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Socratic *Elenchus* in the *Sophist*

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Abstract: This paper demonstrates the central role of the Socratic *elenchus* in the *Sophist*. In the first part, I defend the position that the Stranger describes the Socratic *elenchus* in the sixth division of the *Sophist*. In the second part, I show that the Socratic *elenchus* is actually used when the Stranger scrutinizes the accounts of being put forward by his predecessors. In the final part, I explain the function of the Socratic *elenchus* in the argument of the dialogue. By contrast with standard scholarly interpretations, this way of reading the text provides all the puzzles about being (241c4–251a4) with a definite function in the dialogue. It also reveals that Plato's methodology includes a plurality of method and is more continuous than what is often believed.

Keywords: Plato's *Sophist*, Plato's methodology, Socratic *elenchus*, Ontology

Introduction

Students of Plato's methodology often assume that, for each step of his philosophical development, Plato introduces and practices one prominent method. According to this assumption, while the Socratic *elenchus* plays the crucial part in Plato's early dialogues, it is the method of hypothesis that comes into the foreground in Plato's middle dialogues, only to be replaced itself by the method of collection and division as the most important method in Plato's late philosophy.[1]

In this paper, I would like to challenge this common assumption by showing that the Socratic *elenchus*, a method prominent in the early dialogues, also plays a key role in Plato's *Sophist*, which is generally considered to be a late dialogue.[2] To reveal this role, I will proceed as follows. In the first part of this paper, I will defend the position that the Stranger describes the Socratic *elenchus* in the sixth division of the *Sophist*. In the second part, I will

1 See Robinson (1941), V and, more recently, Benson (2009), 87.

2 What I do not challenge then is the standard chronology of Plato's dialogues, see e. g. Ross (1951), 1–10; Vlastos (1991), 46–47.

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show that the Socratic *elenchus* is actually used when the Stranger scrutinizes the accounts of being put forward by his predecessors. In the final part, I will explain the function of the Socratic *elenchus* in the argument of the dialogue.

My argument has bearing on how one should conceive Plato's methodology. For, if I am right about the key role of the Socratic elenchus in the *Sophist*, it follows that the method of division is not the only important method at work in the *Sophist*. Moreover, since in my reading the *elenchus* is found in the early dialogues as well as in later works such as the *Sophist*, Plato's methodology turns out to be more continuous than what the developmental line suggests. Finally, my paper has consequences for the internal exegesis of the dialogue. Examining the *Sophist* from the perspective of the Socratic *elenchus* will shed new light on certain intricate sections of the dialogue. In particular, my reading of the puzzles about being (241c4–251a4), by contrast with standard readings of this passage, provides all these puzzles with a definite function in the organisation of the dialogue.

The Socratic *Elenchus* and the Sixth Division of the *Sophist*

The dialogue starts with a brief introductory conversation that determines its main goal: giving a clear account of what the sophist is (cf. 216a1–218c1). To perform this task, the Stranger from Elea, one of the protagonists of the discussion, introduces the famous method of division by means of an easy example: the angler. Even if the details of this method are still debated in the literature,[3] one can say, in the case of the angler, that it involves the division of the *genus* of *techne* or art into increasingly specific kinds, in such a way that the art of angling can be isolated from all the other arts (cf. 218c1–221c5). The Stranger then applies the same procedure to the sophist. However, in this case, his divisions of art do not provide one, but not less than six arts that are supposed to specifically characterize or define the sophist (cf. 221c6–231b8).[4]

3 On the method of division in the *Sophist*, see Moravcsik's "clean model" (1973) *vs* Cohen's "superclean model" (1973). More recently, Delcomminette (2000), 29–94 (especially 82) and Brown (2010) have proposed interesting accounts of the method.

4 As I will argue at the end of part I, these multiple arts are in fact *appearances* of the sophist. The centre on which these appearances converge (the genus of image-making) will be identified only later in the dialogue (see the beginning of part II below).

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While the first five arts reached by the Stranger match the traditional picture of sophistry found in Plato's dialogues,[5] the sixth division of art (226a6–231b8) is more controversial. Some commentators indeed claim that the type of "refutation" or ἔλεγχος (230d1, d8, 231b6) described in the sixth division belongs in fact to Socrates,[6] whereas others deny that the sixth division of art portrays Socrates' method.[7] In this section, I will systematically defend the first position. To do so, after presenting the controversial text, I will start by accumulating evidence that supports the identification of the *elenchus* described by the Stranger as Socrates' mode of enquiry in the early dialogues. Next, I will show that the objections against the identification are not compelling. Finally, I will explain why the Socratic *elenchus* occurs right in the middle of an attempt to capture the *sophist*.[8]

The controversial passage occurs near the end of the sixth division where the Stranger describes a special kind of education (παιδεία, 229d2), called "refutation" (ἔλεγχος, 230d1, d8, 231b6). This refutation is needed in order to overcome ἀμαθία, that is, the state of ignorance in which someone believes he knows something while in fact he does not (229c5–d3 and 230a5–b3). More precisely, to get rid of ἀμαθία:

"[Those who practice this kind of education] cross-examine (Διερωτῶσιν) someone when he thinks he's saying something though he's saying nothing (λέγων μηδέν). Then, since his opinions will vary inconsistently (πλανωμένων

5 (1) The art of hunting that uses *persuasion* (cf. πιθανουργική, 222c10) to capture rich and prominent young men (cf. 221c6–223b7) recalls Socrates' association of rhetorical persuasion and sophistry at *Gorgias* 465c3–7 and 520a6–8 (cf. Cornford (1935), 174). The characterization of the sophist as (2) a travelling salesman and as (3) a stay-at-home retailer of products for the soul (whether produced by others or (4) by himself) (cf. 223c1–224e5) parallels *Protagoras* 313c4–7. Finally, Plato vividly illustrates (5) the art of verbal disputation or "eristic" (cf. 224e6–226a5) in the *Euthydemus* (see particularly *Euthydemus* 271c2–272d3).

6 For an impressive list of those who read the sixth division as a description of the Socratic *elenchus*, see Notomi (1999), 65, n. 72 and Dorion (2012), 252, n. 3. To this list, one might perhaps add Proclus according to whom the sixth division of the *Sophist* refers, not to the sophist's activity, but to a type of dialectic practiced by "the true philosopher" (see Proclus *In Parm*. I 654a1–13).

7 See Kerferd (1954); Crivelli (2004). Notomi (1999), 64–68 seems to adopt an intermediary position. He writes that "in the sixth definition, the appearances of the sophist and philosopher overlap in the figure of Socrates, and we seem to be in ultimate confusion" (p. 68).

8 Note that, in this paper, I shall be concerned by Plato's version of the Socratic *elenchus*, that is, the version of *elenchus* that can be found in Plato's early dialogues (and, in my view, in the *Sophist* as well). Occasionally, I will also use evidence from the middle and later dialogues, but only because they reinforce a point also made in the early dialogues or because they occur in a context related to the Socratic *elenchus*. For a similar approach, see Benson (1989), 594, n. 9.

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τὰς δόξας), these people will easily scrutinize them (ῥᾳδίως ἐξετάζουσι). They collect (συνάγοντες) his opinions together during the discussion, put them side by side, and show that they conflict with each other at the same time on the same subjects in relation to the same things and in the same respects (ἐπιδεικνύουσιν αὐτὰς αὑταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἐναντίας). The people who are being examined see this, get angry at themselves, and become calmer toward others (πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἡμεροῦνται). They lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves that way, and no loss is pleasanter to hear or has a more lasting effect on them. (230b4–c4)"[9]

In order to prove that, in this passage, the Stranger intends to describe Socrates' mode of enquiry in the early dialogues, I will pinpoint several important features of the Stranger's description and compare them to Socrates' mode of enquiry in the early dialogues. To begin with:

(a) The *elenchus* described by the Stranger enables its practitioners to get rid of ἀμαθία, or mistaken claims to knowledge (see 229c5–d3 and 230a5–b3).
(b) To overcome ἀμαθία, the practitioners of the refutation *cross-examine* (διερωτῶσιν) their interlocutors about their purported subject of expertise (230b4–5).

These two points are capital for my demonstration because they capture what, according to the *Apology*, Socrates spent his life doing. At the opening of Socrates' defence in the *Apology*, Socrates explains that, puzzled by the Pythian oracle according to which he was the wisest of all men, he decided to *cross examine* (διηρώτων, 22b4) those who, living in or coming to Athens, proclaimed to be wise. While he hoped to disprove the oracle by finding someone wiser than himself, Socrates soon realized that those whom he questioned – be they poets, craftsmen or influential politicians – were not wise about the things they claimed to know, and were even *ignorant* (ἀμαθίαν, 22e3–4) about them. From then on, Socrates spent his life testing people's claim to knowledge and revealing their ignorance (cf. *Apology* 20d2–23c1). Hence, exactly as the refutation described by the Stranger in the sixth division of the *Sophist*, Socrates' mode of enquiry is meant to expose people's ignorance by cross-examining them.[10]

9 White's (1993) translation, 17. (Unless otherwise noted, I quote White's translation of the *Sophist*, sometimes with slight modifications).

10 One might perhaps note a difference as well: whereas Socrates describes himself as an assistant of the god (*Apology* 23b4–c1), the refutation of the sixth division is a teaching method (229a10). However, I will soon contend that Socrates is sometimes ready to describe himself as a teacher, which brings him still closer to the refutation of the sixth division.

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But there is more. In the *Sophist*, the practitioners of cross-examination establish their interlocutors' ignorance by:

(c) Showing that their interlocutors have contradictory beliefs about their purported subject of expertise (cf. 230b7–8).

Again, we have strong evidence that Socrates establishes people's ignorance in the same way. For example, in the *Laches*, Socrates questions the General Laches, an important politician of the time, who claims to know what courage is (cf. *Laches* 190e3–4). However, Socrates' questioning reveals that Laches' belief system about this virtue is self-contradictory. On the one hand, the general thinks (i) that courage is endurance of the soul (192b9) and a fine thing (192c5–7, d8); on the other, he thinks that (ii) endurance of the soul is sometimes not a fine thing, *viz*. when it is accompanied by folly (192d1–6).[11] Similarly, in the *Hippias Major*, the sophist Hippias adamantly claims that he knows what beauty is (cf. *Hippias Major* 287e2–3). But once Socrates interrogates him, his beliefs about beauty seem contradictory: Hippias (i) takes the essence of beauty (αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, 288a9) to be a beautiful girl (288a8–b3), but still acknowledges (ii) that a beautiful girl is ugly compared to the class of gods (289a8–c8).[12] Facing these contradictions, Laches and Hippias offer improved definitions of courage and beauty. Nevertheless, Socrates relentlessly persists with his questioning and is able to reveal new contradictions in their beliefs.[13] Now, because Socrates assumes that proving someone's contradictions is enough for refuting his or her claim to knowledge,[14] he must conclude, as he indeed does in the *Apology*, that he has refuted these "wise" men and that they actually do not know what they claim to know.

So, the refutation presented in the *Sophist* and Socrates' mode of enquiry in the early dialogues both expose ignorance by establishing inconsistencies

11 On this argument, see C. Young's reconstruction in Young (2009), 57.

12 In Vlastos (1991), 115–116 and Vlastos (1994), 31, G. Vlastos argues that Hippias's answers are so inept that Socrates cannot submit them to a proper *elenchus*. However, I am not convinced that reducing the essence of beauty to physical instances of beauty is such an inept philosophical position nor that Plato saw it as absurd in its own right (recall that, in *Republic* V, 475d1–480a13, Plato has Socrates refuting in depth the position of the "sight-lovers" who also reduce beauty to what is beautiful). For an intriguing reconstruction of Hippias's position, see Dixsaut (2001), 108–114.

13 See *Laches* 192d8*ff.; Hippias Major* 289c9*ff*.

14 For this assumption, see *Gorgias* 457e1–458b3, where Socrates hopes that he can keep on *refuting* Gorgias (διελέγχειν, 457e3–4) and proving him wrong (cf. δόξα ψευδὴς, 458a8–b1) by revealing his inconsistencies.

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in their interlocutors' beliefs. However, in the *Sophist*, these inconsistencies appear after:

(d) a process of collection (συνάγωγη) of the beliefs (cf. 230b6).

Moreover, the inconsistency between the beliefs is not established in any old way, but

(e) must occur in the exact same respects (ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταὐτὰ) (cf. 230b7–8).

Different passages of the early dialogues suggest that these two points apply equally well to Socrates' way of refuting. Concerning (d), in the *Protagoras*, after having cross-examined at length Protagoras about the parts of virtue, Socrates says: "Come now, let us add (ἀναλογισώμεθα) our admissions together" (332d1–2). He then does exactly what the text of the *Sophist* describes: he recalls and brings together Protagoras' previous answers in a way that makes their contradiction apparent. In the case in point, Protagoras has been inconsistent to admit both that things have only one opposite *and* that folly has two opposites, temperance and wisdom (see *Protagoras* 332d1–333b3).[15] Concerning (e), unlike practitioners of eristic, Socrates pays constant attention to the qualifications introduced by his interlocutors and recognizes contradiction only when it happens in the exact same respects. So, at *Euthydemus* 295b1–296c7, he irritates Euthydemus by systematically adding qualifications to his answers and at *Republic* IV 436b8–437a3, he explicitly dismisses contradictions that do not happen in the exact same respects.

Since several important features (see (a)-(e) above) of the refutation described in the sixth division of the *Sophist* also characterize the Socratic refutations in the early dialogues, there seem to be solid grounds for concluding that the *elenchus* of the sixth division is actually Socrates' *elenchus*. However, some commentators have resisted this conclusion and argued against it. In the remainder of this section, I will present and refute their objections.

Firstly, some scholars note that certain features of the Stranger's account in the sixth division do not correspond to the portrayal of the Socratic refutations found in Plato's early dialogues. Consider that:

(f) The refutation described by the Stranger is a method of teaching (διδασκαλική, 229a10).

15 The same procedure also takes place at *Ion* 539e7–540a6 where Socrates brings together Ion' previous answers concerning the delimitation of knowledge in order to demonstrate their inconsistency. On the collection of beliefs in the Socratic *elenchus*, see Robinson (1941), 21–22.

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(g) The refutation described by the Stranger is supposed to have calming effects (πρὸς δὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἡμεροῦνται, 230b9–c1).
(h) The refutation of the sixth division is easily carried out because it is performed on people who are confused (ἅτε πλανωμένων τὰς δόξας ῥᾳδίως ἐξετάζουσι, 230b5) and ignorant (cf. λέγων μηδέν, 230b4–5).

But contrary to (f), Socrates denies being a teacher (at *Apology* 19d9–20c3 and 33a5–6)[16]; contrary to (g), he does not always calm down his interlocutor in the early dialogues (think of Callicles' behaviour in the *Gorgias* for instance)[17]; and contrary to (h), he does not seem to always easily refute his interlocutors in the early dialogues.[18]

Nevertheless, even if these concerns are legitimate, they are not decisive, because every feature taken to be problematic in the Stranger's description is in fact well grounded in what Socrates himself says or suggests about his method in the dialogues. Despite his denial, Socrates is indeed sometimes ready to describe his activity as a kind of teaching, just as the Stranger does in the *Sophist* (see Socrates' use of the verb διδάσκω at *Apology* 21b1–2, 35c2; *Laches* 195a7; and *Gorgias* 457c5–d1).[19] Concerning the calming effects of the refutation stressed by the Stranger, they echo Socrates' own declarations. At *Theaetetus* 210c2–4, Socrates explicitly says that his midwifery makes people calmer (ἡμερώτερος); and at *Gorgias* 457c4–458b3, he contrasts his own way of refuting (διελέγχειν, 457e3–4) with the one that triggers anger (χαλεπαίνουσί, 457d3) between interlocutors.[20] Finally, like the Stranger, Socrates also believes that

16 Cf. Kerferd (1954), 89 and Notomi (1999), 66.
17 I thank the anonymous reviewer of this journal for this remark.
18 Cf. Crivelli (2004), 247–248.
19 Why does Socrates himself waver about his teacher status? One plausible hypothesis is that he denies being a teacher in one sense, but is ready to identify himself as a teacher in another sense (see e. g. Brickhouse and Smith (1989), 198). In this context, note that, in the *Sophist*, the Stranger explicitly distinguishes three kinds of teaching: The teaching of crafts (229d1–2), the method of scolding (229e4–230a4, see *Protagoras* 325c5–d7) and, finally, the refutation that purifies the soul of its ignorance (230a5–231b9). Perhaps Socrates' denial concerns the first two senses of teaching while his positive uses of the verb διδάσκω in the *Apology*, *Laches*, and *Gorgias* refer to the third sense distinguished in the *Sophist*, that is, the purification of ignorance. In any case, the passages cited where Socrates uses the verb διδάσκω to describe his activity confirm that the Stranger's description is grounded in Socrates' own description of his activity.
20 See also *Republic* VI 498c9–d2, where Socrates considers that his cross-examination of Callicles (in *Republic* I) results not in anger but in friendship! Nevertheless, despite Socrates' and the Stranger's shared optimism, it remains true that some patients of the Socratic *elenchus* stay agitated and angry after being refuted (besides Callicles, see *Apology* 22e7–23a5). Why then, in Plato's dialogues, is there sometimes a difference between the expected effects and the actual

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refuting confused and ignorant people is easy: in the *Symposium*, just after having refuted Agathon about *eros*, he remarks that it is not difficult at all (οὐδὲν χαλεπόν) to contradict someone who does not know the truth, even if that person is Socrates himself (*Symposium* 201c8–9: see also *Gorgias* 473b10–11). From these texts, it appears that the Stranger's account of the *elenchus* is well and truly grounded in Socrates' own account of his activity.

Yet another source of hesitation might come, not from some discrepancies between the Stranger's description and Socrates' mode of enquiry, but from the *absence* in the sixth division of an important feature of the Socratic *elenchus*:

(i) The confusion (ἀπορία) triggered by Socrates (see e. g. *Meno* 79e7–80d4).

It is true that *aporia* is an important effect of the Socratic *elenchus* (as we will see in the next section) and that its absence in the sixth division is surprising. On the other hand, *aporia* is equally not used for describing the result of Socrates' refutation in the *Apology*,[21] and yet we take without hesitation the account of the *Apology* as referring to Socrates' activity. Moreover, even if the Stranger does not directly make use of the word ἀπορία in his description, he does use the verb πλανάω at 230b5 to describe the state of mind of those who are refuted. But the verb πλανάω can mean "to be at a loss" or "in doubt",[22] and is used by Socrates as synonym of ἀπορῶ in the *Hippias Major*, at 304c2. The aporetic effects triggered by the *elenchus*, moreover, seem compatible with the calming effects of the refutations stressed by the Stranger and Socrates (see (g) above). In the *Sophist*, Theaetetus is often confused (see e. g. ἀπορῶ at 231b9; and later at 251e1–4), but is said to be gentle and mild at the beginning of the dialogue (πρᾴως, 217d5) and remains so throughout the argument, however aporetic it is.

Finally, one question remains. If the ἔλεγχος described by the Stranger refers to a method used by Plato's Socrates, why does it occur right in the middle of an attempt to capture the *sophist*?[23] To understand, note that the six arts that result from applying the method of division to the sophist are in fact *appearances* of the sophist. When the Stranger starts to summarize the result of

effects of Socrates' refutation? Here, I can only offer hypotheses. One is that Plato is ironic in these passages, that is, he knows well that Socrates' refutation sometimes triggers anger, but says the opposite. Another is that he describes the reaction of a *philosophical* mind to a refutation. After all, calm and sweetness (τὸ ἥμερον) are the virtues of the philosopher in the *Republic* (see *Republic* III, 410e1–3). A third one is that reacting positively to Socrates' refutation is the result of getting used to it, a long-term effect of the refutation, so to say. This is actually exactly what Nicias says at *Laches* 188a4–b1.

21 As Szaif (2017), 19, n. 2 points out.

22 Cf. LSJ "πλανάω" II 5.

23 Cf. Bluck (1975), 43; Notomi (1999), 65.

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his divisions, he indeed tries to recall how the sophist *appeared* to him and Theaetetus (cf. (...) ὁπόσα ἡμῖν ὁ σοφιστὴς πέφανται, 231d2). Moreover, throughout the divisions themselves, he makes clear that he is concerned with appearances of the sophist.[24] But surely, Socrates' refutations appear to be sophistic to some people. After all, the conversation of the *Sophist* happens exactly when Socrates has to defend himself against the accusation that he is a sophist who corrupts young people.[25] Since Socrates' refutation can sometimes appear to be sophistic and since the six arts provided by the method of division are different appearances of the sophist, it is natural to find the Socratic *elenchus* among these six arts.[26]

In view of this discussion, I conclude that there are solid grounds for taking the sixth division of the *Sophist* as a description of the Socratic *elenchus* and that the objections against this reading are not compelling. But is the Socratic *elenchus* only described in the *Sophist* or is it present in a different way? I will now argue that the Stranger himself *uses* the *elenchus* in the *Sophist*.

The Practice of *Elenchus* in the *Sophist*

After a brief summary of the six divisions (231c9–e7), the Stranger realizes that there is a problem with the multiple appearances collected: he and Theaetetus were unable to grasp the central point on which the many arts allegedly possessed by the sophist converge (232a3–7). Future developments reveal, however, that the *genus* of image-making is this central point. Applying the method

24 See 223c2–4: φάντασμα (during the transition from the first to the second division); 224d2: ἀνεφάνη (during the summary of the second division); 231b7: παραφανέντι (during the summary of the sixth division); 231c1: πεφάνθαι; 231d2: πέφανται; 231d9: ἀνεφάνη; 232a2: φαίνηται (during the summary of the six first divisions). On the fact that the six first divisions of the *Sophist* reach only appearances and not the essence of sophistry, see Notomi (1999), 78–81.

25 The *Sophist* is supposed to happen the day after the *Theaetetus* during which Socrates makes clear that the procedure against him has already been initiated (see *Theaetetus* 210d2–4 with *Sophist* 216a1–4).

26 This explanation according to which the Stranger collects the sophist's appearances (including Socrates) is preferable to the one suggested by C.C.W. Taylor in Taylor (2006), 164–168. According to Taylor, if the Socratic *elenchus* is portrayed during the sophist hunt, it is simply because Plato in the *Sophist* considers that Socrates is a sophist (a noble one, but still a sophist). This thesis is based on the developmental line under criticism in my paper (see the Introduction above): the Socratic *elenchus* is an expired method closer to sophistry and magic than to the philosophy actually practiced by Plato (under the guise of the Stranger) in the late dialogues. However, I will now show that the Socratic *elenchus* is *not* an expired method. I will show that the Stranger extensively practices this method in the heart of the *Sophist*.

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of division to this *genus* could therefore provide a satisfying definition of the sophist as an image-maker (232b1–236d4). But creating images implies the existence of falsehood and the possibility of saying what is not. However, Parmenides argued that it is impossible to say what is not. So, either Parmenides is wrong about not-being or the sophist cannot be accused of creating images and of speaking falsely (236d9–241c3). Before resolving this dilemma, the Stranger thinks he needs to review the accounts of *being* put forward by Parmenides and his predecessors. This review generates several puzzles or difficulties about being (241c4–249d5). My claim is that the Stranger makes a systematic use of the Socratic *elenchus* to generate these puzzles.

First, consider the dialectical situation: unsure whether they understand what Parmenides and other story-tellers mean when they tell stories about the quantity and quality of beings (243c2–6, cf. 242c4–243a1), the Stranger and Theaetetus decide to use a *method* (cf. τὴν μέθοδον, 243d7). This method consists of *asking questions* to the mythologists *as if these latter were present* (οἷον αὐτῶν παρόντων ἀναπυνθανομένους, 243d7–8) in order to understand what they mean by the term "being" (243d1–8). Thus, the method used here by the Stranger starts in the same way as the refutation described in the sixth division, i. e. by questioning those who think they are saying something. Now, in the refutation of the sixth division, this questioning reveals that those interrogated, far from being knowledgeable, are actually "saying nothing", that is, they have contradictory beliefs about the same thing in the same respects. What about the method used by the Stranger here? Does it also show that the mythologists are "saying nothing" about being and have contradictory beliefs about it?

The dualists think that:

(a) All things are two things, e. g. hot and cold (243d8–9).

But when they are asked what they mean by "being", they must choose one of these answers:

(b) Being is a third thing (243e3–4).
(c) Being is the hot or the cold (243e4–6).
(d) Being is the pair "hot-and-cold" (243e8–244a2).

However, (b) immediately entails (*not*-a). Suppose on the other hand that (c) is true and that being is the hot. Then the cold is not (for if it were, it would be hot), and there is only one thing: the hot. The same reasoning holds if being is the cold. So, if the dualists answer (c), then (*not*-a). What if they answer (d)? In this case, being is identified with the couple "hot-and-cold". But this couple is only one thing, not two. Therefore (d) is again in contradiction with (a). It appears then that the pluralists give contradictory answers with respect to the same thing: being.

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What about the monist?

He thinks that:

(a) There is only one thing (244b9–10).

However, the monist uses two names "being" and "one". He is therefore committed to the following opinion:

(b) There are at least two names ("being" and "one") (244c4–10).

But (b) obviously contradicts (a). Moreover, since the monist uses names, he believes that a name can perform its function of naming. Now, that can only be done if:

(c) A name is different from what it names (244c11–d13).

Because it assumes *two* different things, a name and what it names, (c) implies (*not*-a).

A monist like Parmenides has to face other difficulties. Some sections of his poem indicate that he is committed to the following claim:

(d) Being is a whole that has parts (244d14–e8).

However,

(e) Unity itself has no parts (245a5–b3[27]).

Therefore being and unity are *two* different things, and (not-*a*) again. If the monist tries to give up (d), and maintains that being is not a whole, then either:

(f) There is still a whole different from being or

(g) There is no whole at all.

But (f) again implies that there are two things, the whole and being (245c1–10), therefore (not-*a*). As for (g), it is absurd in its own right, because whatever is and becomes something, is and becomes something as a whole (245c11–d7). So if (g) were true, being would not be and would not become being.[28] Consequently, the monist, like the pluralists, is trapped in contradictions.

Regarding the longer refutations of the "earth-born giants" and the "friends of the forms", one can at least highlight some contradictions in their beliefs about being. The earth-born giants consider that:

27 The Stranger extracts this premise from a "true *logos*" (245a9, b2), which is probably Parmenides' poem itself. See *Parm*. fr. 8, 22 and Dixsaut (2000), 202–203.

28 I am slightly simplifying this difficult passage. For complete exegesis, compare Harte (2002), 100–116 and Crivelli (2012), 79–85.

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(a) Something without a body is not (246b1–3).

Nevertheless, they believe two more things:
(b) Virtues are beings (247b1–3).
(c) Virtues do not have body (247c1–2).

Now (b) and (c) together contradict (a) and force the earth-born giants to accept a new definition of being as the power of affecting something or of being affected by something (247c9*sq*).

The position of the friends of the forms is difficult to articulate. However, there is, if not a contradiction, at least an unresolved tension between two of their claims:
(a) Everything is stable (248a12, 249c11–d1).
(b) Souls can communicate with being through reasoning (*logos*) (248a11).

Why is there an unresolved tension between these two claims? One possibility is that when a soul communicates with a being through reasoning, it affects this being. But "being affected" implies "changing"; hence, there are at least some beings that are not stable, contrary to (a). Nevertheless, in one plausible interpretation of the discussion with the friends of the forms (see the difficult passage 248d4–e6), the friends of the forms foresee this line of reasoning and consequently refuse to understand the communication between a soul and a being as a power of affecting and of being affected.[29] However, *even in this case*, (b) still requires an explanation of how knowledge works and an account of the existence of souls. But these explanations seem impossible to provide without assuming that some things change (i. e. without assuming *not*-a), at least in the frame of the *Sophist* (cf. 248e7–249b7).

The method of questioning used by the Stranger reveals that the mythologists have contradictory beliefs about being – exactly what the Socratic *elenchus* would reveal. The only noticeable difference with the *elenchus* as we know it is that the mythologists are absent and that Theaetetus must serve as their mouthpiece (see 243d6–8; 244b9*sq*; 246e2–4). However, as M. M. McCabe has shown in detail,[30] this absence is probably connected to the fact that some positions held by the mythologists are so radical that they cannot even be consistently *stated*. They therefore need a voice that makes them more amenable and tractable. This is what happens to the giants. If only bodies exist, as they have it, the giants

29 Cf. Cornford (1935), 240, n. 3; Brown (1998), 197; Crivelli (2012), 89, n. 53; Delcomminette (2014), 538.
30 See McCabe (2000), 60–92.

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cannot account for the *immaterial content* of their own speech. Speech has no room in their ontology. So, they themselves cannot consistently answer questions.[31] To perform an *elenchus* despite this, the Stranger must then ask Theaetetus to act as their spokesman and to interpret what they say (246d4–e4). In this process they become "better people" (τοὺς βελτίους γεγονότας, 246e2), since they can now answer questions and become patients of an *elenchus* (recall indeed that the patients of an *elenchus* are said to be calmer or softer (ἡμεροῦνται) towards others at 230b9–c1).

Note, finally, that these conversations with the mythologists generally end in *aporia*. At 244a4–b1, after the discussion with the pluralists, the Stranger indeed confesses twice his perplexity (ἠπορήκαμεν, 244a4, a7). At 245d12–e5, after the discussion with the monists and the pluralists, the Stranger declares: "millions of other issues will also arise, each generating indefinitely many confusions (μυρία ἀπεράντους ἀπορίας, 245d12), if you say that being is only two or one". At 247d4, he suggests that his cross-examination of the giants will leave them in a state of confusion (τάχ' οὖν ἴσως ἂν ἀποροῖεν). Why is this presence of *aporiai* a key point? Because, as we know from Plato's dialogues, ἀπορία (i. e. perplexity, confusion, puzzlement) is the result of Socrates' *elenchus* (cf. for instance the famous comparison between Socrates and a torpedo at *Meno* 79e7–80d4), as well as a cognitive state that Socrates values as a driving force for his own philosophical research (cf. *Philebus* 34d5–7). Thus, the Socratic *elenchus* and the Stranger's method used for reviewing the previous accounts of being do not only work in the exact same way (by revealing contradictory beliefs through a cross-examination), but also produce the same state of mind in their interlocutors: *aporia*. The two methods can, therefore, safely be said to be one and the same.

Before considering the function of the Socratic *elenchus* and the *aporiai* at this point of the dialogue, it is necessary to clarify an aspect of my reading. In the *Sophist*, there are other refutations and other *aporiai* than those occurring during the cross-examination of the mythologists. Consider, for example, the *aporiai* generated by the discussion about not-being (236d9–241c3) and the refutation of those who believe that things cannot mix (251e8–252d1).[32] Given that the Stranger is ready to use the Socratic *elenchus* against the mythologists, it is tempting to also read these passages as different cases of *elenctic* questionings. However, the logic of refutation at work in these passages is at times slightly different from the one described by the Stranger in the sixth division. The "greatest puzzlement" concerning not-being (238d1–239a12) and the

31 Ibid. 78.

32 There is also the *aporia* connected to the last difficulty about being (249d9–250d4), which I will discuss in the next section of this paper.

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"Euryclean" refutation of the late-learners (252b8–d1) involve inconsistency not between two beliefs – as we would expect from the discussion at 230b – but between the content of one belief and the very way this belief is asserted.[33] Commentators have labelled these special refutations that point to a conflict between the way in which something is presented and what is presented "*pragmatic self*-refutations".[34] But these pragmatic self-refutations differ from the Socratic *elenchoi*, which operate by spotting inconsistencies between two or more beliefs, *not* by spotting inconsistency between one belief and the very way this belief is put forward.[35] So, insofar as the "greatest puzzlement" concerning not-being and the "Euryclean" refutation of the late-learners belong to the class of pragmatic self-refutative arguments, they are not occurrences of a Socratic *elenchus*. At best, they might be, in Plato's eyes, special or non-standard cases of Socratic *elenchus* embedded in more standard ones. The most clear-cut case of Socratic *elenchus* in the *Sophist* remains the cross-examination of the mythologists on which I have commented.

The Role of *Elenchus* in the Argument of the Dialogue

Granted that the *elenchus* is described in the sixth division and used for reviewing the mythologists' accounts of being, what is its function in the argument of the dialogue? In particular, what is the impact of the Stranger's use of *elenchus* on the discussion that immediately follows, which raises a last puzzle about being (249d9–250d4)? To answer this question, I will start by presenting the outline of this last

33 In the "greatest puzzlement" concerning not-being, the Stranger examines the consequences of Parmenides' claim according to which not-being shares in no way in being (DK 28 B7, 1-2, quoted at *Sophist* 237a8–9, cf. 258d2–3). If this claim is true, then not-being shares in no way either in plurality or in oneness, for plurality and oneness are beings (238a1–b5). But when someone says or thinks that "not-being does not share either in oneness or in plurality", this person *is* attributing oneness to not-being because (s)he is using "not-being" in the singular (238d5–e4). In other words, this person is breaking the rule (s)he proposes at the very moment (s)he proposes it. Similarly, when the late-learners claim that "everything is separated from everything else", they *are* blending everything with what the words "separated", "everything else" and "is" express (252b8–d1).

34 For a formal analysis of the logic of pragmatic self-refutation, see Mackie (1964), 193–194. For useful critical comments on how to apply this analysis to ancient self-refutation, see Castagnoli (2010), 160–163,

35 Similarly, in his monograph on ancient self-refutation, Castagnoli (2010), 7 explicitly excludes the *elenchus* from the scope of his analysis.

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puzzle. Next, I will introduce the standard reading of this puzzle and contend that it does not provide the eight pages of *elenchoi* that precede with a satisfactory function in the dialogue. Finally, I will propose my own reading of the last puzzle and argue that this reading explains the function of the *elenchoi* in the dialogue.

Let us start with the outline of the last puzzle. The practice of *elenchus* against the friends of the forms forces them to recognize not only what is unchanging but also what changes as a necessary condition for knowledge and intelligence. From there, the Stranger concludes that if knowledge and intelligence are to be preserved, both what changes and what is unchanging must be included in what there is (248e7–249d5). So, even if change and rest are contrary to each other, they are both said to be (250a8–b1). However, the Stranger notes that, when people say that change and rest are, they do *not* say that change and rest are changing or that they are resting (250b2–7). Therefore, being seems to be a third thing in which change and rest partake but that is *different* from them (250b8–c4). Convinced by the argument, Theaetetus accepts this conclusion and its additional consequence: being by its own nature neither changes nor rests (250c5–8). However, once restated, these consequences appear to be highly paradoxical because everything either changes or rests (250c9–d4).

Since G.E.L. Owen and M. Frede's influential publications, most interpreters consider that, in this last puzzle, the Stranger proceeds to an *intentional confusion*. In Owen's version, the Stranger concludes erroneously that being does not instantiate change or rest (250c6–7; 250c12–d3) from the fact that being is not identical with change and rest (250c3–4).[36] In Frede's version, the Stranger concludes erroneously that being does not instantiate change or rest (250c12–d3) from the fact that being is not by nature changing or resting (250c6–7).[37] But in any case, even if the Stranger somehow makes this mistake in these lines, it is only to correct it in the remainder of the dialogue (from 251a5 on) either by distinguishing identity and predication or by distinguishing essential predication and ordinary predication. This is the standard way of reading the last puzzle about being. However, there is a problem with this reading. In this interpretation, the function of the eight Stephanus pages or so that precede remains unclear: if the subsequent section of the dialogue is intended to correct a mistake that occurs only in the last puzzle about being, why should Plato take the trouble to review in detail the positions of the monist, the friends of the forms, and the earth-born giants?[38]

36 See Owen (1971), 257 and 261.

37 See Frede (1967), 67–68.

38 An advocate of the standard reading could answer that the *elenchoi* are necessary to reach the characterization of being as what changes and what is unchanging and that this characterization brings about the last puzzle. But that defence would not do. As he himself suggests at

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This exegetical difficulty calls for an alternative reading of the last puzzle that, while looking forward to the constructive part of the *Sophist* (251a5–264b5), can also provide the previous difficulties (241c4–249d5) – and so, in my interpretation, the *elenchoi* – with a definite function in the argument of the *Sophist*. To reach such a reading, consider again the last steps of the puzzle. Convinced that (a) being is a third thing in which change and rest partake but that is *different* from them (250b8–c4), Theaetetus accepts the additional consequence according to which (b) being by its own nature neither changes nor rests (250c5–8). However, once restated, these consequences appear to be paradoxical (250c9–d4). Why so? My suggestion is that these conclusions appear paradoxical not because they are reformulated by the Stranger in an intentionally confusing way, but because they clash with the general assumption about being that governs the dialogue up to that point. According to this assumption, being is not a third thing different from what there is, being *is precisely everything that is or the whole*.[39]

As we have seen in the previous section, the practice of *elenchus* reveals that the mythologists have contradictory beliefs about being. As we have not seen yet, *elenctic* questionings always start from the same assumption: that being is everything or the whole. At 244b2–3, the Stranger indeed describes a pluralist as "anyone who says that *everything* (τὸ πᾶν) is more than one". At 244b6–7, about the monists, he asks, "well, then, shouldn't we do our best to find out from the people who say that *everything* (τὸ πᾶν) is one what they mean by 'being'?". At 244d14–15, the monists explicitly admit that "the one being" (τοῦ ὄντος ἑνὸς) is the same as *the whole* (τὸ ὅλον). At 249c10–d4, the Stranger concludes the discussion with the friends of the forms in the following way:

"The philosopher (...) absolutely has to refuse to accept the claim that *everything* (τὸ πᾶν) is at rest, either from defenders of the one or from friends of the many forms. In addition, he has to refuse to listen to people who say that being changes in every way. He has to be like a child begging for 'both,' and say that *being* – i. e. *everything* – (τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν)[40] comprises both the unchanging and that which changes".

To be sure, in this last passage, the philosopher himself seems to endorse the equation "being = everything", but it is certainly a provisional and tactical

249e6–250a2, the Stranger could have set up the last puzzle immediately after the discussion with the pluralists who characterize being as what is cold and what is hot. Therefore, the question of why the Stranger needed to go through all the previous accounts of being remains unanswered.

39 Here I draw and expand on Jean Roberts's excellent paper, see Roberts (1986), particularly 235–237.

40 Taking καί epexegetically.

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endorsement, since in the remainder of the dialogue, this equation is never mentioned again. On the contrary, after 251a5, being is treated as a proper kind *distinct* from the other kinds, forms or ideas. At 259b1–4 (cf. 257a4–6), as he summarizes the first constructive part of the dialogue, the Stranger even says: "(...) and again, being, having a part in difference, will be different from all the rest of the kinds; and because it is different from them all (ἕτερον δ' ἐκείνων ἁπάντων), it is not each of them *nor yet all the others put together*, but is only itself (οὐδὲ σύμπαντα τὰ ἄλλα πλὴν αὐτό) (...)".[41]

According to the Stranger then, being is not everything or the whole, it is a distinct entity that has its own nature, which he also calls a kind. Nevertheless, this important result is not yet available to Theaetetus when the Stranger interrogates him during the last puzzle about being. As far as Theaetetus is concerned, the only option available regarding being is the one assumed by the mythologists, that is, that being is everything or the whole. After all, Theaetetus has previously conceded the fact that being consists in everything that changes and rests (249d5). This is why the new claim according to which being is not everything but a distinct thing that neither changes nor rests seems especially paradoxical at first glance and deserves further clarification (250c9–d4).

Now, this reading of the last puzzle throws some light on the role of the Socratic *elenchus* in the *Sophist*. The different *elenchoi* indeed reveal that, as long as being is equated with everything or the whole, contradictory beliefs about being arise. Whether someone maintains that everything is one or many, or believes that everything consists only of bodies or ideas, his or her inability to view being as a distinct entity possessing its own nature, i. e. as a kind, lead him or her to contradictions. The *elenchoi* are meant to show how these contradictions actually arise and why they are inescapable.[42] Well understood, the *elenchoi* motivate Theaetetus (and with him, the reader) to adopt the view according to which being is an entity distinct from everything. It is true that the Stranger never *explicitly* draws this lesson. However, the textual facts remain: whereas the equation "being = everything" is maintained throughout the discussion with the mythologists, it is dropped and even contradicted in the last puzzle and in the constructive part of the dialogue where being is explicitly considered as a proper

41 Cornford's translation (1935), 296 modified and italicized.

42 Even if the Stranger did not prove that anyone who will ever equate being with everything will have contradictory beliefs about being, his discussion embraces every philosophical position concerning being that was taken before him: see "our aim is to have them all in view" (ἵν' ἐκ πάντων ἴδωμεν) at 245e8–246a1. So, at the end of the puzzles about being, he has at least shown that every thinker before him who has understood being as everything is inconsistent and ignorant about being.

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kind distinct from the totality of kinds put together. Moreover, the moral of the dialogue according to the standard readings is not stated more explicitly: the passages where the Stranger is supposed to distinguish identity statements and predicative statements or essential and ordinary predication are themselves highly controversial and open to alternative interpretations (see the vast literature generated by 255c13–14 and 256a3–b4).[43] Ultimately, it is not uncommon in Plato's dialogues that some work remains to be done by the reader. In my interpretation, this work consists in reading the refutations of the mythologists closely enough to realise that being cannot be the same as everything.

Conclusion

It is often believed that there is a major methodological break between Plato's early and Socratic dialogues and the later works where the Stranger is the leading character. However, I have shown that the Stranger not only describes the Socratic *elenchus* but also makes extensive use of this method against the mythologists. Therefore, even if the method of division is in the foreground in the *Sophist* (after being introduced at *Phaedrus* 265c5–266c1), it is *not* at the expense of other more 'classical' methods. This enduring presence of the *elenchus* suggests that Plato's methodology is more continuous than previously understood, while the coexistence of the *elenchus* and the method of division in the *Sophist* implies that Plato's methods are varied.

Moreover, in contrast with standard scholarly approaches to the puzzles about being, I have provided all the puzzles about being with a definite function in the organisation of the dialogue. In my interpretation, the review of the mythologists' accounts of being (241c4–249d8) should be conceived as a series of *elenchoi* that show how contradictions emerge when being is understood as everything. From this perspective, the final puzzle (249d9–250d4) arises, not because of a sudden intentional confusion between identity and predication or between essential and ordinary predication, but because the Stranger finally contradicts the mythological equation between being and everything, arguing that being is a third thing that neither changes nor rests. While this new claim will be further explained in the constructive part of the dialogue, it is still in need of clarification at the end of the puzzles about being.

43 For a good synthesis of this literature, see Crivelli (2012), 140–166.

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