwise he finds it easier to present the matter in a monologue.¹⁹ In other words, whereas Socrates often discusses with people who hold views radically different from his own, presumably in the hope of making them change their views and, accordingly, their way of life, the stranger seems to be more like a professor, willing to explain what he means to a pupil, but not really intent on discussing with interlocutors who are not tractable.

This means that if the *Sophist* is to be a philosophical version of the impending public trial against Socrates, as has been suggested by many commentators,²⁰ the initial attitude of the stranger gives us little reason to believe that he is sympathetic to Socrates' ideal of philosophy. For that reason we should, in what follows, question how the stranger relates to this ideal instead of assuming automatically that he endorses it.²¹

In light of this, we should consider carefully how the stranger states that he intends to settle Socrates' problem. Socrates' suggests that he should carry out the conversation with Theaetetus (217d4-7); he accepts this and makes the following statement:

¹⁸ Cf. Heidegger (1992), 245, Friedländer (III), 224.

¹⁹ This is basically the same demand the aging Parmenides makes in the dialogue bearing his name (cf. *Prm.* 137b).

²⁰ Sallis (1996), 458 and Miller (2004), 2 see the stranger as someone competent to give a fair trial of Socrates since he is himself a philosopher; Rosen (1983), 10, n. 9, Benardete (1986), 70-71 and Howland (1998), 172 ff. emphasise that the stranger is a different type of philosopher than Socrates, and hence that we cannot automatically assume that he agrees that Socratic discourse is philosophy.

²¹ *Pace* Cornford (1935), 170.

“[1] in common with me, you are now to join in the investigation by first beginning, as it appears to me, from the sophist, seeking and making evident in speech (*logos*) whatever he is (*ti pot' estin*).

[2] The reason for this is that as of now you and I have only a name (*onoma*) in common about him, but each of us may have ... his own private notion of the job (*ergon*) we call by that name. And one must always in regard to anything have gained ... an agreement about the matter (*pragma*) itself through accounts rather than only about the name apart from an account”

(218b7-c5)

This remark deserves to be read carefully. I shall begin by looking at the section I have termed [1]. The stranger suggests that the search should begin with the sophist. How this is supposed to affect the general question of how one should discern the philosopher is not spelled out. Apparently knowledge of what the sophist is should help us in finding the philosopher,²² and this knowledge is to be gained by searching through *logos*.

The notion of *logos* became central to the question what knowledge is at the end of the *Theaetetus*; the question of what knowledge is thus turned into a question what *logos* is.²³ To many commentators, the fact that the *Theaetetus* fails to give us an adequate answer to this question should be seen in conjunction with the stranger's way of arriving at definitions in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. In these two dialogues, it is claimed, we are presented with an adequate concept of *logos*, account or definition, which will enable us to successfully answer what knowledge is.²⁴ If this is so, we will want to be sure we understand what the stranger means when he suggests that they should search for the sophist and make him apparent (*zētein kai emphanizein*) in *logos*.

§3. *The traditional understanding of the method of divisions and its problems*

If we followed a widespread way of reading the *Sophist*, we should say that what the stranger suggests is that they define the sophist by way of the *diairesis*-method, a method of definition peculiar to the later Plato. This method of definition is, according to W. K. C. Guthrie, “the climax of a fairly long development, originating in the Socratic search for definitions”.²⁵ It is supposedly a way of defining something through specifying its

²² Notomi (1999) does not state that the dialogue begins by posing two variations of the same problem, but his alternation between different formulations of what he calls “the basic problem” (p.26) points to it; compare p. 22 with p. 25.

²³ Cf. Sallis (1996), 458.

²⁴ E.g. Stenzel (1931), 42 ff.

²⁵ Guthrie (1978), 130.

genus proximum and *differentia specifica* à la the way a Linnaean definition is given.²⁶ Referring to a passage from the *Phaedrus*, many commentators claim that the method practiced in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* is carried out as a double procedure, whereby the dialectician is able, first, to collect a number of scattered terms into a unit, “seeing together things that are scattered about everywhere and collecting them into one kind” (*Phdr.* 265d) and then, secondly, is “able to cut up each kind ... according to its natural joints” (265e).²⁷ By this double move, an *infimae species* is supposedly given an essential definition. If we follow this view, we will expect that what we are to receive in the *Sophist*, at least in its outer part, is a demonstration in “dialectical logic”,²⁸ the purpose of which is to give an essential definition of a natural kind or, to use the terminology of J. Stenzel, of an *atomon eidos*,²⁹ namely the sophist. Although this view of the *diairesis*-method has had its critics, it still dominates scholarship on the *Sophist*.³⁰ It is therefore worthwhile to comment on it at some length. The view faces two serious problems.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, problem is that the divisions that are actually performed both in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* by no means live up to the rigid demands a definition of this kind must satisfy. In the *Sophist*, the starting points for the divisions seem to be chosen arbitrarily and are probably meant to put the sophist in a bad light. Another problem is that we get seven definitions of the sophist, not one. Moreover, what in one definition counts as one “subgenus”, counts as another “subgenus” in another. And in the third definition of the sophist the initial assumption that sophistry is a purely acquisitive *technē* is given up since the sophist is suddenly said to be a seller of insights (*mathēmata*; 224b1) pertaining to virtue, some of which he has “devised on his own” (224d).

These flaws in the actual application of the *diairesis*-method have been noted both by commentators who criticise the view that Plato was a proponent of this method³¹ as well as by scholars who claim that he was the inventor of classificatory definitions.³² The definitions we find in the *Sophist*, if taken to be examples of definitions by *genus*

²⁶ Cf. Cornford (1935), 170.

²⁷ Translation by Nehamas and Woodruff, in Cooper (1997).

²⁸ Cf. Taylor, (1929), 375

²⁹ Apparently, Stenzel borrows this term from Aristotle; the closest we get to something like it is “*atomon*” at *Sph.* 229d5.

³⁰ It is taken more or less for granted by Notomi (1999), 75-77, who claims that the method, in supplying names with a definition (*logos*), changes mere names into real names, signifying “true kinds” which “locate things in the network or relationship between kinds.” Cf. also Iber (2007) 220-223.

³¹ Benardete (1963) and Rosen (1983) criticise the view of *diairesis* as centred on genus and species.

³² Guthrie (1978), 127 remarks that the first six definitions have a “satirical, pseudo-scientific character”.

proximum and *differentia specifica*, at best show us that Plato has an ironical stance towards his own method, at worst that he was not able to use it correctly.

But apart from this a perhaps less obvious, but, to my mind, more serious problem with this traditional understanding of *diairesis* is that it claims that the goal of the divisions is to deliver a definition of an *eidos* understood as a Platonic form or a natural kind.³³ This is where Socrates' formulation of the basic problem of the dialogue becomes important. What we may reasonably assume is to be the main object of the inquiry is either how philosophy or the philosopher, respectively, are related to the different appearances of the philosopher, or how philosopher, statesman and sophist differ from each other. There can be no doubt that the stranger attempts to settle this problem by a kind of divisional procedure. But it seems less than obvious to me that Plato should have regarded the goal of these divisions as definitions of Platonic Forms or natural kinds.

One possible implication of the traditional understanding would be that sophist, statesman and philosopher themselves are natural kinds or Forms. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, it is highly uncertain whether Plato believed that there was a Form, an *eidos*, for man.³⁴ If man is essentially a living being characterized by lack, as the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium* implies (cf. *Smp.* 202a-203a), his "essence", as it were, lies outside himself. The same view, I believe, underlies the digression in the *Theaetetus* with its claim that the happiness of man depends on his becoming as like god as possible. Secondly, even if, for the sake of the argument, we should believe that a definition of man, for instance "two-footed, wingless animal", (cf. *Plt.* 266e), could reveal his essence, what sense does it make to assume that Plato believed that this essence was divided into further essential subspecies such as philosopher and sophist?

Another possible implication is that the natural kind or Form to be defined is the knowledge, *technē* or *epistēmē*, possessed by sophist, statesman and philosopher respectively. At first this seems to be a much more promising suggestion, since the stranger actually begins his investigation by differentiating between different kinds of *technai* and *epistēmai* in the *Sophist* (and the *Statesman*). Also, this focus gives us a clear link, not only with the discussion of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, but also with

³³ E.g. Stenzel (1931), 1-2, Cornford (1935), 171 and Notomi and Iber cited above, n. 30. Rosen (1983), 87, and (1995), 3-4 criticise this view. See also Brown (2009), 1-3.

³⁴ Steiner (1992) makes a strong case for reading Plato's philosophy as fundamentally based on the assumption that soul, *psychē*, is never to be understood as a substance in the sense of a self-sufficient "thing" and thus that there is no Form of the *psychē*.

discussions to be found in almost all Platonic dialogues: What knowledge, if any, does a sophist or a politician possess, and how is it related to the kind of knowledge allegedly possessed by the philosopher? But this interpretative strategy faces another kind of problem. Is it really a convincing view that Plato should have thought that different types of knowledge corresponds to Forms or natural kinds? The difference between types of knowledge is, at least according to the stranger, a result of their objects; so *if* there is a Form for knowledge, it is for knowledge as such, not for different types of knowledge (257c-d, cf. *Phdr.* 247d-e, *Prm.* 134a ff). Moreover, it is highly problematic to claim that sophistry is a kind of knowledge, differentiated from philosophy and statesmanship as two other kinds of knowledge. The picture we get in other Platonic dialogues at least is that sophistry isn't knowledge and that true statesmanship is philosophy. It is reasonable to assume that this is due to the fact that the three in a sense have the same "object", namely the good as pertains to the whole.

My remarks on the traditional way of understanding the alleged method of *diairesis* are primarily meant to spell out that there is a problem regarding *which questions* the dialogue undertakes to examine. For a simple acceptance that Plato is trying to deliver a definition of the sophist through *diairesis* has led more than one commentator to disregard the outer part of the dialogue, believing it to be of no philosophical importance.³⁵ If one does so, it is easy to regard the question what a sophist is as of no real importance to the dialogue and this, I believe, leads to a distorted perspective on the middle part of the dialogue.³⁶ I shall have more to say about the alleged method of *diairesis* in what follows, and about Stenzel's understanding of it in particular (cf. especially part II, §9, and part III §12).³⁷

§4. *To move from a common name to a shared understanding through logos*

In part [2] of the passage quoted above, the stranger explains to Theaetetus why an investigation is necessary in order to determine what the sophist is. The reason is that the two of them have the name (*onoma*) in common, but they might have different understandings of his work; so they ought to secure a shared understanding of the matter (*pragma*) discussed, the sophist, by defining his work in a *logos*.

³⁵ The most extreme example is probably, cf. Ryle (1966), 36.

³⁶ Cf. Notomi (1999), 43-73.

³⁷ I discuss J. Stenzel's reading at some length because his understanding of the *Sophist* has been very influential and because he clearly formulates the premises of a type of interpretation which I find expressed in many later works on the dialogue, also in recent ones.

If we connect this claim with what the stranger has to say about *logos* towards the end of the dialogue, we get an interesting picture. According to the stranger, a name doesn't signify anything by itself. It must be connected with a verb (*rhēma*), "which is an indicator for actions" (262a3-4), in order to become a statement, a *logos*, which reveals a being in its action or inaction. From this we may suggest that Theaetetus and the stranger are looking for an account which combines the name 'sophist' with the action or activity characteristic of his work. But since the sophists are, according to the stranger, a tribe (*to phylon*) which is not easy to comprehend, he proposes to conduct the inquiry in the following way: they should practise the way of pursuing him on something smaller and easier (218c5-d6). In apparent contradiction of what Socrates suggests in the *Republic* (*R.* 368e ff),³⁸ the stranger claims that it is easier to start by looking at a small or easy example before one undertakes to see the greater pattern which it is meant to illustrate, a pedagogical point repeated in the *Statesman* (*Plt.* 277d ff.).

We may finally note that the stranger undertakes his investigation of sophistry by starting with the name 'sophist' in the hope that the initial understanding the two interlocutors have of this name may, through inquiry, turn into a shared understanding.³⁹ This is quite similar to the considerations brought forward by Socrates in the *Theaetetus* at 196d1-197a6 (see part I, §17). In this respect, at least, the stranger seems to share Socrates' ideal of philosophical dialogue. According to both the stranger and Socrates, philosophical or dialectical inquiry seems to presuppose a minimal common understanding, somehow captured in words, on which one can, ideally, build a more elaborate understanding through dialogue.⁴⁰ As it turns out, it is this common understanding, or, more precisely, Theaetetus' understanding, which the stranger undertakes to cross-examine in what follows.

³⁸ Whether this is really a contradiction of Socrates' method in the *Republic* can be doubted. In so far as the point is that it is (presumably) easier to see justice in the city than in the soul, and that one can therefore throw light on justice in the soul by holding it up against justice in the city, we see the same way of using structural resemblances in examples in order to reach understanding in play.

³⁹ I believe Gadamer (1990), 340 is right in insisting that the *diairesis* is far closer to dialogical investigation than is commonly recognised. For the notion of shared search in Plato's later dialogues, see Gill (1996).

⁴⁰ Cf. Iber (2007), 221.

Chapter two: The angler and the first definitions of the sophist

To reach their goal of understanding the work carried out by the sophist, the stranger suggests they should make use of a “smaller example” (*paradeigma*), namely the angler, who, although familiar to all and hence not worth much seriousness, nevertheless offers “a way of inquiry (*methodos*) and an account (*logos*) that’s not unsuited” to the task at hand (218e2-219a2). Before we look at this example, a few comments on the terms *paradeigma* and *methodos* are in order. I shall also have more to say about them in the next chapter.

Literally, a *methodos* means a “way after”. Its original connotation is most probably that of following a path, which is a metaphor for philosophical investigation which is found in many Platonic dialogues, a connotation which, probably, has its origin in Parmenides’ notion of different roads of inquiry.⁴¹ I believe it is important to resist the temptation of translating *methodos* with method. This too readily suggests that the stranger is claiming to have a formal procedure (i.e. “the procedure of division and collection”) by way of which to settle philosophical questions, rather than to follow a path, “tracking” philosophical problems through discourse. Moreover, the idea that he has one method and one method only does not square with the twists and turns of the argument.⁴² As we shall see, Parmenides’ notion of roads is much more important for the attempt to define the sophist than the alleged method of collection and division. In addition, if we translate *methodos* with method, it becomes all too easy to focus on the purely formal aspects of what the stranger is doing in the first part of the dialogue, thereby overlooking the ‘material’ side to the divisions he carries out.

In what regards the notion of *paradeigma*, which means a pattern or an example, we should ask what kind of relationship there is supposed to exist between the *paradeigma*, i.e. the angler, and the sophist. Is the angler an example to be analysed according to a specific way of defining something, a subject merely introduced in order to perform a “test run”? If so, the angler is only exemplary for the way in which the stranger intends to settle the question about the sophist, which is how many commentators see the matter.⁴³ But if we keep in mind that the word *paradeigma* is connected with the verb *deiknynai*, i.e. to point out,⁴⁴ we can understand the stranger’s suggestion in another way: the angler will serve as something which

⁴¹ This may in turn be connected with Hesiod’s notion of two ways of life, from the “Works and Days”, 287 ff. cf. *Historische Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (under “Methode”), and Snell (1955), 320-332.

⁴² For a criticism of the idea that Plato is a proponent of a method in any modern sense of the term, cf. Campbell (1867), xiii, and xii. The most radical statement of the opposite view is Stenzel (1931). Cf. also Iber (2007), 221

⁴³ Again, the most prominent example is Stenzel (1931).

⁴⁴ The basic sense of *paradeigma* is “pattern” or “model”. A *paradeigma* can, in addition to being something “smaller” or less “real”, mean the very model or essence of something, cf. *Theaetetus* 176e3.

brings to light, or points out, what something else is by being placed next (*para*) to it.⁴⁵ What functions as a *paradeigma* is something which is better known which makes something less known more understandable. Regarded in this way, the angler could be a paradigm pointing out features that will allow us, hopefully, to understand what a sophist is.⁴⁶

This procedure, using simpler matters to illustrate more complex relations is not peculiar to the *Sophist*; it can be found in many Platonic dialogues. Nevertheless, the stranger clearly has a specific interest in this way of teaching, as can be seen from his digression on the use of examples in the *Statesman* (277a279a). We may therefore note already at this point that the stranger will change the *paradeigma* in light of which he attempts to analyse sophistry at 226b and at 233d. He also uses a *paradeigma* at 251a to illustrate that one and the same thing can be addressed with many names. We need to understand how these examples work if we are to understand the stranger's analysis of sophistry as well as his doctrine of the intertwining or connection of Forms. We should therefore pay attention to how the stranger analyses angling and in particular to the beginning of his analysis.

§5. *The angler* (219a4-221c5)

The first division we find in the *Sophist*, which initiates the stranger's continued attempts to divide different types of *technē* in order to catch the sophist, is stated as a question as follows: "Shall we set him [the angler] down as an artisan (*technitēs*) or someone artless, but with a different capacity (*dynamis*)?" (219a5-6). He thus identifies art as a capacity, a *dynamis*. Moreover, the division clearly implies that man has other kinds of capacities than art. In light of the goal of the dialogue, namely to clarify what a sophist is, or rather what his work is, in order to differentiate him from a philosopher, this is important.

The general picture we get of sophistry in Plato's dialogues is that it is not an art (cf. *Grg.* 462-63, *Phdr.* 260e). Moreover, although Socrates, as we have seen, claims that he possesses the art of midwifery in the *Theaetetus*, it is fair to say that Socrates' usual claim is that he himself possesses no art, that he is a layman. But the stranger appears to have a different understanding of *technē* or of sophistry and philosophy. At 221d5 he seems to agree with Theaetetus that the sophist has a *technē*. Moreover, his own use of divisions in order to find definitions might give us the impression that he holds that philosophy is a kind of *technē* as well. For these reasons it is worth keeping in mind that the division that starts the entire

⁴⁵ Howland (1998), 184.

⁴⁶ This is emphasised by Heidegger (1992), 263 ff. Cf. also Rosen (1983), 91, who also points out that, since *diairesis* is supposedly a hunt for the sophist, the angler may also be an example of the procedure of hunting the sophist.

investigation through divisions is between *technē* and other kinds of capacities.⁴⁷ As we shall see, the side of the division discarded here, *dynamis*, will be brought back into the discussion at 233a. We should further note that the notion of *dynamis*, which is here mentioned for the first time, becomes important in the central, ontological part of the dialogue, in particular from 246a onwards.

Confronted with the question where to put the angler, it appears evident to Theaetetus that he has an art (219a7). As M. Heidegger remarks,⁴⁸ what seems to guide him in this choice is a preconception of what art and angling is. But this means that the starting point for the stranger's divisions is people's preconceptions, rather than a secured first principle,⁴⁹ a fact which becomes important for understanding what he intends to accomplish through his analysis. I shall return to this issue below.

If the angler is a person possessing an art, it is reasonable to specify what types of art there are in order to determine where the angler belongs. The stranger suggests that *technē* should be divided into two, productive or "poetical" art (*poiētikē technē*; 219b11) on the one hand, and acquisitive art (*ktētikē technē*; 219c7) on the other. Whereas acquisitive art lays hold on something that already exists, through action and speeches (219c5), productive art brings something into being (*ousia*; 219b4-5). Two things are worth noting about this step.

Firstly, in the opening lines of the *Statesman* the stranger divides the kinds of knowledge (*epistēmai*)⁵⁰ according to a different criteria, namely according to whether they are "gnostic" or "practical" (cf. *Plt.* 258b10-e5). This shows us that the stranger's procedure of division depends on what he is seeking. His procedure reflects the interest of the interlocutors rather than the ontological structure of reality.⁵¹

Secondly, the claim that productive art leads what was not before "into being (*ousia*)" is worth noting. For the sophist, although he is initially defined as someone who has an acquisitive art, is at 233d6 defined as a mimetic artist. *Technē mimētikē* is, as is clear from 219b1, a productive *technē*. As such, it brings something into being. As *ousia* is later stated to be one of the subjects the sophist claims to be an expert on (cf. 232c8), and as *ousia* is furthermore a major subject in the middle part of the dialogue (just as *dynamis* is), the claim that production brings something into being may be regarded as a foreshadowing of a central

⁴⁷ Cf. Heidegger (1992), 265, Rosen (1983), 93, Dorter (1994), 125, Howland (1998), 182.

⁴⁸ Heidegger (1992), 265-266.

⁴⁹ This fits with Aristotle's complaint that *diairesis* cannot give demonstrations, cf. *APr.* A, 31, *APo.* B, 5. Gadamer (1990), 340 remarks: „In Wahrheit macht es die Auszeichnung der *Diairesis* aus, daß sie das gar nicht sein will, sondern die Nähe zur Kunst des Gespräches wahr.“

⁵⁰ As already noted, *epistēmē* and *technē* are used interchangeably by the stranger. The difference in how the stranger analyses knowledge is pointed out by Brown (2009), 7-8.

⁵¹ Cf. Rosen (1995), 15-17.

theme of the dialogue: how is the sophist's mimetic production related to his understanding of being and to the overall discussion of being in the dialogue?

The first two divisions thus not only illustrate the way in which the stranger will analyse sophistry, they also foreshadow important themes of the ontological middlepart of the dialogue. This should make it clear that the example of the angler is more than a model used to illustrate a formal method.

Upon these initial divisions follow eight divisions that may be organized according to the *way* the angler hunts, the *object* he hunts and the *instruments* with which he hunts⁵². With regard to the *way*, the stranger divides acquisition into (1) willing exchange vs. mastery of something, and, focusing on mastery, into (2) competition vs. hunting (219d5-e1-2). With regard to the *object* he divides things into (1) soulless objects vs. living beings, and then living beings into (2) pedestrian animals vs. animals that live in water, and water animals into (3) water birds vs. fish (219e7-220b8). Finally, with regard to the *means*, he divides hunting utensils into (1) fences vs. striking instruments, and striking instruments into (2) torchlight hunting at night vs. hook hunting in the daytime⁵³ and, finally, hook hunting into (3) hunting by hooks on a trident vs. hunting by hook, where the striking is "contrary to the former", pulling up from below "by means of rods and reeds", i.e. angling (220e8-221a3). In this way the stranger claims to have led Theaetetus from a mere name, angling, to a shared understanding, through an account (*logos*) of this work (221a7-b2).

We may start by noting that the stranger proceeds by grouping different activities together according to their likeness, in order to separate them from other activities that themselves look alike; he then separates different activities within one of the groups, again focusing on likenesses. For instance, all kinds of hunting of land animals are seen as alike and thus different from all kinds of hunting of water animals. Within the kinds of hunting of water animals, it is again possible to distinguish between types of hunting carried out with nets and similar equipment, on the one hand, and hunting with sharp instruments, on the other and so on. This is the procedure of division he will use in the first five⁵⁴ definitions of the sophist.

At first it may be tempting to regard this as a downward process of division, starting from an upper genus, moving down through a number of bifurcations of subgenera until an

⁵² Cf. Benardete (1986), II.77.

⁵³ This is an anomaly, since it focuses on the time of day, rather than on the means by which the hunting is carried out.

⁵⁴ As has been noted by many commentators, there is a problem concerning how the number of definitions of the sophist should be counted. We are first given four definitions, but when they are counted at 231c-e, the third is split into two. For suggestions of reasons why this happens, cf. Klein (1977), 26-27 and Rosen (1983), 132-143. For the sake of simplicity I choose to stick with the counting we are given at 231c-e.

infima species is finally reached, as commentators who follow J. Stenzel do. But the shift in focus from the way in which the hunt is carried out to the object of the hunt and finally to the instrument used speaks against it. This corresponds to three parallel perspectives we may employ when analysing angling. They surely do not stand below each other in a hierarchy of Forms. For instance, the use of nets is not a natural subdivision of the hunting of fish, since someone who captures birds or butterflies may use a net as well. We have little reason to believe that the stranger would claim that each “part” of a division corresponds to a “real” division, a subgenus in an ontological hierarchy of Forms or natural kinds.⁵⁵

This problem aside, we may ask what the stranger hopes to accomplish through his divisions. For we may wonder whether the account agreed upon does not simply spell out what Theaetetus already knew about angling. When he at 221a5-6 is able to identify the last “cut” in the bifurcatory procedure with the angler, this must be due to a preconception of what angling is: someone totally unacquainted with the art of fishing would not be able to identify the stranger’s description *as* a description of angling. This point becomes important when connected with the stranger’s initial suggestion that he and Theaetetus might have different opinions about the work carried out by the sophist. If the procedure of the stranger requires that his interlocutor has some preconception of the object to be “classified”, in order for the interlocutor to be able to correctly identify a definition *as* a definition, we may wonder how the procedure relates to misguided preconceptions.

§6. *Sophistry and expertise (221c6-d7)*

At 221c6-7 the stranger suggests that they should attempt to define what the sophist is in accordance with the pattern considered so far. He therefore proceeds to ask whether the sophist should be defined as “a layman (*idiōtēs*) or as truly in every way a sophist (*sophistēs*)” (221d1-2), in analogy with the initial question pertaining to the angler (or so the stranger now claims), namely whether he was a *technitēs* or a layman (221c9-d2).

As a matter of fact the stranger has changed his wording slightly. What he asked at 219a5-6 was whether the angler had an art or some capacity other than a *technē*. Apparently, he now identifies all other capacities than *technē* as what laymen possess. This is worth noting since Socrates generally refers to himself as precisely that, a layman, whereby he ironically distances himself from the self-proclaimed wisdom of the sophists. On the other hand,

⁵⁵ If he did, he would be mistaken, since the mere fact that something differs from something else by not sharing a certain feature does not guarantee that what lacks this feature corresponds to a natural class. To be non-Greek, e.g., is, as the stranger himself points out in the *Statesman* (262c ff.), not the same as to be member of a genus.

Socrates' usual denial that sophistry is an art would, according to the present division, seem to place the sophist firmly in the category of laymen. We could therefore expect that the difference between philosopher and sophist should be sought within this category.

A preliminary answer to the question why this does not happen can be elicited from Theaetetus' reply to the stranger's question. It is impossible that the sophist is a layman, he claims, because of his name (*onoma*); due to this he must have an art (221d3-4). It seems fair to say that the name *sophistēs*, the literal meaning of which was at least originally⁵⁶ that of a 'wise man', supplies Theaetetus with a preconception of sophistry which makes him identify the sophist as an expert.⁵⁷ And as mentioned, the stranger's acceptance of Theaetetus' suggestion seems to put him at odds with Socrates. We should note, however, that the stranger started by saying that they should move from a mere name to a shared understanding of the work of the sophist. But the investigation now begins the other way round, since it is the sophist's name which determines how his work is defined. Perhaps the stranger does not, after all, agree with Theaetetus, although he initially seems to – perhaps the stranger is not foreign to Socratic irony.

§7. *The first five definitions of the sophist (221d8-226a5)*

Following the model of the angler as someone possessing expertise, more precisely an acquisitive expertise, the stranger and Theaetetus are now to determine the work carried out by the sophist. This proves to be a laborious task due to the complexity of the art of the sophist (223c1-2). Before the example of the angler is abandoned at 226b1 ff., five different definitions are given, all starting from different divisions within the initial attempt to define angling. The first definition takes as its point of departure the fact that the angler is a hunter, and in analogy defines the sophist as a hunter of rich young men (223a4-5). The second, third and (later)⁵⁸ fourth definitions focus on the angler as someone who has an acquisitive art, and then look towards exchange instead of hunt, defining the sophist as a seller of insights (*mathēmata*) pertaining to excellence (2249-c2). The fifth definition again focuses on the sophist as someone who acquires something, though not through exchange, but through manipulation. It therefore focuses on open competition instead of hunting, defining the sophist as someone who makes money through the art of polemics (*eristikē*) carried out in private (225d1-e2).

⁵⁶ That the word '*sophistēs*' did not have a purely derogatory meaning in the fourth century is clearly testified in the writings of Isocrates, especially in the *Antidosis*. See Guthrie (1971), 27 ff. and Notomi (1999), 51.

⁵⁷ In addition, we should not forget that he has read Protagoras' "truth" many times.

⁵⁸ See note 53 above.

Instead of one “essential” definition of the art of sophistry, the stranger thus lists a number of different activities that may all reasonably be said to describe the work of the sophist. Nevertheless, the definitions are not as disparate as one may at first believe. Apart from the fact that all these definitions take their cue from the way in which the angler was defined, they share a number of features which seem to point to one common activity.

The first sophist is said to hunt the young and the rich. This kind of ‘hunting’ must be understood as a kind of “advertising campaign”, since in contrast to other kinds of “hunting” such as tyranny, pirating and the like, the sophist carries out his hunt through a kind of credibility- or conviction producing art (*pithanourgikē*; 222c10). More precisely, he uses this art in private and is able to demand a salary by proclaiming the ability to make the young virtuous by associating with them.

From the dialogue between Theaetetus and the stranger it is not entirely clear whether the sophist’s art is defined as his (professed) ability to teach others excellence or whether it consists in his ability to make others *believe* that he is able to do so, by persuading them. I would suggest that, since Theaetetus defined the sophist as someone having a *technē*, as a wise man, he believes that the sophist is able to teach others excellence.⁵⁹ Being a potential follower of Protagoras, as we have seen from the *Theaetetus*, and somewhat unacquainted with the debating techniques of the sophists (cf. *Sph.* 239e1), it seems natural that he should regard the sophist as a man able to teach others excellence – for a fee. The stranger, on the other hand, seems to regard the sophist’s work as the ability to persuade others that he can teach excellence, without being able to do so. This can be seen from his quick summary of the first definition, where he introduces a term not encountered in the previously performed divisions, saying that the sophist has a *doxopaideutikē technē* (223b4), an art either of apparent education or of education in opinion. If the above is sound, we see that Theaetetus and the stranger do indeed have their own different understandings of what a sophist is.

Whether the two interlocutors believe that the sophist has a real insight into education or not, it is clear that the first definition of the sophist moves from a preliminary understanding of him as a hunter to an understanding which focuses on the notions of education and excellence, on *paideia* and *arētē*. This, I believe, shows a direct connection between the first and the following four definitions. At 223c2-4 the stranger explains to Theaetetus that the complexity of the sophist’s art can be seen from the fact that in light of what they have just said about it, it appears as something else than what they’re now claiming

⁵⁹ He would not be the first character to make such an assumption in Plato’s dialogues; cf. *Prt.* 312c and *Euthd.* 271c.

it to be. Since the stranger then suggests that they should not look at the sophist as a hunter, but rather as a trader, it is reasonable to suggest that the second definition follows from the first definition's final focus on *paideia* and *excellence*. The second definition seeks to delimit the art of sophistry as a kind of tradesmanship in insights (*mathēmata*),⁶⁰ not those that pertain to the other arts, but such insights as relate to the art of excellence.⁶¹ We may note that Theaetetus shows no hesitation when the stranger seemingly identifies excellence with a *technē*, nor does he doubt that the one who sells insights regarding this “art” is a sophist.

This second definition is at once split into two when the stranger distinguishes between the selling of insights related to excellence, where the trader travels from *polis* to *polis*, and a trade that takes place within a single *polis*. In the description of the tradesman who stays in one city, moreover, he tacitly makes a further distinction, namely between one who sells goods bought from others and one who sells something he has devised himself (224d).⁶²

Let me make a brief comment on this. As mentioned, the claim that the sophist is someone who produces his own insights would be a violation of the stranger's method if it were a divisional procedure à la Linnaean classification. Since the supposed “genus” under which the sophist is sought is art as *acquisition*, it would be a methodological blunder to say that the sophist sometimes *produces* insights. But if one disregards this as a problem which arises from a specific preconception of what the stranger undertakes to do, namely to divide according to genus and species, rather than from the Platonic text itself, one can elicit an important point from what the stranger says about the sophist. The point the stranger wishes to make, I believe, is not so much that the sophist is someone who sells insights that he has acquired from others, but rather that he believes that insights regarding excellence are like commodities which can be transferred from one person to another. The main point of the passage 223c1-224e5 is then that the sophist is identified as someone *selling* insights pertaining to excellence.⁶³

The sophist must indeed claim that knowledge is something which can be passed on to someone else like goods at a market; otherwise he couldn't claim to be able to teach people

⁶⁰ At 223e1-3, such insights are said to be analogous to goods that nourish (*trephein*) the body. For a similar picture, cf. *Prt.* 312.

⁶¹ The Greek “*to men peri ta tōn allōn technōn mathēmata ... to de peri to tēs aretēs*” (224b9-c2) seems to suggest that excellence is here defined as an art.

⁶² It is this implicit distinction, between a seller of second-hand insights and a seller of “self-made” insights, which can be regarded as giving a fourth definition which later causes confusion as regards the number of definitions.

⁶³ The image of learning and teaching as kinds of hunt for “knowledge-birds”, found in the *Theaetetus*, enabling the possessor of such “birds” to pass them on to others, spring to mind.

excellence in a relatively short period of time. Whereas the first definition of the sophist focused on his hunting ability, his ability to lure the young by claiming to be able to make them virtuous, the definitions in 223c1-224e5 focus on the sophist's conception of excellence, namely that it is, apparently, a *technē*, that it can be taught and that this teaching consists in "transferring" insights from one person to another. However, what is not made clear from these new definitions is what the sophist understands, more substantially, by excellence understood as a *technē*. The following definition goes some way to make this clear.

As mentioned, the fifth definition of the sophist describes him as the very man Theodorus initially claimed that the stranger was not, namely a polemic or an eristic. More precisely, the sophist is now described as the practitioner of the art of disputation (225b1), pitting words against words, not in public, but in a private debate (225b11). When such a debate is carried out concerning the just and the unjust, which is what the stranger defines as polemics, and when the man performing these disputations does not lose, but rather gains, money from his activity, this is, as the stranger and Theaetetus agree, nothing else than sophistry.

If we compare this picture with the previous descriptions, the only apparent connection is that all definitions focus on the fact that the sophist makes money from his activity. Following this line of reasoning, one could be tempted to suggest that what characterises the sophist as a sophist is simply the fact that he makes money.⁶⁴ But this will not enable one to differentiate the sophist from any other merchant or retailer. In order to do so, one has to say something about the product which the sophist sells. After all, this may in turn point to another connection between the new description and the previous ones. For one may wonder why anyone would want to pay someone else money for carrying out a dispute about the just and the unjust, if such a dispute is carried out in private and not on one's behalf in a courtroom or at some other public gathering.

In light of the discussions of the power of sophistic education found in the *Euthydemus* and the *Gorgias*, the natural answer is that the sophist receives his payment because he promises to teach others his art of disputation.⁶⁵ But how is this related to the previous descriptions which focus on the teaching of *aretē*? To be able to contradict is surely not a sign of excellence? But in an extremely orally oriented culture such as the *polis* of Athens, it was only natural that people would be interested in learning the art of getting one's

⁶⁴ This is suggested by Cornford (1935), 175. For criticism of this view, see Kerferd and Flashar (1996), 4, and Zeller (2006) I/II, 1343.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Sph.* 232b8-9.

point through; to excel in political life – and most free, grown up men would regard this as the ideal life – required the ability to master the spoken word.⁶⁶ From this perspective it is possible to regard the teaching of the art of disputation as the teaching of excellence.⁶⁷ The full realisation of a human being was seen in connection with the ability to make one’s voice count. Thus we see a possible connection between the former descriptions and the new definition. The *mathemata*, the insights, that the sophist claims to possess and to be able to sell to others, is simply the art of carrying out disputations. Therefore, although there can be little doubt that the stranger gives a *series* of descriptions of the sophist rather than *one* definition, we can at least see some connections between the descriptions. If we follow the line of reading suggested here, what the first five definitions give us is a gradual disclosure of a cluster of notions central to defining the sophist, namely *paideia*, *aretē*, and, since the excellence the sophist teaches is the art of debating, *logos* .

Unfortunately, this shows us another feature pertaining to the first definitions. By the rather abstract way the stranger goes about his task of describing the sophist, he leaves three important matters undecided, namely 1) what excellence is, 2) whether it can be taught and 3) what the correct use of speech amounts too. In other words, he leaves all the basic, Socratic questions, known from other Platonic dialogues, out of the picture. This in turn seems to make all the descriptions inadequate for the task of differentiating between the Socratic philosopher and the sophist. If excellence is a *technē*, if it is teachable, and if it is the same as, or intimately connected with, the ability to dispute, the sophist would be in his good right to demand a salary for his teaching.⁶⁸ Socrates’ quarrel with the sophists, which Plato depicts in other dialogues, would then seem pointless.

That the descriptions do not provide an adequate differentiation between philosophy and sophistry can further be seen from the fact that the stranger has included a number of features in his diairetical investigations of the sophist which are clearly reminiscent of Socrates. In the first definition, at 222d7-e3, when the sophist is described as a hunter of young men, he is differentiated from another “hunter” who hunts by giving gifts, exercising the “art of erotics”. This is the art which Socrates in the *Symposium* claims to be his sole metier (*Smp.* 177d-e).⁶⁹ Moreover, as Socrates’ specific kind of eroticism is founded in a conception of *paideia* as a caretaking of the soul, it too can be described as a kind of

⁶⁶ Cf. Gadamer (1978), 150.

⁶⁷ Cf. Gorgias fragment DK 82 A8.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Apology*, 20b-c

⁶⁹ This is echoed in the *Phaedrus*, 227c. Cf. the opening scenes of the *Alcibiades*, the *Charmides* and, of course, the *Theaetetus*.

socializing (*homilia*) for the sake of excellence (223a4-5), only differentiated from sophistry by the fact that he does not make any money from this. Furthermore, in the fifth description of the sophist, the final division carried out before the sophist is reached is between a private debater who loses money and one who earns money. The constant activity of discussing what justice and injustice is, whereby one loses money through neglect of one's own affairs, as Socrates claims he has done in the *Apology* (23b-c, 37b), is described by the stranger as a kind of disputation which is "heard without pleasure by many of its auditors", an activity best termed a kind of yammering (*adoleschikos*; 225d10-11). This is how Socrates refers to his own activity of conducting dialectical conversations in the *Theaetetus* (195b-c)⁷⁰, and this is how Parmenides (cf. *Prm.*, 135d) says the many terms dialectics. It seems as if Socrates' way of conducting speeches is defined as a kind of eristic by the stranger, merely differentiated from sophistry by the fact that its performer loses money.

⁷⁰ In the *Phaedo*, 70c, Socrates says that no-one, not even a writer of comedies, could describe him as a chatter-box when discussing the matter of the survival of the soul – the reference is to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 1485, which used exactly this word to describe Socrates. As Campbell (1867), 40 points out, the ironic description of philosophy as "yammering" may also be reflected in *Plt.* 299b.

Chapter three: The sophist of noble lineage

I turn now to a passage which has received more attention than any other passage in the outer part of the dialogue, namely the one that undertakes to define the so-called sophist of noble lineage (cf. 231b8). As there is some controversy about who this noble sophist is, as well as what function the passage has in the dialogue as a whole, I shall analyse it in greater detail than I did the previous definitions.

§8. *The change of paradeigma (226a6-226d11)*

Apparently, the stranger is what Socrates feared, a man who has come to refute him by showing that he is a sophist. However, at 226a6 ff. the stranger suddenly modifies the way by which he intends to search for the work carried out by the sophist. He exclaims that the initially postulated complexity of the sophist (cf. 218c, 223c) has now become clear. This is, I believe, due to the likeness between sophistry and philosophy which has now come to light. The stranger explains that they will not be able to grasp the sophist with one hand but must use both. From this remark we seem justified in supposing that the preceding use of the method of division has been carried out in a one-sided fashion.

Thus we appear to face a change of level in the discussion. This is also indicated by the fact that the stranger now changes his guiding *paradeigma*. The stranger's initial division of arts centred on the difference between producing and acquiring; at 226b2-3 he introduces a number of arts that are not captured by this division, namely a group of domestic arts concerned with different sorts of dividing (*diakrinein*; 226c3). They are referred to as examples (*paradeigmata*) by Theaetetus at 226c1-2.

The domestic arts introduced by the stranger fall into two kinds, the ones like filtering, sifting etc. that separate something worse (*cheiron*) from something better (*beltion*), and the others like carding, spinning etc., which separate like (*homoion*) from like. As the goal of the dialogue is to separate sophist from philosopher, in order to discern what they are, we may suppose that what the stranger is about to say concerning the dividing arts has a reflexive character pertaining to the entire investigation.

The procedure of divisions treated in the previous chapter can be seen as centred on likeness,⁷¹ since they were arrived at through a type of division which grouped different activities together according to their likeness, in order to separate them from other activities (cf. §5, above). This procedure made clear that Socratic dialogue looks like sophistry. Like

⁷¹ Cf. Rosen (1983), 119, Howland (1998), 168, 200.

the sophist, Socrates “hunts” the young, he associates with them for the sake of virtue and his dialogical activity is carried out in the realm of “pure” *logoi*, in speeches or arguments.⁷²

But this points to a limitation in the stranger’s procedure of division, at least if we do not believe that Socrates is a sophist. If sophist and philosopher in fact look alike, a procedure of division which is preoccupied with likenesses will be unable to bring out the difference between them. Focusing on likeness when differentiating types of art or knowledge will necessarily place sophistry and philosophy within the same ‘branch’.

If this interpretation of the initial procedure of diairesis is fair, the fact that it is now the separation of better from worse, characterized at 226d9-10 as a kind of cleansing (*katharmos tis*), rather than the distinction of like from like that the stranger brings into focus, suggests that a new way of dividing is to be introduced. Moreover, if sophist and philosopher stand apart from each other in a non-mathematical, value-based sense, as Socrates claims at the beginning of the *Statesman* (257b2), the division between better and worse seems to be what we need in order to draw the distinction between the confluent philosopher and sophist.

As noted in the previous chapter, the example of the angler could be seen both as a “subject matter” for the practise of division and as a kind of metaphor for the sophist. What then are the household arts a *paradeigma* for? I suggest that it is the method of division itself which the stranger now intends to thematize.⁷³ The example is neither an object on which a formal method is to be practised, nor is its function to illustrate the work of the sophist; it is a model for the activity of dividing or distinguishing.

For this reason it is interesting that the examples used as illustrations seem to cast doubt on the claim that that this activity *is* an art or at least points out that it is an art of a very particular kind. The mentioned domestic activities, which illustrate cleansing – straining, sifting, winnowing – were normally carried out by slaves or women⁷⁴ and, as a consequence, would hardly be considered genuine types of art, i.e. *technai*, which enable people, to quote Roochnik, to hang “a “shingle” to advertise [their] profession.”⁷⁵ This connects the present discussion of the cleansing art with Socrates’ claim in the *Theaetetus* that he possesses the art of midwifery. Midwifery is also an art practised by women and was thus, presumably, not regarded as a genuine art in patriarchal Athens. Moreover, just as the mentioned domestic arts cannot be said to be either acquisitive or productive, so does “ordinary midwifery def[y] easy categorization because of its strange relationship to its objects. It is neither simply productive

⁷² Cf. Theodorus’ remark at *Tht.* 169a6-b4.

⁷³ Cf. Klein (1977), 20, Sallis (1996), 473.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Od.* XXII, 421-23, and *R.* 455c.

⁷⁵ Roochnik (1996), 25.

nor simply acquisitive”.⁷⁶ In the *Theaetetus* Socrates informed Theaetetus that his bad reputation was the result of his art or *technē* of “man-midwifing”, a *technē* that is not itself wisdom, but can help others to wisdom (150c-d).⁷⁷ As we shall see, the practitioner of the art of cleansing, who we are about to be confronted with, claims to do something similar.

§9. *The normative stance of the stranger’s way of inquiry (226e1-227c9)*

At 226e1, the stranger suggests that cleansing can itself be divided according to the object that the cleansing is concerned with, namely bodies, on the one hand, and souls, on the other. Within this subdivision, at 227a7-c6, the stranger makes his first explicit comment on division. This proves important for the understanding of his conception of a *methodos*.

At first sight, what he says looks like strong evidence against my suggestion that he is now introducing a value-oriented, instead of a likeness-oriented, way of dividing. It is, in fact, often read as evidence for the opposite claim, that division in the *Sophist* is a strictly value-neutral method, corresponding to a value-free ontology.

Since Stenzel wrote his *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonischen Dialektik*, it has been customary to see a difference between the way philosophy is conceived of in the *Republic* and the way it is conceived of in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.⁷⁸ Whereas the focal point of the notion of dialectic as found in the *Republic* is the idea of the Good as a highest, normative-ontological principle, dialectic in the later works consists in a “piecemeal approach to knowledge” which maps out “one field after another by classification *per genera et species*”, as Hackforth expresses it.⁷⁹ This is done with no reference to any normative hierarchy, and the method for carrying it out is the method of division that we find in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.⁸⁰ Commentators who believe that this alleged new method of dialectic expresses a change in Plato’s conception of dialectic as well as those who see it rather as an expression of the stranger’s conception of philosophy⁸¹ agree that the method is value-neutral or “quasi-mathematical”⁸². It sees everything as standing on a par.⁸³

The passage in the *Sophist* which at first sight seems to legitimise this view comprises the first half (227a7-b2) of the passage referred to above and goes as follows: “the pursuit through speeches (*he tōn logōn methodos*) does not at all care either less or more for the art of

⁷⁶ Howland (1998), 79.

⁷⁷ Cf. Howland (1998), 78.

⁷⁸ Cf. Stenzel (1931), 25 ff.

⁷⁹ Hackforth (1972), 136.

⁸⁰ Hackforth (1972), 135.

⁸¹ For this view, see. Rosen (1983), 120-21, Dorter (1994), 14, Howland (1998), 200, Ambuel (2007), 35 ff.

⁸² Howland (1998), 168.

⁸³ Cf. Stenzel (1931), 1-2 and, especially, 28, note.

bath-sponging than for drinking medicine, regardless of whether the purification they do benefits us a lot or a little. For this pursuit, for the sake of mind (*heneka noun*), tries to understand the kinship (*syggenēs*) and lack of kinship in all arts”, so that it honours them all equally. The stranger goes on to say that his *methodos* does not see generalship as a better or finer illustration of the art of hunting than the activity of louse-catching.⁸⁴

When evaluating the meaning of this statement, we should note the reason the stranger gives for this neutral approach. The explicit purpose is to enable an understanding of what is alike or akin in the arts and what is not. This can be read as a simple reminder to Theaetetus of the purpose of their joint investigation: the goal of the inquiry is to find out whether sophistry and philosophy are akin (*syggenēs*) or whether they are as different as people in Elea claim. If this is correct, we may regard the stranger’s further comment about the general and the louse-catcher as a warning that they have to focus on the actual work, the *ergon*, accomplished by sophistry and philosophy in order to see whether they are alike or not, rather than merely follow common opinion or prejudice about the two.

Does the stranger’s contempt for common opinion turn him into a spokesman for a value-neutral method? The comparison between medicine and sponging, between general and louse-catcher, surely expresses a divine, rather than a human perspective on things, resembling that of the “top notch” philosophers described in the *Theaetetus* (172c ff.).⁸⁵ But this does not in itself imply a value-neutral outlook. In fact, if the passage 227a7-c6 is read in its entirety, it becomes clear that the stranger does not see all arts as being of equal worth at all. At 227c2, he clearly states that what the method wants to point out⁸⁶ by regarding all kinds of bodily purifications as on a par, is that they all differ from the arts which deals with purification of soul (*psychē*) and, more precisely, with the purification of discursive reason (*dianoia*). In other words, it is due to the method’s focus on *kinds* of purification that the doctor and the bath attendant can be said to stand on an equal footing. Seen in connection with psychic cleansing, such arts are all akin (*syngenēs*).

The passage can thus be read as echoing the ethical stance Socrates takes in the *Apology* and other allegedly early dialogues, rather than as replacing a normatively motivated conception of philosophy. Socrates’ self-description as an “intellectual gadfly” trying to reorientate his fellow men by turning their caretaking of the body and interest in money into a

⁸⁴ A similar point is made in the *Statesman* (266b), when the stranger compares the statesman to a swineherd, a passage Stenzel (and others) also rely on. However, this comparison is later shown as misguided, cf. Miller (2004), 40 ff.

⁸⁵ Cf. *R.* 485b-486a.

⁸⁶ The stranger’s notion of an active *methodos* which wants to show the two interlocutors something is reminiscent of the Socratic notion of following the *logos* wherever it may take one.

caretaking of the soul (cf. *Ap.* 30-a-b) matches the stranger's distinction between bodily and psychic purification. Moreover, the first division the stranger performs *on* the cathartic art shows us, *pace* Stenzel and commentators who follow him, that the stranger's earlier procedure which attempted to divide arts by focusing on their likeness, is now supplemented by an orientation towards what is better or worse, since the stranger removes the inferior kinds of purification from the superior ones that deal with *psychē*. Each of the following divisional steps of the sixth definition bear witness to such an orientation.

How should we then regard the relationship between the two ways of dividing? Is the stranger giving up one way of dividing for the sake of another,⁸⁷ because divisions which focus on likeness are useless, whereas divisions that are normatively motivated are what we need? I don't think this is the case. A purely normative perspective on things may make one blind to actually existing likenesses; I believe that the first definitions of sophistry which the stranger conjures up, are meant to point out to Theaetetus (and to us) the close resemblance that actually exists between philosophy and sophistry. Thus the first descriptions are not wrong, albeit they are not adequate if we wish to distinguish philosopher from sophist. In terms of what Socrates says about dialectic in the *Phaedrus* (cf. 265d-e) we may regard them as an "act" of "seeing together" (*synhoraein*) a manifold, which is then later to be divided.⁸⁸ We see, through them, how sophist and philosopher actually look alike and therefore where we have to look for the relevant difference between them. The task of the remainder of the dialogue is to bring out this difference. It is, I believe, in order to carry out this task that the stranger introduces a supplementary way of dividing or, perhaps better still, a supplementary way of looking at things.

§10. The stranger on psychē, excellence and vice (227c10-229a11)

Having established the difference between bodily and psychic purification, the stranger turns his attention to the notion of soul. Since purification removes the worse from the better, the stranger needs to make clear to Theaetetus what he understands by "worse" and "better" as pertaining to souls, i.e. by "vice" (*ponēria* or *kakia*)⁸⁹ and "excellence" (*aretē*). These notions, which were only vaguely hinted at in the previous attempts to define the sophist, are thus brought into the centre of the investigation. This causes Theaetetus considerable trouble (cf.

⁸⁷ This appears to be the view of Klein (1977), 26.

⁸⁸ I partly agree with Cornford (1935), 186-87, who suggests that the dialogue does not begin with a collection, but that it is the "first six Divisions" which "serve the purpose of a Collection preliminary to the seventh."

⁸⁹ There is a bit of confusion about these two terms in the text. At 227d4, *ponēria* is used as a generic term for the two types of vices, but at 227d13 the generic term is *kakia*.

227d14, 228a3, 228a5-6), which I believe is an indication of the importance of what the stranger is about to say.

The stranger begins by suggesting, at 227d13, that vice comes in two forms, one like sickness (*nosos*), the other like ugliness (*aischos*). This suggestion is what initiates Theaetetus' problems. In order to explain what he means, the stranger likens psychic sickness to civil war (*stasis*) and ugliness to a lack of measure (*ametria*; 228a4-11). What these likenesses are meant to illustrate is spelled out in the passage 228b2-229a11.

The vice corresponding to sickness is determined as a kind of corruption (*diaphthora*) that results in a disagreement (*diaphora*)⁹⁰ between elements that are akin by nature. More precisely, the resulting disagreement exists between a) opinions (*doxai*) and desires (*epithymiai*), b) spiritedness (*thymos*) and pleasures and c) reason/speech (*logos*) and pains. This kind of vice thus corresponds to a psychic condition where the soul is in total conflict with itself, a condition which is, according to the stranger, correctly identified as villainy (*ponēria*; 228b8-9) by the many (228d6-7).

What he means by pointing out that “the many” call this villainy becomes clear when we contrast it with the kind of vice he likens to ugliness. The stranger points out (228c1-5) that as regards things that participate in motion (*kinēseōs metechō*) and are able to set themselves a goal (*skopos*), when they miss their target, do so due to a lack of measure (*ametria*). The context, with its focus in the purification of soul and, in particular, *dianoia*, makes it clear that the movement he is talking about is intellectual. What he is after is cases where thinking misses its goal, an image we have already seen in play many times in the *Theaetetus* (177e4-178a2, 189c3, 194a2-4). The stranger adds that both he and Theaetetus know that every soul, when ignorant, is so unwillingly (*ækōn*), so that the ignorance which results when the soul makes an attempt at the truth (*ep' alētheian hormaō*) but misses it is involuntary. So the stranger calls the vice of being ignorant (*anoēton*) psychic ugliness (228d4) because it is the soul's lack of measure which makes it miss the truth. If the movement he describes is the movement of thought or discursive reason, the disproportion, it seems, must be a kind of intellectual blindness which makes the soul miss its target.

Through his distinction between two kinds of vice, the stranger endorses the view that ignorance is a vice.⁹¹ That he regards the failure of the psychic movement as involuntary gives his teaching a clear Socratic ring. His insistence on terming this condition, although

⁹⁰ I follow Galen's suggested emendation here.

⁹¹ Pace Kerferd (1954), 87. I have elaborated on this, as well as on how the stranger's notions of psychic gymnastics as opposed to “medical treatment” of the soul reflects on his understanding of vice, in greater detail in Larsen (2007).

involuntary, a vice is also in agreement with Socrates. To me, this looks like an echo of the central claim of the *Republic* (*Resp.* 505d-e), that every soul strives to obtain the good, but most fail to do so due to ignorance. If this is correct, the stranger's description of the vice that corresponds to ugliness points toward claims central to Socratic or Platonic ethics, claims which stand in opposition to commonly held opinions on these matters.

At 228d10-11 the stranger openly admits the paradoxical character of his conception of vice; for most people do not agree that ignorance is a vice, at least not "when it comes about only inside the soul" (228d10-11). As I understand this latter remark, the stranger means to point out that people in general do not regard ignorance as a vice if it is purely intellectual and does not show itself on the outside in any kind of action.⁹² Purely intellectual ignorance need not result in any visible vice, whereas strife within the soul is said (cf. 228e2-4) to result in cowardice, lack of restraint, and injustice, which people in general agree are vices. By claiming, in contrast to what "the many" believe, that such ignorance is vice, the stranger thus comes to resemble Socrates a lot more closely than he initially did, at least as regards his conception of psyche and human excellence. But his reflections pertaining to soul, excellence, and vice have not as yet pointed out where the difference between Socratic conversation and sophistic teaching lies.

§11. Elenchus as education (229b1-230e5)

How these two are ultimately to be disentangled becomes clearer when the stranger undertakes to divide the art of teaching according to the "object" that teaching deals with, ignorance. If ignorance comes in more than one kind, the stranger argues (229b7 ff.), there is more than one type of teaching. He suggests that there are two principle kinds of ignorance.

The kind of ignorance the stranger focuses on at first is "big and difficult", "distinctly set apart", and is equal in weight to all other kinds of ignorance. This is the ignorance of believing to know what one doesn't know (229c1-5), which should be called stupidity (*amathia*; 229c9).⁹³ According to the stranger, this type of ignorance is the cause of all the "slips we make in thought" (c5-6). I shall return to this claim below.

What is this kind of ignorance opposed to? The stranger doesn't tell us, but from Theaetetus' comment at 229d1-3 we can see what is meant. Whereas he emphatically calls the teaching that treats stupidity *paideia*, he refers to the other kinds of teaching as "instruction in

⁹² Benardete (1986), II.171, n. 26, suggests that "the stranger alludes to the law-abiding man whose behaviour does not correspond to the nature of his soul", referred to at *R.* 619b-c.

⁹³ Cf. *Symp.* 204a.

handicrafts” (*dēmiourgika didaskalia*).⁹⁴ In other words, the difference is between a lack of positive, “technical” knowledge and self-knowledge, a knowledge of what one knows and what one doesn’t know. Whereas a lack of knowledge of how to make shoes can be removed through professional teaching and training, a false self-understanding (believing to know what one in fact does not know) is removed through education.

How are we to understand the particular kind of ignorance that the stranger is after? According to G. B. Kerferd, the term *amathia* is “confined to cases where a person thinks ... he knows something about a thing when he does not know it” and that there is “nothing particularly Socratic about” it.⁹⁵ The description of *amathia* taken in isolation might seem to support this reading, implying that what the stranger means by being tripped up in thought is simply the result of having the false belief that one knows something, whatever, when one doesn’t. But there are good reasons to reject this reading.

Since the procedure which deals with this type of ignorance, namely *paideia*, is contrasted with professional training, it is safe to assume that stupidity, *amathia*, is a different type of ignorance than the technical ignorance of the layman. This is in itself important since the first five portraits the stranger has given Theaetetus of the sophists were of men claiming to possess information about virtue, which they claimed they were able to sell and teach to others, the way people possessing a *technē* can teach others. In other words, I suggest, by distinguishing between ignorance that can be removed through technical teaching and a deeper kind of ignorance, the stranger begins to show Theaetetus (and Plato us) how one should differentiate sophist from (Socratic) philosopher.

What is *amathia* then? One could perhaps suppose that it is the *attitude* of believing to know something one doesn’t know which distinguishes *amathia* from “normal” ignorance, i.e. that it is not differentiated through its *object* from “normal” ignorance, but only through the psychic *attitude* of the one who suffers from it. This would explain why *amathia* is said to be equal in weight to all other kinds of ignorance. It is categorically different from an ordinary lack of knowledge due to its specific reflexive structure. But the notion of *paideia* rules out, I believe, that this can be all there is to it. To be ‘educated’, *paideuteos*, can hardly mean simply to know what one really knows and what one doesn’t. After all, the purpose of *paideia* is to bring about excellence. If excellence depends on knowledge, this must be a specific kind of knowledge.

⁹⁴ Cf. Sallis (1996), 476.

⁹⁵ Kerferd (1954), 88.

It is therefore more plausible to assume that *amathia* must be the kind of ignorance where one falsely believes to understand important things such as what the excellences in general are and in particular what kind of life is truly worth living, thus echoing the notion of ignorance spelled out by Socrates in the digression of the *Theaetetus* (176c4-5). I therefore suggest that *amathia* consists in a specific, reflexive psychic attitude, namely of believing to know something one doesn't know, which distinguishes it from mere lack of knowledge, but that what one falsely believes to know is not just any old thing, but rather the most important matters.

This reading is supported by the last division found in the stranger's description of psychic purification, in the passage 229d8-230e5. Here he distinguishes between two types of *paideia*. On the one hand there is traditional education, performed by the *paterfamilias* who uses admonition (*nouthetētikon*) to educate his sons when they are mistaken. We may note that the word used here for being mistaken is *examartanō*, which literally means "to fail to hit the mark". The motif of intellectual error as the inability to hit what one aims at is thus once again brought into play. Since all *paideia* is meant to cure *amathia*, we may suggest that when the stranger claimed that our slips in thinking are the result of ignorance (229c6), this connects directly with the teleological claim that all souls strive towards understanding, although many miss the mark.

It is precisely an understanding of this matter which characterises the other kind of educators that the stranger describes. They have given themselves an account (*logon didōnai*)⁹⁶ of the matter, i.e. they know that lack of learning is involuntary, and they further believe that the man who thinks he's wise isn't willing to learn the things about which he thinks he is terribly clever (230a5-8). Therefore, these people use a different method of education, in order to expel (*ekballein*) such false beliefs (*doxai*); they cross-examine (*diarōtain*) people.

Both kinds of education are carried out through speech (*en tois logois*; 229e1), but the latter kind of education consists in an interrogation where the educator shows his interlocutor that he has contradictory opinions "about the same things in regard to the same things in the same respects" (230b7-8). This is supposed to make the interrogated person harsh towards himself and gentler towards others, because it delivers him from his "big and stiff opinions" about himself.

⁹⁶ Cf. *Men.* 93a ff., *Prt.* 319e ff.

Who are these cross-examiners? They are said to cross-examine people because they believe, in analogy to doctors,⁹⁷ that without their activity, a person who suffers from *amathia* will have “no benefit of the learnings (*mathēmata*) he is offered before someone, by refuting (*elenchein*) and putting him to shame ... renders him clean” (230c7-d2). This cleaning is the removal of opinions (*doxas*) which impede learning (230d2-d4). In light of what has been said about *amathia*, the impeding opinions must be people’s self-conception of being wise when in fact they are not. It should thus be easy to see that the picture given by the stranger of the practise of *elenchus* corresponds exactly with how Socrates describes his own activity in the *Apology*. It also fits the picture Socrates gives of himself as an intellectual midwife in the *Theaetetus* pretty well. So even if the cross-examiner may be said to have a certain resemblance to the eristic contender portrayed in the fifth definition who also carries out his activity in speech (*logos*), a resemblance that apparently made Theodorus blind to their difference, it should be clear that the described cross-examiner can *only* be someone who practises conversation in the way that Socrates does.⁹⁸

The greatest difference between the sophists portrayed in the previous definitions and the people who use *elenchus* as an instrument for education thus seems to be the following: The latter draw a categorical distinction between the view people have of themselves as being wise, and positive “pieces of knowledge” or insights (*mathēmata*). They liken the self-conception people have to the overall physical state of a body and the positive pieces of knowledge to bodily food. The point is not that a stupid person lacks knowledge – he may indeed be knowledgeable about a great number of things, like Hippias – but rather that this knowledge will not benefit him as long as he falsely believes to know what it is most important to know. Thus the teaching of excellence, according to the *elenchus*-practitioner, cannot consist in imparting knowledge to other people. To make people excellent, one must force them to acquire a reflexive understanding of their own situation.

This suggestion is supported by two things said in the final discussion of the practitioners of the *elenchus*. On the one hand Theaetetus, at 230d5-6, claims that the result of the *elenchus* is the best and most sound-minded (*sōphronestatos*) of all psychic conditions

⁹⁷ Cf. the opening scene of the *Charmides*.

⁹⁸ N. Notomi (1999), p. 65 is thus right in pointing out that in the description given of the *elenchus* we “see some continuity from the previous definition”, due to the shared focus on education, branches of learning and discourse (*logoi*), but I cannot follow his suggestion, p. 66, that the practitioner of the *elenchus* may indeed be “nothing but the sophist whom the inquirers have been seeking”. However much can be said in defence of the sophists as refuters of traditional dogmatism (cf. Campbell (1867), liii, Zeller (2006) II, 1, 108-109, 120, Kerferd (1954), 89), it seems obvious to me that the practitioner of the *elenchus* is meant to be portrayed as the counterpart of the sophists in the previous descriptions. Whereas the sophist imparts opinions to his students, making them believe they are wise, the practitioner of the *elenchus* removes this false conceit of wisdom.

(*hexeis*). In other words, he confirms that the *elenchus* is preoccupied with the condition or *habitus* (*hexis*) of the soul rather than with the positive knowledge it possesses. Its goal is to bring about *sophrosynē*.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the stranger concludes that the *elenchus* is the “greatest and most authoritative of purifications” and that a person who hasn’t been through refutation must be considered uneducated and deformed, since he is “unpurified in the greatest matters” (*ta megista*).¹⁰⁰ Such purifications, he explains, is a prerequisite for anyone who wishes to be happy (*eudaimōn*; 230e2-4).

The picture we get from the entire passage 226a6-230e5 is thus the following: there is a kind of discriminating art, which distinguishes between better and worse and is directed at the soul and not the body, more precisely at the intellect (*dianoia*), which is regarded as a kind of movement. As a specific kind of *paideia*, which is a higher kind of teaching than both technical instruction and traditional moral upbringing, it cleans this part of the soul by removing a misguided self-conception of being wise. This in turn liberates the soul’s movement towards truth and understanding, a requirement for obtaining happiness.

This notion of *paideia* is thus based on a conception of knowledge directly opposed to that propounded by Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*. The notion of thinking as movement towards a natural goal, as well as the claim that mistakes are involuntary, depends on the claim that false opinions or misconceptions are possible. If they weren’t, the *elenchus* would have no purpose. This possibility is what the relativistic standpoint defended by Protagoras denies. The opposition to this standpoint, implied by the notion of education as founded on *elenchus*, proves to be the major turning point of the drama in the *Sophist*.

§12. The refutation of *Theaetetus*’ understanding of sophistry (230e6-232a)

Before we can turn to this, however, an objection has to be met. The claim advanced in the preceding paragraph, that the description of the practitioner of the *elenchus* is a description of Socrates, faces a difficulty. At 231a1-5 the stranger and Theaetetus agree that what they have just described is a sophist, albeit a sophist of noble lineage. In N. Notomi’s words, this leads to the following problem: “commentators who take this view [i.e. that it is Socrates who is described] are at a loss to explain why the description of Socrates is inserted here as the sixth definition of the sophist.”¹⁰¹ In other words, if the description is meant to refer to Socrates, we

⁹⁹ This is, of course, an exact parallel to what Socrates says at the end of the *Theaetetus*.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ap.* 22d, where Socrates says that his questions pertain to people’s understanding of the greatest matters.

¹⁰¹ Notomi (1999), 65.

need to understand both why he is being defined as a sophist and what this identification means for the dramatic “economy” of the dialogue.

Let us start by focusing on the passage where the practitioner of the *elenchus* is identified as a sophist. At 231a1 the stranger expresses doubt about what they should call the practitioners of the elenctic art. He fears to call them sophists. When Theaetetus asks why, he explains that he does not wish to confer on them too great an honour. It is difficult to decide whether it is the sophist or the elenctic practitioner he is afraid to show too great an honour, a fact which has resulted in some controversy.¹⁰² I believe this difficulty is intended. For although the stranger has introduced a value-oriented way of dividing, although he has presented Theaetetus with a character who carries out an activity which stands in direct opposition to what he had previously described as sophistry, and although he has more than hinted at the fact that sophistic education is superficial whereas true education must be connected with *elenchus*, no explicit statement about how Socratic philosophy and sophistry relate to each other has been made.¹⁰³ This is, I believe, reflected in the fact that Theaetetus immediately responds to the stranger’s cautious remark by saying that what they have just described resembles a sophist (231a4-5). It is, I believe, paramount to note that it is not the stranger, but rather Theaetetus, who identifies *elenchus* with sophistry.

Let me suggest a reason why he does so. As became clear at the beginning of the investigation, Theaetetus believes that a sophist is a wise person. Nothing so far in the investigation has shown him that this is wrong. Moreover, since the stranger has just described a type of education which Theaetetus himself was subjected to the day before, and which Theaetetus believes leads to the virtue of *sōphrosynē* (cf. 230d5), it seems natural that Theaetetus should be willing to describe the one who practises this kind of education as a wise person, i.e. as a sophist. In other words, the young mathematician has not understood the difference between the one who professes wisdom and the one who seeks it.

This is, I take it, the point of the stranger’s warning at 231a6-8. Just as the wolf resembles the dog, he explains, so does the sophist resemble what they have just described. But resemblances (*homoiotēta*) are, as Socrates also pointed out at the beginning of the dialogue, a difficult thing to get an adequate grasp of. Be that as it may, the stranger agrees to call the practitioner a sophist, albeit, as he puts it in his summary of the sixth definition at 231b3-8, a sophist of noble lineage. So does the stranger not, after all, agree that Socrates is a sophist? We should note that in the same moment he terms him a noble sophist, he adds

¹⁰² Cf. Cornford (1935), 180, n.2, Kerferd (1954), 84-85, Notomi (1999), 65.

¹⁰³ Cf. Notomi (1999), 67.

something that was not part of the divisions he has just made, namely that what this noble sophist does is to investigate sham-wisdom (*doxosophia*, 231b6)¹⁰⁴ or what has the appearance of wisdom. Just as he added, in his summary of the first definition, the qualification that the sophist merely had a *doxopaideutikē technē*, he now adds that the noble sophist educates by examining seeming wisdom. Whereas other sophists, as “retail-sellers” of mental food, supply people with information which makes them believe that they are wise, the noble sophist thus appears to be like an administrator of a vomitive that will cure this condition. This subtlety apparently escapes Theaetetus. Without further thought, he simply accepts the stranger’s definition of the elenctic art as a kind of noble sophistry (“let it be stated in this way”, 231b9).

By granting that Socrates may be regarded as a sophist, however, the stranger produces a genuinely Socratic effect. For Theaetetus now admits to be in *aporia*, being uncertain of what they should say that the sophist is “in his very being (*ontōs einai*)” since he has appeared as so many things (231b9-c2). This is of course no surprise to the stranger, who immediately suggests that they should proceed by counting up the different ways the sophist has by now become apparent. Through this counting, he demonstrates that Theaetetus’ opinions about the sophist actually “wander” (cf. 230b5), since he has agreed that each description is a description of him.

The stranger draws two conclusions from this: 1) There is something unsound about the appearance (*to phantasma*) of someone who shows himself (*phainesthai*) as knowledgeable about many things while at the same time being called by the name of one *technē* (232a1-3). 2) This appearance is something that someone else “suffers” (*paschein*) because he is not able to see the one thing that all the different types of knowledge the *technitēs* possesses, have in view (232a3-6). We are led to understand that the many ways the sophist has appeared is not just a result of the sophist’s strange expertise, but, more importantly, is due to Theaetetus’ lacking ability to discern what it is that the sophist is preoccupied with, what all his insights (*panta ta mathēmata*) are directed towards. We should note that this situation duplicates the initial problem concerning the identification of the philosopher, as stated by Socrates at 216c4-5, a fact that is accentuated by Theaetetus’ willingness to define Socrates as a sophist.

The question what it is that Theaetetus has not understood about the sophist’s alleged expertise will be our main concern in the following chapter. It will lead us from the outer part

¹⁰⁴ For the notion of *doxosophia*, cf. also *Phdr.* 275b ff. and *Phlb.* 49a ff.

of the dialogue into its core part. But to conclude the present chapter: Theaetetus has now admitted that he does not know what a sophist is. Since he has defined Socrates as a sophist, we may at the same time wonder whether he knows what a philosopher is. Theaetetus' *aporia* is a result of the many definitions of the sophist the stranger has delivered, and more particularly of the fact that the stranger has accepted Theaetetus' suggestion that the practise of the *elenchus* is sophistry. The fact that the stranger accepts this and then proceeds to count the number of appearances of the sophist should be understood, I believe, as the stranger *enacting* the Socratic *elenchus*.¹⁰⁵ We may therefore note that, if the practise of conducting *elenchus* is a noble variety of sophistry, the stranger is no less a sophist than Socrates is.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Benardete (1986), II.100. A similar reading is advanced by Iber (2007), 233. For the opposite view, see Frede (1996), 138.

Chapter four: logos and mimesis

Having finally made clear to Theaetetus that his initial notion of sophistry is inadequate for understanding what the sophist is, the stranger begins his seventh and last attempt to define the sophist. This is the attempt that, apparently, leads to an adequate definition of the sophist at the end of the dialogue. Before we turn to it, a few observations concerning how it is related to the previous definitions are therefore in order.

§13. *Why the art of debating in particular reveals the art of sophistry (232b1-b10)*

At first, it may seem rather haphazard when the stranger, at 232b3-6, suggests that they should pick up something said about the sophist at an earlier point, since he believes it reveals him more than anything, namely that he is a debater, an *antilogikos*. The stranger is referring to the second-to-last division carried out in the fifth definition (cf. 225b9-11). Why is this trait thought to be particularly revealing?

As I suggested above, we may regard the first five definitions of the sophist as displaying a gradual progress, advancing toward a disclosure of the essential feature of sophistry. This progress moves from an initial suggestion that the sophist hunts the young by claiming to be able to teach them excellence, to a determination of the foundation of his claim, namely the sophist's ability to contradict others. The excellence he professes to teach is the ability to conduct *logoi* in the "right" way (cf. 232b8-9). If my suggestion is sound, we may better understand why the stranger now claims that this feature, that the sophist possesses an *antilogikē technē*, reveals him most of all. Still, we may wonder how this relates to the last definition of sophistry, the one that was admittedly disputable (231e4), namely the noble sophist as a refuter of sham-wisdom. How does the definition of the Socratic art of discussion as noble sophistry affect the search for the sophist?

When the stranger first turned his attention to *antilogikē*, he differentiated between people who carried out debates "artfully", terming them eristics, and people who discussed things in an artless manner. The first, he said, were primarily interested in questions pertaining to the just and the unjust and "the rest" (*peri tōn allōn*, 225c8), where one part lost money thereby, another part made a living from it. This in effect showed how Socratic dialogue and sophistic disputation might be confused with each other, which may be seen as the reason why the stranger, at 226a7, claimed that the sophist couldn't be caught with one hand. This in turn led us to the sixth definition. At the beginning of this new definition, the stranger said that he and Theaetetus had to pursue the trail of the sophist (226b2) to the best of their ability.

It seems reasonable to suggest that it was in order to be able to follow this trail adequately that the stranger introduced a new way of dividing. By way of this type of division, he introduced a more profound discussion of topics central to the previous definitions of sophistry – *psychē*, excellence, and education – which enabled him to focus on the connections *and* differences between sophistry and Socratic dialogue from a new perspective. And by confronting the sophist’s notion of education with a Socratic ideal of self-knowledge, the stranger forced Theaetetus to admit that he was not sure what a sophist is. I believe that it is from the level of this new insight that the stranger now suggests that they should pick up the discussion, or the trail, where it was left at 225.

We should therefore note that the investigation which is to follow does not proceed through diairetical divisions. Something fundamental that was not stated at the beginning of the inquiry has to be made clear about the sophist before divisions can be resumed. Moreover, when division is resumed, at 235b8 ff., it comes to a standstill at once due to ontological problems pertaining to the notions of image and imitation. It is as if the “art” of carrying out divisions has reached a limit when it has pointed out how Socratic philosophy and sophistry look alike and where they differ. In order to “capture” the sophist, in order to show how he differs from the philosopher, the stranger and Theaetetus now have to proceed along different lines. How this ultimately reflects on the procedure of divisions is a question I shall address in part III, chapter 7.

§14. The sophist as a producer of opinions (232b11-233d2)

If the sophist is rightly described as someone who teaches others to debate, it seems natural, in order to understand what it is he professes to teach, to ask what he claims to be able to debate about. The short answer to this question is: almost everything. According to the stranger (and Theaetetus agrees to each suggestion), the sophist is able to debate about (cf. 232c1-e1):

- 1) Divine things that are “not apparent to most men”
- 2) Things manifest on the earth and in the heavens
- 3) The being (*ousia*) and becoming (*genesis*) of everything
- 4) Laws and political affairs
- 5) Different *technai*

Of course, as Theaetetus himself suggests (232d3-4), it is particularly the fourth “category” that captures what a sophist would claim to be able to discuss. Nevertheless, this list isn’t just something the stranger makes up without any foundation in reality, in order to debunk

sophistry. Protagoras became famous for saying that he did not know whether the gods existed or not (DK 80, B4),¹⁰⁶ and Gorgias certainly discussed being and becoming in his treatise “On the Non-existent” (DK 82, B3). More important, however: by enumerating the subjects on which the debater is able to debate the stranger focuses on the principle issue at stake, namely that *logos*, speech, is able to thematise anything.¹⁰⁷ Thus the debating skill, founded on this ability, is apparently a power (*dynamis*; 232e4) which enables a skilled debater to discuss any subject (*peri pantōn*; 232e3), regardless of whether he possesses expertise on the matter or not.

And this is the point the stranger wishes to make. Even if the sophist’s skill enables him to debate everything, it seems obvious that no human being is able (*dynaton*) to know everything (*panta epistathai*, 233a3), a point Theaetetus most emphatically affirms (233a4, 233c9). Thus it would seem that the reasoning employed by the sophist cannot be sound, even though it must appear to be so if the sophist is to convince people that he is indeed wise (233b1-7). This in turn raises the question what extraordinary power (*dynamis*, 233a8) it is the sophist possesses. The repeated emphasis that he has a power (232e4, 233a3, 233a8) is, I suggest, meant to remind us of the initial distinction at the beginning of the dialogue between *technai* and other types of power (cf. 219a5-6) and thus to prepare us (and Theaetetus) for the conclusion that the sophist’s *technē* is a *technē* in appearance only, a kind of power that is not really a *technē* at all.

But before we accept the stranger’s claim as willingly as Theaetetus does, we should pause to consider what is at stake. Let us first of all note that the notion of *epistēmē*, when brought into relation with the notion of everything (*panta*), reminds us of the final discussion of *epistēmē* in the *Theaetetus* (cf. 203e-206c). The problem how “everything” (*panta*), understood as the sum of parts, and the “whole” (*holon*) relate to each other, which was the main problem there, comes to play an important role when the stranger later undertakes to cross-examine Parmenides (*Sph.* 244d14 ff.). Moreover, at 233e1 ff. it becomes clear that what Theaetetus doesn’t understand about sophistry, the single thing that the stranger implied Theaetetus wasn’t able to grasp adequately about the sophist’s “art” (232a3-6), has everything to do with the notion of “all”. We may wonder whether this notion doesn’t play a vital role, not only in defining sophistry, but also for an adequate understanding of philosophy. This at least is Socrates view in *Republic* (*R.* 486a, cf. also 533c-534d). In a similar manner Plato’s

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Tht.* 162d5-163a1.

¹⁰⁷ As Notomi (1999), 85 rightly points out, the power of speech to deal with everything is clearly emphasised in the *Dissoi Logoi* (DK 90, 8,3). A similar point is reportedly noted by Protagoras (DK 80, A1 (51)).

pupil Aristotle claims that it “belongs to the philosopher to be capable of considering all things (*peri pantōn*)”. And when Aristotle attempts to distinguish his own conception of wisdom from Plato’s as well as from the sophists’, he further states that “sophistry is wisdom in appearance only [i.e. the sophist imitates the philosopher], while dialectic discourses about everything [as does the philosopher]”, so that “sophistry and dialectic turn themselves to the same class of things as philosophy”.¹⁰⁸ To decide whether it is humanly possible to know everything, a lot thus seems to depend on how we understand “know” as well as “everything”. If we look at the stranger’s considerations in the central part of the dialogue from this perspective, we may note that it looks like the search for a kind of knowledge which considers, not any one particular being, but rather being *as* being and hence, in a sense, a knowledge about everything. For the moment, however, we can let these considerations rest. Let us instead focus on what the stranger wants to point out about the sophist’s debating skill at this point in the dialogue.

Assuming that the sophist cannot have knowledge of everything, but that he is nevertheless able to discuss everything in a manner which makes him appear knowledgeable about it, his power must consist in being able to give others a certain opinion about himself (233b1-2), namely that he is wise. Thus, the “wisdom” of the sophist seems to consist in being able to give others the impression that he is wise. The stranger can therefore claim that the *technē* which they have been assuming that the sophist possesses is in fact an *epistēmē doxastikē*. We may assume that *doxastikē* here should be understood in a double sense; on the one hand a type of knowledge *about* opinions, *doxai*, a knowledge of how one can produce certain opinions in others, on the other hand a merely *apparent* knowledge. Moreover, if we focus on the fact that the sophist is not only a disputer, but also a teacher in the art of disputation, we see that he not only gives others an impression (*doxa*) that he is wise, he at the same time supplies them with an opinion of themselves as being wise, once they have learned his “art”. It is in this sense, probably, that the stranger earlier suggested that the sophistic education is a *doxopaideutikē*.¹⁰⁹ But even if this diagnosis of sophistry is correct, it still doesn’t tell us why the sophist is able to give people this impression. The foundation for the sophist’s apparent wisdom has not been brought adequately to light yet.

¹⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Metaph.*, gamma, 2, 1004a34-1004b1, 1004b17-23, translation D. Sachs. Cf. also *Rh.* 1354a.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Cornford (1935), 193. If the procedure of divisions can be regarded as a kind of *technē*, an interesting mirror effect between the stranger and the sophist may be noted: the sophist is initially defined as possessing a *technē*, and his counterpart, the Eleatic stranger, pursues him using a *technē*. When it becomes clear that the sophist does not possess a *technē*, but only an *epistēmē doxastikē*, the stranger gives up his own *technē*, divisions.

§15. *Logos and the problem of imitation (233d3-237a2)*

The fact that the sophist has come to light as someone able to impress certain opinions upon others results in a change in the way he is being sought. If he can be said to possess a *technē* at all, it must be a kind of production, a production of opinions and appearances. This is one reason why the stranger, at 234d3-4, suggests that they should use a new model or example (*paradeigma*) to illustrate the sophist, namely the portrait sketcher. In contradistinction to both angler and servant, the previous models used,¹¹⁰ the painter produces something. Moreover, if learning and understanding should be regarded as acquisition (cf. 219c), the change in model suggests that the sophist's work is not essentially connected with learning. Finally, the model is chosen, I believe, because it throws the problem of imitation, which was indicated as a central problem of the discussion from the very beginning of the dialogue, into relief.¹¹¹

When the stranger introduces this new model, he once again brings the notion of “everything” (*synpanta, panta*, 233d10-11) into focus. The importance of this is underlined by the fact that he exhorts Theaetetus to pay close attention (233d6-7). The stranger suggests that someone might be able, not to speak or debate about everything, but to make everything. As Theaetetus states that he does not understand what “everything” means, the stranger concludes that he is ignorant about the ruling principle or beginning (*archē*) of what is being said. By everything, he explains, is meant human beings, plants, as well as “the sea and the earth and the heavens and the gods and all other things” (234a3-4). The man who is able to “produce” all this is the type of painter who creates a *trompe l'œil* and makes a living by showing it from far off so that it appears as something real.

This may look like nothing more than banter, meant to put the sophist in a bad light. Like the painter who is able to “fool the more thoughtless among young children” (234b8) into believing that his pictures are the very things they are imitations of, so the sophist is able, through clever speech, to fool young people into believing that he knows everything he discusses. But beneath the playful illustration there is, I believe, a very serious problem. The idea that the sophist is an imitator, qua debater, points to a fundamental question pertaining to

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the three different models, see Rosen (1983), 147 ff.

¹¹¹ The fact that the stranger shifts his guiding model, as well as the fact that he gives more than one apparently correct definition of the sophist, is, according to some, a problem, cf. Moravcsik (1973), 166, Brown, (2009), 8-14. It is true that none of the definitions in the *Sophist* are ever explicitly dismissed. But I do not see why this should be incompatible with a claim that we move from a more superficial to a more adequate understanding of sophistry through the different definitions, nor with the point that the initial assumption, that sophistry is a *technē*, proves groundless in course of the investigation. Something said on false presuppositions (the sophist has a *technē* of teaching virtue, enabling him to earn money) may still contain a kernel of truth (this is at least what the sophist claims) which informs later definitions.

logos, namely how it relates to being, the clarification of which is just as relevant for understanding philosophy as it is for understanding sophistry. Let us therefore take a closer look at how the stranger draws his analogy between painter and sophist.

- 1) The painter produces imitations through his art of drawing. If he is skillful, he is able to fool people inexperienced with his art into believing that what he paints are real things.
- 2) A similar art exists, the stranger suggests, by which it is possible, through *logoi*, to enchant the young while they are still standing at a distance “from the truth of things” (234c3-5) by showing them spoken images (*eidōla legomena*, 234c5-6).

These “spoken images” make the sophist capable of producing *doxai* in his audience in two ways. First of all, he is able to convince people that his “spoken images ... are spoken truly” (234c6), i.e. that what he is saying is true. This will give his audience certain opinions about how things are. In turn, this gives the people who listen to him the impression, the *doxa*, that he is all-wise (234c7).

Surprisingly, perhaps, the stranger goes on to suggest that the first type of opinions will evaporate once people grow up and are forced to “lay their hands” on the things that are (234d4). It thus seems that he does not consider the effect a sophist has on his audience as a serious danger, in contrast to what Socrates suggests in for instance the *Protagoras* (313a ff.). Like the painter, the sophist only seems able to fool the thoughtless among the young. Let us note, however, that Theaetetus responds to this suggestion by saying that he is not sure whether it is true; for he fears that he too belongs to the class of people who are standing off at a distance from the truth (234e3-4). This should make us wonder whether the stranger is not deliberately presenting the problem as less serious than it is. Though Theaetetus is young, he is certainly not thoughtless.

This suspicion gains further support if we reflect for a moment on the picture of the noble sophist which the stranger has just drawn. We may wonder whether what the stranger says about the weak force of the illusions created by the sophist is not in conflict with the picture he has just given of the Socratic *elenchus*. If people will inevitably, when confronted with “things as they are”, change the opinions they have received as children about important matters,¹¹² when these are not in accordance with reality, why should the *elenchus* be absolutely necessary for anyone who wishes to find truth and thus happiness?

¹¹² Contrast this with *Ap.* (19a).

It is therefore worthwhile to reflect a bit longer on the analogy the stranger draws. First of all, we may note a peculiar difference between the two activities which are compared. A painter tricks people by displaying his images from a distance, so that they give the impression of being the originals they imitate. This presupposes that people know what he imitates, in order that they may (mistakenly) identify his image as the original. If people came nearer to the pictures, they would no longer be fooled. But the sophist fools people, not because they are far away from his “word pictures”, but because they stand far away from the truth of the things that are. What the stranger wants to make clear is therefore, I believe, that the sophist is able to bewitch people through speeches or arguments because his audience has not adequately understood what he discusses. Whereas illusionary art depends on the spectator’s knowledge of what the artist imitates, the sophist’s art presupposes that his audience does not have knowledge of that which he talks about.¹¹³

If we regard this in light of what Socrates said in the *Theaetetus*, that there are things which the soul forms an opinion about through the senses, and others it forms an opinion about alone, itself by itself, and that a correct understanding of the latter is the result of hard work, education and time (cf. *Tht.* 186c2-5), a more sinister picture of the sophist’s art emerges. For from the catalogue presenting what the sophist is able to debate about, it seems fair to assume that everything the sophist debates about belongs in this latter category of matters, matters “which are not apparent to most men” (*Soph.* 232c1-2). In particular, we may assume, the sophist is able to beguile the young about the “greatest matters” mentioned in the discussion of the noble sophist. This means that even if it should be true that the “wisdom” the sophist sells to his pupils will inevitably, when people grow older, reveal itself as sham wisdom, this “evaporation” does not in itself result in people getting an adequate understanding of these matters.¹¹⁴ And it is not clear that it is true that this evaporation necessarily takes place, since one may never notice that one has a false understanding of justice or the good, for instance. Indeed, although it is perhaps correct that it was the young in particular who went to the sophists for education, we have no reason to believe that their doctrines did not have an impact on a much wider audience, nor that Plato was not painfully aware of this.

The problem that the sophist is able to deceive people through *logoi* about matters that are difficult to understand gets further aggravated by the fact that an adequate understanding of such matters is only to be gained through *logoi*. As *Theaetetus* and Socrates agreed in the

¹¹³Cf. Sallis (1996), 481, cf. also Gadamer (1961), 21.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Benardete (1986), II.106.

Theatetus, the soul reaches being, and hence truth through calculation (*analogizomai*, *Tht.* 186a11), an activity later to be described as the speech (*logos*) that the soul carries out alone, as a silent discussion with itself (189e6-190a7). The philosophical process of gaining an adequate understanding of reality is dependent on *logos* no less than the sophist's alleged expertise is.¹¹⁵ In addition, the comparison of Socratic elenchus with sophistic eristic has shown us how philosophical and sophistical debating looks identical to the untrained eye.

From the discussion of the sophist's alleged *technē*, we are thus confronted with the question how one can discriminate between speech which conceals or distorts that which it addresses, speech which liberates the soul from its misguided opinions about these matters, and speech which reveals or reflects the beings it addresses. *Logos*, in conjunction with its influence on the human soul, appears as a twofold focal point one has to look to if one wishes to point out how philosopher and sophist differ from each other. It is this problem which the stranger undertakes to unravel when he returns to his former procedure of making divisions.

At 235b8-9 he suggests that the image-making expertise (*eidōlopoiikē technē*) should be divided in two. This expertise is also defined as the mimetic art (cf. 234b2, 235c2-3, 235d1-2). That the ability to produce images is brought into focus is no surprise, since the sophist has now been defined as a producer of spoken images. But why should it be divided? We stand here before a difficult question which is made all the more pressing by the fact that the procedure through division immediately comes to a halt, once this first division has been carried through. The stranger explains that he is not able to see clearly where he is to put the sophist (235d2-3), a remark which becomes all the more baffling due to the fact that he has just stated that no one should be able to escape their *methodos* (235c5-7). The claim that the sophist is an imitator who uses *logos* to fool people is immediately turned into a problem by the stranger, a problem which apparently cannot itself be settled through divisions. But let us take a closer look at the division itself.

It is oriented towards the *object* made through imitation, the image or *eidōlon*. On the one hand there is an art which produces images that are in accordance with the proportions of the model (*paradeigma*; 235d6-e2); such an image is termed a likeness (*eikōn*, 236a8), wherefore the art is called likeness production (*eikastikē technē*, 235d6). On the other hand there is a kind of imitation where the craftsmen “dismiss what's true and work at producing in their images not the proportions that are but those that seem beautiful” (236a4-6). Such

¹¹⁵ One may note that the stranger states (234e5-7) that he is trying, through pure *logos*, to bring Theaetetus in contact with the truth.

images are termed apparitions (*phantasmata*, 236b7) and the art an art of apparition- or illusion-making (236c4).

The stranger's distinction is drawn in analogy to a difference between sculptors or painters who make works of art that are supposed to be viewed close up and works of art that are to be viewed at a distance. When creating a very large statue, for instance, the proportions must be distorted; otherwise "the upper parts would appear smaller than they should and the lower parts larger" (235e7-236a2). Such a work of art only seems beautiful, the stranger informs Theaetetus, "because it is seen from an unbeautiful point of view" (236b4-5). If human beings were not subject to perspective distortion, works of art that take such distortion into account would appear ugly; one way of overcoming the effect of such 'illusionary' art would be to get a better position from which to view the work, for instance by using a ladder.

If we apply what is said about this type of imitation to what the analogy is purportedly meant to illustrate, namely the word images of the sophist, we get a fascinating picture. One kind of word picture faithfully copies the "proportions" of what it describes, whatever this means; the other takes into account the specific point of view of the one it addresses. Surely, we may believe, the sophist is to be placed in the category of imitation-making which bids farewell to the truth and is only interested in giving the appearance of being beautiful? Moreover, if what the stranger is after is that the sophist is a liar, and if his lies are to be understood as misproportioned linguistic imitations of reality, is the counterpart to the *phantastikē technē* pertaining to speech not an art which produces true linguistic imitations of reality? Is the *eikastikē technē* dealing with speech then not philosophy?

These matters cannot be decided here. The stranger still claims that he is unable to tell where he should place the sophist (236c9-10), and the final elaboration of what he understands by spoken images or imitations, whether likenesses and apparitions, and how they relate to philosophy and sophistry, is postponed till much later in the dialogue, in fact till the very end of it, when the stranger resumes division at 264b6. In between we find the long and difficult middlepart of the dialogue which addresses the question of being and non-being. When we turn to this in a moment, however, we must constantly keep in mind that it is motivated by the problems pertaining to imitation through *logos*. More precisely, it is the fact that the sophist is able to appear (*phainesthai*) or seem (*dokein*) wise, when in fact he is not, by making spoken images which are false (236d9-e1), that leads into the problem of being and non-being. All of this presupposes, according to the stranger, that it is possible to make false statements or entertain false beliefs and this is, as he will soon spell out, in conflict with

the teaching of “father Parmenides”. Before we turn to the discussion of this, a final comment on the problems that until now have come to light in the *Sophist* is in order.

That the sophist appears as something which he is not, wise, reflects the initial problem of the dialogue, namely that the philosopher appears as something he is not. Such appearances are due to people’s opinions about sophists as well as about philosophers. As regards the sophist, these opinions are brought about by the sophist himself, since he actively induces people with false beliefs. As regards the philosopher, his false appearances are the result of people’s ignorance of what he is and, ultimately, of philosophy. For these reasons, I cannot agree with F. M. Cornford that the investigation the stranger undertakes in what follows has a bearing on the “world of Seeming, which is neither wholly real nor utterly non-existent.”¹¹⁶ The notion of *eidola* discussed here and elsewhere in the dialogue is not, I believe, meant to remind us of a world of appearance which reflects or imitates, but still differs from, the wholly real; nor is the question discussed in the *Sophist* “what sort of existence ... such objects [can] have”.¹¹⁷ Though I fully agree with Cornford that the discussion running from 242b to 259e is ontological in nature, its aim is to investigate the possibility of false opinion and speech, which in turn is meant to point out the possibility of the sophist and the philosopher appearing as what they are not.

¹¹⁶ Cornford (1935), 201, cf. also De Rijk, 81.

¹¹⁷ Cornford (1935), 201. Many pages later, (p. 248) this view leads Cornford to a disappointing conclusion: “We set out ... in order to seek a justification for speaking of *eidola*.... The reader might [therefore] expect that the discussion ... should lead on to an explanation of *eidola*, how they relate to ‘the perfectly real’. But this hope is disappointed... What Plato intended, we can only guess.”

Part III: An Eleatic defence of Socratic philosophy

We now turn to the middle part of the *Sophist* which, compared to the outer part, has received considerably more attention in the scholarly literature. Roughly, one can distinguish two main lines of interpretation in recent scholarship. One regards the middle part as primarily occupied with logical or linguistic questions or questions pertaining to philosophy of language. Among such readings are those of J. L. Ackrill, G. E. L. Owen, and M. Frede, all loosely connected with the Oxford “philosophy of ordinary language”.¹ The other regards it as primarily occupied with ontological questions.² Such readings include those of F. M. Cornford, P. Seligman, S. Rosen, L. M. de Rijk and D. Ambuel.

In an influential article M. Frede claims that the main problem Plato sets before himself in the *Sophist* is to solve a riddle about “false statements”, or, more precisely, to “find a coherent way of thinking about them such that, thought of in this way, they no longer seem to pose a problem.”³ The problem arises, according to Frede, due to the claim that the sophist is someone who states what is false. For, as mentioned above (cf. part I, §15), according to a standard Greek explanation of what it is to state something which is false, it is to state “what is not”⁴ and this, the sophist will claim, is impossible. In order to be able to say that the sophist says something false, Plato needs to show that it is possible to state what is not, wherefore he needs to investigate what being and non-being means. According to Frede, the crux of this investigation is to be found in the passage 255c12-13, where he detects a differentiation between two ways of predicating something about something, which reflect two ways of being, namely that “some of the things we say something is, it is by itself; other things we say something is, it is just with reference to something else”.⁵ So Plato’s analysis of being is centred on different uses of the verb ‘to be’ in predicative statements.

Whether Frede is right in his understanding of this particular passage need not detain us here; the main point for the moment is that he claims that the overall purpose of the dialogue is to analyse false statements.⁶ And one can easily acknowledge that his interpretative strategy has strength in its simplicity. If one follows Frede and focuses on the

¹ This is most radically expressed by Ackrill (1955), 76-78.

² The choice of one approach does not, of course, preclude one from acknowledging the other perspective; M. Frede clearly believes that Plato’s analysis of the way we speak about ‘reality’ reveals (according to Plato) or depends upon the way reality is.

³ Frede (1992), 398-99. This article is written on the basis Frede (1967).

⁴ Frede (1992), 397.

⁵ Frede (1992), 400.

⁶ Cf. also Frede (1996), 135.

one problem of false statements, one is able to trace a structure of questions and answers in the *Sophist* resembling Chinese boxes.⁷ The problem of false statements leads to the problem of non-being, the problem of non-being leads to the problem of being, which finally leads to a problem how we can state or predicate something about something else; the solution of this final problem goes hand in hand with the clarification of the meaning of being, which in turn solves the problem of non-being and this finally solves the problem about false statements. But this simplicity is also a weakness. For the claim that the question of false statements constitutes the key to the whole dialogue seems somewhat forced if one looks at the dialogue in its entirety.

It is of course true that the problem of false statements, opinions and appearances becomes central to the dialogue from 236e onwards. It is also true that in the final analysis of false statements (261c6-264b9), we are given an explanation of false opinions and false appearances based on the explanation of how false statements are possible. But if we compare the intricate way in which Plato has presented the problem how philosopher and sophist should be differentiated from each other in the first part of the dialogue with the simple resolution to the problem of false statements we get at the end of the dialogue, the solution seems, if not irrelevant, at least too simple to explain the emphasis Socrates has placed on this problem. It seems implausible that the problem with the sophist is merely that he states what is false so that we cannot catch him if we cannot explain the possibility of false sentences: if so it seems difficult to understand why there should be a specific problem in differentiating philosopher from sophist.

Another problem with Frede's exclusive focus on false statements is that this makes him put all the weight on a very small section of the middle part of the dialogue, i.e. on the passage 255e8-264b9 where we are, supposedly, given the solutions to what he takes to be the aporetic part stretching from 237a-251a.⁸ This aporetic section, the main purpose of which is, according to Frede, to call "into question our understanding of "being" " is not, as Frede acknowledges, treated in any detail at all. But this part of the dialogue seems to me to be more than just a catalogue of problems, the solutions to which we get from 251a onwards. If Plato merely wanted to analyse false statements, and, in order to do so, needed to show that we do not have an adequate understanding of being, much of this section seems rather superfluous.

⁷ Cf. Frede (1992), 423. Cf. also Brown (2008), 439.

⁸ The passage 251a-255e is discussed more thoroughly in Frede (1967), but the aporetic part is also largely neglected in that study.

⁹ Frede (1992), 399.

If one approaches the dialogue without assuming that Plato's main interest lies in investigating different meanings or uses of the verb 'to be', in order to clear up misunderstandings in previous Greek philosophy, or in order to get a clear view of how predication works, but rather assuming that his main interest is in the question "what is being", the allegedly aporetic part of the dialogue is in fact of particular interest. Such an approach is characteristic of de Rijk's study of the *Sophist*. What he takes to be Plato's primary interest, as the ancient subtitle to the dialogue, *peri tou ontos*, also seems to indicate, is the question what we mean by "to on ...[where] we have to understand the phrase [in the subtitle] as 'about what is'. So 'what is' is the subject matter proper of the dialogue"¹⁰; this, according to de Rijk, is not a question about predication.¹¹

I think de Rijk' is right in insisting that the central part of the *Sophist* is, primarily, an ontological investigation and not an investigation into how predication and false sentences can be explained. But my approach at the same time differs from de Rijk's interpretation by emphasising that this investigation is carried out as a result of the problem of differentiating philosopher from sophist. For, like so many other scholars, De Rijk almost completely neglects the first part of the dialogue, presumably due to his overall interest in the question whether Plato in the *Sophist* is advancing a "novel metaphysical position"¹² or not. This interest at one point even leads him to the following statement: "the subject proper of our dialogue is to clear up [the] problem area [of 'appearing', 'real being' and 'not being'] rather than looking for the Sophist's true nature. The fellow is only the material theme of the dialogue to which he is good enough to lend his name."¹³ To this I cannot agree. However important the ontological considerations found in the *Sophist* may be, I believe Frede is right in emphasising that the problem about the sophist is what motivates the entire discussion in the central part.

Chapter one: Non-being and images

The claim that one can appear or seem to be something which one is not, as well as that one can speak and opine falsely, is problematic, since it is difficult to say or opine that the false really is (*pseudē ontōs einai*, 236e4) without contradicting oneself. Why there is a problem,

¹⁰ De Rijk (1986), 76.

¹¹ In this De Rijk agrees with Rosen (1983), 229-240.

¹² Cf. De Rijk (1986), 103-109.

¹³ De Rijk (1986), 83.

which is not clear to Theaetetus (cf. 237a2), is elaborated by the stranger in the passage 237a3-241c1.

§1. The problem of non-being 237a3-239c8

The problem is that a *logos*, a statement or argument, which claims that one can state or opine what is false, contradicts Parmenides' poem. For such a *logos* dares to suppose that what is not is, since this is a condition for the existence of falsehood.

To understand the full significance of this problem we should recall the following. The claim that it is impossible to opine what is not, and hence to opine falsely, was a crucial part of Protagoras' defence speech in the *Theaetetus* (167a6-8); the claim also played a major role in the generation of paradoxes concerning false opinion or belief in the second part of that dialogue. So if the claim that false speech and opinion are possible is in conflict with Parmenides' poem, Parmenides gives the sophist as good a backing as does Heraclitus. Moreover, as Socrates' conception of philosophical search through discourse depends on the possibility that people may have true as well as false opinions, or, more precisely, that people can advance from a less adequate to a more adequate understanding of something, Parmenides' poem apparently undercuts the possibility of Socratic philosophy (cf. *Tht.* 161e4-162a3). If false opinions are impossible, it is impossible to differentiate *elenchus* from sophistic eristic. The claim that one purges one's interlocutors of false opinions has no foundation in reality.

A simple, but important point follows from these considerations, I believe: The problem the two interlocutors are facing is not that the sophist states what is false, in contrast to other people. The problem is that we need to prove that it is false when the sophist denies that there are false opinions and/or speech and hence that people can be mistaken. And he has a right to do so as long as Parmenides' conception of being and non-being stands. Behind the "logical" problem of true and false speech and opinion thus lurks a problem which both ethical/political and ontological, and the solution to the problem of false statements touches the problem of understanding philosophy as much as it touches on the problem of understanding sophistry. We should also note that the problem that the sophist denies that falsehoods are possible, is a different problem than the problem about imitation and images. Imitation depends on falsehood, according to the stranger, but it does not reduce to it, as we shall see (cf. chapter 6, below).

But let us return to Parmenides. The stranger begins his investigation by quoting Parmenides' poem: "never shall this be forced, that the things which are not are".¹⁴ The conflation of non-being (or the things that are not) with being, the opinion that non-beings are, is a road (*hodos*; 237a9) which the goddess of Parmenides' poem warns the philosopher from turning his thoughts towards.¹⁵ The stranger now undertakes to demonstrate the reason for this warning.

The best way to do so, he says, is by forcing the *logos* itself to make clear what is meant by Parmenides' testimony through "a mild degree of torture" (237b2). Which *logos*, we may ask. It is important to see that it is *not* Parmenides' *logos* which the stranger wishes to examine, as some translations suggest, but rather the *logos* which he referred to at 237a3, the one that dares to suppose that non-being is.¹⁶ The stranger is attempting to demonstrate that Parmenides' warning should be taken seriously.

The demonstration can be broken down into three parts,¹⁷ the first running from 237b7-e7, the second from 238a1-238c12, and the last from 238d1-239c8. The first part focuses on the problem what the expression "non-being" is meant to point out, the second on the problem of uttering the expression and the third shows that anyone who tries to utter it, even if only to say that one cannot know or utter it, ends up in self-contradiction.

The stranger starts by asking Theaetetus whether they "dare utter that which in no way is" (*to mēdamōs on*)?" and Theaetetus answers innocently: "why shouldn't we?" (237b9). Like the *logos* condemned by Parmenides' poem, representing the "mortal belief"¹⁸ that what is not, is, Theaetetus believes that we can speak of non-being.¹⁹ But when asked what someone could possibly apply the name 'utter non-being' to and what he could possibly point out by it (237b10-c4), the problem becomes clear to him; evidently it cannot be applied to, cannot point out, any of the things that are (237c7-8).

The assumption here is that 'utter non-being' is a name (*onoma*), and that a name is something which points something out.²⁰ But the name 'utter non-being' (*to mēdamōs on*), which in this part of the dialogue is used interchangeably with non-being (*to mē on*), cannot point out any being, and if it does not point out any being, it follows that it cannot point out

¹⁴ DK 7.2.

¹⁵ This road is the third road in Parmenides' poem, the road of mortal belief, cf. O'Brien (2000), 46.

¹⁶ Cf. Cornford (1935), 208 and O'Brien (2000), 57-67.

¹⁷ Cf. Benardete (1986), II.113 and De Rijk (1986), 84.

¹⁸ The *brotōn doxa* of Parmenides' poem, cf. DK 1.30.

¹⁹ The fact that the stranger, in his question, uses the verb 'to dare' connects Theaetetus' affirmation with the *logos* discussed at 237a3, which dares to suppose that what is not, is, cf. O'Brien (2000), 80.

²⁰ Cf. De Rijk (1986), 84-86.

something (*ti*) either; for “something” is a name or a sign (*sēmeion*) used of a being (237c10-d11). The stranger draws the conclusion that he who speaks of “non-being” does not speak of something (*mē ti legonta*), wherefore he who utters it says nothing (*mēden legein*, 237e1-2). In fact he cannot even be said to be speaking while saying nothing (*legein mēden*); rather he is not speaking at all (*oude legein*) when he tries to utter “that which is not” (237e3-6).²¹ We see that an underlying assumption is that to speak, or to name, is always to speak of, or name, something.²² Since the name “non-being” doesn’t refer to anything, the one who dares to utter it isn’t speaking.

The stranger now points out a further problem with the *logos* which states that “non-being is”. In short, the perplexity is that one cannot *utter* non-being without contradicting oneself. For just as non-being cannot be applied to something that is, so it is impossible for one of the things that are to be applied to non-being. But since numbers *are*, as the young mathematician readily agrees (238b1, cf. *Tht.* 188e8-9), numbers cannot be applied to non-being. But this makes it impossible to utter or even to grasp non-being with one’s mind (*Sph.* 238b6-7); for by uttering “non being” (*to mē on*) we speak of it as one thing whereas in uttering “non beings” (*ta mē onta*) we speak of them as of a plurality. In the very act of uttering “non being”, the one who utters it implies something impossible about what is, in and of itself, not (*to mē on auto kath’ hauto*; 238c9),²³ namely that it is countable and therefore something that is. The stranger concludes that non-being is unthinkable, not to be spoken of, impossible to utter and without a *logos* (238c10-11).

Finally, and most baffling: since non-being is unutterable, the very denial of the possibility of knowing or talking of non-being is bound to bring the one who claims so into trouble. By uttering that it cannot be known or uttered, such a person says the contrary of what he intends to say since he, in saying that non-being(s) is (are) unutterable, or that it *is* unutterable, ascribes both number and being to non-being. In short, one cannot state that one cannot state anything about non-being without becoming “tainted by the crime [one] ... seeks to condemn.”²⁴ This is no objection against Parmenides; it rather goes to show the utterly perplexing “nature” of that which in no way is.

²¹ For problems with the translation here, see O’Brien (2000), 40-42.

²² Cf. 262e6-7, 263c9 and *Tht.* 188d1-189b2.

²³ This expression corresponds to *to mēdamōs on* at 237b7-8, as Cornford (1935), 203 rightly emphasises.

²⁴ O’Brien (2000), 84.

The stranger's demonstration thus makes clear that it is impossible to utter non-being and that it cannot be known. But why, we may wonder, is the sophist able to hide behind Parmenides in the first place?

§2. *Images, non-being and false speech (239c9-241c1)*

In order to show this connection, the stranger asks Theaetetus, on behalf of the sophist, to define what an image (*eidōlon*; 239d4) is. Theaetetus proposes that images are reflections in water and mirrors, as well as painted and sculpted images which, “although of this sort, are different” (239d7-9). Both the notion of difference (*heteron*)²⁵ and of being of a “certain sort” (*toiotos*) will prove important for understanding images. Nevertheless, there are two serious problems about Theaetetus' answer.

The first problem is that Theaetetus has apparently forgotten that the sophist was said to be a creator of *spoken* images (*eidōla legomena*; 234c5-6). Perhaps misled by the stranger's illustration of image-making by painting and sculpting, Theaetetus defines image as “material” images. The second problem is that the definition does not satisfy the demands that Socrates stated for all definitions at the beginning of the *Theaetetus* (cf. 146d ff.).²⁶ Theaetetus lists a number of examples instead of focusing on the common *logos* for images (*to dia pantōn toutōn*; *Sph.* 240a4), and the sophist will, according to the stranger, dismiss the answer, claiming to know nothing of “mirrors or water surfaces or vision in general”, instead demanding to hear only what follows from Theaetetus' words or speeches (*ek tōn logōn monon*; 240a1-2). It is thus not without a certain irony that the stranger claims that Theaetetus' answer reflects the fact that he has never seen a sophist (239e1), for the invoked ‘sophist’ has an uncanny likeness to Socrates.

Without recourse to examples, Theaetetus attempts to define an image as “another such thing made similar (*aphomoioun*) to the true one” (240a8). It is different (*heteron*) from the true thing (*t'alēthinon*), while being of the same kind, since it is made to be similar to it. The stranger asks if the image is also true? How should one understand ‘such a kind’ (*toiotos*)? Theaetetus suggests that it does not mean that the image is true, but rather that it is like or resembles (*eoikos*; 240b2) the true.

Seizing this concession the stranger is able to connect the discussion of images with the problems about non-being. By substituting “different from” (*heteron*) with “contrary to”

²⁵ The important notion of difference, *heteron*, has already been mentioned at 238a5-6, where it was said that a being could be connected with a different being.

²⁶ Cf. Bernardete (1986), II.173, note 53.

(*enantion*), he is able to make the following inference: If the true means that which truly is (*ontōs on*; 240b3), and if what is not true is contrary to the true, the like (*to eikos*), as contrary to what really is, is not truly a being (*ouk ontōs on*; 240b7). This means that an *eidolon* is utter non-being. If difference is understood as contrariety, Theaetetus' protest that the like is in some way (*pōs*; 240b8) is to no avail. What is truly (*ontōs*) a likeness shows itself as truly not being. The notion of likeness presupposes an interweaving (*symplokē*) of non-being with being (240c2-3), it seems, which, according to Parmenides, is impossible. The stranger concludes that the "sophist has ... compelled us to agree, though not willingly, that non-being somehow (*pōs*) is." (240c5-7) This is not said entirely without irony, since the stranger is the one who generates these paradoxes. That non-being is intertwined with being is, moreover, a conclusion towards which the stranger is steering.

The defence of the sophist is summed up as follows: They claim the sophist is a person who deceives (*apatan*) the young, making them opine falsely (*pseudē doxazein*; 240d2-4). But if false opinions, which by definition opine what is not, opine what is contrary to the things that are (240d6-7), which is impossible, the sophist can dismiss the accusations brought against him. This problem leads the stranger to a semi-formal definition of falsehood.

The definition is the converse of a common understanding of true opinions, namely that "a statement that is true says of things that *are*, that they *are*, and of things that *are not*, that they *are not*";²⁷ conversely a false statement states that the things that are, are not, and the things that are not, are. In the stranger's formulation of this, however, things look slightly different. He asks Theaetetus whether false opinions come about 1) when someone opines that things that in no way are (*ta mēdamōs onta*; 240e2), somehow are, and 2) when someone opines of the things that truly are (*ta pantōs onta*), that they in no way are (*mēdamōs einai*; 240e5-6). As we can see, the stranger specifically introduces the notion of that which in no way is as well as the notion of that which truly is in his questions. This is important. As regards the first half of the definition, Theaetetus agrees with the stranger's suggestion, but he reformulates it a bit. False opinions opine, not that the things that are not at all, are, but simply that things that are not (*ta mē onta*; 240e3), somehow are (*pōs einai*). This points in the direction of the solution to the problem about false statements, where the notion of utter non-being will be discarded in favour of another kind of non-being (cf. 241d4-5).²⁸

²⁷ O'Brien (2000), 87, cf. *Theaetetus* 188d.

²⁸ Cf. O'Brien (2000), 87.

As regards the second half of the definition, which Theaetetus also accepts, the expression “things that truly are” easily leads one’s thought to Plato’s conception of true being as expressed in other dialogues, such as justice, beauty etc. If we compare Protagoras’ defence speech in the *Theaetetus*, as well as Socrates’ digression on the philosopher in the same dialogue with this definition of false opinions, it seems to gain a specific significance. For if the sophist is a deceiver, we may reasonably think that he, according to Plato, makes young people believe that things that truly are, justice, for instance, do not exist, but are merely conventions.

Let me elaborate a bit on the second kind of false statement. The notion that the sophist makes people believe that the things that truly are, are not, is not made into an explicit theme in the final discussion of false speech, opinion and appearance found at 263a-264b. This discussion focuses on the, to my mind, rather trivial example that “Theaetetus sits” is a true sentence when Theaetetus actually sits, whereas the sentence “Theaetetus flies” is false. This propositional and non-ontological account of falsehood is perhaps one reason why many commentators believe that ethical or political matters are not central to the main argument of the *Sophist* or, as J. L. Ackrill believed, that Plato had simply stopped believing in forms as “ethical ideals and as metaphysical objects”.²⁹

But the previous discussion of the soul’s movement towards truth, central to the description of the noble sophist, shows, I believe, that the ethical problems dominating Plato’s so-called early and middle period dialogues are not lost from sight in the *Sophist*, nor disconnected from the question of truth. This becomes even clearer, I shall argue, if one pays close attention to 1) the discussion about being found in the so-called *gigantomachia* (see chapter 3 below), 2) the description of the dialectician found at 253 (see chapter 4 below) and 3) the stranger’s final discussion of imitation (see chapter 7 below), which brings the notion of justice, as well as all the other excellences, quite explicitly to the fore (cf. 267c2-d2). I thus believe that, just as the epistemological questions dominating the *Theaetetus* shows themselves to the careful reader to be intertwined with ethical and political questions, so are the ontological questions dominating the central part of the *Sophist*, on closer inspection, carried out against a background of ethical and political themes.

²⁹ Ackrill (1997), 79.

§3. *The stranger's change of attitude (241c2-242b5)*

The stranger has now shown Theaetetus how the sophist is able to 'hide' behind Parmenides. In fact, he has been so successful that Theaetetus is almost prepared to give up hunting the man (cf. 241c2-3). This is no doubt what the stranger has intended all along. By deliberately conjuring up a whole swarm of definitions of sophistry, by apparently confusing sophistry with philosophy, or, more precisely, by allowing Theaetetus to identify Socrates as a sophist and, finally, by playing the devil's advocate for the sophist in showing how the sophist is able to deny the possibility of false opinions and speech, the stranger has destroyed any pretensions Theaetetus may have had of understanding what a sophist, or, for that matter, what a philosopher, is.

In the short passage 241c7-242b5 the stranger asks three favours of Theaetetus, and this indicates a turning point in the discussion. First of all, Theaetetus should be content if they only manage to "pull back a bit from [the sophist's] mighty argument" (241c8-9). To do so, they need to submit Parmenides' own *logos* to torture (*basanizein*; 241d6), in order to force from it the conclusion that "non-being in some respect *is* and that Being in turn *is not* in some way" (241d6-7). The stranger therefore asks of Theaetetus to show him a second favour, namely not to regard him as a parricide (*patraloias*; 241d1); for they now have to venture to "take on the paternal argument" (242a1-3). Finally, he asks permission to turn his position upside down, even if it should result in him appearing as a madman (*manikos*; 242a11) to Theaetetus.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates suggested that philosophers sometimes appear as madmen (cf. 216d2); if the stranger has appeared as a sophist in the preceding defence of sophistry, we may suspect that he is about to reveal his true face.³⁰ The change in position which he is about to make will ultimately make it clear that he has not come to refute Socrates for having a poor understanding of *logos*, as Socrates initially feared (cf. 216b5-6); rather it is Parmenides who is to be cross-examined, an examination which is, as the stranger says, carried out on behalf of Theaetetus (242b1-2). As we shall see, this forces the stranger to use the same kind of *logos* which Socrates claims has brought him his bad reputation.

³⁰ Cf. Klein (1977), 37.

Chapter two: The cross-examination of earlier thinkers

The main purpose of the middle part of the *Sophist* is to cross-examine (*elenchein*; 242b1) Parmenides' *logos*, forcing the concession that what *is*, somehow is *not* and what is *not* somehow *is*. This requires that the two interlocutors take another road of inquiry (*hodos*; 242b7), namely Parmenides' first road, the road of being. If the sophist is able to rely on Parmenides' understanding of non-being when defending himself, and if this conception is dependent on Parmenides' notion of being, to question Parmenides' understanding of being seems to be what is necessary in order to capture the sophist.

The cross-examination of Parmenides, however, proves to be more comprehensive than one might expect. The stranger does not limit himself to examining Parmenides' conception of being. He begins by questioning some early ontological attempts to determine what kinds of beings (*ta onta*) there are, asking what is meant by the notion 'being' (*einai*), and then turns his attention to Parmenides, asking the same question. Next, he proceeds to question two general and opposed conceptions of being (*ousia*). I concentrate on the first part of this questioning in the present chapter and turn to the discussion of *ousia* in the next.

§4. Questioning the notion of being (242b6-243d6)

The stranger suggests that they might be as confused about being as it has turned out that they are about non-being (242b10-c2). More precisely, he suggests that Parmenides, as well as anyone else who has tried to determine how many, and what kind (*posa te kai poia*) of beings (*ta onta*) there are, have spoken too lightheartedly (242c4-6). They have been telling others nothing more than a good story, a *mythos*,³¹ as if they were children. The stranger thereby implicitly likens "the ancients" to the sophists since they, like the sophists, have presented "spoken images" which leads others to believe they know what they in fact do not understand (i.e. being).

The stranger distinguishes three different ways in which people have attempted to determine the number and quality of the beings that are. One kind of *mythos* regards the beings as a plurality, generated and differentiated through "natural/psychic" forces such as love and hatred (242c9-d4). Opposed to these the stranger lists his own people, the Eleatics, who, following Xenophanes, state that all things (*ta panta*), are in fact one (242d6-7). Finally, he mentions some "Ionian and ... Sicilian Muses" who think it safer to unite (*symplekein*) the

³¹ This may be a pun on Parmenides' use of *mythos* at B8.1, where *mythos* means exposition. Cf. McCabe (2000), 65, n. 24.

two previous viewpoints, saying “that being (*to on*) is both many and one, and that it is held together (*synechein*) by enmity and friendship.” (242d7-e2) The Ionian muse, Heraclitus, is of particular interest. He states that “differing from itself it always agrees with or is brought together with itself” (*diapheromenon gar aei sympheretai*; 242e2-3).

Although Heraclitus is not explicitly discussed in what follows, a few comments are in order, since his teachings were a major theme in the *Theaetetus*. According to fragment B51, the fragment the stranger partly quotes,³² most people do not understand that, “while differing from, it is in agreement with, itself: a back-turning connection or harmony (*palintropos harmoniē*), like that of a bow or a lyre”.³³ What differs from itself, while being in agreement with itself, is most probably the totality of beings, *ta panta*, since this seems to have been the focus of all the early thinkers.³⁴ In what appears to be a closely connected fragment (B50),³⁵ we learn that wisdom is to agree (*homologein*) that everything (*panta*) is one (*hen*). Obviously, this resembles the standpoint the stranger has just ascribed to the followers of Xenophanes, the Eleatics.

It is therefore interesting to note that the stranger, in this short presentation of earlier thinkers³⁶, contrary to many modern historians³⁷ of ancient philosophy, sees Heraclitus as representing a response to or an evolution from Eleatic teaching, rather than as an earlier philosopher criticised by Parmenides. Contrary to Socrates’ claim that Heraclitus’ teaching boils down to the claim that everything is in constant change, in contradistinction to Parmenides’ one, stable being (cf. *Tht.* 152e, 183c-e), it appears that the stranger regards Heraclitus as more congenial with the teachings of his own people. We may further note that the idea which he ascribes to this “muse”, that the one and the many must be twined or mixed together (*symplekein*; *Soph.* 242d8) echoes the concession that being and non-being must somehow be interwoven (*symplokē*; 240c2-3), which, in turn, foreshadows the stranger’s own teaching about the intertwining of forms (*symplokē eidōn*; cf. 259e5-6).³⁸ From these

³² Eryximachus quotes this fragment (cf. *Smp.* 187a), with considerable less enthusiasm than the stranger.

³³ Trans. T. M. Robinson, slightly modified.

³⁴ Cf. Robinson (1991), 115.

³⁵ Hippolytus, the source of fragment 51, connects it with fragment 50; cf. Robinson (1991), 115.

³⁶ The present passage is the closest we get to an overview of previous philosophers in Plato’s work; it foreshadows Aristotle’s introductions to the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*. Like Aristotle, however, Plato is not writing a history of philosophy; he is pursuing a philosophical problem.

³⁷ Exceptions are Hegel, as well as K. Reinhardt (1916) and, following him, J. Stenzel (1971).

³⁸ The discussion of this, under the headings of a communion (*koinōnia*), mixing (*symmeignymi*) or participation (*methechein*) of forms, begins at 252d2. It was already an implicit theme in the dream-theory expounded by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, cf. Part I, § 20.

considerations it would appear that the stranger has a closer affinity to Heraclitean teachings than his birthplace might make us suspect.

The stranger suggests that it would be both “harsh and discordant” (243a3) to evaluate whether these wise men of old said anything true or not. However, he is certain that, when they did speak, they looked “down upon us the many” since they stated their conclusions without caring whether ordinary people were able to follow them or not (243a7-b1).

It looks as if the stranger wishes to question the form, rather than the “content”, of the teachings of previous philosophers³⁹ in a way reminiscent of Socrates’ criticism of Protagoras’ tendency to give long speeches (cf. *Prt.* 229a ff., 334c ff.). In fact the stranger is about to cross-examine the philosophical tradition in a Socratic manner,⁴⁰ forcing it, as it were, to abandon its monological exposition in favour of a dialogical attempt to give an account of what it means by ‘being’. However, we should note that the problem with monological expositions is not that long speeches as such are problematic (Socrates is quite capable of speaking at great length), but the tendency this kind of discourse has to lead one to assume that the addressee of the speech understands what one means. And this is what the stranger finds faulty with previous philosophers: they have expounded all kinds of teachings about being but have forgotten to pose and clarify the one important question, namely what being means. His “formal” complaint against the tradition is really a substantial complaint about its teaching about being.⁴¹

As a consequence of this teaching, the stranger suggests, he and Theaetetus have “taken into [their] souls this same experience” concerning being as they had concerning non-being, since they believe that they “understand [it] ... whenever anyone utters it” (243c2-4). If Theaetetus and the stranger⁴² falsely believe they understand what is meant by being as a consequence of the dogmatic teachings of previous philosophers, we see that what was said about the sophist as a deceiver, able to make his interlocutors entertain false beliefs, is equally true about these thinkers; the problem of the sophist reveals itself as a problem about how speech relates to the soul of the one who hears it and to the subject matter the speech is about. The connection between *logos* and ontology, which gradually emerged in the first half of the dialogue, thus unfolds itself in full when the question of being is now addressed. The purpose of pursuing this question is primarily to point out problems with Parmenides’ notion of being

³⁹ Cf. Wieland (1982), 60.

⁴⁰ Cf. Notomi (1999), 211-221.

⁴¹ Cf. McCabe (2000), 65-66.

⁴² We may wonder to what degree the stranger is really perplexed, and to what degree he is merely leading Theaetetus along.

and his understanding of *logos*; Parmenides' notion of being, which seems to make Socratic inquiry impossible, is to be examined exactly through that kind of inquiry.

Before we turn to this inquiry, we should note that the stranger refers to this questioning procedure as their "way of inquiry" (*hē methodos hemas*; 243d7). Since this has nothing to do with division and collection, but much to do with Socratic dialogue, this is one further reason to reject the claim that the stranger is the proponent of a new philosophical method, meant to replace dialogical examination as found in the so-called earlier dialogues.

§5. *Questioning the first physiologoi (243d6-244b5)*

The first session of cross-examination is short and quite simple. Any philosopher who claims that "the all" or the totality of beings (*ta panta*; 243d9) is made up of two types of beings can legitimately be asked what it is he utters (*phthengesthai*) about both and each (*amphō kai hekateros*) of them when he claims that they are (243d8-e2). How should one understand this "being" (*einai*)? The stranger suggests three alternative answers.

Either they must mean that being is something in *addition* to the two kinds of beings they accept, so that they in fact say that everything is made up of three "things" (243e3-4). Or they can say that one of the two beings is what really is, what "being" points out (*sēmeinein*; cf. 244a), but in that case, there will only be *one* being (243e4-6). Or, finally, they can claim that it is the two, taken together (*amphō*), which is what "being" refers to, but that, again, would have the result that being is one, not two (243e8-244a2).⁴³ All three answers imply that being must be one thing, either in addition to the beings posited or as the being of these beings.

According to some commentators, this examination should not be taken as a refutation of the earliest Greek philosophers. The main point is to awaken an attitude of wonder in Theaetetus, by questioning what being can possibly mean and this is a question which these thinkers were not interested in.⁴⁴ As regards the earliest Greek thinkers this may be true. Because they attempted to state how many beings there are or what types of beings constitute everything, they may be said to have disregarded the question: "what does being mean?" But what is true of these thinkers is not true of Parmenides. The problem the stranger has pointed out is the problem which lies at the heart of Parmenides' thinking. If we say of different beings that they are, what do we mean by being? When Parmenides is questioned about what

⁴³ Cf. De Rijk (1986), 94-95.

⁴⁴ Cf. Rosen (1983), 207-8, Notomi (1999), 213; see also Iber (2007), 257.

he means to point out by the name ‘being’, this is no longer a question imposed from the outside. It is the central question in Parmenides’ poem, as well as in the investigation carried out in the middle part of *Sophist*.

§6. *Parmenides and the one being (244b6-245e5)*

According to the stranger, the teaching of “father Parmenides” and the Eleatics is that everything or the all (*to pan*), the notion first encountered in the discussion of the sophist’s strange power and briefly touched upon in the pluralists’ attempt to determine being (cf. 243d9), is really one (244b6) in the sense that “one alone is” (*hen monon einai*; 244b9-10). According to Parmenides’ poem, being, *to on* or *einai, is*,⁴⁵ the affirmation of which is the only “road” possible for inquiry. But even if being is one,⁴⁶ the road of being contains a plurality of signs (*sēmata*) which reveal being (DK B8.2-3): it is one, ungenerated, a continuum, a whole etc.⁴⁷ These signs are the focus of the stranger’s cross-examination of Parmenides. This examination falls in two parts, the first focusing on unity (*hen*), the second on wholeness (*holon*).⁴⁸

The first round of questions runs as follows.⁴⁹ Assuming being is one: is being the same as the one, so that there are two names (*onomata*) for one and the same thing (*Sph.* 244c1-2)? If so, the Eleatics are faced with a problem: If only one is, how can there be two names, two signs of being? Is that not a concession that more than one thing is (244c8-9)? Even claiming that *one* name of being is would in fact seem absurd. For either one would have to say that the name is different from the matter it refers to, that it reveals a being which it itself is not. But then there would be two things, the being (*pragma*) and a name different (*heteron*) from it (244d3-4). Or the name is not a name of something different from itself; in that case, either the name is a name of nothing, or, if it is of something, it must be a name of itself, “the name is only a name of a name and is of nothing else” (244d6-9). The assumption that everything is one thus seems to preclude the possibility that names are signs, pointing out

⁴⁵ Cf. B2.3, B6.1-2, B8.16.

⁴⁶ Whether the emphasis on unity (rather than on being) represents the historical Parmenides’ view is not important to the present inquiry, which only aims at analysing the stranger’s understanding of Parmenides. Cf. also *Prm.* 137b.

⁴⁷ These characteristics are ascribed to the Forms in the *Phaedo* (78b-d, 80a-b), the *Phaedrus* (250c) and the *Symposium* (211a-b).

⁴⁸ For “whole”, cf. B8.4, for “one”, cf. B8.6.

⁴⁹ Theaetetus quickly drops out of the conversation, which is conducted as an imagined dialogue between the stranger and the followers of Parmenides; for interesting observations about why this happens, see McCabe (2000), 67 and 72-72.

something else. This does not only preclude the possibility of *logos*,⁵⁰ in a way similar to the Heraclitean doctrine of eternal flux (cf. *Tht.*183a), it also precludes the different signs that Parmenides had claimed the road of being revealed. If everything is one, it is nothing. Two things may be noted about this argument.

Firstly, it mirrors the problem stated at the beginning of the dialogue, whether the name ‘sophist’ points out a separate being (*pragma*) or a work, distinct from the philosopher (cf. 218c), at a higher level, namely as the question how different names used to pinpoint being relate to being. It thus brings naming and *logos*, as these relate to being, into focus. Names, the stranger argues against Parmenides, are something different from that which they point out (244d3). It is important to see that this difference is not a neutral difference but an ontological difference; names (and *logoi*) differ from that which they reveal by being less real than or ontologically inferior to it, as was also indicated by Theaetetus’ attempt at determining the nature of an image (cf. §2 above).⁵¹ Thus, the difference between name and being is not parallel to and cannot be reduced to the difference between existing beings or between determinations of being, a notion of difference which takes central stage in what follows. It will prove important to keep these two notions of difference in mind when we turn to the final attempt to pin down the activity of the sophist (cf. chap. 5 and 6 below).

Secondly, the reasoning used in the argument is Eleatic in origin.⁵² Like Zeno’s *reductio* arguments against the assumption of a plurality of beings, the stranger takes an assumption as a starting point in order to show that it leads to its opposites. But this assumption is Parmenides’ teaching that everything is one. So the stranger uses Zenonian reasoning, cast as a Socratic question-and-answer session, against Eleatic doctrine. Even more surprisingly, the conclusion he reaches is close to what Gorgias demonstrates, also through Zenonian dialectic, in his treatise “On non-being”.⁵³ If everything is one, we must either give up all talk of it or must say that there is just a name which is a name of nothing (or of itself), wherefore names (and hence *logoi*) never point out anything.

The second round of questions, which focuses on wholeness, is introduced by a new quote from Parmenides’ poem (244e3-5)⁵⁴ according to which being is a whole “like a well-rounded sphere”. If the whole is like a sphere, the whole, that is, being, which according to the previous assumption is the one, must have parts, since a sphere has both a centre (*mesos*)

⁵⁰ Iber (2007), 261. cf. also McCabe (2000), 70-71

⁵¹ Cf. McCabe (2000), 70 for related observations.

⁵² Cf. Cornford (1935), 220.

⁵³ Cf. Cropsey (1995), 91.

⁵⁴ These lines correspond to the lines 43-45 in what is now referred to as fragment 8.

and extremities (*eschata*; 244e6-7).⁵⁵ Parmenides' one being has parts since it is a whole. But how can what has parts be the same as what is one?

The dilemma this gives rise to is, according to the stranger, as follows: although nothing prevents what is divided into parts from being *affected* (*pathos echein*) by the one, so that it thereby becomes a unity, a single whole (*holon*) and a sum (*pan*), this still means that what is thus affected is different from the one which affects it; for that which truly is one is, according to the correct account (*orthos logos*), without any parts (*amerēs*; 245a1-9). This means that the Eleatics end up with *two* unities, the (true) one, which has no parts, and another unity, a sum of parts affected by the true one.

The relation the stranger sketches between these two unities, where one is affecting the other, making it into a whole, is, we should note, described in quasi-causal terminology.⁵⁶ This is significant since the stranger, if he was merely bent on refuting Parmenides, had not needed to spell out this relationship. It would suffice to simply point out, as he does in 245a8-9, that what is one cannot have any parts. The two “predicates” of being, unity and wholeness, exclude each other. The explicit assertion at 245a1-3 that a sum *can* be affected by the one so as to become a whole therefore reflects, I believe, the stranger's own views.

Faced with the problem that being cannot both be whole and one, the Eleatics will have to identify being (*to on*) with the whole or, denying that it is a whole, with the one (245b4-5). If being is the whole, being is a sum of parts and hence more than one, which they cannot accept (b7-9). On the other hand, the stranger claims, if being is not the whole, but the whole *is*, then being will be in lack (*endeēs*) of itself and hence, lacking itself, it will not *be* (c1-6). The most plausible reading of the latter dilemma, which is not altogether easy to grasp, is, I believe, as follows: The stranger is assuming that the whole *is* according to the Eleatics and that this means that it is *identical* with being. If this is so, it means that being, since it is different from the whole (in being the one), lacks itself. In other words, it seems that the stranger is arguing along similar lines as he did against the pluralists. Both names, the one and the whole are treated as identical with being, whereby impossible consequences are drawn, just as before when the stranger assumed that both the hot and the cold were identical with being. This reading is supported by the next inference made by the stranger, namely that being and the whole, if they are not the same, each have a peculiar nature (*physis*), wherefore they are two things, not one (c8-9).

⁵⁵ Cf. *Theaetetus*, 204a ff. and Cornford (1935), 222.

⁵⁶ This is pointed out by Leigh (2010), 73-74.

The stranger constructs a final set of problems for the Eleatics which are even more difficult to follow than the previous dilemma.⁵⁷ Assuming that the Eleatics should deny that the whole *is*, being must, the stranger suggests, be denied being as well (245c11-d1). In addition to not *being*, it will also never *become* (d1-2). Theaetetus does not understand this and the stranger offers the following explanation: whatever comes to be always (*aei*) comes to be as a whole so that, if “the whole” is not set down among the things that are, neither being (*ousia*) nor becoming (*genesis*) will be (d4-5). He further points out that the one, since it is no whole, must be deprived of quantity (*hoposon*) as well, since any quantity, any “many”, however many it may be, must be so large a whole (d8-10). Rather puzzling, the stranger offers no argument as to why what comes to be or is must become or be as a whole, nor why it should be a problem for the Eleatics that the one should be without quantity. If one denies a plurality of beings as well as the possibility of becoming, as Parmenides does, why should these consequences be fatal to one’s argument? Once again, it looks to me as if the stranger is revealing his own notion of being and whole (*holon*) more than pointing out an internal problem in Parmenides’ teaching. It seems that according to the stranger, being is a whole, a plurality of parts, made into a unity through the one.

So is the stranger’s discussion of whole and part meant as a serious refutation of Parmenides at all? Did Plato really find this attack on “father Parmenides” lethal? L. Brown seems to believe that he did not. Among other problems, Brown notes that the stranger’s criticism rests on a far too literal interpretation of the notion of “sphere”, as something which has parts; for, she claims, the “simile [of the sphere] is designed to convey the notion of homogeneity”,⁵⁸ not that being literally has parts. Additionally she claims that the criticism rests on a crude misunderstanding of *logos*, which falsely construes predication as naming, a misunderstanding the *Sophist* is actually meant to clear up.⁵⁹

If the signs of being are really predicates and, as such, do not point out things or natures, in analogy with names, but rather predicate qualities about being, we may agree with Brown that the stranger’s argument is unreasonable. The claim that “being is whole”, for instance, would be what we, with Hegel, could call a speculative sentence, where the “predicate” is the same as, or explicates the nature of, the “subject”. The whole and being are not different natures or beings, pointed out by different names; rather, wholeness is what the

⁵⁷ Cf. Cornford (1935), 226.

⁵⁸ Brown (1998), 185.

⁵⁹ Cf. Brown (1999), 469.

nature of being is. And if being is not a material thing, the notion of sphere, which is meant to illustrate the nature of being, should not be taken literally.

As plausible as this objection to the stranger's argument may seem, however, it faces a serious problem. If the interlocutors need to refute Parmenides' notion of being in order to "capture" the sophist, it is rather strange if it is refuted on arguments which Plato must himself have seen as spurious. And it is, I believe, quite possible that Plato did not see the criticism he has the stranger level against Parmenides as resting on a misconstrual of Parmenides' view.⁶⁰ Even though Parmenides' poem is about the one being which is revealed to thought, the language of the poem quite consistently describes this being in quasi-sensible terms with existence in space and time. In the generation following Parmenides, this dilemma became the basis for intense discussions. The atomists, for instance, reinterpreted Parmenides' one being as a plurality of beings, namely the many atoms, which, although invisible and only accessible to thought, nevertheless existed as a plurality of beings in time and space.⁶¹ The ascription of sensible qualities to being is, of course, also exploited by Gorgias to the full in his treatise on non-being (see in particular B3, 70).⁶²

However we may understand Parmenides' poem, it seems safer to assume that Plato believed that the paradoxes generated by the stranger were valid arguments against Parmenidean monism or at least arguments which pointed to problems in the way Parmenides had formulated his doctrine. More precisely, I believe that the arguments are meant to point out two different problems with Parmenides' teaching. On the one hand, the arguments which focus on unity are meant to show that Parmenides does not have an adequate understanding of how *logos* relates to the being it is meant to reveal. *Logos* is other than, different from, being, but *logos is*, nevertheless. On the other hand, the arguments focusing on wholeness are meant to show that Parmenides' one, whole being implies that being itself is not just one, but must be conceived of as a manifold of beings. Anticipating the further development of the dialogue I suggest that the stranger, through his dialectical examination of Parmenides, is pointing out problems connected with Parmenides' conception of being which his own doctrine of being is meant to solve. This doctrine can be regarded as a reinterpretation of Parmenides' teaching, a reinterpretation which revolves around a whole/part relation existing between a plurality of intelligible beings and the unity of being. It is, so to say, an idealistic version of Parmenides'

⁶⁰ Cf. McCabe (2000), 67 for a criticism of Brown along similar lines.

⁶¹ See Friis Johansen (1994) 75 and 97.

⁶² Cf. Gadamer (1950) for an interesting discussion of this.

quasi-physical description of being. This doctrine of being, moreover, is meant to make *logos* understandable in its relation to being.

Chapter three: the *gigantomachia*

The discussion of the previous thinkers', in particular Parmenides', account of being has shown that the question: "what is being?" is no less difficult to answer than the question: "what is non-being?" When the stranger now turns from these thinkers to people who speak in a different way (245e6-8), namely the participants of the famous *gigantomachia* (or battle between gods and giants) about being (*ousia*),⁶³ the question "what is being?" is addressed once again, but now from a different perspective. A short presentation of the participants in the battle, found in the passage 246a8-e1,⁶⁴ highlights this difference. Before we turn to the actual battle, some remarks on this passage are therefore in order.

§7. *A dispute about being (246a8-e1)*

Whereas the thinkers discussed in the previous chapter tried to determine how many, and of what kind, the beings that are, are (cf. 242c5-6), the participants in the *gigantomachia* speak differently. On the one side are the giants or somatists, as I shall henceforth call them, who claim that only what allows for touching and embracing can be said to be, defining or marking off (*horizein*) being and body (*sōma*) as the same (246b1). On the other side are the gods who claim that true being (*ē alethinē ousia*) is thinkable, non-bodily looks or Forms (*eidē*; 246b7-8), whereas they argue that body is not being but a kind of "swept-along becoming" (*genesis pheromonē*; c1-2). Who are these participants?

The stranger's description of the somatists echoes the description Socrates gave in the *Theaetetus* of certain crude people who denied the existence of all that couldn't be touched (*Tht.* 155e3-156a3). It seems unlikely that this is a mere coincidence,⁶⁵ and we are probably not meant to identify the somatists with one particular "school" of philosophers, but rather to see them as representing all those "who believe that tangible body is the sole reality".⁶⁶ As regards the "gods", however, we face a more thorny issue. It has been suggested by many scholars that these people, soon to be identified as "friends of Forms" (*hoi eidōn philoi*; 248a4-5), represent Plato's own view as expounded in earlier dialogues, in particular the

⁶³ Brown (1998), 184 states that the word *ousia* is "used with apparently no significant difference in sense" from *to on* or *einai*. I do not deny that the stranger seems to use *ousia* synonymously with *to on*, but I still believe that the shift from *on* to *ousia* in the present context is meant to highlight the difference between the way being is discussed in the *gigantomachia* and the way it was discussed earlier, as I shall argue below.

⁶⁴ This passage mirrors the passage 242b6-243d6.

⁶⁵ Compare also *Sph.* 246b4-5 with *Tht.* 155e8-156a1.

⁶⁶ Cornford (1935), 232. If one compares the present passage with *Metaph.* 1069a26-30 it looks as if the somatists represent a later type of "materialism" than the *physiologoi* discussed in the previous part of the dialogue; this, however, is difficult to decide with certainty and I leave the question open.

Phaedo.⁶⁷ Since they are to be criticised, it would appear that what we are facing in the *gigantomachia* is a kind of self-criticism.

Surely, what the friends of Forms believe about true being resembles what is said about Forms in other Platonic dialogues. Nevertheless, a number of features of the dramatic context speak against identifying them too readily as people representing Platonic doctrine. First of all, the stranger claims (cf. 248b7-8) to understand what they say because he has had “habitual dealings” (*synētheia*) with them; as a character in a Platonic dialogue he can, of course, hardly have met people who are adherers to Platonic doctrine.⁶⁸ If we stick to the dramatic point of view the insinuation is that the friends of Forms are people well known to the Eleatic stranger. The dramatic context thus suggests that they are people loosely connected with Eleatic doctrine rather than specifically with Plato’s own teaching.⁶⁹ This suggestion gains further support from the following consideration.

At 246c2-4 the stranger states that the dispute about being is a boundless battle (*apletos machē*), taking place in the middle (*en mesōi*) between the two parties, a battle which is forever (*aei*) joined. Just as the stranger’s description of the somatists echoes Socrates’ description of a similar group of people, the stranger’s description of the battle echoes Socrates’ description of a similar battle in the *Theaetetus*, at 179d3-181b5. Here, as we saw above (cf. part I, §11), he described the doctrine that everything is really *kinesis* as a teaching about “being that’s carried along” or in change (*pheromenē ousia*), a teaching which had instigated a battle (*machē*) among a great many people (179d3-5). He described the party opposing the Heraclitean supporters of the moving being as people like Melissus and Parmenides (180e3). Socrates explained that he, Theodorus, and Theaetetus, had fallen into the middle (*eis to meson*) between the two parties. If these parallel expressions are not coincidental, as I doubt they are, it seems reasonable to suggest that the stranger’s description of the two parties in the *gigantomachia* are not meant to recall any specific philosophical schools, but should be seen as sketches of philosophical attitudes towards being, associated loosely with the names of Heraclitus and Parmenides.

⁶⁷ Cornford (1935), 242, Ross (1951), 107, De Rijk (1986), 102, Brown (1998), 194, Notomi (1999), 219-220; for other suggested candidates, see Ross (1951), 105-6.

⁶⁸ Cf. Taylor (1929), 385, Rosen (1983), 213 and Mesch (2010).

⁶⁹ Cf. 249c10-d4. The fact that the purpose of the present investigation is to refute Parmenides’ conception of being (cf. 242b1-2) lends further plausibility to the suggestion that the friends of Forms are connected with Eleatic teaching. A fact which complicates the matter is that Plato’s philosophy is also usually regarded as intimately connected with Eleatic teaching. See Prauss (1966), 27-41.

Let us turn to the question how the contestants in the *gigantomachia* can be said to speak differently from the philosophers discussed in the previous part of the dialogue. The somatists, in defining being as what is tangible, stress that only what allows for being grasped or touched (246a11) really is. Their definition of being as body thus springs from a focus on how beings are accessible to humans. In contradistinction, the friends of Forms posit true being as certain thinkable and bodiless Forms or kinds (*noēta atta kai asōmata eidē*; 246b7-8). That the Forms are said to be thinkable and bodiless indicates that the friends likewise focus on how beings stand in relation to our ability to “grasp” them when they define being.⁷⁰ What truly is or what has true being, is what reveals itself or is manifest to the mind (*nous*).

So whereas the thinkers discussed earlier in the dialogue focused on how many kinds of beings there are, or what qualities they have, the participants in the *gigantomachia* focus on how beings become manifest to us. They do not discuss what beings there are, but rather what characterizes beings *as* beings, to use an Aristotelian formula, i.e. what ontological qualifications something must “live up to” in order to count as a being. I believe that the stranger’s statement that the *gigantomachia* is about being (*peri tēs ousias*; 246a5) rather than about the things that are or the beings, *ta onta*, reflects this difference.

Before Theaetetus and the stranger turn to the two parties in the battle in order to question their understanding of being (246c6-7), the stranger gives a final characterization of the somatists. Whereas the friends of Forms are tamer and easier to engage in discussion, the somatists are difficult to deal with; perhaps it is even impossible to obtain an answer from them (246c9-d2). Consequently the stranger suggests that they need to be made better, if not in deed (*ergon*), then at least in argument (*logos*); for “an agreement that’s reached by the better is ...more authoritative than what’s agreed on by the worse”. Since the two interlocutors are seeking the truth (246d4-9), the somatists need to be reformed.⁷¹

Why, we may wonder, should the value of what is agreed upon increase if the persons who agree are good? What has this got to do with truth in ontological questions? S. Rosen⁷² suggests that this means that “we ought to formulate” a theory to be refuted “in the best or strongest way”; since the somatists are crude people, the stranger wants to help them in articulating a coherent theory of being. But this can hardly be what he has in mind. The

⁷⁰ Cf. Heidegger (1992), 464-465, McCabe (2000), 81, Iber (2007), 269.

⁷¹ Cf. also 247b7-c7. McCabe (2000), 76 is right in describing the giants as “missing persons”; they never enter into conversation with the stranger or Theaetetus. Cf. also Dorter (1994) 142.

⁷² Rosen (1983), 214.

“refutation” which follows is not a refutation of the somatists at all,⁷³ as the stranger admits at 247c3-7, and, as we shall see, the views of the reformed somatists do not correspond to their former views, made into a more articulated theory. A more plausible explanation is, I believe, that the stranger regards questions about ontology as closely related to what we would call ethical questions or questions about character. A person able to “see” more of reality, or, to use the image the stranger used when describing the difference between apparitions and images, a soul positioned so as to look at the things that are from a more beautiful place (cf. 236b4-5), is better than a narrow minded person, and what such a person agrees upon in ontological discussions is thus of a higher value than what a worse person would agree upon.

§8. *The somatists (246e5-248a3)*

The conversation with the somatists is, like the previous imaginary conversations, carried out as a short Socratic conversation. But, apart from the fact that the somatists are reformed before they are questioned, there is a further difference: the stranger and Theaetetus are explicitly given different roles, which was not the case in the previous part of the dialogue. Theaetetus is acting as interpreter for the somatists, as well as for the friends of Forms (cf. 246e2-3, 248a4-5), whereas the stranger acts as their interrogator.

The stranger’s strategy is to make the somatists, in the guise of Theaetetus, agree to posit a being which cannot be characterized as bodily, i.e. to posit a being that their notion of being cannot account for. To that end, he begins by obtaining a number of concessions from them (cf. 246e5-247a10): 1) Mortal animals exist and, since they can rightly be described as ensouled bodies (*sōma empsychon*), souls (*psychē*) must exist. 2) But souls differ, in so far as some are just, others unjust, some thoughtful and others not and 3) these differences in souls are brought about due to a soul’s possession (*hexis*) of excellences or their contraries, i.e. due to the presence (*parousia*) of them in the soul. Finally the somatists agree that 4) if something is able (*dynaton*) to become present or absent, as the excellences and their counterparts are, it must be something that *is (einai ti)*.

Is the concession that souls and virtues exist what changes the somatists into reformed somatists? If it is, they are still entitled to believe, as materialists, that both soul and excellences can be described as something material, and the concession would be unproblematic for their definition of being. A refutation of their view would have to demonstrate independently of this concession that soul and excellences cannot be regarded as

⁷³ Rosen (1983), 215 admits as much, when he deals with the actual refutation.

material. But this is not what happens. The subsequent refutation of the somatists is certainly centered on the fact that soul and excellences *are* and that this poses a problem for the somatists, but no argument is given against regarding them as bodily. Rather, we get the following line of reasoning: If the somatists admit that souls and the excellences *are*, they should be asked whether they are visible and touchable (*horaton kai haptan*; 247b3). Obviously souls and justice are not visible “things” or beings. But can they be said to have a body? This is what the somatists will have to maintain in order to uphold their definition of being.

For a thinker like Democritus, whom some commentators suggest as a representative of the reformed somatists, the answer would definitely be yes. But Theaetetus claims that the somatists will respond to this question in the following way: on the one hand they will say that a soul *acquires* or *supplies itself* (*ktasthai*; 247b9)⁷⁴ with a body, on the other that justice and the other excellences exist and that they cannot be reduced to body. The stranger points out (247c4-7) that a real somatist would not respond this way and that Theaetetus’ twofold answer therefore shows that the somatists have been reformed. The reformed somatists are somatists who do not believe that only what is tangible exists. In light of this rather strange refutation, we may note that there is something amusing about the very idea that the young mathematician, who has twice uttered his contempt for materialism (*Sph.* 246b4-5, *Tht.* 155e8-156a1), functions as interpreter for the somatists. He is not a good defender of their position. Surprisingly, this doesn’t seem to bother the stranger.

As suggested above, I believe that the most plausible way to read this refutation is to take it quite literally when the stranger says that he and Theaetetus are not interested in the somatists but only in the truth and that reaching this will be easier if they discuss with better people. On this reading, the stranger is not discussing with the materialists, but only with Theaetetus.⁷⁵ Moreover, to me at least the reformed somatists look suspiciously like the young mathematician himself who has just been convinced by Socrates on the previous day that the soul is different from the body, which it uses (*Tht.* 184c1-9), and learned that there a godlike ideal which the soul has to imitate as much as possible in order to become just and pious (*Tht.* 176a9-177a8). I suggest that the views of the reformed somatists are, if the views of anyone at all, the views of the young mathematician.

⁷⁴ Brown (1998), 188 believes that this equals the claim that the soul *is* a body, a view I cannot follow.

⁷⁵ We should remember that the entire ontological investigation is carried out on his behalf; cf. 242b and 234e. Cf. McCabe (2000), 87 for a different way of dealing with this question.

However this may be: If the reformed somatists grant that non-bodily beings exist, it follows that being cannot be body, wherefore the somatists need a new definition. The stranger offers them the following:

“I say that that which possesses any power (*dynamis*)⁷⁶ whatsoever – whether ... to affect (*poiein*) something else in any respect ... or to be affected (*pathein*) even to the smallest degree ... I say that all this really is (*ontōs einai*). For I set down as a definition (*horos*) defining (*horizein*) the beings (*ta onta*)⁷⁷ that they are nothing else than power.” (247d8-e4)

It has been a matter of controversy whether this is suggested as a definition of being or merely as a mark to delimit the beings that are from what is not. G. E. L. Owen insisted on the first alternative against Cornford,⁷⁸ and on this I agree with him. Whether the stranger (or Plato) accepts the definition or not, the dramatic context requires that it is offered to the somatists as a substitute for their rejected definition.

But if it is a definition, how should we regard it? Is it a definition the stranger himself accepts, or is it merely offered to the somatists? The latter alternative is preferred by Cornford who believes that Plato “regarded the argument” which leads to the definition (or distinguishing mark) “as one that a reasonable materialist would accept”.⁷⁹ This interpretation seems to gain support from the fact that the stranger, when he has stated the new definition, suggests that the matter may appear different at a later time (247e7-248a1). Nevertheless, if the refutation of the somatists is not a real refutation, since it does not take their position seriously, I fail to see how the definition could be acceptable to them. A reasonable materialist, who is still a materialist, would have no need for it. Its only *raison d’être* is that the somatists’ original definition is not able to encompass the being of non-bodily beings; if one does not believe in non-bodily beings, there is no need for a new definition.

⁷⁶ In order to understand the stranger’s proposed definition correctly, I believe, the Aristotelian concept of *dynamis* must be kept out of the picture. The stranger is not proposing that to be means to have potentiality.

⁷⁷ The definition is not said to give a *horos* for being (*ousia*) but rather for beings (*ta onta*; cf. also 248c4-5) which might seem to pose a problem for my suggestion that the terminological shift to *ousia* is meant to pinpoint a difference between the present discussion and the previous discussions of being. But if *ousia* is a term meant to capture what characterizes a being regarded *as* a being, i.e. what a being is, so that the parties in the *gigantomachia* do not discuss something different than the previous thinkers, but discuss it in a different way, this objection is, I believe, less fatal than it might seem. To define beings as power, i.e. to say that everything which has power is a real (*ontōs*) being would, I take it, be nothing but to state what the being (*ousia*) of beings is. I thank L. Brown for pointing out this objection to me.

⁷⁸ Cf. Cornford (1935), 230-38 and Owen (1999), 421-22, n. 13.

⁷⁹ Cornford (1935), 239.

The proposal therefore seems to me to be the stranger's own. This suggestion is supported by a dramatic feature: the stranger is, as F. Leigh has pointed out, "speaking in the first person throughout the proposal".⁸⁰ This stands in radical opposition to how he speaks when he is suggesting something on behalf of his imagined interlocutors in the rest of the *Sophist*. If my suggestion is correct, we may say that the stranger puts forward the new definition as his own and then offers it to the reformed somatists or, rather, to Theaetetus, in order to be able to define the being of both bodily and non-bodily beings. To be is not to be touchable but to be able either to act or to be acted upon. Since the phenomenon that excellences may be present in souls, or that souls can "get hold of" excellences, is what proved problematic for the somatists, we may suppose that this is what the definition is primarily meant to explain. But let us see how it fares when the stranger now turns to criticise the friends of Forms.⁸¹

§ 9. *The dynamis-proposal and the friends of Forms (248a4-248c9)*

If to be is to have the power either to affect or to be affected, bodily beings, souls that possess bodies, and excellences that can be present in souls can all be said to be. Whether they *are* in different ways, whether excellences, for instance, are beings to a higher degree than bodily beings, is not decided by this general claim. In principle, the proposed definition doesn't rule out that this might be so, and the claim of the friends of Forms, that what truly is, are thinkable Forms, might thus be compatible with the stranger's suggestion. As the stranger will soon point out, however, the friends of Forms think otherwise. Their main problem is not, as one might suspect, that the *dynamis*-proposal ascribes being to something they do not regard as true beings. Rather, it is the claim that their own preferred beings, the Forms, are powers which troubles them. Let us take a closer look at what the friends believe about being.

In contradistinction to the somatists who only acknowledged one type of beings, that which is tangible, the friends speak of two kinds of beings, characterised as becoming (*genesis*) and true being (*ontōs ousia*, 246b).⁸² They claim that we commune (*koinōnein*) with what is becoming by means of our bodies, through sensation (*dia aistheseōs*), and with real

⁸⁰ Leigh (2010), 65.

⁸¹ Gonzalez (2010) remarks that it is a commonly made mistake to fail to note that the criticism of the friends of Forms is guided by the stranger's definition of being and is meant as a defence for it. Cf. also Rehn (1982), 164, note 118.

⁸² As Benardete (1986), II.172, note 63, points out, the term used by the friends of Forms for the opposing party's candidate, *genesis pheromenē*, reflects the expression *pheromenē ousia* used in the *Theaetetus* at 177c7 and 179d3, meant to characterise the doctrine that being is really *kinesis*. This again indicates a close connection between the gigantomachia and the battle about being discussed in the *Theaetetus*.

being by means of the soul, through reckoning (*dia logismou*). This distinction is what reminds many commentators of the *Phaedo*, in particular the short passage 78b-80b. Here Socrates claims that the body is something used by the soul when it connects with bodily, changing beings, whereas it is the soul that reaches for the true beings through its reasoning activity. When this latter activity is fulfilled, the soul attaches itself to these beings or grasps them (*ephaptein*) and the soul attains reason (*phronēsis*; 79d7). So like the friends, Socrates distinguishes between two types of beings (*duo eidē tōn ontōn*; 79a6), changing beings and stable, self-identical beings, the first reached through the senses, the latter through thinking. But even though what the friends state about the things that are resembles this, a closer look at their notion of communion makes it apparent, I believe, that their point of view differs dramatically from that of Socrates in the *Phaedo*.

First of all, their notion of sensation is different, since they regard it as something done with the body, whereas Socrates in the *Phaedo* (79c2-8), as well as in the *Theaetetus* (184c1-9), regards sensation as something carried out by the soul when it uses the body.⁸³ According to L. Brown,⁸⁴ this doctrinal difference may be regarded as no more than the result of Plato's wish to "state the Friends of the Form's theory in a bold and economical way", wherefore they can still be seen as representing his own view. Since Plato does not write treatises and thus never puts forward his own views in simple doctrinal language, it is of course difficult to decide what should count as Platonic doctrine. But in light of the great emphasis Socrates places on the difference between the claim that we perceive *with* the sense-organs and the claim that we perceive *through* them in the *Theaetetus*, a dialogue so clearly connected with the *Sophist*, Brown's suggestion seems to me to lose some of its plausibility. If Plato found the difference important, we would expect that the friends of Forms would insist on it if they really represented his own view.

More importantly, however, the friends are, to my mind, also out of tune with Platonic thinking as regards the communion which the soul has with the Forms. At 248b5-6 the stranger asks Theaetetus whether the friends might concede that the relation they say we have with changing as well as unchanging beings is an affecting or a being affected which results from some kind of power. Will they accept the definition of being the stranger has just offered to the somatists? Before Theaetetus gets a chance to answer, the stranger interrupts himself and states that he will be best suited to answer for them: for he knows that they will not accept

⁸³ Cf. Rehn (1982), 113.

⁸⁴ Brown (1998), 195, note 23.

this suggestion. They agree that the beings described as becoming may be said to have a share in the power to affect or be affected, but will hold that the unchanging beings cannot be described as powers. So whereas they accept that sensation can be explained as the “meeting” of two powers, one affecting, the other being affected, much the way Socrates suggested in the *Theaetetus* (156a-160c, cf. part I, §5 above), they deny that this model can be used to understand the soul’s relation with real being. We should note that this seems reasonable to Theaetetus (248c10) who represents the friends of Forms.

Is this really Platonic thinking? F. Gonzalez has emphasized⁸⁵ that it is quite common that Plato has Socrates treat the excellences for which the soul strives as *dynameis* which makes souls (as well as city-states) excellent (e.g. *R.* 443b4-5). In the *Phaedo*, moreover (see especially 100b ff.), the Forms are explicitly treated as “causal powers” (*aitiai*), as what is responsible for other beings being as they are. If the Forms are “causes”, both of natural phenomena and of the excellences of souls, the stranger’s proposed definition of being seems to capture this quite well. In light of this, it seems to me that we have reason to suppose that the *dynamis*-proposal (which the text goes out of its way to bring to the readers attention; cf. 248b4-8 and again 248c3-5) represents, not only the stranger’s own view, but also, since the view seems to fit well with what Plato has Socrates state about Forms elsewhere, either Plato’s own conception of being or at least a conception he would find attractive.

If this is correct, the friends of Forms do *not* represent Plato’s own views. In fact, their assumption of Forms seems to be an assumption which denies that the Forms have the function Socrates bestows on them in other Platonic dialogues. And if the Forms cannot be regarded as powers or “causes” for anything, how will they help explain anything? They would indeed be nothing more than the unneeded doubling of the world that Aristotle complains about (*Metaph.* 990a34-990b8). It is therefore significant, I believe, that it is the young mathematician who finds the position of the friends of Forms attractive. Like the young Socrates of the *Parmenides*, he finds the basic distinction between what is intelligible and what is sensible attractive. This is not surprising, given that he is, after all, a mathematician, and given the fact that Socrates pointed out this difference to him in the *Theaetetus*. But the ability to make this distinction is not the same as a full understanding of the status of the Forms.

⁸⁵ Gonzalez (2010). Cf. also De Rijk (1986), 101 who states that “to view a thing’s true nature in its true function ... is truly Platonic thinking”.

But if the *dynamis*-proposal is not manifestly out of tune with what Plato has Socrates state about the Forms in other dialogues, why is it dismissed as un-Platonic by so many scholars? I believe one reason for this can be found in the complicated refutation of the friends which follows upon their denial that being is power. For this refutation shifts the focus away from the notion of power to the notion of *kinesis*. That Forms should be in motion is much more difficult to reconcile with other Platonic dialogues than that Forms are powers; the shift of focus tends to overshadow the fact that power and *kinesis* are not the same.

§10. *The refutation of the friends (248c11-249d5)*

The refutation of the friends basically follows the same path as the refutation of the somatists; the stranger attempts to show them that their understanding of being, namely that being is always “in the same state in the same respect” (248a12), does not allow for certain beings which they want to accept as real. However, the refutation is more difficult to follow because the stranger seems to argue for a number of different conclusions. First he seems to argue that the friends cannot explain knowledge because they deny that the Forms are powers. Next, he seems to make one of the following two arguments: either that souls who recognise the unchanging Forms, an activity which is a kind of movement, are a kind of beings the friends will want to accept as real, or that the friend’s preferred beings, the Forms, are not the changeless beings the friends claim they are. How these different lines of reasoning are meant to add up has been a matter of great dispute, and I doubt if there is a reading of the passage which can account for all aspects of it in a satisfying manner.

The focal point of the refutation is the phenomenon of recognition, *gignōskein*,⁸⁶ which is of central importance to the friends (cf. 248d1-3); their claim that the soul partakes in real being through reasoning or calculation (*logismos*; 248a11) only makes sense if the soul is able to recognise the Forms and if the Forms are knowable. As I see it, the first part of the stranger’s refutation (248b2-e6), which is easier to follow than the second part (248e7-249b4), is meant to point out that the friends cannot account for this phenomenon if they deny that Forms are powers.

To this end, the stranger poses a threefold question about recognising and being recognised. Will the friends say that 1) each of these a doing (*poiein*), or a being affected (*pathein*), or that both are both, or 2) that “one is an affection, and one is the other” or, finally,

⁸⁶ It is the communion between the soul and the Forms which stands at the centre of the refutation, not the relationship between Forms and the “changing world”, as for instance Dorter (1994), 144 claims.

that 3) “neither gets a share in either one of them” (248d4-7). According to Theaetetus, they must opt for the third alternative, for else “they would be contradicting their previous remark” (248d8-9). If Forms have no share in power, either to affect or to be affected, as the friends claim (248c8-9), it follows that to recognise the Forms cannot be an affecting or a being affected either. For this would imply that the Forms were affected or themselves affected something when recognised.

Before we look at the first half of the stranger’s refutation of the friends, we need to take a closer look at the second alternative rejected by them.⁸⁷ L. Brown draws attention to the fact that it can be read in two different ways, either as 2a: recognition is affecting and to be recognised is to be affected or as 2b: to be recognised is to affect, whereas to recognise is to be affected. 2b is compatible with what she terms a “‘conservatory’ reading”,⁸⁸ according to which Plato does not give up his belief in Forms as the unchanging essences of the things that are in his latter dialogues. If one finds such a reading attractive, as I do, one would like the stranger to be arguing for 2b as the correct account of recognition. And it is possible to read the first half of his refutation in precisely this way.

Upon the friends’ denial that neither to recognise nor to be recognised is a *poiein* or a *paschein*, the stranger makes the following argument: if to recognise is to affect, then what is recognised must be affected. Since the friends claim that Forms are recognised by the soul when it reasons, it seems to follow that Forms, when recognised, are affected and thus, apparently, changed or moving, contrary to what the friends claim. However, the premise for this conclusion seems strange: what sense can it make to say that Forms are affected through our recognition of them? As can be clearly seen, the argument rests on option 2a. As Brown⁸⁹ points out, it is presented as a hypothetical argument: “if to recognise is to affect, then ...”. As this assumption seems implausible, it is tempting to see the present passage as an indirect argument for option 2b: the conclusion of the stranger’s hypothetical argument is untenable, wherefore the correct account must be the opposite hypothesis.

If this is correct, the stranger indirectly presents us with a model for recognition according to which Forms affect the soul when they are recognised without being changed thereby. This is a model which has a parallel to the doctrine of *aisthesis* presented by Socrates

⁸⁷ As Brown (1998), 196 observes, the first two ways of understanding the first alternative (both knowing and being known are only “affecting” or both are only “being affected”) are “non-starters”; the third alternative is theoretically possible, but apparently not discussed in what follows. If one believes that the outcome of the *gigantomachia* is that the Forms have been shown to be moving, this alternative might be attractive.

⁸⁸ Brown (1998), 198-200.

⁸⁹ Brown (1998), 197. A similar observation is made by Ross (1951), 110.

in the *Theaetetus*, according to which perception is the result of two powers meeting, creating the double offspring of a perception and a perceived “object”. The difference between this doctrine and what I take to be the stranger’s view of cognition, is that on the latter the Form, the “object” of cognition, is a power which is not moving or changing, and that the “double offspring” of the soul’s meeting with a Form is that the Form becomes known, whereas the soul becomes knowing or thoughtful.⁹⁰ This way of looking at the attainment of knowledge has, I believe, a clear Platonic ring to.

The second half of stranger’s refutation of the friends seems to go in the opposite direction, however, arguing that Forms, not souls, are what is changing or moving. The stranger here alters his manner of arguing, beginning with the rhetorical question: “What the Zeus! Shall we easily be persuaded that motion and life and soul and intelligence (*phronēsis*) are truly not present in that which perfectly is (*to pantelōs on*)?” (248e7-249a2) The notion of “perfect being” is reminiscent of the notion of *ē alēthinē ousia* from 246b8, i.e. the unchanging Forms of the friends.⁹¹ If it means the same, the point of the ensuing argument must be that the Forms are moving. The argument is as follows (249a4-b1): If perfect being has mind (*nous*), as Theaetetus accepts, it must be living, and, as such, it must have a soul. As it is ensouled it seems to follow that it is moving,⁹² and this vindicates the notion of motion against the friends understanding of true being. Indeed, the stranger claims, if motion is excluded from the things that are, “there never is mind to anything about anything.” (249b5-6)

This argument, however, seems strange, if not directly absurd to many scholars. If it is difficult to understand how Forms can be changed by our recognizing them, it seems even more difficult to understand how one can conceive of Forms as living, ensouled entities, unless one wants to follow a Neoplatonic line of interpretation. If one does so, however, the argument seems to lose its main function against the friends. If the problem the stranger wishes to point out is that their conception of being makes it impossible to explain the phenomenon of human cognition because they deny that Forms are powers (or have power), what is the point of arguing that the Forms themselves are living? First of all, this does not seem to be necessary in order to say that they are powers, nor does it seem to be sufficient to explain how we come to recognise them. Consequently, there do not seem to be very good reasons for why the friends should have to accept the stranger’s suggestion.

⁹⁰ Both De Rijk (1986), 62-63 and Brown (1998), 196 point to this parallel.

⁹¹ In the *Republic* 477a3 the Forms are referred to as *to pantelōs on*.

⁹² That soul is essentially movement is claimed by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (*Phdr.* 245c) and by the Athenian stranger in the *Laws* (892d ff.). It was implied in a slightly different manner when the stranger identified thinking as movement at 228c1-5.

Due to these problems, it has suggested that *to pantelōs on* means something different than the Forms posited by the friends, namely the totality of beings: If this is correct, all the stranger is arguing for is that soul must be included in the totality of the things that really are.⁹³ This view fits with the stranger's next claim, at 249b8-c1, that we need unchanging beings (Forms, presumably) in addition to motion if we are to explain the fact that mind (*nous*) exists. Here, he seems to state quite clearly that Forms are *not* moving. So, if one focuses on this, it would seem that the stranger is only arguing that soul, an essentially moving and changing being, is a real being. On this reading, this is the point he wishes to make when he, at 249c10-d5, claims that the philosopher must refuse to accept that everything (*to pan*) and that which is (*to on*) is either at rest, as the followers of Parmenides claim, or moving, as the followers of Heraclitus believe, but, as the child, must beg for both.

Although this line of reading has its attraction, I think it is somewhat strained, since the most natural reading of the expression *to pantelōs on* is as referring to Forms, which means that the stranger does seem to be arguing, in a highly rhetorical manner, to be sure, that the Forms are ensouled, living beings. Moreover, if one claims that the stranger cannot be arguing that Forms are living, since this would go against Plato's firmest convictions, one might retort that it seems just as problematic that he should be claiming that human souls are among the things that *really* are. If human souls are changeable and unstable, as seems to be a predominant view expressed by many characters in Plato's dialogues, it seems difficult to see how it could be a perfectly real being. Nor is it clear why the friends need to elevate soul to that position in order to explain cognition. We may further note that the stranger later on makes it clear that he regards the Forms as divine beings (cf. 254a10-b1), and, in his final attempt to define the sophist (cf. 265c1 ff), seems to indicate that he is of the same belief of the quasi-Pythagorean philosopher Timaeus, that the world is the result of divine creation.

So where does this leave us? Perhaps one way to look at the second half of the stranger's refutation is to see it as a rhetorical argument, meant to convince Theaetetus that the totality of beings is a divine *kosmos*. If one does so, one could argue that it is, together with the *Timaeus*, the closest Plato comes to arguing for Anaxagoras' notion that *nous* is the principle for everything and that which orders it into a *kosmos* (cf. *Phd.* 97). If such a notion could be incorporated into a Platonic ontology, it would probably be along the lines hinted at here by the stranger and spelled out as a *mythos* in the *Timaeus*.

⁹³ This is how Ross (1951), 107-110 understands the passage. Brown (1998), 203 reads it in the same manner.

How, then, are we to understand the conclusion drawn at 249c10 ff. that being is made up of what changes or moves as well as what is at rest? As I see it, it is more a conclusion that follows from the fact that the contestants in the *gigantomachia* identify being with either movement or rest, than a conclusion the stranger himself is steering towards. The conclusion is, I believe, a result of the Heraclitean and Parmenidean doctrines underlying the *gigantomachia*, where each side is supposed to be refuted by having to acknowledge the opposite of what it took for granted. What is, is not moving or resting, but is both moving and at rest. That this is not a view which the stranger finds acceptable becomes in what follows.

To sum up the long discussion of the present chapter: I think the advancement of the dynamis-proposal is what is of primary importance, both in the argument against the somatists and in the argument against the friends is. This proposal, rather than the notion that being is both moving and resting, is what becomes important in the remainder of the dialogue. And if the above interpretation of the first half of the stranger's refutation is correct, we may regard the stranger's criticism of the friends as an elaboration of what he said about soul, movement, excellences and knowledge in the 226-231 passage. The movement that is the soul's reasoning activity reaches true or real being when carried out successfully. This in turn results in a change in the soul, since real beings have the power to affect the soul that cognises it. If this is a reasonable suggestion, we can say that the view the stranger is advocating about knowledge and reality in the *Sophist* is by no means in conflict with what Socrates states in the *Phaedo* or in the central books of the *Republic*. Rather, it turns out to be is a fascinating confirmation and elaboration of these views.

Chapter four: the problem of being and the power of dialectic

The result of the investigation carried out in the *gigantomachia* is that being appears to be both moving and standing still. No sooner is this conclusion reached, however, than the stranger points out a new dilemma. If being is rightly described as both, it appears that they are now faced with the same problem as the pluralists (250a1-2). If both movement and rest *are*, it seems that rest, since it *is*, will be moving, since movement also *is*, and vice versa. As movement and rest are absolutely contrary to each other (250a8-9), this seems impossible. The dilemma is brought about in the same way as the previous dilemmas posed to the *physiologoi* and to Parmenides: rest and motion are taken to be determinations of being, since both are said to be. If the name 'rest' points out being, it seems that being is resting. Conversely, if movement is, and being is resting, movement must be resting. The stranger suggests (250b8-11), as a solution to this dilemma, that being must be a third thing, different from both rest and motion. Accordingly being is neither identical with rest, motion nor both of them taken together, but has its own specific nature (250c3-7) which embraces both motion and rest (250b9).

This foreshadows the stranger's positive doctrine of the combination or intertwining of Forms which follows in 254b8-259d8. As can be seen, the notion of difference is bound to come up for discussion in relation to the problem of being; if the paradox that movement is at rest is to be escaped, each of the names must be said to point out *different* natures. Since both rest and change *are*, and this, assuming that "to be" means to be *identical* with being, is what generates the paradox, the problem of identity is also latent in the discussion of how rest and motion relate to being.

Before the stranger turns to his positive investigation of being, however, he points out a final set of problems facing them, problems raised by people (the so-called late learners) who claim that we cannot possibly ascribe several names to one and the same thing. This problem in turn leads to a reflection on philosophical knowledge, i.e. dialectic, which will prove to be the key for attaining a new understanding of being.

§11. The new problem of being, the late learners and the mixing of beings (250c9-252e7)

If being is neither at rest nor moving, it seems to ordinary reasoning that being is impossible to grasp. For rest and motion seem to exhaust the realm of beings (*ta onta*); what is not at rest must be moving, what is not moving must be at rest (250c12-d2). So if we regard being as itself a being, it seems impossible that it is neither moving nor at rest; when the stranger asks

Theaetetus whether it is possible (*dynaton*), he claims that this is the most impossible of all (250d4).

The stranger is quite satisfied with Theaetetus' confusion. Now, he claims, it appears that being is as perplexing as non-being. And if being and non-being have shown themselves as equally problematic,⁹⁴ it may be hoped that, to the degree that one of them will come to light, equal light will be thrown on the other (250e5-251a1). He suggests that they should, even if they turn out to be unable to throw any light on either of these, push their account or speech (*logos*) "simultaneously through them both". This idea of pushing *logos* through being and non-being contains a double foreshadowing. The notion of *logos* which dominates the *Sophist* is speech, but *logos* also means, among other things, relation, or structure. And in the famous passage containing the stranger's teaching about the great kinds which we are about to turn to, it is precisely the notion of *logos* as a structure, existing between being and non-being, that comes to the fore.⁹⁵ Being and non-being will be clarified through an investigation, not of how they exclude each other as contraries, as in Parmenides' poem, but rather of how they stand in relation to each other. This new conception of being and non-being, on the other hand, will enable a new understanding of *logos* (speech) that will challenge the notion of *logos* which has dominated the discussion so far, namely that speaking is naming, a notion that is made into an explicit theme when the stranger turns to the discussion of the problem of the late learners.

The stranger turns his attention to the fact that we address (*prosagoreuein*) the same thing with many names; an example (*paradeigma*; 251a7) of this is that a man is said to have colours, shapes, a size, vices and virtues. Here we posit something as one being, but then address it as many by using several names about it (251b2-4). We should note that the stranger's example of a man being more than one "thing" is explicitly said to be an example. As we have seen, all the examples used in the outer part of the dialogue had the same relation to that which they were meant to illustrate: the angler, the household-servant and the painter or sculptor were all simpler examples meant to illustrate more complex matters. I suggest that this is also the case with the present example. The problem which has come to light in the discussion of being is not how a single being can be addressed with several names, but rather

⁹⁴ That they have "had an equal share in perplexity" (250e6-7) does not mean that it is the same perplexity that pertains to them, as is rightly pointed out by Moravcsik (1992), 178-79; the point is only "that with regard to neither notion have we arrived at... clarification".

⁹⁵ Cf. Gadamer (1990), 358.

how being itself can be given many names.⁹⁶ In particular, the one being of Parmenides was shown to point towards a plurality of “ontological notions” connected with being.

The late learners, however, deny that it is at all possible to say that what is one is many, regardless of whether the one is a single being or being itself. They stick to the claim that one cannot be many, wherefore they will only allow expressions such as “man is man” or “the good is good” (251b9-c2). Who the late learners are and exactly what they allow one to say is a matter of controversy;⁹⁷ I cannot go into a full discussion of this here. The most natural reading of the text is, I believe, that the late learners allow identity-statements, whereas they reject all other kinds of statements. This is commonly regarded as a rejection of a certain kind of predicate-expression, namely statements where we predicate something about a subject which is different from the subject.⁹⁸ According to many scholars, the stranger’s clarification of *logos*, prepared through his teaching about the great kinds and explicated at 259e4ff, is precisely a clarification of the predicative nature of statements,⁹⁹ wherefore it can be regarded as an answer to the late learners’ strange conception of *logos*. And, many scholars claim, this clarification is what is needed to solve the problem of false opinions encountered in the *Theaetetus*.

I agree that the stranger’s teaching about *logos* is directed against the late learners, and that it connects with the problems about false opinions encountered in the *Theaetetus*. However, as I shall argue below (chapter 6), to regard the stranger’s clarification of *logos* as centered on predication in general is not entirely unproblematic. Moreover, the notion of predication is in itself, as I think Cornford and De Rijk¹⁰⁰ are right in insisting, potentially misleading, since it easily imports an Aristotelian ontology into the stranger’s teaching. In keeping with the stranger’s determination of a *logos* at 262e ff. as a synthesis of a name and a verb, we can say that the late learners reject the synthetic structure of *logos*. They allow tautological expressions where one states the name of a thing about that thing, but nothing else.

But why will the late learners only allow one to use one name for each thing? One reason may be that they wish to avoid the confusion a skilled speaker (sophist or

⁹⁶ That the former problem is not a problem for Plato, since this is what the assumption of Forms is meant to explain (cf. *Prm.* 128e-130a and *Phlb* 14c-e), is pointed out by Cornford (1935), 253. Cf. also Szaif (1996), 416.

⁹⁷ See Cornford (1935), 254-257, Guthrie (1978), 214, 216-218, Rosen (1983), 229-244, De Rijk (1986), 114, 123-124, Moravcsik (1992), 205-7, Brown (2008), 442-44.

⁹⁸ Some commentators believe that the late learners denies all types of predicate expression, i.e. also identity statements.

⁹⁹ Cf. Frede (1992), 398.

¹⁰⁰ Cornford (1935), 256-7, De Rijk (1986), 72-6, 114.

philosopher?) will be able to bring about¹⁰¹ by trading on the fact that one being, since it can be regarded *as* a many (a man is also tall, good, etc.), may be treated as something which does not correspond to its real nature. A human may then be treated, not as a human, but as tall, whereby absurd consequences for what it means to be a human may be drawn. Or, more subtly and illuminating for the previous discussion of Parmenides, the one being, if it is also called a whole, may be treated as more than one, since a whole implies parts. Whether this problem is the motivation for the late learners' notion of *logos* or not, it is at least clear that they have a very restrictive view of *logos*. *Logos* is namegiving and namegiving is "atomistic". To each being corresponds one name, and one name only.

Surprisingly, this seems to connect their view of *logos* with the stranger's treatment of the earlier ontologists. As we have seen, his "strategy" against them consisted in taking each term used by them as referring to one being. In particular, the many signs of being expressed in Parmenides' poem were treated as so many names, pointing out so many beings or natures. But to say that each name necessarily points out one being looks like the converse of saying that there only belongs one name to each being. There is thus a certain irony in the stranger's expressed contempt for these youths and old people (*Sph.* 251c3-6) who stick to this simple conception of *logos*; his and Theaetetus' discussion of previous thinkers builds on a similar conception.¹⁰² Indeed, the trouble Theaetetus will have in following the stranger when he finally turns to the discussion of the true nature of *logos* (cf. 261e3. E7, 262a12) indicates that Theaetetus' understanding of *logos* is not much better than that of the late learners. The basic task set before the two interlocutors at the beginning of the dialogue was to move from a mere name to a *logos* about the sophist (cf. 218c); it seems as if the stranger here, in a similar manner, intends to move the discussion of being from a discussion of names of being to a discussion of the *logos* which reveals being.

In order to do so, the stranger connects the late learners' conception of *logos* with the problem which he and Theaetetus is facing about being, motion and rest. He now silently drops the example of the particular man who can be said to be many things, and begins to speak of the ability of Forms (*ideai, eidē*) or kinds (*genē*) to commune or mix with each other (cf. 253b9 ff.).¹⁰³ He asks specifically whether they must deny, with the late learners, that being (*ousia*) can be ascribed (*prosaptein*) to motion and rest (as a third, embracing them) and

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gadamer (1950), 22-24. See also *Phlb.* 14e ff.

¹⁰² Cf. Brown (2008), 443, n. 19 for a similar diagnosis.

¹⁰³ Although it has been a matter of controversy whether the "entities" (termed both *genē* and *eidē*) discussed in the section dealing with the great kinds (254c-259d) are Platonic Forms or not, I take for granted that they are Forms or at least not concepts.

indeed claim that, since everything is immiscible and unable (*adynaton*) of sharing in one another, we should talk of them in the same way (251d5-8). Alternatively, it could be that everything should be said to mix with everything. A final option is that some kinds are capable of mixing, others not (251d9-e1).

The first possibility is dismissed as impossible in the following way: If nothing has the power (*dynamis*) to have communion (*koinōnia*)¹⁰⁴ with anything, being cannot commune with rest or motion. This means that neither will be (252a2-3). In fact, if being cannot combine with anything else, all the previous ontologies will become meaningless. Then one cannot say that being is hot and cold, one, many or anything of the sort, since none of these determinations of being will *be*. Being will perhaps be, namely being, but the hot will not be hot, but rather nothing, since it has no share in being. Any attempt to determine what being is presupposes that some Forms commune with each other.

This argument only makes sense if we take being to mean something more than a concept or the function of a verb. The conception of being as power or ability, developed in the *gigantomachia*, here comes quite explicitly to the fore. Being is a Form which 1) has the power to commune with other beings and 2) is a power in the sense that it gives these beings being. To the modern reader of nominalist sympathies, this may perhaps sound strange, but it seems clear to me that this is what the stranger implies. To interpret this as mere metaphorical language is, I believe, to fail to interpret what the stranger's is claiming. On his view, being is clearly neither a concept nor a verb but a transcendent Form which has or is a power.

The stranger furthermore points out that the denial that anything combines with anything else has fatal consequence for the late learners (252c2-9): They are forced, in articulating their conception of *logos*, to contradict their own theory. For they use a number of “notions”, such as being, apart, in itself, etc. when claiming that each being is apart from every other, in itself. By claiming that each being can only be designated by one name, they contradict this very claim when making it. In much the same way that Socrates criticised the Heracliteans for disrupting their own *logos* (and any *logos*) through their teaching of the ever-changing being (cf. *Tht.* 182d ff), the stranger thus criticise the late learners for making *logos* impossible. Since the consequence of this is that the kinds must be able to mix, we can say that being, according to the stranger, is revealed, partly through a reflection on language. We may, somewhat anachronistically, call this a transcendental argument: Since we are able to

¹⁰⁴ The notion of *dynamis* is the same as the one the stranger advanced in the *gigantomachia*, whereas the notion of a *koinōnia* of Forms differs from the notion of the soul's communion with the Forms.

speak, a conception of being which makes speech impossible is wrong. This means that the stranger is not investigating language as an autonomous phenomenon; he is looking at how the structure or relation (*logos*) between Forms makes *logos*, understood as speech, possible, by reflecting on how we speak.

The second possibility, that all beings mix or intertwine, is easier to dismiss. If every Form is able to combine with every other, absurd consequences will follow; rest will commune with motion, i.e. rest will move, which is impossible (252d4-11). Consequently, some Forms must be able to combine while others are not.

§12. *Dialectic and sophistry*

If Forms differ like this, expertise is required to know which Forms combine and which do not. The stranger suggests that, since Forms can combine, they are like letters (*grammata*); and knowledge about these combinations, which is what he understands by dialectic, will be analogous with the art (*technē*) of spelling or of letters (252e9-253a12). He draws a second analogy by comparing dialectic with the art of music. It is worthwhile to reflect on these analogies, since the description he gives of this knowledge (*epistēmē*; 253b10), i.e. dialectic, is “one of the most puzzling passages to be found anywhere in Plato”.¹⁰⁵

The *technai* used to illustrate dialectic contain two different levels of knowledge. There is knowledge of the elements used in spelling and in composition, of letters and tones. A man skilled in writing will know the difference between vowels and consonants and also how the different vowels and consonants stand in relation to each other.¹⁰⁶ Likewise, a man skilled in music will know how the different tones stand in relation to each other, according to the scale. In addition to this knowledge, the accomplished grammarian and musician will have a knowledge of which elements can be combined with which in order to make a harmonious tune or a correctly spelled word. The *technitēs* will know both how to differentiate the elements and how to connect them with each other.

In the case of letters, a further point is relevant for understanding what the stranger says about dialectic.¹⁰⁷ The vowels do not only differ from the consonants in that they are voiced, they also differ by the fact that they “pass through” the consonants “as a sort of bond” (*desmos*; 253a5) which makes the combinations of consonants possible. The dialectician will investigate whether there are some similar kinds (*genē*) which, “present throughout, hold the

¹⁰⁵ Dorter (1994), 152.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. the discussion above in part I, §21 of *Tht.*, cf. also *Phlb.* 18b-d.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Gómez-Lobo (1977), 37.

other kinds together, so that they are able to intermix, and again where there are divisions, are causes (*aitia*) of division through the wholes ” (253c1-3). In other words, he will know how to distinguish between “vowel” and “consonant” Form. To know this and to have the ability to divide according to kinds (*genē*) and not to confuse one Form (*eidōs*)¹⁰⁸ with another is characteristic of the knowledge of the dialectician (253c7-d3).

After these preliminary reflections, let us turn to the much-debated description of the dialectician’s ability to divide according to Forms. The passage (253d5-e1) reads as follows: “whoever is able to do this perceives adequately 1) one look (*idea*) stretched in every way through many, though each one is situated apart, and 2) many (looks) other than one another comprehended on the outside by one (look); and 3) one (look), in turn, bound together into one through many wholes, and 4) many (looks) set apart and distinct in every way”.

In assigning numbers to this passage, I have followed J. Stenzel’s influential interpretation from his *Studien zur Entwicklung der Platonsichen Dialektik*. Since Stenzel’s interpretation underlies Cornford’s reading of the passage,¹⁰⁹ and since this latter has become the “prevalent interpretation” in subsequent scholarship,¹¹⁰ it is worth taking a closer look at Stenzel’s understanding of the passage. In short, Stenzel believes that the passage should be understood in the following way (cf. pp. 62-71):¹¹¹ the four steps describe a double procedure, the first contained in steps 1 and 2, the second in steps 3 and 4. Further, step 1 and 3 are preconditions (*Vorbedingung*) for the result achieved in 2 and 4. 1 and 2 describe the activity of seeing a manifold, divided through the Form difference (step 1), and subsuming them under a higher concept (step 2), whereas 3 and 4 describe the reverse activity, *diairesis*, where many wholes, the concepts or ideas under which the manifold is subsumed, are divided according to kinds (step 3) until one reaches a final Form, set entirely apart from every other (step 4), i.e. what Stenzel calls the *atomon eidōs* (p. 57). So Stenzel believes that the passage describes the process of making concept-divisions (*Begriffseinteilung*).

This interpretation should be understood against the background of Stenzel’s overall interpretation of the *Sophist*. He believes that the main purpose of the dialogue is to reach a new conception of definitions, of *logos ousias* (p. 47), a problem he claims the *Theaetetus* ends with, since it does not manage to discover the nature of knowledge. This interpretation rests on Stenzel’s development thesis discussed above (see part II, §9), according to which a

¹⁰⁸ Form (*eidōs*) and kind (*genos*) are here used synonymously, cf. also 253d1-3.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Cornford (1935) 263-267.

¹¹⁰ Dorter (1994), 153.

¹¹¹ I leave the page references to Stenzel (1931) in the running text rather than in the notes.

radical change in Plato's outlook takes place in his allegedly later dialogues. Whereas his earlier focus was on ethical problems, which culminated in the teaching about the Form of the Good in the *Republic*, he now attempts to gain a more "encompassing understanding of reality" as his interest turns toward the fields of theoretical and natural philosophy (p.1); the objects he is investigating in turn force him to change both his method and his conception of the Forms. Forms become more like concepts (Begriffe) than metaphysical entities, and the new method by which such concepts are to be defined is division according to *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica* (p. 44). This is a "free logic", disconnected from the notion of the good and the useful (pp. 38-39). Stenzel even goes so far as to claim that a Form is now a "subject" (Substrat) or "the constancy of species" (Konstanz der Arten) found in "the realm of classes of natural science (naturwissenschaftlichen Klassenreich)" (p.1). Plato's new interest is to define the particular concrete being (das einzelne Wirkliche) in a scientific manner (p. 2), and it is the procedure for doing so that the passage under discussion is meant to spell out. More precisely, Stenzel takes it that the question raised at the beginning of the dialogue is whether sophist, philosopher and statesman are one, two or three concepts (Begriffe, p. 45), and that the method of division is introduced to settle this question.

In defence of Stenzel it can be said that Socrates initially asked whether sophist, philosopher and statesman are one, two or three *genē* (217a7-9),¹¹² and the opening scene of the dialogue more than suggested that the three are often confused and that they stand in a highly complex relation to each other. When the stranger now claims that the dialectician, by his knowledge, will be able to divide according to kinds (*genē*) and not to confuse one Form (*eidos*) with another (253c7-d3), this could be taken as evidence for Stenzel's interpretation: To differentiate the sophist from the philosopher, the dialectician will give a definition of the former which pinpoints what this Form is, in contradistinction to Forms it resembles, for instance the philosopher. No doubt, there is some truth in this.

Nevertheless, as I have argued above, I doubt that Plato can have regarded the sophist, or sophistry, as a Form in any substantial way.¹¹³ The sophist's "knowledge" is not a subspecies of knowledge, to be defined as a natural kind;¹¹⁴ sophistry is revealed in the course

¹¹² Stenzel's interpretation thus has the merit of clearly connecting the present passage with the outer part of the dialogue, which cannot be said about all interpretations of it.

¹¹³ The claim that the sophist is a natural kind reveals, I believe, the hidden agenda behind Stenzel's development thesis, namely the Neokantian project of reconciling Plato with a modern conception of science which has as its main focus Particular beings, rather than Universals. Cf. Gadamer's (1990), 343-344.

¹¹⁴ As pointed out in n. 17 in part II *eidos* by no means always refers to Platonic Forms, but often simply means 'a type' or 'a look or feature'; likewise *genos* may be used in the nontechnical sense of 'a kind of being', 'a type of people' (i.e. a tribe).

of the discussion as no real knowledge at all, but as an imitation of wisdom. Nor is the sophist, I believe, a subspecies of human being, but rather a “direction” of soul or way of life; souls are, for the stranger as for Socrates, moving beings, differing through their ways of movement or, less metaphorically, their character and knowledge and such differences are not differences between Platonic Forms or natural kinds. This at least is how I understand his claim that discursive reason is movement, directed at a goal it sets for itself, but which it often misses. If this is sound, most of the rationale for Stenzel’s claim that Plato introduces “new Forms” and a “new dialectical method” disappears. Additionally, it is simply not the case that the stranger’s attitude is that of a disinterested scientist who disregards normative matters,¹¹⁵ nor that he has one method, division, which he uses throughout the dialogue.

A further problem with Stenzel’s interpretation is that it fails to connect the passage on dialectic with its immediate surroundings, as has been pointed out by A. Gomez-Lobo.¹¹⁶ Given that the problem of how being, motion and rest relate to each other is what initiated the discussion of the late learners, and that this discussion is the background against which the stranger introduced the science of dialectic, it is more reasonable to suggest that the Forms treated by this kind of knowledge are ontological Forms such as rest, movement, being, and non-being, rather than different types of souls such as sophist, philosopher, and statesman. This reading is supported by the fact that it is the question how these ontological Forms differ from each other and connect that is treated in the next section of the dialogue.

This does not rule out, however, that the dialectical investigation of these Forms has a fundamental impact on the question how one should distinguish philosopher from sophist. Thus, in a sense Stenzel is right in claiming that the description of dialectical knowledge is meant to bring to mind to the reader the basic difficulty of determining what a sophist, a statesman, and a philosopher are. This can also be seen from the fact that the stranger, before he turns his attention to how being, rest, and motion relate to each other, briefly indicates how sophist and philosopher differ from each other. The way in which he does this, however, in my view speaks clearly against Stenzel’s development thesis.

At 253e7-254b1, the stranger states that the philosopher, just like the sophist, is “difficult to see vividly”, preoccupied as he is with investigating how Forms relate to each other. But he is difficult to discern in a different (*heteron*) way than the sophist. Whereas the sophist is “a fugitive into the darkling of ‘that which is not’, to which he attaches (*prosaptein*)

¹¹⁵ Cf. also Friedländer (III), 472, note 13.

¹¹⁶ Gómez-Lobo (1977), 33 ff.

himself by a knack (*tribē*), a region difficult to understand, the philosopher, who through reasoning (*logismos*) is attached to (*proskeisthai*) the Form or look (*idea*) of that which is eternal, is difficult to discern because “the eyes of the soul of the many are incapable of keeping up a steady gaze on the divine”.

Cornford is surely right in remarking that this passage is reminiscent of the cave-allegory found in the *Republic*.¹¹⁷ In fact, the claim that the philosopher devotes himself to that which is eternal and divine (*theion*) through reasoning is reminiscent of the *Pheado* (79d ff.) and the *Timaeus* (27d ff.) as well, and the passage is, I believe, quite strong evidence for the view that Plato did not change his notion of Forms from ethical, normative paradigms to a conception of them as mere concepts, as e.g. Stenzel and Ackrill claim. Concepts are hardly divine.¹¹⁸ It is also worth noting is the fact that the stranger restates the conclusion reached at 233c, that the sophist does not have expertise, and now formulates this in a traditional Socratic manner by claiming that the sophist only has a knack (*tribē*) for what he is doing.

But what about the difference in the difficulty of discerning sophist and philosopher? The passage seems to indicate that the two devote themselves to completely different things, namely being and non-being. How does this fit with Socrates' initial suggestion that the philosopher is often confused with the sophist? An answer to this question cannot be given until we reach the stranger's final attempt to define the sophist. We may suspect, however, both in light of the previous definitions of the sophist which all showed a likeness to the philosopher, and in light of the claim that being and non-being will come to light simultaneously if the interlocutors try to push their account through both at once, that the difference the stranger is pointing to is a difference to be found within a likeness.

¹¹⁷ Cornford (1935), 263. In fact, one is reminded of more than that, since the metaphor of the turning of the eye brings to mind the metaphor of the turning of the soul, which is how philosophical education in general is described in the *Republic*, R. 521c.

¹¹⁸ Cf. (1978), 159-160, who nevertheless believes that this nothing more than something Plato “remember”, but that this “exalted status” find “no place in the logical problems of the Sophist.”

Chapter five: The dialectic of the great kinds and the clarification of non-being

As the analogy between dialectic and grammar would lead us to expect, dialectic contains two levels of knowledge; knowledge of which “elements” or Forms there are, and knowledge of how they connect. The difference between them is highlighted by the stranger at 254c4-6, where he states that two tasks are now set before them. First they have to look into “what sort they are, each of them, next how they are in terms of their capacity of sharing in one another.”¹¹⁹ This is not to be done in relation to all Forms, but only a number of very great ones (254c2-4).¹²⁰ The explicit purpose is to get hold of being and non-being as clearly as possible, in order to show that non-being really or in its being (*ontōs*) is (*estin*) non-being (254c6-d2), without contradiction, the task that was set before the interlocutors at 241d6-7.

§13. *Ontological letters* (254d4-255e7)

The dialectical investigation into Forms starts with the three Forms discussed in the aftermath of the *gigantomachia*, rest, motion and being. As we have seen, motion and rest are absolutely contrary to each other (cf. 250a8-10) and cannot connect, whereas being connects with both, as a third nature, embracing them (250b8-11). To put this in analogy with letters, we may regard being as a Form like a vowel, and motion and rest as Forms like consonants.¹²¹

Since these Forms are three, each must be *the same* as itself and *different* from the other two (254d14-15). Otherwise one of them could be reduced to either of the other. Thus “the same” and “the other”, identity and difference, come up for discussion. What are identity and difference? Are they also separate Forms, or can they somehow be reduced to one of the other three (254e2-255a2)? The stranger undertakes to demonstrate that they cannot, first by establishing that identity and difference cannot be reduced to rest or motion (255a4-b7), and then, more importantly, by showing that they cannot be reduced to being either (255b8-e1).

If identity and difference, which characterise both rest and motion, could be reduced to either of these, motion and rest would become the opposite of themselves (255a10-b1). For rest and motion participate in (*metechein*; 255b3) both, wherefore they would participate in their opposites if identity or difference could be reduced to either of them.

¹¹⁹ The amount of literature dealing with this notoriously difficult part of the *Sophist* is vast and the discussions of how the different sections of the argumentation work are intense. In what follows, I limit myself to focus on what is relevant for my perspective on the dialogue, ignoring a lot of the more technical aspects of the discussion of the stranger’s doctrine of being and non-being.

¹²⁰ I follow Cornford (1935), 273-274, n. 2 in seeing *megistē* as referring, not to *the* but only to *some* very great ones.

¹²¹ Cf. Gómez-Lobo (1977), 36 ff.

The demonstration that *the other* and *the same* cannot be reduced to being is more complicated to follow. This reflects, I believe, that a more complicated relation exists between being, the same, and the other than between rest and motion, on the one hand, and the same and the other, on the other hand. As we shall see, being, the same, and the other are all Forms which are like vowels, or what we may call “universal” Forms.¹²²

The stranger begins by looking at *the same* in relation to being. If the names “being” and “the same” do not point out (*sēmainein*) something different, then, when we address both motion and rest as *being*, we shall address both as the *same*, which is impossible (255b11-c2). The same cannot be reduced to being, but must be different, the stranger concludes.

This inference, that if being and the same means the same, then, when we address rest and motion as being, we will in fact be addressing them as the same, may seem problematic. For to say that “rest and motion (are) the same” is, as K. Dorter points out, ambiguous since it may “mean ‘... the same as themselves’ ... in which case there is no paradox. Or it may mean (as the stranger takes it to mean) ‘... the same as each other.’”¹²³ But in taking the sentence in this latter meaning, the stranger’s inference might seem fallacious. When we say that both rest and motion are, we use being existentially, not attributively, in the copulative sense.¹²⁴ Shouldn’t the sentence “rest and motion (are) the same” be taken in the same sense, i.e. shouldn’t “the same” be understood in an absolute sense, meaning self-identity (cf. 254d15)? If so, we would not imply that motion and rest are the same as the other when we say that both are the same.

Whether Plato saw this as a problem or not is of course difficult to say. Dorter thinks that Theaetetus’ somewhat hesitant reply at 255c5, that it is nearly (*schedon*) impossible that being and identity could be one, rather than two, suggests that Plato was aware that the inference wasn’t really valid. The point could then be that Plato, through the stranger’s inference, wishes to point out that we need to clarify in greater detail what we mean when we say that something is the same. This is not implausible, since the stranger seems to indicate, at 256b1-2, that to be a being means, among other things, to be self-identical. However this may be, at present the stranger takes it for granted that it has been demonstrated that being and the same are two Forms, not one.

¹²² By this I mean universally participated. All Forms are, of course, Universals.

¹²³ Dorter (1994), 156

¹²⁴ Dorter (1994) *Ibid.* That Plato uses “being” existentially is denied by Frede (1967) and Owen (1999). See Brown (1999) for criticism.

That *the other* cannot be reduced to being is established in the following way. Suppose, hypothetically, that being and the other are two names (*onoma*) for one kind (*genos*; 255c9-11). But this is impossible for the following reason: Of the things that are (*ta onta*), some are said themselves by themselves (*auta kath' hauta legesthai*), whereas others are always said in relation to something else (*pros alla*; 255c14-15). What is meant by this distinction is not spelled out in detail, but the point seems to be as follows.¹²⁵ If we reflect on how we speak about beings, we see that “being” is the name used to point out a specific kind (*genos*), i.e. the things that are, and these come in two forms (cf. 255d4). To illustrate the point: man and knowledge are both beings, but “man” can be said itself by itself, it is not a relational term. Knowledge, on the other hand, is relational, it is said in relation to something else, since knowledge is always knowledge of something.¹²⁶ Now, in contradistinction to “being”, “the other” is always said in relation to another, just like knowledge, and this would be violated if “the other” referred to the same kind as “being” does. Then, hypothetically, some other¹²⁷ could be said itself, by itself, and not in relation to something else. Thus, what the stranger wishes to say, I take it, is that “the other” is a relational Form, so that what is characterised as other is always the other in relation to something else which is not the case for “being”. Therefore being and the other are different.

Whatever we may think of these arguments, the stranger assumes that he has established that motion, rest, being, the same, and the other are five Forms; we may regard this as an illustration of the dialectician’s ability to “divide according to genera and not to believe either the same to be another Form or if it is another [to believe it is] the same (253d1-2).” The stranger proceeds to make a further remark about the Form of the other: since each of the other Forms is different from all the others, the other is, like being, an all-encompassing Form (like a vowel) which passes through all the others. This Form makes them different from other Forms due to (*dia*) their participation in it; for it is not due to their own nature

¹²⁵ As mentioned above (cf. this part, cha. 1) M. Frede bases his interpretation of the *Sophist* (later followed by G. E. L. Owen) on this passage (cf. Frede (1967), 29-32, (1992), 400-01), claiming that Plato here distinguishes between two uses of “being”, meant to capture the difference between self-predicative sentences made about Forms and normal predicative sentences, the former being a case of a being which is always said in relation to itself, the latter of a being which is said in relation to something else. That both expressions are meant to illustrate kinds of predication is the assumption which leads Frede to deny that any existential use of “is” is at play in the *Sophist*. I do not find this reading plausible, but cannot go into a full discussion of it here. For criticism, see Brown (1999) and Fronterotta (2010).

¹²⁶ Cf. Cornford (1935), 282-284. It must be kept in mind that the stranger himself does not illustrate what he means by any examples.

¹²⁷ Heidegger (1992), 543 complains that the stranger (or Plato) at this point doesn’t make a clear distinction between the beings that can be said to be different from others and difference as such. Cf. also Cornford (1935), 292, Frede (1967), 12 ff., and Szaif (1996), 425 ff.

(*fysis*; 255e3-6) that they differ from the other Forms. The stranger thus clearly suggests that otherness is a Form *responsible* for the other Forms being different. This is what comes to be of prime importance when the stranger turns to the second task set before them, namely to see how the different Forms connect and, in particular, “whether there are some that hold [the Forms] together ... [and] others [that] are causes of the divisions” (253c1-2).

§14. *The combination of the Forms (255e8-257a12)*

The stranger undertakes to investigate in which way the Forms are able (*dynasthai*) to share in the others and in which way they are not (cf. 253e1-2) by focusing on one of the “consonant” or non-universal Forms, motion. His interest, however, is not in motion (nor in rest), but in the same, being and, in particular, the other.

The stranger’s treatment of how motion relates to the other Forms is in principle simple – he looks at how it connects with each of them in turn – but there are some complications that should be commented on. The relation of motion to the other Forms can be depicted in the following way:¹²⁸

- 1) a: Motion is different from rest, they are not identical, but
b: Motion is, since it participates in being (255e11-256a2)
- 2) a: Motion is different from the same, they are not identical, but
b: Motion is (also) the same, since it participates in the same (256a3-c3)
- 3) a: Motion is different from the other, they are not identical, but
b: Motion is (also) the other, since it participates in the other (256c4-9)
- 4) a: Motion is different from being, they are not identical, but
b: Motion is (also) being, since it participates in being (256c10-d9)

As can be seen, there is an anomaly in this table. As regards 2, 3, and 4, motion is said both to be other and not to be other than, or to differ from while participating in, the Form under consideration. But this is not the case with rest; at 256a1 motion is not said to participate in rest, but in being. Moreover, this is awkwardly repeated at 256d9. This has led R. Rehn and others to suggest that the meaning of step 1 (255e11-256a2) must be, not that motion is different from rest but at the same time *is*, but rather that it is different from rest but, in so far as it *is*, also is at rest.¹²⁹ If this is so, the conclusion is that, viewed dialectically, motion does participate in rest, contrary to the dictates of ordinary reason. This reading would

¹²⁸ I here reproduce R. Rehn’s table (Rehn (1982), 126), slightly modified for reasons that will become clear below.

¹²⁹ Rehn (1982), 127-28.

also make the four steps symmetrical. Rehn believes that this suggestion is supported by the fact that, at 256b6-8, the stranger says that “were motion itself to partake in rest at some point, it would not be at all strange to address it as stationary”.

However, this sentence is stated as a counterfactual:¹³⁰ *if* motion should partake (*ei metelambanen*) in rest, in the same manner that it partakes in the same, it would be resting. And this, we know, is impossible (cf. 250a8-9, 254d7-8). The picture we get from the above table is therefore not, as Rehn claims, that all the five great kinds are able to participate in each other, but rather that motion and rest are Forms that are like consonants which cannot connect, whereas being, the same and the other are universal, or vowel Forms, which every Form participates in. The reason why rest and motion are discussed is not, I believe, that they themselves are universal Forms, but primarily because they played such a prominent part in the *gigantomachia*, as candidates for what being is. They are the Heraclitean and the Parmenidean candidates for an answer to the question: what is being?

If this is correct, a suggestion may be made as to why it is mentioned twice that motion participates in being. In the first instance, the point could be to reaffirm that, although motion isn't resting, it still *is*, contrary to what the friends of Forms claimed. On this reading, the stranger is indicating that rest is not a “predicate” adequate for describing being, as the friends thought. So 1b is, so to say, pointing backwards, to the previous discussion of being. The point of mentioning a second time that motion *is*, this time in connection with the claim that it is also different from being, could then be to introduce the new conception of being and non-being which the stranger is aiming at establishing in what follows.

This leads us to another point that needs mention. When the stranger has stated, at step 2, that motion is both different from the same and the same, he spells out in greater detail (cf. 256a10-b4) what he means by this. When they claimed (at 256a3-8) that motion is different from the same but at the same time that it was the same, they did not speak “in a similar manner”. For when they said it was the same, it was due (*dia*) to participation (*methexis*) in the same in relation to itself (*pros heautēn*), whereas when they said it was not the same, this was due (*dia*) to its sharing (*koinōnia*) in the different. This double sharing, in the Form of the same and in the Form of the different, is what explains how motion can be both the same and not the same, without this being a contradiction.

¹³⁰ This is emphasised by Gómes-Lobo (1977), cf. also Brown (2008), 448.

Many modern commentators, following an influential article by J. L. Ackrill,¹³¹ believe that Plato is here trying to solve the problem posed by the late learners and that he does so by unraveling an ambiguity which enables him to distinguish “predications from statements of identity” which “is just what is needed to defuse the late learners’ difficulty of 251a-c”.¹³² There is controversy as to which ambiguity it is that he unravels. Scholars who follow the tradition of G. Frege (e.g. J. L. Ackrill and G. Vlastos) hold that what is needed to solve this problem is a distinction between different meanings of the verb “to be” (*einai*), namely the “is” of identity and the “is” of predication, and that it is this distinction the stranger draws here. M. Frede, on the other hand, doubts that it is the modern distinction between predication and identity that is drawn here and instead suggests that what Plato is distinguishing is different uses of the verb to be. L. Brown, finally, has attacked the notion that Plato is interested in analysing the verb “to be” at all and gives different suggestions as to where the ambiguity may be found.¹³³

I do not wish to enter that debate here. As I see it, the stranger’s main interest lies in investigating how ontological notions relate to each other, which is also what we would expect from the discussion of how Parmenides’ one being relates to wholeness and unity. I do not think that the stranger’s real interest is in analyzing the fact that we can *say* that motion both is and is not the same. It may be that he *also* wishes to unravel this apparent ambiguity, but I believe that his main interest in looking at these two different expressions is to point out that there are two Forms, the same and the different, that, according to him, work like causal powers (we should note the use of *dia*). These Forms explain this phenomenon of apparent ambiguity. The linguistic phenomenon highlighted at 2a+b is thus meant to illustrate a structure (X differs from..., but X also participates in ...) that will be used at 4a+b to explain how motion can be said both to be and not to be.¹³⁴ I believe it is this phenomenon (which is not linguistic), that motion both is and is not, that is the stranger’s main interest. For this line of reasoning will lead the stranger to a new conception of non-being, which in turn will allow him to develop a “structural” ontology to compete with Parmenides’ monistic ontology, behind which the sophist hides.

Let us see how the stranger applies the result from steps 1, 2, and 3 to the question of how motion relates to being. As was already clear from the previous investigation, motion *is*

¹³¹ Ackrill (1955).

¹³² Brown (1999), 471. Cf. also Brown (2008), 440-449.

¹³³ Brown (2008), 445.

¹³⁴ Cf. Brown (2008), 445.

(it is embraced by being, cf. 250b8-9). It was also clear that it cannot be the same as being, since it would then follow that rest, which is, would participate in motion. At 256c10-d9 this is spelled out as follows: Just as motion is other than rest, the same, and the different, it is other (*heteron*) than being, wherefore it truly is not being (*ontōs ouk on esti*). At the same time, however, it is, since it shares (*metechein*) in being.

We might think that the fact that motion is identical with itself, and that it is not identical with the Form of being, is all we need to explain that it is other than being. But the stranger thinks otherwise.¹³⁵ At 256d12-e2 we learn that the difference from being, which characterises all the kinds (*panta ta genē*)¹³⁶ except being, results from the nature (*physis*) of the different. This is what makes (*poiein*) motion, as well as all other Forms, different from being. Again, we see the *dynamis*-proposal quite clearly at play. The nature of the other is a Form possessing the power to make all Forms other than being different from being, just as being itself is a Form which gives the other Forms being.

At 256e5 the stranger further infers that as regards each Form, there are many things it is, but an unlimited amount of things it is not. This might possibly mean that a Form, as a Form, participate in a number of other Forms (for instance sameness, otherness, being), whereas there are countless Forms it does not, or even cannot, participate in (motion excludes rest, cold excludes warmth).¹³⁷ Even being itself is other, namely other than all the Forms that are different from being, so that being to that extent can be said not to be, namely as not these Forms (257a1-6).

§15. Contrariety and otherness (257b1-259d8)

This result of the stranger's twofold dialectical investigation is now utilized to overcome Parmenides' prohibition of claiming that that which is not, is. This is done by examining the notion of non-being, understood as "not being ..." or negation, in greater detail, an issue that is introduced at 257b1 as something that needs further discussion. The point of the examination is to gain further clarity about the Form of otherness. This leads to one of the most difficult passages in the dialogue; I shall limit myself to sketching what I see as the stranger's main point against Parmenides.

¹³⁵ I here draw on an as yet unpublished paper by D. O'Brien, presented in Prague in November 2009 (entitled "The Stranger's farewell"), as I also do in the next paragraph.

¹³⁶ The stranger presumably means all Forms, not just the ones under consideration in the present context.

¹³⁷ How this is to be understood is again a matter of great controversy, cf. Szaif (1995), 431-33, Brown (2008), 455. I readily admit that my own suggestion is nothing more than that, a suggestion.

The stranger begins, at 257b3-4, by suggesting that when we say “*mē on*” we are not saying anything contrary (*enantion*) to being, but only something other (*heteron*) than, or different from, it. This picks up the difficulty encountered at 236 ff., namely that a contrary to being is, as Parmenides rightly claimed, unspeakable, unknowable etc. Otherness, we gather, is the key to gaining a different understanding of non-being from that of Parmenides, a notion of non-being as standing in a different relation to being than mere opposition. The stranger now goes on to illustrate what he means (257b6-c3) by a number of examples: The expression “not big” (*mē mega*), for instance, does not reveal (*dēloun*) the small any more than the equal, he claims, and in general, a negation (*apophasis*) does not reveal (*mēnyein*) something contrary to what is negated, but only something different from it.

We should note that this, of course, does not preclude that what is revealed through such a negation *may* be contrary to what is negated, as small is in fact contrary to big. Negation only implies otherness, but what is other *may* be contrary. Contrariety, it seems, is a specific form, a sub-genus, of otherness, or, if one prefers, otherness is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for something being contrary to something else.¹³⁸ For whereas something that is other than something else may still participate in that something, in the way that motion participates in being while still being other than, or not identical with, being, what is contrary is not only not identical with, but also cannot participate in that which it is contrary to. Contrary Forms, such as motion and rest, cannot participate in each other. This difference between what is contrary and what is just other will soon become important.

To clarify further what is to be understood by otherness, the stranger draws the following comparison (257c7-d2): just like knowledge (*epistēmē*), the other has been chopped up into parts. Knowledge is in itself one, but it is differentiated into many arts (*technai*) and types of knowledge (*epistēmai*) due to the different beings it deals with, and the other, the stranger suggests, is divided in the same manner. But whereas a part of knowledge depends directly on the beings it is about, a part of otherness depends on the beings that are other than, or different from, the beings negated in a negation (cf. 258a7-9). This is what the stranger will use to vindicate his notion of non-being, since non-being, as we shall see, is not the contrary of being but simply all the beings that are other than being, which, I take it, is the sum of all the parts of otherness.

On the way to this conclusion, (257d7-258a5) the stranger gives three examples of what he means by saying that the nature of the other has parts. The examples are the not

¹³⁸ For discussion of this, cf. Brown (2008), 456-457.

beautiful, the not big and the not just, all said to be parts of the other. The not beautiful, e.g., is said to be anything that is different from the nature (*physis*) of the beautiful (257d11-13). This appears to be a great many things. First of all, it seems to include each and every Form different from the beautiful. Additionally, it seems to include all the particular beings, both those that are beautiful (since they, as particular beings, are different from the nature of beauty),¹³⁹ and those that are not beautiful but in fact ugly. The part of otherness that is “the not beautiful” seems to include what is different from, but participates in beauty, as well as what is different from, and does not participate in, beauty.¹⁴⁰

The expression or negation “non-being”, where the name (or rather being, *pragma*, cf. 257c2) negated is not the big, the beautiful or any particular Form or being, but being in itself, is, the stranger now suggests, just as the expression “not beautiful”, not a sign of something contrary to being, but just something different from being. Moreover, since everything that is, whatever it is, is because it participates in being, the part of otherness that is opposed to being *cannot* be contrary to being, for nothing, *absolute nothing*, is what is contrary to being. And *that* is no part of anything but just – nothing - Parmenides’ contrary to being, that which is not to be spoken or thought of.

The stranger thus concludes that a specific part of otherness, which is the negation, not of any specific being, but of being itself, the part that is non-being (258b7-8), is, in its opposition to the nature (*physis*) of being, “no less a being than ‘that which is in itself’ (*auto to on*)” (258a11-b2), although, as the other of being, it is *that which is not*. It is a Form to be counted among the things that are (258c2-3), so that the stranger can claim that the interlocutors have found a Form which happens to be of that which *is not* (258e1-3). They have not only “disobeyed Parmenides” (258c7-8) in investigating non-being, nor just pointed out that the things that are not, somehow are, but have declared that there is a Form of non-being which is (258d5-7). Contrary to the non-being Parmenides talks about, however, which is a contrary of being, the Form of otherness which they have found is not contrary to, but only different from, being. It is a Form of non-being which *is*, due to its participation in being.

¹³⁹ Cf. Frede (1992), 407.

¹⁴⁰ If so, what does it mean to say that this is a part of otherness? At 257e2-4, the stranger claims that the not beautiful has turned up as “one genus (*genos*) of the things that are”. This seems to imply that he regards the parts of otherness as themselves being Forms. Cf. Szaif (1996), 438-445, In particular, the passage 258c1-2 looks like support for the view that the stranger posits negative Forms. But it may seem difficult to accept that such a part could correspond to a Form. Cornford (1935), 293 rightly points out that the stranger denies, in the *Statesman* (262b ff.), that negative expressions such as non-Greek correspond to Forms.

I will not here try to deal with the many complicated questions this explanation raises. No doubt, many things remain obscure. But what is clear from the text, I think (at least if we refrain from translating the stranger's language into something else, where participation or intermixing is reinterpreted so as to mean "predicated of" and Forms are reduced to concepts), is that the stranger regards being and non-being as Forms or powers that, like vowels, extend through everything that is (cf. 259a4-6). Everything that is, is due to participation in being, also the Form of non-being. On the other hand, whatever is, which is not being itself, is different from being due to otherness. In fact, everything that is, is *not* many other things due to its participation in otherness in relation to all the things that it is not. Taken in its entirety, the dialectical examination extending from 254c4 to 259e7 thus demonstrates, I believe, at least two things.

Against the late learners, it is shown that the Forms are able to blend or mix, some only with some, others with all. This means that, contrary to what the late learners claim, there is no reason why we should not say that one thing is another. On the other hand, since some Forms are able to mix, whereas others are not, it is no good to say that everything mixes. This is why we need dialectic, in order to be able to see which Forms connect and which do not, or as the stranger puts it, a bit more cryptically, "to be able to follow the things that are said both whenever someone says it to be the same while it is other in a sense, and whenever someone says it to be other while it is the same" (259c8-d1). This is what he has done in relation to the great kinds or Forms discussed in the present passage. If one is allowed to draw a parallel to the *Theaetetus*, we may note that this ability was also employed there, in order to decide whether perception, true opinion, or finally, true opinion plus an account, were the same as knowledge or rather different. And, we may suppose, the same ability is at play when the interlocutors are attempting to decide whether the sophist is different from, or identical with, the philosopher.

Against Parmenides it has been shown that being and non-being stand together in a relation that is not one of contrariety. The Form of being gives everything else its being, whereas the Form of the other, or so the stranger seems to suggest, makes them distinct, differentiates them from everything else. This conclusion is spelled out in greater detail at 259a5-b4. Both being and otherness are universal forms that pass through everything else, even each other. It is because otherness, also the part of it which is opposed to being, partakes in being, that non-being is. On the other hand, being also participates in non-being or otherness in relation to all the kinds or Forms that it is not, "and, in being other than all of

them, is not each of them or all the rest together (*sympanta*) but only itself". Being is not one massive whole, as it were, but something beyond the manifold Forms, which themselves do not reduce to being (259b1-4): The things that are (*ta onta*), or the whole (*to pan*), cannot be reduced to one, eternal being, as Parmenides claims.

As I see it, this is only the first half of the refutation of Parmenides. The dilemma about being and wholeness, spelled out at 244e3-245d10, here comes to its end, since being is now interpreted as something different from the whole, something which gives it being, but is not itself the whole. The other dilemma posed to Parmenides, however, about the one and being, spelled out at 244b9-e2, which as I see it is a problem about how *logos* (or names) and being relate to each other (see §6 above), has still not found its solution. This question brings us back to the question how sophist and philosopher relate to, and differ from, each other.

Chapter 6: Nonbeing in thought and speech

The Parmenidean conception of being and non-being has been relaxed by what may perhaps be called a relational notion of being and non-being. This opens the way for a final confrontation with the sophist and his denial that there can be false speech and false opinion.

At 260a ff. the stranger returns to the discussion of falsehood and deceit which he left at 236e due to the ontological problem of non-being. The question now arises, according to the stranger, whether non-being, i.e. otherness, also connects with opinion (*doxa*) and speech (*logos*); for although they have proved that non-being is intertwined with being, the sophist could still, according to the stranger, deny that it connects with these and hence still deny the possibility of falsehood (*to pseudos*). If non-being doesn't connect with opinion and speech, the stranger claims, everything will be true, since falsehood is to speak or opine what is not (260b7-c4).

At first this may come as a surprise. Since it has been shown that non-being and being connect with all beings, we would expect that the question was already settled. If *logos* can be said to be one of the kinds that are (260a5-6), it surely connects with non-being? The stranger thinks otherwise; this must be demonstrated if they are to capture the sophist. Why? The stranger gives the following reason: the sophist may have been convinced that non-being is dispersed throughout the things that are, but still not convinced that it connects with *every* being, in particular not speech and opinion (cf. 260d6-e1); therefore the interlocutors need to demonstrate that it does. But this doesn't tell us *why* the sophist should be allowed to make this objection.

An explanation can perhaps be found if we recall that speech, *logos*, was initially likened to image-making and the sophist's *logoi* were likened to images, *eidola*. The question arose whether these images depicted what they were about precisely, as a likeness (*eikōn*), or distorted them, as an apparition (*phantasma*). But an image (*eidōlon*), regardless of whether it is precise or not, was, according to Theaetetus, something made similar to that which it depicts, while still being other than or different (*heteron*) from this being (240a7-b11). This means that the difference between spoken images and that which they depict is of another kind than the one discussed as otherness or difference in connection with the great kinds. The not beautiful, e.g., differs from what is beautiful, while it is, according to the stranger, no less a being and thus, ontologically speaking, on a par with the beautiful (cf. 257d7-258a9). In contrast to this, the notion of speech as image-making implies that speech has a different

ontological status.¹⁴¹ An image depends upon what it depicts, wherefore it differs from it ontologically. From the previous discussion of the sophist's spoken images we would therefore expect that a clarification of the ontological status of *logos* is still needed if the sophist is to be captured.¹⁴²

This explanation gets some support from the following fact. That some Forms must mix if there is to be *logos* was an implicit point in the discussion of the late learners (cf. in particular 252c) and this is repeated by the stranger at 259e5-260a7: *logos* is due to (*dia*) the intertwining of Forms. So this intertwining can be said to found *logos* and thus make philosophy (and sophistry) possible. However, the stranger continues by saying that they still have to make clear *what speech is* and how it relates to opinion and appearance (cf. 260a8 and 260e3-5).¹⁴³ This means, I believe, that the ontological investigation of how the Forms connect does not in itself explain what *logos* is. We are facing a new investigation at 260a8,¹⁴⁴ focusing on *logos*, *doxa*, and appearance, phenomena that have not already been explained in the previous ontological discussion.¹⁴⁵ It is this investigation, I believe, which picks up the first half of the argument against Parmenides, found at 244b9-e2.

The stranger's clarification of *logos* begins from a consideration of names (261d1-3), which is hardly surprising given the prominent place names have occupied in the entire ontological investigation. Before we turn to this, however, a few remarks on falsehood, deception and *logos* are needed to establish more clearly the connection between the present discussion of *logos* with the previous discussion of the sophist's apparent knowledge.

§16. Falsehood in speech and opinion, the possibility of deception, and the notion of logos

The stranger's abovementioned claim at 260c1-3 that if non-being does not mix with *logos* and *doxa*, everything will be true, is basically a restatement of the predicament of 236d-e; but now he adds that, just like falsehood in speeches (*en logois*) only comes about when one says what is not, so falsehood in thought (*en dianoiai*) only comes about when someone opines that which is not (260c1-4). Thinking and opining are thus linked together, a fact which connects the present discussion with the discussion of false opinion in the *Theaetetus* (187a

¹⁴¹ The following considerations are partly inspired by Spinka (2010). See also Cornford (1935), 302.

¹⁴² For thoughts along similar lines, see Sallis (1996), 525, Rosen (1983), 291 ff. and Ambuel (2007), 163 ff.

¹⁴³ I here side with Peck (1962), Szaif (1996) and Brown (2008).

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Szaif (1996), 421 ff., Brown (2008), 451.

¹⁴⁵ The insistence that this in fact constitutes a new investigation comes at a price. It makes it more difficult to connect the stranger's clarification of non-being in the previous section seamlessly with his clarification of false statements, which leaves my interpretation considerably less elegant than that of e.g. M. Frede.

ff., cf. part I, §15). Moreover, when the stranger turns to the question how one should understand thought (263e3-5), his definition of thought proves, as we shall see, to be an echo of what Socrates put forward on the previous day (*Tht.* 189e4-190a7). The connection between thinking and opining becomes important for understanding the *ergon*, work or deed, of the sophist.

As regards this “work” we should note that according to the analysis begun at 233a, the sophist’s activity is not simply to make false statements (cf. part II, chap. 4; part III, chap. 1); the issue is rather that the sophist is an enchanter (*goēs*; cf. 235a1 ff.) who deceives the young. In the present part of the dialogue, however, it might look as if the stranger is about to drop this claim, opting for the claim that the sophist is just someone who states something false. This claim is less plausible for the following reasons: The stranger’s analysis of falsehood terminates in the claim that to state what is false is to say what is different from the things that are (or, if one prefers, to say things that are not the case). But to state something that is different from the things that are, things that are not the case, would seem to be something everybody does, also philosophically inclined people.¹⁴⁶ If the stranger believes that this turns them into sophists, we would have good reason to doubt the soundness of his philosophical views. On the other hand, if the stranger does not believe that the sophist is simply one who states what is false, but rather a trickster, and nevertheless ends up claiming that the clarification of false speech is all we need in order to ‘catch the sophist’, we could claim that his analysis of sophistry ultimately fails, since the “technical” definition of falsehood in speech does not explain the phenomenon of speech as potentially deceptive images.¹⁴⁷

I do not think that we need to make any of these assumptions about the stranger’s views, however. For the point that the sophist is a deceiver (rather than one who simply states what is not true) is implicitly repeated when the stranger claims that there can only be deceit (*apatē*) if there is falsehood (260c6; cf. also 240d2-4). I take this to mean that if there is to be deception, it must be possible to lie or say something false, but not that falsehood is the same as deception. The false utterance “Theaetetus flies”, for instance, deceives no one. Furthermore, the stranger, when he has stated that deceit only comes about if falsehood is, claims that the fact that deceit is possible in turn means that “everything will be full of images and semblances and appearance” (260c8-9). It seems reasonable to take this to mean that, just

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *R.* 376-77a, 382a-c, 389b-c, 535d9-e5.

¹⁴⁷This is the view of S. Rosen, K. Dorter, J. Howland, and D. Ambuel.

as false speech (*pseudē logos*) makes deceit (*apatē*) possible, deceit makes images (*eidōla*), likenesses (*eikōnā*) and appearances (*phantasia*) possible. And this is also what is implied by the stranger's imagined defence of the sophist at 260d5-e3: if it cannot be proved that it is possible to state what is false, the sophist will retort that it is pointless to accuse him of having the expertise of making images and apparitions (*eidōlopoiikē kai phantastikē*; 260d8-9). In other words, both images and apparitions depend on the possibility of falsehood in speech and opinion and, it appears, of deceit.

Before we turn to the stranger's doctrine of *logos* and false statements, we may note that the notion of images (*eidola*), which has been absent from the investigation from 242 onwards, is reintroduced into the discussion exactly at the point where the sophist's art of deception is to be reconsidered. This confirms the claim above (see part II, §14) that the notion of *eidolon* in the *Sophist* has nothing to do with a world of phenomena or a transient world "existing" between being and non-being. In the *Sophist*, *eidolon* is always used in connection with *logos*, either as a metaphor for speech itself, or for *dianoia*, *doxa* and *phantasia* in virtue of their being founded on or related to *logos* (cf. 264b3).

§17. *Logos as statement: naming and speaking* (261d1-262e3)

The stranger's explanation of what he understands by *logos* is surprisingly short in light of the complicated role *logos* has played so far in the dialogue. It is as if the previously proposed image of *logos* (it is like painting, in words), as well as the broader notion of *logos* as speech or discourse, is now to be replaced by a more "scientific" model, focused on the function of words in a *logos*, and where *logos* is understood narrowly as a statement.¹⁴⁸

The stranger proposes to investigate *logos* (and *doxa*) in the same way (*kathaper*) letters and Forms (or kinds) were investigated, by seeing whether all names or words (*onomata*) match or fit together (*synarmozein*) with all, or no one does with any, or whether some do, while others do not (261d1-7). More precisely, he suggests that words spoken in succession (*ephexēs*), which reveal (*dēloun*) something, fit together and thereby constitute a statement, while those which when connected do not point out (*sēmainein*) anything, do not fit together. This suggestion causes Theaetetus considerable trouble (cf. 261e3-262a2, 262a12), a fact which, on the dramatic level, indicates the importance of what the stranger is about to say. Additionally, Theaetetus' difficulty in following the stranger is probably meant

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Cornford (1935), 303, n. 1; for problems with translating *logos* as statement, see White (1993), 57, note 74.

to spell out to the reader “that the “partial mixing” of words [the stranger] is about to expound must not be confused with the “partial mixing” of kinds discussed” in the preceding part of the dialogue.¹⁴⁹

To explain to Theaetetus what he means by claiming that some words fit together while others do not, the stranger suggests the following distinction. A statement can, at a general level, be said to consist of words (*onomata*; 261d2-3); a closer look, however, reveals that words can be differentiated into verbs (*rhemata*), which are indicators for actions (*praxeis*), and nouns (*onomata*),¹⁵⁰ which are signs for the beings which perform the actions (261e4-262a11). Both verbs and nouns are said to be indicators of being (*ousia*), a role they can only fulfill when they are combined. For, according to the stranger, neither the combination of verbs with verbs, nor nouns with nouns, reveal (*dēloun*) “any action (*praxis*), inaction (*apraxia*), or being (*ousia*) of a thing that is or of a thing which is not” (262c2-4). By contrast, he illustrates a combination which does make such things plain by the statement “man learns”.

How this explanation of statements and their functions should be understood has been a matter of controversy. In particular, it has been discussed how the trio of *praxis*, *apraxia* and *ousia* stand in relation to *on* and *mē on*.¹⁵¹ The most natural reading of the text is, I believe, to take *praxis*, *apraxia* and *ousia* as standing on a par, being something that belongs to a being or a non-being. The being or non-being is then most probably what is revealed through the noun, the *praxis*, *apraxia* and *ousia* what is pointed out by the verb. This leaves us with some difficulties. The most pressing is that it has already been agreed upon that it is impossible to speak of something which is not, a fact the stranger will soon reaffirm (cf. 262e6-7). So how can a statement make something clear about a non-being? A further problem is the question how *ousia*, *praxis* and *apraxia* relate to each other. Some clarification can be gained, I think, from what the stranger goes on to say about naming and speaking.¹⁵²

Let us start with the question how we should understand the expression “of a thing that is or is not” at 262c3. The stranger explains, at 262d2-4, that a statement makes something

¹⁴⁹ Brown (2008), 452.

¹⁵⁰ Just as *logos* has a number of different meanings in the dialogue, so does *onoma*. In most of the dialogue, it has the simple meaning of name or title; here, however, it seems more correct to translate *onomata* as ‘words’ when it is used to describe the general class of “things” out of which a *logos* is composed and as nouns when the term stands for the parts of *logos* which reveals the beings performing actions.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Cornford (1935), 305, n. 1, Frede (1967), 52, De Rijk (1986), 197-200.

¹⁵² I thank L. Brown for suggesting to me that the passage 262c2-4 is *meant* to be aporetic, reflecting the fact that Theaetetus has not fully understood what a *logos* is; to understand what the stranger means, we need to look at the passage 262d2-4.

clear about (*peri*) 1) beings, 2) things that become, 3) things that have been or 4) things that will become. From this, I believe, it is perfectly clear that a statement does not need to be about Forms (case 2, 3 and 4).¹⁵³ This seems to confirm that the dialectical proof that certain Forms can connect, while others do not, in itself does not explain what a statement is. For anything that can somehow be said to be can be the subject of a statement, wherefore a statement need not contain a connection of Forms. In light of this, an explanation of what is meant by non-being in 262c3 could be that it is a (sensible) being that no longer, or not yet, is (case 3 or 4). This would not be an utter non-being, but still something that *is* not, strictly speaking.

But how are we to understand that a statement makes something clear about a being or a non-being? The stranger claims that when one joins a verb with a noun, one no longer merely names (something), but rather completes or limits something (*ti perainein*; 262d4). If it is correct that the trio *ousia*, *praxis* and *apraxia* is what is revealed by the verb in a statement, the difference between speaking and naming would be that a statement, by connecting a noun with a verb, reveals a being (present, past or future) in its activity, inactivity or being, whereas naming designates something without revealing it.

According to many scholars, the purpose of this analysis of *logos* is to clarify the predicative function of statements denied by the late learners, i.e. the function where we “say something, state something, predicate something of or about the subject”.¹⁵⁴ Whereas the *onoma* identifies or pinpoints the subject, the *rhēma* describes this something *as* something.¹⁵⁵ According to this reading, this clarification, which rests on the stranger’s previous analysis of non-being, is what will lead the way to a clarification of false statements. The basic function of *logos*, denied by the late learners, is to describe or identify a subject *as* something else, to predicate something of it, and when this predication is in conflict with the facts, the statement is false.

I have no quarrel with the claim that the investigation of how the Forms intertwine is directed against the late learners’ objection (cf. 260a1-3). It is also correct that the stranger’s new-found form of non-being, understood as otherness, is central to his clarification of false statements. Nevertheless, I think it is problematic to claim that what the stranger is trying to clarify is simply how predication works. Apart from the fact that I believe it is potentially misleading to use the terms ‘subject’ and ‘predication’, which are fundamental to modern

¹⁵³ This does not preclude that a statement *may* be about a Form; see §18 below.

¹⁵⁴ Frede (1992), 414.

¹⁵⁵ Se Frede (1992), 412 ff., Brown (2008), 442-443.

grammar, since these terms may easily suggest an Aristotelian way of “analysing” being, there is another problem. The claim that the stranger intends to clarify predication does not, I believe, square easily with the text; for if the stranger was trying to analyse predication in general, it would be rather misleading to focus only on nouns and verbs in the way he does.¹⁵⁶

We may look at this alleged problem in one of two ways. Either, we may regard Plato as a pioneer in logic and grammatical theory, struggling with the most basic problems pertaining to predication, which explains why his stranger is not able to give a more precise analysis of the matter.¹⁵⁷ Or we may suspect that the stranger is actually trying to say something else. Cornford comments that the “definition of ‘verb’ as ‘an expression applied to actions’ would be ... defective, as ignoring verbs expressing states; and to define ‘name’ in terms of the verb ... - ‘the spoken sign applied to what performs these actions’ - would be odd” if Plato was writing a “treatise on logic”.¹⁵⁸ If we assume that Plato is not writing a treatise on logic, we could legitimately ask why the stranger chooses to give these apparently odd definitions of a sentence.

If we begin by putting aside modern grammatical terminology, according to which a verb is a specific kind of predicate among others, there should, I believe, in principle be no problem in agreeing with the stranger.¹⁵⁹ The minimum requirement for making a statement is to connect an acting individual/being with the action performed by that being.¹⁶⁰ As the stranger says at 263c2-3, such a combination is an example of the shortest statement one can make.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ This leads Frede (1992), 413 to claim that “we ... get a characterization of an irrelevant subclass of statements, whereas it seems that Plato is aiming at a characterization of simple... statements quite generally and really is looking for syntactical categories”. On this point, Brown (2008), 453 agrees with Frede. De Rijk (1986), 198, claims that “those scholars ... are correct who are of the opinion that *rhēma* includes any predicate or attribute assigned to some entity”; however, he qualifies his view in the following way: “*rhēma* seems in fact to be used by Plato as a generic heading for what we might call ‘verb-predicates’”. I believe the latter claim is correct, whereas the first is wrong; consequently, I render *rhēma* as verb, not as attribute as De Rijk does.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Frede (1992), 423 for this view.

¹⁵⁸ Cornford (1935), 308. See also Benardete (1986), II.156-57.

¹⁵⁹ As regards Cornford’s remark that it is strange to define verbs in terms of activities and leaving out states, it might be argued that the trio *praxis*, *apraxia*, and *ousia* (262c3) is a more precise description of what a verb points out than what is said at 262a3-4, so that the stranger is not committed to the view that a verb always points out an activity. The sentence “Theaetetus sits”, for instance, could be seen to exemplify an *apraxia*, rather than a *praxis*.

¹⁶⁰ This does not require, however, that one actually connects a noun with a verb since the verbform, at least in Ancient Greek, may “contain” the performer of the action.

¹⁶¹ Cornford (1935), 307 remarks that “other parts of speech are ignored” since Plato, just as Aristotle, believes “that a noun and a verb are ... necessary and sufficient for the minimum statement that can be true or false”.

But is there more to what the stranger says than a syntactical or grammatical clarification? Is there also an ontological reason why he chooses to say that something is only a *logos*, i.e. that a collection of words only manages to say (*legein*) something or reveal something, rather than just to name it, when a verb is connected with a noun? I think there might be. Let us recall that the dialogue started with a question about the *ergon* performed by the sophist (218c2), which turned into the question whether he possessed a *technē* or rather some other *dynamis* (cf. 219a4-6, 221c9-10). The question about the sophist's power came to the fore again in connection with the claim that his *technē* was, in fact, only a *doxastikē epistēmē* (cf. 233a3-9, 233c10-11). Finally, in the ontological investigation which followed, *dynamis* turned out to be a fundamental ontological notion for the stranger, indirectly in the critique of Parmenides, and directly in the *gigantomachia* and in the stranger's doctrine of the intertwining of Forms.

In light of this, it seems significant to me that the stranger starts his analysis of *logos* by looking at verbs which are indicators for actions (*praxeis*) and then turns his attention to nouns, stating that the latter are signs for the beings who carry out the actions (*hoi prattontes*; 262a6). For to ask what power a being has, or what work or deed it does, is parallel to, if not identical with, asking what actions it performs. We may also note that the stranger explicitly goes on to label the being indicated by the noun, i.e. the one carrying out the action, a *pragma* (262e13), just as he originally labelled the sophist a *pragma* (218c4). It is of course true that *pragma* often means the same as a being, an *on*, but in the present context it seems reasonable to suppose that the stranger chooses the term specifically to underline that the being pointed out by the noun is a being which acts, and, as such, has a certain power.

Let me try to spell out some implications of this line of thought in greater detail. As we have seen, verb and noun are, according to the stranger, the two fundamental elements in any statement, being the "elements" that point out an action and an actor. When they are connected, one completes or limits something. If we look at what the stranger says as being primarily of syntactical importance, it is natural to take this to mean that one completes a sentence by connecting a verb and a noun. However, at the risk of reading too much into the text I suggest that what the stranger says can be understood in a double sense. In addition to meaning that one completes a sentence, the stranger is saying, I believe, that through a

statement one completes or, better, determines,¹⁶² something, namely the being which the statement is about.¹⁶³ On this reading, a statement becomes a *logos* which determines a being instead of merely naming it by pointing out an action and the one who performs it. When I make the statement “man learns”, I not only name a being; I also say something about what a man is. A man is a being capable of learning, a being whose being is such that he may learn.¹⁶⁴

This reading seems to fit rather well with the stranger’s general focus on *dynamis* or power in connection with the question what something is. For instance, to say what a sophist is, i.e. to give a *logos* for him, would consist in pointing him out as the performer of a specific activity. And this is in fact what the stranger does in the outer part of the dialogue, where he ends up claiming that the sophist’s activity is to deceive. Similarly, as we saw in the previous chapter, his analysis of being and non-being focus on what power they have to combine with other Forms and what they do (*poiein*) to other Forms when they combine with them.

§18. *False statements and the nature of dianoia, doxa and phantasia (262e4-264b10)*

On the basis of his analysis of how words fit together in statements, the stranger goes on to demonstrate how non-being connects with *logos*, i.e. how false speech is possible. As became clear in the discussion of Parmenides’ poem (cf. 237c10-e6 and Part III, §1 above), a statement must be *about* something, a *logos* is always a *logos tinos* (262e6-7). The stranger now adds that all such statements must have a certain quality (262e9). To illustrate what he means, he gives two examples of very short sentences, now famous in the secondary literature: “Theaetetus sits” vs. “Theaetetus flies”. Both sentences are about (*peri*) a *pragma* (which is the same as to say that the *logos* is a *logos tinos*), namely the human being pointed out by the name “Theaetetus”; they are about him or “belong” to him (263a5).¹⁶⁵ And both “reveal him” or point him out, through the verb, as performing a certain activity. The quality

¹⁶² Cornford translates “*ti perainei*” as “gets you somewhere”, White as “accomplishes something”. Benardete (1986), II.60 translates 262d3-4 as “not only names but puts a limit on something”. Schleiermacher translates it as “bestimmt etwas”.

¹⁶³ The suggestion is partly inspired by Prauss (1965), 186-91; I cannot agree with him, however, that Plato becomes aware of the fact that a particular thing is the product of a “spontaneous positing in thought” (p. 186, see also 188) and thus foreshadows I. Kant.

¹⁶⁴ Iber (2007), 455 observes that the sentence illustrates Plato’s controversy with the sophists in general; if one claims that falsehood is impossible, as Protagoras does, it makes no sense to say that man can learn – but in that case, it makes no sense to claim that one is a teacher of men either.

¹⁶⁵ Cornford (1935), 308, n. 1 remarks that the two expressions “about me” and “mine” mean the same thing. This is a safer assumption, I think, than Frede’s speculation that they are meant to remind us of Antisthenes’ position, cf. Frede (1992), 416.

that the stranger is interested in is obviously that one is false, the other true (263b3). But how can this be explained?

Since both statements are about something which *is*, namely Theaetetus, it follows that, if to say something false is to say what is not, it must be what is said *about* Theaetetus in the false statement which “is not”.¹⁶⁶ Anything that is can, broadly speaking, be termed an *on*, and activities can therefore legitimately be termed *onta*. The true sentence “Theaetetus sits” can therefore be said to say the things that are about him, that they are (*hōs estin*; 263b4-5), whereas the false sentence can be said to say things different from these (i.e. things that are not), that they are, or, more precisely, it says things “which are other (*heteron*) than the things which are about you” (263b7-11). Since it has been established (against the late learners, at 256e6 ff) that “there are many things which are about each thing, and many which are not” (263b11-12), false statements no longer seems to pose a problem.

Exactly how the present account relates to the discussion of the great kinds, the *megistē genē*, i.e. how the notion of non-being as otherness introduced to explain false sentences relates to the notion of otherness or non-being in the previous part of the dialogue, is a matter of controversy. But however one regards this, the point the stranger is making is the following: when saying that Theaetetus, who is at the very moment sitting, is flying, one ascribes an activity to him which is different from the one that pertains to him. This means that the sentence is about a being, but that it is still false, since it ascribes a non-being, namely an activity different from the activities the being is actually performing, to that being. By distinguishing between naming, which just pinpoints a being, and speaking, which reveals a being as doing something, the stranger can illustrate in a quite unproblematic way how a false sentence may come about. Because speech consists, minimally, in the weaving together of noun and verb, one may, through a statement, ascribe an activity to an acting being which is different from those that are (the case) about that being. If statements in general reveal the being (*ousia*), action or inaction of a being (*on*), a false sentence must “reveal” or point out one of the first three in such a way as actually to conceal or distort the being spoken about.

We may recall that the stranger claimed, at 238a5-6, that a being could be connected with a different (*heteron*) being, whereas a non-being could not. Furthermore, in the *Theaetetus*, when false opinions were discussed, Socrates claimed that it was impossible to opine what is not, “either about (*peri*) any of the beings or itself, by itself (*auto kath’ hauto*)” (189b1-2, cf. also 188d9-10, cf. part I, §15). The discussion of Parmenides’ poem illustrated

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Frede (1992), 412.

that the latter was impossible. But it now turns out that it is possible to state, and hence to opine, that which is not about another being, as long as that which one opines is not strictly non-being, but a being that is something different from the beings that are (the case) about the being one states something about.

From this account of the possibility of false speech, the stranger goes on to explain the possibility of false opinion and appearance (*phantasia*) by determining what (discursive) thought (*dianoia*) is.¹⁶⁷ What he says about this is of great importance for the attempt to “capture” the sophist. For, as already mentioned the explanation of false speech is not an explanation of what sophistry is. The sophist is not just a liar, but also a deceiver, and the problem spelled out at 236d-e was not just a difficulty concerning how one should talk about false speech without contradicting oneself, but also a problem of how things can “appear and seem but not ... be” (236e1), a problem which became pressing because the sophist appears to be wise, without actually being it. Clearly, no-one is able to deceive anyone, or to appear wise to anyone, by stating falsehoods that are obviously false. In other words, it is not yet clear how the possibility of false statements is supposed to explain how the sophist can appear as something he is not.

The stranger suggests, just as Socrates did in the *Theaetetus*, that thought and speech are the same (*tauton*), only differing in that thought is a dialogue carried out in silence, whereas speech is a voiced dialogue directed to someone else (263e3-8). To explain what opinion is, the stranger introduces the notion that, in speeches (and thus in thought) there is affirmation (*phasis*) and denial (*apophasis*); when this comes about in thinking, an opinion results (263e12-264a2).

Above I defended my translation of *doxa* in the *Theaetetus* as opinion, rather than judgement (cf. part I, chap. 5). But how should it be translated here? If one believes that the stranger is suggesting that thought, like *logos*, is a combination of noun and verb, and that by such a combination the stranger is thinking of the connection of a subject with a predicate, the claim that a *doxa* comes about through affirmation and denial looks a good reason to translate *doxa* should as judgement.¹⁶⁸ But this, I believe, is not what the stranger is suggesting. When

¹⁶⁷ It is possible to see the stranger’s procedure here as a further exemplification of the dialectical ability to divide according to kinds, not misidentifying one with another. At 263d7, thought, opinion, and appearance are identified as *genē*, and at d10-e1 the stranger suggests that it should be determined what they are and how they differ from each other.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Stenzel (1931), 40, whom many commentators follow. This reading becomes more attractive if one reads what the stranger says in light of Aristotle, *Int.*, 17a25. My contention is that the stranger says something different than Aristotle, since he defines a statement precisely as a connection of verb and noun, not just as saying something, anything (*tinōs*), about something. Cf. the discussion at the beginning of cha. 5 in part I.

the stranger compares thought with *logos*, he is no longer thinking narrowly of what we would term statements, but, as can be seen from 263e4, of discourse and dialogue. His claim that there is affirmation and denial in thought should therefore, I believe, be seen in connection with Socrates' claim in the *Theaetetus* that, when the soul asks itself questions and answers them, it affirms or denies them, comes to a determination and thus acquires an opinion (*Tht.* 190a1-4). Likewise the stranger is claiming, I believe, that a *doxa* is the result of a train of thoughts, a dialogue (cf. 264a9-b1), not simply an instantaneous judgement, wherefore I think we should render *doxa* as opinion here as well.

In contradistinction to an opinion, the stranger explains, an appearance (*phantasia*) comes about when the affirmation or denial is not formed in the soul when it is by itself, but is formed in connection with, or, as the stranger puts it, *through* perception (*di' aisthēseōs*). Again, we should probably understand this in connection with the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates pointed out that we do not perceive *with*, but rather *through* the sense-organs. If this is correct, the stranger seems to be saying that an appearance is a mixture of an opinion with perception (264b1), something which arises when the soul deliberates about what is passed on to it from the sense-organs and comes to a decision about what it is.

From these considerations the stranger can conclude that thought, opinion, and appearance can be true as well as false, since they depend on, or are related to (*syggenos*), speech (264a8-b4). If the foundation of these three phenomena can be true and false, so can they themselves. The stranger will use this result in his final attempt to define sophistry, by returning to the question of what image-making is, which in turn will lead us to the important notion of imitation. We shall look at this in the next, and final, chapter. But before we turn to this, some remarks about the stranger's analysis of false speech are in order.

The sentence "Theaetetus flies" is, as mentioned, obviously inadequate as an illustration of the lies told by the sophist. Surely, it is false, but it is a trivial falsehood that is completely harmless. The problem is not just that anyone can say, without knowing what Theaetetus is doing, that it is false, since men cannot fly;¹⁶⁹ even if it could be true, one would merely have to look in order to decide whether it was true or not. In light of the difference between *doxa* and *phantasia* the stranger has just pointed out, we can say that the sentence only illustrates that one can say something false about the matters which the soul forms opinions about by using the sense-organs. It does not illustrate falsehood about the matters

¹⁶⁹ Man belongs to the non-flying class of two-legged animals, as the stranger humorously puts it in the *Statesman* (264e6, 266e5-7), wherefore only a madman or a dreamer would actually believe that he was flying, cf. *Tht.* 158b3-4.

which the soul forms opinions about when conversing with itself, without the use of the senses, as for instance being and the useful (cf. *Tht.* 186c3). As D. Ambuel puts it, it is a sentence about “purely factual matters of observation”, not about “essences known by the mind”.¹⁷⁰ It is surely about matters of the latter kind that the sophist deceives, as should be clear from the catalogue of subjects the sophist is able to dispute about (*Sph.* 232c1-d8), as well as from the claim that his *eidola legomena* deceive those who are still standing “far from the truth of things” (234c4, cf. part II, §13-14). It is such matters, I suggest, that the false statements of the sophist conceal or distort, in their being, action or inaction.

Let us look at this problem not from the side of what kind of being a false statement is about, but from the side of how one can decide whether it is false or not. If the truth or falsity of the statements the stranger has given as examples is decided, in the end, by perception or the opinions the soul forms in connection with perception, we may wonder how one decides the truth or falsity of statements which are about matters that cannot be perceived? How are we to decide, for instance, that the sophist’s claims about the divine, about being, about justice, are not true? The stranger does not tell us. But the picture we get from the entire middle part of the dialogue, with the discussion of the notions of being and non-being, is what I take to be a traditional, Platonic picture: We have to decide such matters through discursive reasoning, through dialogue, testing whether what the sophist says can be right or not. On the other hand, if we ask how one is to find the truth about these matters, once one realises that the sophist is lying (cf. 234d2-235a4), or realises that one does not have adequate knowledge about them, for instance through conversation with Socrates, we do not seem to get any other suggestions than what we get in the *Republic*, namely that we must rub arguments “against each other like sticks” in the hope that illumination might spring from them (*R.* 435a).

If these considerations are sound, I think it is clear that we have no reason to suppose that the clarification of how false statements and false opinions are possible, though important, solves the problem with which the *Theaetetus* ended, what knowledge or expertise is. The explanation of how one can entertain false opinions does not tell us what knowledge is – it merely shows us that we can have false opinions. Nor do I think we have any reason to believe that Plato thought that the so-called method of *diairesis* is able to turn true opinions into knowledge, as J. Stenzel and many others have claimed. In fact, I shall argue, the last attempt to capture the sophist through division will illustrate both that opinions are different

¹⁷⁰ Ambuel (2007), 166.

from knowledge, and that the “method” of division cannot help us solve a philosophical problem, although it may be helpful in pinpointing it.

Chapter 7: Imitation, sophistic and philosophic

From the optimistic tone of the stranger's remark at 264b6-11, that false speech and opinion were easier to find than Theaetetus had feared, one might expect that the problem of how to account for sophistry could now be resolved without further difficulty.¹⁷¹ In the passage 264c12-d2 the stranger recapitulates the sophist's earlier defence: he denied the possibility of *eidola* in general and of likenesses and apparitions in particular, since falsehood, according to him, was impossible. But since falsehood in speech and opinion has now been shown to be possible, it looks as if the sophist is trapped. This is not quite the case, however. In fact, the notions of imitation and spoken images, introduced at 234b-c, have not yet been adequately clarified, and this proves to pose a greater problem than most commentators lead one to expect.

As can be seen from the stranger's recapitulation, all images are, according to the sophist, false, regardless of whether they are likenesses or apparitions. This was also implied in Theaetetus' attempt to define images at 240a7-c3. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, all spoken images are ontologically inferior to what they imitate; and they are thus, ontologically speaking, "false".

One might still suppose that some spoken images, namely likenesses, are, logically speaking, true, whereas other images, apparitions, are false, and one could further suppose that the sophist belongs to the group of people who use *logoi* to make apparitions, the philosopher to the group of people who make likenesses. This does not, however, seem to be what the stranger says in what follows. First of all, at 264d4-7 he claims that, since there is false speech and opinion, there is imitation of the things that are and also an art of deception. This may suggest that he agrees with the sophist that both likenesses and apparitions, qua imitations, depend on false speech or opinion. Secondly, and more importantly, the stranger seems to silently dismiss the notion of precise imitation, i.e. likeness, in what follows, while apparently placing the philosopher firmly within the art of apparition-making (or so I shall argue). It appears that the clarification of *logos* and false speech has not been able to solve our problem of how to differentiate sophist from philosopher.

When the stranger introduced the distinction between the two kinds of imitation, likeness- and apparition-making, he claimed that he was unable to decide in which of the two one should place the sophist (cf. 235c9-d3, 236c9-d3). At 264d9-10 he repeats that this matter

¹⁷¹ The fact that many commentators altogether disregard the final attempt to define the sophist leads one to suspect that they are victims of this illusion.

is unresolved, and goes on to make the following obscure suggestion. He and Theaetetus should now resume their way of divisions, proceeding “always toward the right-hand part of the section” in order to capture the sophist by stripping “away all things he has in common”, such that only “his own nature” remains, in order that they may exhibit it, primarily to themselves “and then to those who are by nature nearest in genus to a pursuit of this sort” (264d12-265a2).

It is not made clear why they should keep to the right hand section, nor what it means that there are people who by nature are closer to this way of pursuing philosophical questions. But whoever these people may be, the stranger quite clearly seems to display an ironical distance towards his own alleged “method”. We may further wonder what it means that the sophist is to be displayed in his nature (*physis*) by stripping away what he has in common. In common with what or with whom? In light of the initial problem with which the dialogue began, we may suppose that it must be what he has in common with philosopher and statesman that have to be stripped away. Let us take a closer look at how the stranger performs his last divisions.

In order to settle the issue of which kind of imitator the sophist is, the stranger proceeds to divide productive art, under which imitation falls, which he left undivided at the beginning of the inquiry (cf. 219b1, 265a10-b2). For the first and last time in the dialogue, he suggests a division which is not simply a bifurcation, but rather a double-division, one horizontal, the other vertical (266a1-2). This, taken together with the fact that Theaetetus has a hard time understanding what the stranger means (cf. 265b7, 266b1, 266b9), points, I believe, to the importance of this division. It introduces a divine dimension into the dialogue in much the same way as the “digression” did in the *Theaetetus*, a dimension hinted at in the *gigantomachia* as well as in the short description of the dialectician. At first, however, it is not clear why this perspective on things is introduced at this point, nor why it is needed in order to understand imitation. If we already know that the sophist’s imitation is human and that, qua imitation, it is not a production of the things that are, but a production of an image of them (265b1-2), we may wonder why we cannot just start by looking at imitation.

The stranger suggests that they should divide production into 1) divine and 2) human production, and then divide both into a) production of beings and b) production of images of these beings. The god, the stranger suggests (and Theaetetus agrees), has crafted everything that lives as well as all (natural) soulless beings; things that are by nature can therefore be said to be the result of divine craft (265c1-e6). In addition, the god has produced images of these

beings which accompany them, such as shadows, mirror-reflections, dream visions and the like (266b7-c4). In a similar manner, humans produce beings by putting together the primary beings made by the god, for instance into houses (265e4-5, 266c7-8), and also by imitating beings, presumably both those made by god and those made by humans, for instance by painting (266c7-8). The latter art apparently corresponds to the god's production of dreams and shadows.

Has the division made us understand imitation any better? If the point of all this is just to say that imitation, which we want to claim is carried out by the sophist, is a kind of parasite activity, i.e. that the sophist is someone who imitates the productions of others, but produces nothing of his own, why do we need this complicated division? I believe the reason why we need it touches on the very problem of differentiating sophist from philosopher, which is a problem concerning imitation, not just a problem about true or false sentences.

At 267a1 the stranger suggests that within the human art of image-making, the art of making apparitions can be subdivided. He thus leaves the art of likeness-making behind, without further comment, as mentioned above. One form, he now claims, makes its apparitions with instruments, another by using the artist's own body. For some apparitions are brought about, not by painting or by drawing, but by impersonating another human being, where the artist imitates the voice and gestures of another. It is this kind of apparition-making the stranger is interested in and he therefore suggests that the title 'technē mimetikē' should be reserved for it alone (267a10-11).¹⁷²

Within this kind of imitation, a further division can be made, since some artists imitate knowing (*eidenai*) what they imitate, whereas others do not (267b7-9). This suggestion is of course absurd as long as one discusses *mimesis* as imitation of other human beings. No one imitates other people without knowing them, at least to a certain extent. However, as so many times before, the stranger has begun to analyse something of great philosophical importance by using an apparently insignificant example. What he is interested in is a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental, Platonic theme, and not a trivial question about mimicry as an art form. This becomes clear at 267c2-3, where he suddenly introduces the figure (*schēma*) of justice and all the other excellences. Are there not many, he asks, who are ignorant about them, and yet somehow entertain opinions about them, and who try very hard to make what they believe is justice and the other excellences appear as if they were in them, imitating them in both deeds

¹⁷² At 234b this term was used for all kinds of image-making.

and words (267c3-6)? This is something Theaetetus agrees to. Moreover, is it not so that quite a lot of people manage to appear just, even when they are not? Again, Theaetetus agrees.

In this way, all the problems introduced in the second book of the *Republic* suddenly seem to appear here at the end of the *Sophist*. The difference between the one who imitates justice and excellence *with* knowledge, which is what Socrates in the *Republic* claims that the philosopher kings do (*R.* 500b-d), and the one who imitates them without knowledge, but only with an opinion, seems to be a much more serious and fundamental question than the question how we can account for true and false sentences.¹⁷³ This deeper problem was already hinted at when the stranger claimed that the philosopher, through calculations, turns the eye of the soul towards what is eternal and divine (254a8-b1). But what has this got to do with the sophist?

The problem with the sophist was that he produces spoken images which fool the young or those who are ignorant about the matters he discusses. More precisely he was a producer of opinions, opinions about himself, namely that he is a wise man, and about the things he discusses (cf. part II, §14). But how is this connected with the claim that he is an imitator? This is not spelled out in detail in the *Sophist*, but I think that it is possible to construct an answer from what we have already been told in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.¹⁷⁴

When the man who does not know what excellence is imitates what he holds to be excellence, it is in order to give the appearance of being excellent. If we look at this in light of what is said in the *Republic* (cf. in particular the discussion in book 2), we may presume that this is an activity which is not just characteristic of the sophist, but rather of people in general. But if the imitator is a sophist, we may presume he wants to give this impression to others, not only in order to appear excellent, but also in order to appear to be able to teach his excellence to others. So what does the sophist believe excellence is? From where does he acquire his opinion about it? From the society in which he teaches, I would suggest. Otherwise, it would be difficult for him to convince people that he was in possession of excellence. But if what he holds to be excellence resembles what most people take it to be, and if he is good at giving an impression of living in accordance with this, people will come to believe that he is excellent and that what he tells them about excellence is true. He will, so to say, reinforce the opinions about excellence of the society in which he lives, and which provides him his livelihood, by

¹⁷³ One may recall that Aristotle likewise, in the *Metaphysics*, claims that sophistry is not just a matter of lying, but a matter of choosing a way to live (*Metaph.* 1004b24), a fact Gadamer (1990), 365 rightly draws attention to.

¹⁷⁴ It may be worth pointing out that the following suggestion reflects what I take to be the picture of sophistry which Plato presents in these two dialogues, not how I evaluate the sophistic movement.

giving people an image of excellence that resembles the one they already believe in. Hence sophist is an imitator of people's opinions about excellence.

If this suggestion is correct, the sophist as imitator can be seen as the opposite of Socrates. Socrates questions people's opinions, whereas the sophist reinforces them. For where Socrates tries to show people that their opinions may be false, the sophist tries to show them that they are true, and, indeed, that they can only be true, since there is nothing more to excellence than the opinions people have about it.

This provides us with an (at least partial) explanation of what the stranger meant at 254a4-b1, when he said that the sophist is a fugitive into the darkness of non-being, "to which he attaches himself by a knack" (254a4-6), whereas the philosopher turns his gaze to the eternal and divine. What he meant, I suggest, is that the sophist deceives people into believing that things are as most people believe, and that he therefore lives in the "shadow realm" of people's opinions, which he knows how to manipulate through familiarity with them. The sophist is, to say it with Socrates' words from the *Republic*, 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" (493a-b)¹⁷⁵. This kind of imitation is then the opposite of the kind of imitation of the godly paradigms mentioned by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*. It is, I think, in order to bring out the difference between these two ways of imitating that the stranger, apparently for no reason, divides production into human and divine production.

From these heights, however, we need to return to the more "tangible reality" and in particular to the stranger's final divisions. For the division between those who imitate knowingly and those who do it with mere opinion contains a host of problems which the suggestion just sketched does not take into account. Granted that there is a fundamental difference between imitation with knowledge (*epistēmē*), which the stranger suggests should be called "historical" (*historikē*) imitation, or, perhaps better, a kind of imitation based on inquiry (267e2-3), and imitation with opinion (*doxa*), which can be termed opinion-imitation (*doxomimētikē*; 267e1), it is natural to suppose, as I have just done, that the philosopher is to be found in the first class, since the philosopher surely knows, whereas the sophist, who is ignorant, must surely be placed in the second. And this appears to be what the stranger is suggesting. For they had already agreed (cf. 233c6-11), the stranger explains at 267e5-6, that the sophist is ignorant, although he is an imitator. He must therefore be placed in the class of

¹⁷⁵ Translation by Bloom (1991).

ignorant imitators and his counterpart, it appears, the imitator who knows, would seem to be the philosopher.

But this answer is too simple. For it cannot account for Socrates. This becomes clear in the second to last division the stranger makes. Here he claims that there are two kinds of imitators who do not know what they imitate; on the one hand the imitators who naively believe that the things they opine are things they know (267e11-268a1), on the other hand a kind of imitator who has a great fear that he does not know the things which he “has embodied in figure before everyone else as if he knew”, a fear which is due to the great time he has spent in discussions (268a1-4). The first kind of ignorant imitator must surely include most of the sophists, especially a figure like Protagoras who claims that there is no distinction between opinions about a matter and knowledge, and it could also include Socrates’ accusers Anytus and Meletus. None of these people doubt that they know what they in fact do not know. But the description of the other kind of imitator easily leads one’s thoughts to Socrates’ claim in the *Apology*, that he is ignorant about the most important matters, but that young people, because he questions people about these things, come to believe that he is himself knowledgeable about the matters he asks about (*Ap.* 23a). And, if this is not enough, the stranger goes on to suggest that this imitator should be called an ironic imitator (268a7-8).

If the accounts given of the sophist in the first five divisions seemed to get dangerously close to Socrates at times, but in the end turned away from him towards the sophist,¹⁷⁶ the last rounds of divisions seem to do the opposite. In fact, the last division, which distinguishes between an ironic imitator who speaks before the assembly, and an ironic imitator who speaks in private and “with brief speeches compels his interlocutor to contradict himself” (268b4-5) looks more like Socrates than any other sophist. And this is the man who Theaetetus in the end, with enthusiasm, claims is “the one whom we have to address truly as that very one who’s altogether in his being the sophist.” (268c3-4) If the ironic imitator is in fact no one else than Socrates, we seem to be thrown back to the beginning of the dialogue. If Theaetetus, without a moment’s hesitation, identifies Socrates as the one who truly is a sophist, we see how true Socrates’ prediction was, that it is hard to tell the sophist from the philosopher. For all the technical discussions of being and *logos* he has witnessed, Theaetetus is, apparently, not able to see a difference between sophistry and Socratic philosophy. The philosopher is the one who knows what he imitates, the one who likens himself to a god, whereas Socrates the very incarnation of the sophist.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Friedländer (III), 236.

Before we accept this conclusion, however, we may ask a final question, namely what it is that Theaetetus believes the ironic imitator imitates. At 268b11-c4 he suggests that this imitator, whom he will not call wise, since he does not know, is an imitator of the wise (*ho sophos*, 268c1). If by this Theaetetus means, in agreement with Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1004b), that the ironic imitator, the sophist, is but an imitator of the philosopher, a man who is indeed wise, he seems to claim that Socrates is but an imitator of the philosopher. Whether this is correct or not, it leaves us with problem, namely the problem what the philosopher is, since, in order to understand what the sophist's (or Socrates') imitation really is, we would seem to need to know what it is he imitates. If Socrates is not the philosopher, and if the stranger has attempted to define the sophist without giving Theaetetus, or us, a complete picture of what a philosopher is, we seem, again, to be led back to the problem with which the whole discussion began: what is the philosopher and how can one distinguish him from his look-alikes?

On the other hand, Theaetetus might agree with Socrates (and Diotima) that only the god is wise (cf. *Ap.* 23a, *Smp.* 204a, *Phdr.* 278d), both in light of what he has heard Socrates say in the digression of the *Theaetetus* (cf. *Tht.* 176a9-b1) and also in light of what his teacher, Theodorus, said at the beginning of the discussion carried out in the *Sophist*, namely that philosophers are not gods, although they are godlike (*Sph.* 216b8-c1). He would then seemingly imply that the sophist, as an imitator of the wise, is in fact the philosopher. This might explain why he seems to identify Socrates as a sophist – but, apparently, it would still lead us back to the problem that initiated the whole investigation.¹⁷⁷

While the *Theaetetus* ended in apparent *aporia*, the *Sophist* does not. On the dramatic level, Theaetetus seems content to have finally “caught” the sophist. But we, as readers, are apparently lead into *aporia* all the same. So what are we to conclude from this apparent *aporia*? Perhaps, as H.-G. Gadamer suggests, that the difference between philosophy and sophistry is not just a difference between ways of using arguments, but a difference in types of life, wherefore this difference lies outside the realm of *logos*; it is a question of *ergon*.¹⁷⁸ This may be true. But this is then our, and not Theaetetus' conclusion. There is, I think, little which suggests that he has, in the end, learned that philosophy is not sophistry.

We may therefore wonder if this is due to a flaw in the stranger's argument. I do not think that this is the case. He has demonstrated successfully how Forms intertwine, how we can account for the difference between false and true statements and opinions, and how we

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Benardete (1986), II.72.

¹⁷⁸ Gadamer (1990), 366, cf. also Frede (1996), 151.

can explain deceit, and there is, I think, in principle nothing wrong with his account of what sophistry is, namely the ability to give people false opinions about important matters. But to show that and how we can have false opinions is not the same as to demonstrate which of our opinions are true and which are false. This cannot be decided through an account we are given by others, only by the accounts we try to give to ourselves. This, it seems, is where Theaetetus fails.

There is thus some irony in the fact that the long and complex account of how false statements and opinions are possible ends, apparently, with Theaetetus having a false opinion about Socratic philosophy. As pointed out, the dialogue in a way ends where it began. At the end of part I, I suggested that, in order that a true opinion with an account could count as knowledge, it at least had to be arrived at through an account, not just supplied with an account. Perhaps the apparent paradox with which the *Sophist* ends might be Plato's way of saying that even a correct account of something will not necessarily give you knowledge, and not even a true opinion about the matter you try to give the account for. Whether the stranger's account of sophistry is able to give us an understanding of how sophistry differs from philosophy might not just be a question facing Theaetetus – but us as well.

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