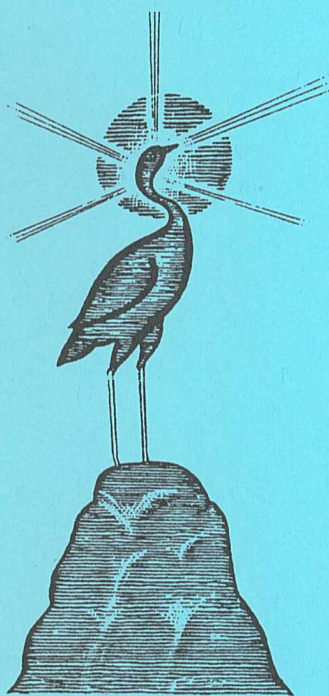


PHOENIX



LXVI No. 1-2, Spring-Summer/printemps-été 2012
Classical Association of Canada
Société canadienne des études classiques

IGNORANCE, SHAME AND LOVE OF TRUTH:
DIAGNOSING THE SOPHIST'S ERROR IN PLATO'S *SOPHIST*

MICAH LOTT

And likewise, human beings by nature will to know, and yet they reject knowledge because of the toil involved in learning or the fear of being kept from the sins they love. And so the will can in some way command ignorance.

Aquinas, *On Evil* 3.7 (tr. Regan)

IN THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, PHILOSOPHERS HAVE SHOWN substantial interest in Plato's dialogue the *Sophist*. Much of this interest has focused on the sections of the dialogue which provide an account of being and not-being, and of true and false speech. The sixth definition of the sophist, however, which is developed at 226b–231e, has received less attention.¹ Moreover, there have been even fewer sustained attempts to connect the sixth definition of the sophist to the final definition of the sophist given at the end of the dialogue.² According to the sixth definition, the sophist is a soul-cleanser, and his expertise lies in refuting people in order to cleanse them of a false belief in their own wisdom. It is the thesis of this paper that the sixth definition sheds important light on the final definition. More specifically, the sixth definition helps us to grasp more precisely the nature and cause of the sophist's error—namely, that the sophist has a disguised disregard for the truth, and this disregard is rooted in the sophist's concern for protecting his own status as one who is thought to be a wise person. Understanding the sophist's error enables us not only to grasp a key part of the dialogue's final account of the sophist, but also to appreciate more fully the dialogue's subtle portrayal of the attitudes and emotions involved in the search for truth. In particular, the sixth definition helps us to see how the sophist forms a kind of exception to the principle, laid down at 228c, that “no soul is willingly ignorant of anything.” The sophist is *willingly ignorant*,

For helpful comments on this essay, I thank Jonathan Beere, Gabriel Richardson Lear, participants in the Ancient Philosophy Workshop at the University of Chicago, and two anonymous reviewers for *Phoenix*.

¹Some discussions of the sixth definition include: Campbell 1867, esp. li–lvii and 41–64; Hackforth 1946; Kerferd 1954; Trevaskis 1955–1956; Sayre 1969, esp. 148–157; Albury 1971; Gooch 1971; Oscanyan 1972–1973; Starr 1973–1974; Klein 1977, esp. 20–27; Rosen 1983, esp. 118–131; Bernardete 1984, esp. 91–99; Dorter 1990; Notomi 1999, esp. 64–73 and 270–301.

Because the primary focus of this paper is neither to expand upon nor refute views found in the secondary literature, I will mostly confine my comments on secondary literature to the footnotes in order to preserve flow and readability in the main text.

²The notable exception to this is Notomi 1999.

insofar as he knowingly acts in a way that he believes will keep him in a state of ignorance concerning the topics he discusses.

I begin with a brief overview of the dialogue and a summary of the argument leading to the sixth definition. I then address some of the ambiguities in that argument and spell out some of the argument's implications, paying particular attention to the notions of ignorance and shame. I then show how ideas from the sixth definition illuminate the final definition of the sophist. Although my focus in this paper is the *Sophist*, in my discussion of the sophist's condition I also touch on some relevant cases of learning and shame from other Platonic dialogues, including the *Apology*, *Charmides*, and the *Republic*.

Two key assumptions that affect my interpretation but which remain mostly unargued for are: 1) that the sixth definition describes some kind of expertise, even if it does not accurately describe the sophist, and 2) that the final definition of the sophist is, at least within the context of the dialogue, an adequate definition of the sophist.

SUMMARY OF THE DIALOGUE AND THE SIXTH DEFINITION

The structuring principle of the *Sophist* is the search for a definition of the sophist. After an introductory interchange involving Socrates and Theodorus, the Visitor from Elea leads Theaetetus in this search using a method of dividing things according to their kinds. Their initial effort results in six different definitions of the sophist, none of which is accepted as adequate. They continue the search, however, focusing on the sophist as an appearance-making kind of copy-maker. The notion of appearance-making, in turn, leads to a long and complicated discussion of being, not-being, and the forms. The conclusion of this discussion is that false speech, false belief, and that which is not are all among those things that are. This conclusion paves the way for the final definition of the sophist given at the very end of the dialogue: "Imitation of the contrary-speech-producing, insincere and un-knowing sort, of the appearance-making copy-making, the word-juggling part of production that's marked off as human and not divine. Anyone who says the sophist is of this 'blood and family' will be saying, it seems, the complete truth" (268c).³

Like the other definitions, the sixth definition is arrived at through the method of dividing things according to their kinds. The need for a definition of the sophist, and hence the need for this method, arises from a question about how to relate names and kinds. In the opening scene of the *Sophist*, Socrates asks the Visitor if those in the Visitor's country "think that sophists, statesmen, and philosophers make up one kind of thing or two? Or did they divide them up into three kinds corresponding to the three names and attach one name to each of them?" (217a). The Visitor answers that they believe there are

³Tr. Nicholas P. White. All further quotations of the *Sophist* are from White's translation in Cooper 1997.

three kinds, and he then suggests the need for a verbal account of the sophist: “Now in this case you and I only have the name in common, and maybe we’ve each used it for a different thing. In every case, though, we always need to be in agreement about the thing itself by means of a verbal explanation, rather than doing without any such explanation and merely agreeing about the name” (218c). This verbal explanation of the sophist is to be given by means of the method of division, which “aims at acquiring intelligence, so it tries to understand how all kinds of expertise belong to the same kind or not” (227a–b). The aim of the method of division is not to supply merely an accurate description of some of the sophist’s activities or characteristics. Rather, the method aims to give a definition of the sophist, which states, with reference to various kinds, what the sophist *is*, or what makes a sophist a sophist and not something else. The Visitor describes this goal in one of his comments leading up to the final definition of the sophist: “Let’s go ahead and always follow the righthand part of what we’ve cut, and hold onto things that the sophist is associated with until we strip away everything that he has in common with other things. Then when we’ve left his own peculiar nature, let’s display it, especially to ourselves but also to people to whom this sort of procedure is naturally congenial” (264e).

The sixth definition begins with examples of various practices of dividing—filtering, straining, etc.—and the expertise associated with these kinds of dividing is identified as “discrimination” (διακριτικήν, 226c). The method of division is thus now being applied to the practice of dividing itself. However, there are two kinds of discrimination: one kind separates better from worse and the other kind separates things of like value. The method of division used in acquiring intelligence must be of the latter kind, because it does not discriminate better or worse forms of expertise but, “values them all equally without thinking some of them are more ridiculous than others, as far as their similarity is concerned” (227b). The sophist, however, is an expert in the former kind of discrimination, which is labeled “cleansing” (καθαρός, 226d). Cleansing is divided between cleansing of the body and of the soul, and the latter is again divided according to two kinds of badness in the soul which cleansing treats. The first kind of badness is like bodily sickness (νόσον ἐν σώματι), the second like ugliness (αἰσχρός, 228a). Sickness is said to be the same as discord (στάσιν), and discord “is just dissension among things that are naturally of the same kind, and arises out of some kind of corruption” (τινος διαφθοράς, 228a). Those who are sick in this way have dissension in their souls “between beliefs and desires, anger and pleasures, reasons and pains, and all of those things” (228b). The sophist, however, is a cleanser of the second kind of badness, which is like ugliness. Ugliness is said to be “a consistently unattractive sort of disproportion” (ἀμετρίας, 228a), and this disproportion in the soul is identified with ignorance (228c–d).

The first kind of badness—sickness/discord in the soul—is identified with moral vices: cowardice, licentiousness, insolence, and injustice. The expertise

most appropriate to cleansing this form of badness is correction; that most appropriate to remedying the badness of ignorance, however, is teaching. The expertise of teaching is itself divided into two kinds according to two kinds of ignorance which it treats. One kind of ignorance is, "Not knowing, but thinking that you know" (229c). This special kind of ignorance is called "lack of learning" (*ἀμαθίαν*, 229c).⁴

This special kind of ignorance seems to be what Plato refers to as "double ignorance" in the *Laws*:

Thirdly, we would be saying nothing but the truth if we named ignorance as a cause of wrongdoing. The lawgiver would, in fact, do a better job if he divided ignorance into two: (1) "simple" ignorance, which he would treat as the cause of trivial faults, (2) "double" ignorance, which is the error of a man who is not only in the grip of ignorance but on top of that is convinced of his own wisdom, believing that he has a thorough knowledge of matters of which, in fact, his ignorance is total. (*Laws* 863c, tr. Trevor J. Saunders in Cooper 1997: 1521)

The other kind of ignorance is not labeled, but seems to consist in simply not knowing without the presumption that one knows. It is also the kind of ignorance involved in ignorance of crafts.

Lack of learning is said to be treated by education (*παιδείαν*, 229d), and then education is divided between admonition (*νουθετητικὴν*, 230a) and refutation (*ἔλεγχον*, 230d). The sophist is an expert in treating lack of learning through refutation. The sophist cross-examines persons with lack of learning and shows that their opinions contradict one another. Seeing that they have been refuted, such persons get angry at themselves, calmer toward others, and they lose their false beliefs about their own knowledge. Just as doctors must remove what is troubling a sick body before the body can benefit from food, so these cleansers use refutation to remove lack of learning from the soul in order that it might benefit from true learning:

The people who cleanse the soul, my young friend, likewise think the soul, too, won't get any advantage from any learning that's offered to it until someone shames it by refuting it, removes the opinion that interfere with learning, and exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more (230c-d).

The Visitor finishes off the sixth definition of the sophist with a claim about the importance of this kind of cleansing, and the connection between this kind of cleansing and happiness (230d-e):

⁴The error of thinking that one knows what one does not know is, of course, a common theme in other dialogues involving Socrates. The most famous treatment of this kind of ignorance is probably Socrates' description of his philosophical activity in *Apol.* 21b-22e. In claiming that no one actually knows whether or not death is the greatest evil, Socrates says, "And surely it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know" (*Apol.* 29b, tr. G. M. A. Grube in Cooper 1997: 27).

For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we have to say that refutation is the principal and most important kind of cleansing. Conversely we have to think that even the king of Persia, if he remains unrefuted, is uncleansed in the most important respect. He's also uneducated and ugly, in just the ways that anyone who is going to be really happy has to be completely clean and beautiful.⁵

Interestingly, this claim goes beyond the bounds of the method of division laid down by the Visitor himself, according to which the method values all forms of expertise equally (227b). This does not mean that the Visitor's conclusions contradict or undermine his use of the method, but simply that the Visitor's claim about the importance of refutation involves, by his own account of the method of division, some other kind of activity than the activity of merely identifying the form of expertise involved in refutation.

At the same time, the Visitor's claim about the importance of refutation is strongly suggested by the very terms employed in the method of division, because descriptions such as sickness and ugliness of soul are normative characterizations, suggesting the value and importance of certain qualities or characteristics. Thus, while it might be strictly speaking possible for the Visitor to claim consistently that refutation is necessary for health and beauty of the soul but is nevertheless unimportant, such a claim would be very odd, given that health and beauty of soul are highly desirable. Hence, when the Visitor claims that refutation is the "most important kind of cleansing," it seems that the concepts employed in the method of division have already gone a long way in setting out the basis for this claim, insofar as having a clean soul is (plausibly) much more important than having a clean house, or even a clean body.⁶

Of course, we might concede that the cleansing of the soul is the most important kind of cleansing but not concede that refutation is more important than other forms of soul-cleansing. To see why the Visitor makes this stronger claim about the importance of refutation, we need to understand better his account of the soul's ignorance.

IGNORANCE AND UGLINESS

The Visitor's claim that the "ignorant soul is ugly and out of proportion" (228d) may appear implausible taken on its own. Surely most of us are ignorant of all kinds of things, such as how to build a car, what the capital of Botswana is, etc., without being ugly on account of this ignorance. A little later, the Visitor modifies the point slightly and says that there is a kind of ugliness

⁵For other mention of the king of Persia's happiness or lack thereof, see *Gorgias* 470e and 524e.

⁶A reviewer suggests that, with respect to its axiological neutrality, the goal of the method is to achieve understanding—a theoretical concern. With respect to the importance of the object of investigation (the skill of refutation), a practical concern comes to the fore. This seems to me basically correct, although, as I say, the very terms of the description—health, beauty, ugliness—already convey a sense of the practical significance of the topic.

in being “extremely ignorant of all sorts of things” (228e). A person who is thoroughly ignorant about a great many things is more plausibly described as “ugly.” However, even this is unsatisfactory, if taken as a point about mere quantity of ignorance, because babies and children are ignorant of many things, and it is very odd to suppose that they are therefore all ugly.

The Visitor's argument that the ignorant soul is ugly goes as follows:

- 1) ugliness is a consistently unattractive sort of disproportion
- 2) if something in motion tries to hit its target but repeatedly misses the target, then there is a disproportion between target and object⁷
- 3) no soul is willingly ignorant of anything
- 4) ignorance occurs when a soul tries for truth but misses
- 5) therefore, an ignorant soul is ugly and out of proportion (228a–d).

Premises 1 and 2 establish that when a certain kind of thing obtains, it is ugly. Premises 3 and 4 establish that this kind of thing obtains with the ignorant soul. In the case of ignorance, the ugly disproportion is between the soul, regarded as something aiming to know the truth, and the truth itself, which the ignorant soul fails to reach. Premise 3 establishes that souls *do* aim to know the truth, and premise 4 establishes that ignorance is their failing to achieve this goal. The soul's motion, then, is toward the truth, as an arrow moves toward its target.⁸ The soul's ignorance is a state in which it repeatedly misses its goal, like an arrow missing its target, and this state is out of proportion and ugly.

If an arrow fails to hit its target, it will nevertheless land somewhere; something analogous is true of the ignorant soul, as least with respect to ἀμαθία. The person with lack of learning not only has failed to reach the truth, but he has various false and inconsistent beliefs.⁹ Thus the Visitor says that the opinions of such a person “will vary inconsistently” (230b). That is why this person is a potential subject for refutation, because refutation happens when the soul-cleanser brings out the inconsistencies among his opinions.¹⁰ In addition, the

⁷White renders the relevant passage (228c1–5) in the following words: “Well then, suppose something that's in motion aims at target and tries to hit it, but on every try passes by it and misses. Are we going to say that it does this because it's properly proportioned or because it's out of proportion?” This translation suggests that the disproportion is internal to the object in motion. However, the (dis)proportion in question is actually *between* the object and its target—πρὸς ἄλληλα (228c4). I thank an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on how to understand the Visitor's argument in this section.

⁸For a description of the soul as that which moves itself and never stops moving, see *Phaedrus* 245c–e.

⁹It is not clear that the other sort of ignorance will always involve false beliefs and inconsistency. If I am ignorant of the craft of house-building, this does not mean that I will have false beliefs about the right way to build houses. Thus, my ignorance about house-building cannot be the object of refutation either.

¹⁰The Visitor assumes that such a person will have not only wrong opinions, but also opinions that contradict one another. He does not seem to consider the possibility of a person who is ignorant

person who lacks learning has at least one false belief about *himself*—namely, that he is someone who knows. It is this “inflated and rigid” belief about himself that goes away when he is refuted (230c).

REFUTATION AND SHAME

Thus far we have characterized ignorance as the soul’s failure to attain the truth, which might suggest that ignorance is a purely intellectual failure. If we treat ignorance as such, then it looks as if the distinction between the badness of ugliness/ignorance and the badness of sickness/dissension corresponds to a distinction between intellectual badness and moral badness. However, this very distinction between two kinds of badness is blurred by the end of the discussion of lack of learning. Initially, a distinction is made between the badness that is sickness on the one hand, and the badness that is ugliness on the other. Ignorance is the second kind of badness, and the sophist treats a particular type of ignorance, lack of learning, through refutation. However, in the description of this refutation, the sophist is compared to a doctor. This is strange, because earlier medicine is identified as the treatment for sickness, while gymnastics is the treatment for ugliness (229a). Given that ignorance is a kind of ugliness, we would expect the expert in refutation to be compared not to a doctor, but to a soul-gymnastics trainer. As Paul Gooch says, “In this small remark, Plato twists out of place the neat parallelism he has drawn throughout his classification of the process of purification Stupidity [Gooch’s translation of ἀμαθίαν] it appears, must be a diseased as well as deformed state of the soul.”¹¹

If lack of learning calls for treatment by a doctor, this suggests that lack of learning is a kind of sickness/discord as well as a kind of ugliness/ignorance, and hence that lack of learning involves moral as well as intellectual error, or some mixture of the two. Gooch seems correct in suggesting that lack of learning is both sickness/wickedness and ugliness/ignorance because lack of learning, unlike other kinds of ignorance, involves the irrational parts of the soul: “Stupidity, because it affects the soul’s irrational parts, is clearly a moral evil and cannot be confined to mere intellectual failure.”¹² The idea, then, is that moral evil, unlike intellectual failure, is a kind of badness involving the irrational parts of the soul, and the unique association of lack of learning with sickness/moral evil is explained by the fact that lack of learning, like other forms of sickness but unlike general ignorance, must be explained in terms of badness involving the irrational parts of the soul.

and who lacks learning, but who nevertheless has a set of (false) beliefs which are entirely mutually consistent. Perhaps the Visitor thinks that such a set of beliefs is impossible. In the *Cratylus* (436c–d), Socrates does acknowledge the possibility of beginning with a false belief and then constructing a set of false beliefs in accord with it.

¹¹Gooch 1971: 129.

¹²Gooch 1971: 131.

The notion that lack of learning involves moral error is supported not only by the twisting of the doctor-trainer metaphor, but also by the Visitor's claim that person being refuted experiences shame (αἰσχύνην, 230d). Moreover, reflection on the nature of shame can illuminate the kind of moral failure involved in lack of learning. Why is it that those with lack of learning experience shame upon seeing that they are refuted? Why do they not just say, "Oh, I guess I was wrong" and go on without that emotion? It seems that shame enters the picture because of the uniquely self-referential nature of lack of learning. What those who lack learning do not recognize is precisely that they do not know, even though they think that they know. In a way, then, the problem with those who lack learning is not so much their basic ignorance, but their additional belief about themselves as people who know. Thus, when they are refuted, they do not merely change their opinions about some particular topic in question, but they change their beliefs about themselves: "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" (230c). Moreover, the Visitor does not seem to think of this false belief in one's own knowledge as only a local mistake related to a particular topic. Rather, it is a general belief about oneself as a wise person (231b).

Now, without attempting an analysis of shame, I think we can point to some of the most important features of the experience of shame. Central to shame is the sense of feeling oneself to be exposed. As Bernard Williams says, "The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition."¹³ In shame, a person typically feels himself to be exposed in a way that somehow reveals his falling short—as being unworthy, or weak, or a failure. Hence, shame is closely connected to a sense of regret over that which causes one to fall short. In feeling himself to be exposed as falling short, the shamed person has a sense of himself as being humiliated, or brought low in the eyes of those before whom he is exposed: the shamed person is in a position of unworthiness or weakness below those before whom he is shamed. In this way, shame contrasts with pride or self-confidence in which one has a sense of one's high status or worthiness or power. Finally, the shamed person characteristically wants to hide himself from the gaze of the others.¹⁴

The Visitor's claim, then, seems to be that persons with lack of learning have an exalted view of themselves. They have an "empty belief in their own wisdom" (Δοξοσοφίαν, 231b),¹⁵ and this is not simply a matter of believing themselves

¹³Williams 1993: 78.

¹⁴We can think here of the story in Genesis of the fall of humanity. Before sinning, the man and women are "naked and not ashamed" (*Gen.* 2:25). After sinning, however, they cover themselves and hide from God in the garden, not wanting their nakedness exposed.

¹⁵Klein's (1977: 25) translation of this as the "conceit of wisdom" perhaps captures better the attitude I am trying to describe.

to have some particular piece of knowledge when in fact they do not, but rather it involves taking themselves to be wise in a way that confers on them a measure of status or worth. Thus, when through refutation they are forced to lose their belief in their own wisdom, they also lose their sense of their own high status and worth. They gain both a new awareness of their previous failure and a new sense of their own lowly status—they are not as wise or as honorable as they took themselves to be. Through refutation, they have been “brought low,” and they have been exposed before their interlocutor(s); in this way they are shamed. The moral failure, then, of those who lack learning, seems to be a kind of arrogance or hubris. They take themselves to be wiser, more valuable, more exalted than they truly are. Such an attitude is plausibly seen as a form of insolence, which is earlier listed as one type of sickness/wickedness in the soul (ὕβρις, 229a), and this suggests the way that lack of learning is a moral as well as intellectual failure.

In wanting to hide himself from others, the shamed person seems to view himself as ugly, insofar as he does not want others to look at him, and he does not even want to look at himself. In shame, it is as if there is a kind of personal unattractiveness that is exposed. In fact, the Visitor’s word for shame, αἰσχύνη (230d), is closely related to his word for ugliness, αἴσχος (228a), and αἴσχος can even mean shame or disgrace as well as ugliness and deformity.¹⁶ If shame involves seeing oneself as ugly, then those who lack learning must first become ugly in their own eyes in order to become beautiful. Those who lack learning are truly ugly, because they are ignorant, but they do not see themselves as ugly. It is only by being shamed through refutation, and thus being forced to see themselves as ugly, that they are cleansed from ignorance and hence can become truly beautiful.

Interestingly, the Visitor appears to think that when those who lack learning lose their false beliefs about themselves, this will be sufficient to leave them cleansed. He says that the person who refutes the soul, “exhibits it cleansed, believing that it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more” (230d). But persons who have been refuted might remain ignorant in many ways. They will have lost their false belief in their own wisdom, and hence they will recognize that they do not know, and they will no longer hold both of the beliefs that have been shown to be contradictory. But nevertheless they might still not know. This, according to what we have said earlier, would mean that such people might still have a disproportion in their souls that would be a kind of ugliness and badness in need of cleansing. How is it, then, that the Visitor says they are exhibited cleansed?

Refuted persons are already cleansed of ignorance insofar as lack of learning plays a unique role in causing people to be ignorant, such that when lack of learning is removed people will naturally direct themselves toward the truth.

¹⁶LSJ s.v. “αἰσχύνη” and “αἴσχος”.

The key point here is the Visitor's earlier claim that no soul is willingly ignorant of anything (228c, premise three in the argument outlined above). The thought seems to be that souls always desire to know the truth, and because of this the only thing that will keep a soul from seeking the truth is the belief that it already knows the truth. Put another way, no soul will see itself as ignorant and choose to remain that way rather than seeking after the truth. This is why the Visitor says that "lack of learning is always involuntary" (*ἀκούσιον*, 230a)—no soul wills to be in a state of thinking that it knows when it does not know, because that would be to will to remain ignorant of something. Moreover, the Visitor points out that people are not willing to learn about what they already believe they are clever at (230a). Thus, lack of learning is an especially pernicious form of ignorance because it puts a stop to the soul's instinctive search for truth by "tricking" the soul into thinking that it already knows what it does not know. Lack of learning is not just another failed attempt to gain knowledge, but rather it is a state of soul that keeps genuine attempts at truth from even getting started.

The picture, then, is of an ignorant soul that is failing to reach the truth and whose false beliefs conflict with one another, and what keeps the soul in this state of disproportion is precisely the one false belief that it knows what it does not know. This special role of lack of learning in causing other forms of ignorance is why the Visitor says that lack of learning "probably causes all the mistakes we make when we think" (229c) and it is why the Visitor is able to say that the refuted person is exhibited cleansed. Moreover, this also explains the Visitor's claim, noted earlier, that refutation "is the principal and most important kind of cleansing" (230d) and that to be unrefuted is to be "uncleansed in the most important respect" (230c). Refutation is most important because it must happen first in order for other learning to take place, just as the particular thing interfering with the body must be removed before any food can have a positive effect (230c).

In addition, the importance of cleansing seems to result not only from its role in each individual soul, but also from its ubiquity among human beings. The Visitor appears to suggest that everyone needs to be refuted: "Conversely we have to think that even the king of Persia, if he remains unrefuted, is unclesed in the most important respect" (230d–e). The Visitor's assumption is that just as no soul is willingly ignorant of anything, so all people are inclined to believe that they know when in fact they do not know.

THE SIXTH DEFINITION AND THE SOPHIST

At this point we have yet to address the question of whether the sixth definition is actually a definition, or even a description, of the sophist. As far as the dialogue is concerned, it seems that the sixth definition is not an accurate definition of the sophist, and there is reason to believe that the cleanser described

in the sixth definition is not the sophist at all.¹⁷ No sooner has the account of the cleanser been given than the Visitor expresses doubt about it, not on the grounds that it is an accurate description but inadequate as a definition, but on the grounds that to call such an expert a sophist would be paying the sophist too high of an honor (231a), thus suggesting that the cleanser is someone other than the sophist. Moreover, the sixth definition is markedly different from the definition of the sophist accepted by the Visitor and Theaetetus at the end of the dialogue. In the final definition, the sophist is identified as a producer of appearances. In the sixth definition, however, the sophist does not produce anything; rather he takes away a kind of ignorance, and only in this derivative sense can he be said to “produce” knowledge or beauty in the soul. In addition, the final definition includes elements that are not in the sixth definition, such as the claim that the sophist is an insincere sort of imitator who mimics things on the basis of belief rather than knowledge. The final definition also leaves out central aspects of the sixth definition, such as the idea that the sophist is an expert in discriminating or cleansing. Thus, if we accept the final definition as the dialogue’s conclusive definition, it seems that the person described in the sixth definition is not the sophist.

Nevertheless, if we take the sixth definition to be an accurate description of some kind of expertise, then the sixth definition sheds light on the final account of the sophist. In the final account, the sophist is said to imitate “the character of justice and all of virtue taken together” and he imitates this in his words and in his actions (267c). In this way, the sophist is not like a sculptor who produces copies that are outside of him. Rather the sophist himself, in his words and in his actions, *is* the copy which he produces.¹⁸

¹⁷ Authors who see the sixth definition as a description of Socrates or Socratic-type activity include: Hackforth, Trevaskis, Sayre, Starr, Klein, and Dorter. In contrast, Kerferd and Oscanyan argue (unpersuasively, to my mind) that the sixth definition is a description of either the sophists in general or one sophist in particular. Rosen argues that the sixth definition is a combination of the sophist and philosopher. Concerning the sixth definition, Notomi (1999: 67) argues that it is “highly plausible that Plato deliberately blurs the difference between the sophist and Socrates, who is usually taken to be a real philosopher In so far as this dubious definition of the sophist of noble lineage has something to do with the method of Socrates, we have good reason to suspect that Plato discards, or at least casts doubt on, his previous way of showing what the philosopher is: that is, by displaying Socrates as the model philosopher. The *Sophist* as a whole is an attempt at showing the philosopher in a fresh way, apart from the vivid image of Socrates.” Notomi (1999: 277) later argues that “the whole argument of the Middle Part, by discussing the combination of kinds and exemplifying the right dialectical method, makes possible the method of division, which depends on the ability to distinguish similarity and dissimilarity between kinds. It is on this ground that the second Outer Part fixes the first five definitions as the appearances of the sophist and excludes the problematic sixth definition from the list. The educational purifier, if properly understood, was not a sophist, though he appeared to be similar. It is an apparition of the sophist.” For more on this issue, see also Notomi 1999: 295–296.

¹⁸ See Notomi’s (1999: 278–288) interesting and helpful discussion of the sophist’s imitation of the wise.

Yet, the sophist is ignorant of the things he imitates. Does the sophist, perhaps, have the kind of ignorance that is called “lack of learning” in the sixth definition? The Visitor distinguishes between two kinds of people who imitate on the basis of mere belief rather than knowledge: “One sort of belief-mimic is foolish and thinks he knows the things he only has beliefs about. The other sort has been around many discussions, and so by temperament he’s suspicious (ὄψιαν) and fearful that he doesn’t know the things that he pretends in front of others to know” (268a). The sophist is the second kind of belief-mimic, which the Visitor calls an insincere imitator (εἰρωνικὸν μιμητὴν).¹⁹ The insincere belief-mimic is similar to the earlier description of those who lack learning, but there are also important differences. On the one hand, the insincere belief-mimic is the same as the uncleansed person before refutation insofar as both are actually ignorant and both act as if they believe they are not ignorant. On the other hand, the insincere belief-mimic does not have quite the same belief about himself as the person who lacks learning. Whereas the person who lacks learning has the sincere belief that he knows, the insincere belief-mimic does not have this same self-understanding; rather, he suspects that he does not know what he pretends to know.

How, then, should we characterize the kind of belief that the insincere belief-mimic has with respect to the things he believes about virtue, i.e., with respect to his beliefs and about his beliefs? Does he know that he is ignorant and is he simply dissembling in discussions with others?²⁰ To say that he knows he is ignorant seems too strong, because the Visitor describes him as fearful that he does not know what he pretends to know. Should we say, then, that he believes that he is ignorant? I think it is best to say that he suspects that he is ignorant, i.e., he believes that it is likely that he is ignorant.²¹

Why, then, is the insincere belief-mimic fearful and suspicious?²² The answer lies in the fact that he has “been around many discussions.” Drawing on the

¹⁹I have stayed with White’s rendering of εἰρωνικὸν as “insincere,” rather than “ironic,” as, for example, Dorter renders it. The adjective εἰρωνικός is of course closely associated with Socrates and “Socratic irony.” However, the features by virtue of which the sophist is characterized as εἰρωνικὸν are crucially different from the features that define Socratic irony. Thus I think it is less illuminating to describe the sophist as an “ironic imitator.” Further comparisons between Socrates and the sophist are discussed below, 51, as well as n. 23.

²⁰If the sophist believes that what he says about virtue is false, then what he is saying does not express his beliefs about virtue.

²¹We can imagine a detective in a similar cognitive state: He thinks it is probably the case that Sam has committed the crime, but he is not convinced. So the detective does not quite believe that Sam is the guilty party, but he believes that it is likely that he is; Sam is the suspect.

²²Dorter (1990: 43) suggests that the distinction between the sincere (or simple) belief-mimic and the insincere (or ironic) belief-mimic is, “between those who hold their beliefs uncritically and those who engage in a self-examination that leads to an appropriate self-doubt and humility; and the sophist is said to belong to the latter group.” I see nothing in the text to suggest that the insincere belief-mimic has either appropriate self-doubt or humility. Rather, the fact that the sophist is described as fearful and suspicious, and that he dissembles when talking with others by

sixth definition, we can suppose that in those discussions he has seen many other people refuted. Having seen the ignorance of others repeatedly exposed gives him reason to suspect that he too is ignorant. He might think to himself, "If others who thought that they had knowledge were exposed as ignorant, why couldn't the same happen to me?" Perhaps he even held the same opinions as some of those whom he has seen refuted, so he knows that he has been wrong in cases when he thought he knew. Moreover, the insincere belief-mimic will understand that refutation of lack of learning results in shame. And it is precisely this, I suggest, which explains his attitudes of fearfulness and suspicion. As we saw earlier, shame involves feeling exposed in a way that is humbling, even humiliating, and it means seeing oneself as lacking status or worth, or even beauty. The prospect of being shamed, then, is an unappealing one. The insincere belief-mimic is fearful precisely because he suspects that he is ignorant, and thus he realizes that he may be examined in such a way as to be refuted and shamed. Moreover, he is suspicious of others because they may prove to be persons who will refute him.

If this picture of the sophist is correct, then he provides a type of exception to the Visitor's claim that "no soul is willingly ignorant of anything" (228c) as that claim functioned in the argument of the sixth definition.²³ There, the idea

pretending to be wise, is strong evidence against the idea that he has appropriate self-doubt and humility. If he has appropriate self-doubt, of what is he afraid and suspicious? And if he is humble, why does he pretend in front of others to be wise? Dorter (1990: 43) also says that "No further distinction is made that would distinguish the sophist from Socrates, or from any philosopher who is aware of his own limitations." An appropriate response to this claim, I think, is a point made by Notomi (1999: 292): "They are both [Socrates and the sophists] in a certain inner conflict and far from the cognitive state of the simple-minded, and both use arguments and, as a result, reveal the ignorance of others and of themselves. Yet Socrates and the sophists are contrasted with each other in respect of their responses to their own ignorance. Although the sophist is somewhat aware of his own ignorance, he still boldly claims to know what he does not know. By contrast, Socrates sincerely admits that he is ignorant, and it is by that admission that he is qualified as a man of human wisdom. Irony is the characteristic of the sophist which is in one way related to Socrates and in another separated from Socrates."

²³The only writer I am aware of who has commented on this point is Campbell (1867: lvii), who, speaking of the sixth definition, says: "The form of evil from which deliverance is effected by refutation deserves a passing notice, although the thought is one of the most familiar to readers of Plato: the *greatest* ignorance, i.e. ignorance which the mind mistakes for knowledge Yet in the conclusion of this dialogue it would seem as though unconscious ignorance were the less culpable; for the Sophist is defined as having a guilty suspicion that all is not right within. The inconsistency of these two views does not seem to be noticed by Plato, who would probably, however, have said, if he had been taxed with it, 'that he meant by conscious ignorance, the ignorance of one desirous to know.' Still, the notion of a state of ignorance acquiesced in, notwithstanding a suspicion that it exists, is hardly reconcilable with the Socratic principle, which is here made the ground of the Socratic cross-examination, that no soul is willingly ignorant of anything" (italics in the original). Although Campbell correctly points out how the sophist is an exception to the principle relied on in the sixth definition, he seems to me to put the wrong words into Plato's mouth as a response to this point. It is the person with *unconscious* ignorance (the sincere belief-mimic) who is desirous

was that the soul naturally pursues the truth, such that the only thing that will keep a soul in a state of ignorance is the (false) belief that it already knows, i.e., lack of learning. The sophist, however, suspects that he is ignorant; this is what makes him an insincere belief-mimic, and it explains why he is suspicious and fearful in conversations. Yet, the sophist makes a decision to imitate the wise person (268c), and this keeps him from being refuted and thereby prevents him from being cleansed of his ignorance. In this sense, the sophist can be described as willingly ignorant, because he knowingly acts in such a way as to keep himself in a state which he (correctly) suspects to be a state of ignorance.

At the heart of the sophist's error, then, is a lack of concern for reaching the truth. Perhaps this is because he rejects the importance of truth,²⁴ or because, having been around many conversations and seeing many people refuted, the sophist despairs that he (or anyone else) will ever attain the truth.²⁵ In any

to know (and hence can benefit from the cleansing of refutation), while the person with conscious ignorance (the insincere belief-mimic) betrays by his fearful, dissembling behavior the fact that he is not truly desirous to know (or, at least, not desirous enough and in the right way). Also, whereas Campbell sees a tension between the sixth definition and the final definition, I am trying to show how the sixth definition sets out themes and categories for better understanding the final definition and its significance.

²⁴There are interesting connections between the definitions of the sophist in the *Sophist* and a speech in the *Theaetetus*, given by Socrates on behalf of Protagoras. In the speech, Protagoras (Socrates) compares the sophist-as-educator to the doctor. However, whereas the soul-cleanser of the sixth definition, who is also compared to a doctor, works to remove ignorance in the patient's soul, Protagoras uses the analogy with a doctor to argue that education is not properly concerned with removing ignorance or falsehood. Rather, just as the doctor does not say the sick man is ignorant but instead that he is in a bad state, so the educator is not properly concerned with truth and falsehood in the student's soul, but with changing the state of the soul from worse to better: "In education, too, what we have to do is change a worse state into a better state; only whereas the doctor brings about the change by the use of drugs, the professional teacher [sophist] does it by the use of words. What never happens is that a man who judges what is false is made to judge what is true. For it is impossible to judge what is not, or to judge anything other than what one is immediately experiencing; and what one is immediately experiencing is always true. This, in my opinion, is what really happens: when a man's soul is in a pernicious state, he judges things akin to it, but giving him a sound state of the soul causes him to think different things, things that are good. In the latter event, the things which appear to him are what some people, who are still at a primitive stage, call 'true'; my position, however, is that one kind are *better* than others, but in no way *true*" (167a–b, tr. M. J. Levett, revised by Myles Burnyeat in Cooper 1997: 185–186; italics in the original).

It seems that the sophist of the final definition does not hold a resolutely Protagorean position as described in this passage. For the sophist has beliefs about virtue, and he fears that he does not know what he pretends to know and is wary of having his false beliefs refuted. The resolute Protagorean, however, will have moved beyond such concerns with truth and knowledge. He will hold that, strictly speaking, it is not possible for him to judge falsely, since one judges what one is immediately experiencing and immediate experience is always true. His concern will instead be with having a good soul, where that goodness is not understood as attaining knowledge of the truth.

²⁵Jonathan Beere first pointed out to me the possible connection between the sophist's experience in argument and that of the mislogues described by Socrates at *Phaedo* 89d–91c. I later discovered

case the sophist's disregard for reaching the truth is combined with, and hence disguised by, his concern to be recognized as knowing the truth. Although lacking real concern for reaching the truth, nonetheless the very thing of which he is fearful is being exposed as someone who does not know the truth. This is not surprising if we recall our earlier point that those who see themselves as wise typically confer on themselves an exalted position or worth by virtue of their wisdom. In a way, then, the sophist is deeply concerned about the truth, but his desire is not actually to know the truth but to have the status (and perhaps power) that accompanies recognition as a wise person. Furthermore, having abandoned the actual search for truth out of a desire to be thought by others to know the truth, the sophist then lives out a lie about his own knowledge. As Notomi says, "the combination of awareness or suspicion of one's own ignorance and its concealment constitutes deception. By consciously concealing his own ignorance, the sophist deceives people into thinking that he is wise and knows what he claims to know."²⁶

The evidence that the sophist cares more about his own status than about the truth itself comes precisely from the context of discussion and refutation. It is in this context that one's status as one who knows is pitted against one's actually attaining knowledge, and a person is, as it were, forced to choose between the two. In order to be truly cleansed and able to learn, all people must be refuted from their lack of learning, which involves being shamed and losing one's status as one who already knows. As argued above, there is no way to become beautiful except by first being exposed as ugly. The sophist, by choosing to pretend that he is wise even though he suspects that he does not actually have knowledge, thereby chooses to remain in a state of ignorance rather than be shown to lack knowledge. In so doing he reveals that he cares more for the status of being thought wise than actually reaching the truth.

It is interesting to contrast the sophist's fear with something Socrates says about himself in the *Charmides*. Socrates explains to Critias that his motive for trying to refute the statements of his friends is the same as when he tries to refute his own statements: "the fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not" (166d).²⁷ What we fear is an expression of what we take to be harmful, and hence an expression of what we value. The sophist's action shows

Albury's (1971) article, where he explicitly identifies the sophist as a misologue: "Now we are in a position to say precisely what the Sophist's crime is. The Sophist is an arch-misologist himself and a spreader of misology to others. His life is spent loathing and decrying the *logos*, and converting others to the same attitude. But the *logos* as we see from the *Republic*, is the rightful sovereign; consequently, the Sophist's crime is one of High Treason. And it is for this crime that the Sophist is deserving of arrest on the royal warrant of treason" (10). The connection between sophistry and the *misologia* described in the *Phaedo* is also noted by Notomi (1999: 57), who later says that "the sophist disbelieves arguments (*logoi*) in an ultimate sense; for his inner self refuses to follow what the argument shows and to admit his own ignorance" (291).

²⁶Notomi 1999: 291.

²⁷Plato *Charmides* tr. Rosemond Kent Sprague in Cooper 1997: 653.

that he is more afraid of being revealed as ignorant than of actually remaining in a state of ignorance. Were this not so, his suspicion of his own ignorance would motivate him to subject his beliefs to investigation. That, however, would mean risking exposure as someone who was not wise, and thus losing the status that comes with being thought wise, a status that the sophist values over the truth.

In his lack of concern for the truth, the sophist has something in common with a figure who may initially appear to be his opposite. In the *Republic*, Socrates describes a person who is shameless when his ignorance is exposed:

Similarly with regard to truth, won't we say that a soul is maimed if it hates a voluntary falsehood, cannot endure to have one in itself, and is greatly angered when it exists in others, but is nonetheless content to accept an involuntary falsehood, isn't angry when caught lacking learning, and bears its lack of learning easily, wallowing in it like a pig?²⁸

Whereas the sophist is (excessively) concerned to be considered wise and to conceal his ignorance, this character is shockingly indifferent to having his lack of learning exposed. At another level, however, the sophist and this wallower manifest the same failure: neither cares properly for the truth. Socrates compares the wallower to someone who loves only half of hard work and hates the other half, as when a person loves bodily labor but not mental labor, or vice-versa (525d). The wallower cares about half of truth, the voluntary falsehood part, but he does not care about the half of truth that concerns involuntary falsehood, which includes thinking that one knows what one does not know. Like the sophist, the wallower is not sufficiently concerned about the risk of ignorance to undertake the intellectual labor required to remove ignorance from his soul. But whereas the sophist keeps himself in a state of ignorance because he prizes being thought wise, the wallower appears to do so out of sheer laziness.

Having identified disregard for truth as the sophist's essential error, we can see that the final definition of the sophist reveals a new role for choice in the soul's direction toward the truth. In the picture of the soul drawn from the sixth definition, there was an automatic, or quasi-automatic, character to the soul's search for truth: no soul is willingly ignorant of anything, and once lack of learning is removed the soul will seek the truth. With the final definition, however, we see that the soul does not "automatically" avoid ignorance, but that a soul may choose to live in a way that the soul suspects will keep it in a state of ignorance. In this way, we see that one's attempts at truth may be dependent upon one's desires and one's sense of self, including especially concerns about one's status and the desire to be perceived by others in a positive way.²⁹

²⁸Pl. *Rep.* 535d-e (tr. G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve in Cooper 1997: 1151). I have modified the translation slightly, to bring out connection between the state in which the soul is caught (*ἄμαθαίνουσα*) and the condition which it wallows (*ἄμαθία*).

²⁹Might it not be the case that the sophist believes, incorrectly but sincerely, that knowing the truth is not essential for happiness, or that having status is more important for living well than knowledge is? And if so, might it not be that with respect to this belief about the nature of

Given this account, there is a sense in which the sophist has “progressed” beyond the person with lack of learning. Whereas the latter believes that he knows what he does not know, the sophist has been disabused of this belief by his experience in discussions. In this way the sophist is comparatively less naive than the person with a lack of learning. However, in spite of his “sophistication,” the sophist is still ignorant; although he has beliefs about the character of virtue, these beliefs are not accompanied by knowledge (267c–e). He rightly suspects that he is ignorant, but that suspicion does not motivate him to subject his beliefs to refutation in order to discover the truth about the matters on which he speaks. Since ignorance is a kind of ugliness, the sophist is ugly and in need of cleansing.

This last point—that the sophist is ugly—might seem impossible, given the earlier account of ignorance and ugliness, plus the claim that the sophist is, in a certain respect, willingly ignorant. For the ugly disproportion of the ignorant soul involves the soul’s motion toward the truth, on the one hand, and its consistent failure to hit its target, on the other. However, if a soul is willingly ignorant, then it seems to have stopped striving after the truth; it has acquiesced in its ignorance. Thus, one of the items required for the disproportion seems not to be present.

This characterization of the sophist’s ignorance, however, is not quite right. For the insincere belief-mimic still has beliefs, and insofar as he believes, then his soul is striving toward knowledge of the truth. This striving, however, is falling short of its goal. There is still a kind of motion, and an ugly disproportion, in the soul of the sophist. The sophist is not willingly ignorant in the sense of choosing to believe something he thinks false; nor is his goal to attain a state of ignorance as such. However, correctly suspecting that his soul is falling short of knowledge of the truth, he wills to remain in this condition, and to that extent the sophist willingly accepts ignorance in his soul.

Compared with those who simply lack learning, the sophist is less naive about his intellectual condition. Even so, there are at least two important ways in which the sophist is in a worse condition than those with mere lack of learning. Unlike those who lack learning, the sophist’s moral failure is not the hubris of the person who takes himself to be wiser than he is. Rather, the sophist appears to be plagued by an excessive desire for the honor associated with wisdom, and/or an excessive fear of the shame associated with ignorance. Yet, with those who lack learning, we have a picture in the sixth definition of how their hubris is treatable: there is hope they may be refuted, thereby realizing that they are ignorant and in this way be cleansed. With the sophist, however,

happiness, the sophist is unwillingly ignorant. If so, there would be a sense in which the sophist was willingly ignorant—the sense I have identified in the text—and also another, deeper sense in which the sophist was unwillingly ignorant. In that case, the sophist would be a partial exception to the principle that no one is willingly ignorant. I mean to note this possibility here, and not to argue one way or the other concerning the sophist’s beliefs about happiness.

the possibility for such cleansing appears to be nearly, if not entirely, closed off. Refutation cleanses by revealing to a person that he does not know, thus causing the person to lose his false belief in his own knowledge and thereby opening the door to actual knowledge. But the sophist already suspects that he does not know—this is the reason he is fearful—and this awareness has failed to bring about the appropriate acceptance of his own ignorance and a new willingness to learn. It is as if the doctor has administered the appropriate medicine of refutation, or something close to it, but the medicine has failed to have its cleansing impact.

In this respect, the sophist is similar to some Athenians whom Socrates describes in the *Apology*. Socrates explains that young men of the city have been imitating him and questioning other Athenians. When they do so, the young men reveal their interlocutors to have the kind of ignorance we have been calling “lack of learning.” As Socrates says, “I think they find an abundance of men who believe they have some knowledge but know little or nothing. The result is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me” (23c–d). Here, the suggestion is that these men *should* be getting angry with themselves, which is how the successful case of refutation and cleansing is described in the *Sophist*: “The people who are being examined see this, get angry at themselves, and become calmer toward others. 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” (230b–c). The men described in the *Apology* differ from the wallowers of the *Republic* in that the former do get angry at having their ignorance exposed, whereas the latter are emotionally indifferent. Their anger, however, is not directed at themselves but misdirected at Socrates. It appears that it is not their own lack of learning which they find hateful, but the annoyance of being questioned or the embarrassment of being shown to lack learning.

The sophist's position is also made worse by the fact that he is involved in an elaborate deception wherein in spite of his awareness of his own ignorance he appears to be the very one who is able to expose the ignorance of others. He “uses short speeches in private conversation to force the person talking with him to contradict himself” (268b). This description, of course, recalls the account of the cleanser in the sixth definition. It also seems to be meant to explain a crucial way in which the sophist mimics the wise person (268c). However, precisely to the degree that the sophist is able to pass himself off as one able to cleanse others, his own ignorance is likely to remain undiagnosed and untreated. The picture, I think, is of a person who turns the conversation against the other person and forces his interlocutor to contradict himself; in so doing he keeps his own beliefs from being subject to criticism while simultaneously reinforcing others' opinion of him as a wise person. If this is the case, then it is precisely the “skill” of the sophist that will tend to preclude the exposure of his own ignorance, or, at the very least, it

will take a special kind of interlocutor to expose the sophist for what he truly is.

Here we see that the sophist's posture is not simply an admirable humility about his own knowledge, acquired after being around many discussions.³⁰ If the sophist possessed such humility, along with a love of truth, then we could expect him to have an attitude similar to Socrates in the *Gorgias*: "What kind of man am I? One of those who would be pleased to be refuted if I say anything untrue, and who would be pleased to refute anyone who says anything untrue; one who, however, wouldn't be any less pleased to be refuted than to refute."³¹ Socrates is just as pleased to be refuted as to refute, because in being refuted he is saved from ignorance, which he fears. The sophist's avoidance of being refuted reveals that he does not fear ignorance as he should.

Interestingly the sophist's "skill" at refuting also connects the final account of the sophist to a central theme of the dialogue: the difficulty of distinguishing the sophist from other figures, especially the philosopher. In the opening scene of the dialogue, Socrates points out the difficulty people have in distinguishing genuine philosophers, saying that philosophers are mistaken for, among other things, sophists (216c–d). In fact, it is precisely this observation about the difficulty of identifying the philosopher which leads Socrates to question the Visitor about how the people in the Visitor's country apply the names sophist, statesman, and philosopher, and it is this question about applying these names which in turn prompts the Visitor to pursue a "clear account" (218c) of the sophist. Thus, the framework of the entire dialogue is born out of the difficulty of distinguishing the philosopher from the sophist. In addition, after the sixth definition is finished, we find this tantalizing interchange between Theaetetus and the Visitor (230e–231a):

VIS: Well then, who are we going to say the people who apply this form of expertise are? I'm afraid to call them sophists.

THT: Why?

VIS: So we don't pay sophists too high an honor.

THT: But there's a similarity between a sophist and what we've been talking about.

VIS: And between a wolf and a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest. If you're going to be safe, you have to be especially careful about similarities, since the type we're talking about is very slippery . . .

Later, the philosopher is identified as an expert in dialectic, able to discriminate which things associate with one another and which do not (253d–e). Such skill in dialectic would seem to enable a person to identify the contradictions in the speech of others. I am not arguing that the soul-cleanser of the sixth definition is the philosopher, or delving into the complicated question of the identity of the philosopher in the *Sophist*. But given how the philosopher is

³⁰ Pace the interpretation by Dorter. See above, 47–48, n. 22.

³¹ Pl. *Gorgias* 458a (tr. Donald J. Zeyl in Cooper 1997: 802).

characterized, we can expect that he will be especially capable of refutation. Thus the final definition of the sophist connects with the ordering question of the dialogue and hints at a possible answer. In showing the sophist to be one who masquerades as a wise person by forcing others to contradict themselves, the final definition suggests that the sophist and philosopher are so often mistaken for one another because both appear to demonstrate an exceptional ability to refute other speakers. However, whereas the philosopher has “a pure and just love of wisdom” (253e), the sophist, as we have seen, cares more for his own status than the truth itself.³²

Dorter, however, argues that the *Sophist* itself never provides this distinction between the philosopher and the sophist. He says that “at the end of the dialogue the sophist is defined in merely technical terms” (42) and that “by confining itself to the categorial aspect of the forms without their valuational aspect, the *Sophist* proves unable to distinguish knowledge from wisdom—or, therefore, sophistry from philosophy” (55). In this paper I have tried to show how the final definition of the sophist, like the sixth definition, is not given in “merely technical terms,” as opposed to moral or ethical or value-laden terms. Likewise, if what I have argued here is correct, then the *Sophist* contains a more subtle picture of the sophist’s error than Dorter seems to think; this picture is aware of the moral aspects of the sophist’s error and it implies, even if it does not develop, a distinction between the philosopher and the sophist that is almost, if not exactly, the same as the distinction Dorter seems to think the dialogue lacks.

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT
MALONEY HALL
21 CAMPANELLA WAY
BOSTON COLLEGE
CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02467
U.S.A.

micahelias@gmail.com

³²Although Dorter (1990: 55) does not focus on the connections between the sixth definition and the final definition, and does not discuss the role of shame in the dialogue, he reaches a similar conclusion to mine about what distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist: “What distinguishes the philosopher and the sophist is just their differing beliefs *about* what is good. For the philosopher what is good is the love of wisdom, and the sharing of it with others. For the sophist what is good is personal gain—whether in terms of honors or riches—and skill in reasoning is good only as a means to this end. As long as we try to distinguish them without reference to the idea of value, the good, but only by means of the products that they generate in the course of these pursuits, we will be no better than those whom Socrates ridicules in the *Pbaedo* for trying to understand things in terms of their material results rather than in terms of their underlying purposiveness (98c–99a). The difference between the philosopher and the sophist is not that the philosopher creates accurate images while the sophist desires to create persuasive ones whether or not they happen to be accurate. Only if we understand the differing values from which these different desires springs, will the distinction between likeness and semblance tell us anything about the real difference between the sophist and the philosopher” (italics in the original).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Albury, W. R. 1971. "Hunting the Sophist," *Apeiron* 5: 1–12.
- Bernardete, S. 1984. *Plato's Sophist*. Chicago.
- Campbell, L. 1867. *The Sophistes and Politicus of Plato*. Oxford (Repr. of New York 1973).
- Cooper, J. M. ed. 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis.
- Dorter, K. 1990. "Diairesis and the Tripartite Soul in the *Sophist*," *Ancient Philosophy* 10: 41–61.
- Gooch, P. W. 1971. "'Vice is Ignorance': The Interpretation of *Sophist* 226A–231B," *Phoenix* 25: 124–133.
- Hackforth, R. 1946. "Moral Evil and Ignorance in Plato's Ethics," *CQ* 40: 118–120.
- Kerferd, G. B. 1954. "Plato's Noble Art of Sophistry," *CQ* N.S. 4: 84–90.
- Klein, J. 1977. *Plato's Trilogy*. Chicago.
- Notomi, N. 1999. *The Unity of Plato's Sophist*. Cambridge.
- Oscanyan, F. S. 1972–1973. "On Six Definitions of the Sophist: *Sophist* 221C–231E," *The Philosophical Forum* 4: 241–259.
- Regan, R. J. tr. 2003. *Thomas Aquinas: On Evil*. Oxford.
- Rosen, S. 1983. *Plato's Sophist*. New Haven.
- Sayre, K. 1969. *Plato's Analytic Method*. Chicago.
- Starr, D. 1973–1974. "The Sixth Sophist: Comments on Frederick S. Oscanyan's 'On Six Definitions of the Sophist: *Sophist* 221C–231E,'" *The Philosophical Forum* 5: 486–492.
- Trevasakis, J. R. 1955–1956. "The Sophistry of Noble Lineage," *Phronesis* 1: 36–49.
- Williams, B. 1993. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley.