The False Appearance of the Sophist Himself in the First Six Definitions of Plato's *Sophist*

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ABSTRACT

The key to how the definitions in *Sophist* fit together is the seventh definition, the maker of false appearances. The first six definitions are a false appearance of the sophist himself, as a businessman who sells an art of disputation to rich young men. Because this is a deception, to unmask him we need to supplement the brief descriptions in *Sophist* from Plato's portraits of sophists in other dialogues. This lets us see his true nature, a predatory hunter for students' money, whose promise of political success is bait, but whose practice enslaves one to the ignorance and vice of the people.

Keywords: Sophist, Appearance, Collection, Division

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interpretations of the seven definitions of the sophist, in Plato's *Sophist*, range from (A) unimportant or (B) inconclusive sketches, to (C) completely false appearances, to (D) a catalogue of historical sophists, (E) to genuine aspects of sophistry.[1] This lack of scholarly consensus seems to indicate that we don't yet have a successful account of how these definitions fit together into a coherent whole. In this study I will suggest that *Sophist* cannot be understood on its own. Taking as my starting point the seventh definition, the sophist as a maker of false appearances (*phantastikê*), I will argue that each of the first six definitions is deceptive in some manner and that in order to see through these deceptions we need to supplement them with Plato's portrayals of sophists in other dialogues.[2]

If Plato means for us to take seriously the dialogue's conclusion that the sophist is an 'insincere, unknowing word-juggler',[3] who makes false rather than true copies of things, then presumably he also thinks that the sophist would not want to advertise this character of his.[4] If this is the case, then it is worth investigating whether the much more reputable descriptions in the first six definitions, as hunter, merchant, disputer, and purifier of souls, serve in some way to hide or obscure the sophist's character as a fraud and a cheat. My thesis is that Plato has given us an enactment of the sophist's technique of verbal deception in the first six definitions, applied to the sophist himself, whose aim is to make himself seem better than he is.[5] If this is so, then we should expect a certain amount of difficulty in discerning what is going on in them, which could explain the kind of scholarly difference of opinion we in fact have.

In order to test the thesis that they are deceptions, I will employ two principal strategies that would let us see through them. First, I will argue that in other dialogues Plato portrays much more fully the aspects of sophistry given only a very brief description in each of the first six definitions. So by looking at those other dialogues, we can be better equipped to understand what it really means for a sophist to be a hunter, merchant, disputer, or purifier of souls. Second, I will argue that, in these other dialogues, Plato portrays sophists employing two related rhetorical techniques, which are a sort of inversion or violation of the philosophical techniques of Collection and Division outlined in the *Phaedrus*.

When we apply the results of these two strategies to *Sophist*, it will become clear that this pair of rhetorical techniques allows the first six definitions to present an appealing picture of the sophist as a businessman who sells virtue as an art of disputation to rich young men.[6] Because the fuller accounts in other dialogues have alerted us to the falsehood of this picture, and because we have discerned the rhetorical techniques that produced it, we will also be able to find the deeper coherence that Plato has embedded in these six definitions. It will turn out that the sophist's true nature is a predatory hunter for his students' money, who baits his trap with the promise of political success, but whose art of disputation enslaves them to the ignorance and vice of the people.[7]

2. FALSE APPEARANCE IN *SOPHIST*

At the beginning of his seventh and final definition, the Stranger asserts that the sophist claims he can dispute about every single subject. But because it is impossible to be wise about everything, the Stranger continues, the

sophist has only the appearance of wisdom (233a-c). He fools the young and the ignorant, making them believe he speaks the truth about everything, when all he has is a sort of a cheat and a copy (234c-e). The stranger characterises this cheat and copy as the worse half of the art of imitation (*mimêsis*). The better kind of imitation reproduces the proportions of its model faithfully, and is what the Stranger calls "likeness-making (*eikastikê*)" (235d). The sophist's imitation, on the other hand, is not faithful. The Stranger gives the analogy of a sculptor who makes very large works. Just as this sculptor falsifies the proportions of his original, so does the sophist, the Stranger implies, presenting an image in words that 'falsifies the proportions' of what he is discussing, be it "laws and all kinds of political issues" (232d), or anything else. Were the sculptor to reproduce the true proportions of the original, his product would not appear beautiful: "the upper parts would appear smaller than they should, and the lower parts would appear larger, because we see the upper parts from farther away and the lower parts from closer" (236a). The Stranger proposes to call this part of imitation that falsifies its model *phantastikê* (236c). In this paper I will bring out the character of *phantastikê* as a kind of falsification, opposed to *eikastikê* as the art of making true or accurate likenesses, by calling it the art of 'making false appearances'.[8]

Before the Stranger is able to complete the analogy and explain how the *phantastikê* of the sophist falsifies the proportions of his original, the discussion is derailed by the objection that making false appearances is impossible. "This appearing, and this seeming but not being, and this saying things but not true things" (236e) involves us in speech which has been forbidden by Parmenides. The bulk of the dialogue addresses the question of Being and Not-Being, and in the end it concludes that false appearances are in fact possible, because there is a licit kind of Not-Being, the form of Difference shared in by all other things (259a-b). Not-Being mixes with speech, so because "there is deception then necessarily the world will be full of copies, likeness, and appearances (*eidôlôn te kai eikonôn êdê kai phantasias*)" (260c). The Stranger then picks up the division of the art of imitation where he left off, completes the final definition of the sophist, and the dialogue ends. We are left on our own to figure out how the sophist's falsifications work.

I propose to take seriously the analogy with those who make very large sculptures that the Stranger used to explain what he meant by 'false appearances'. If we complete the analogy ourselves, we should be able to figure out how Plato thinks the sophist 'distorts the proportions' of his 'original' and how he makes these false proportions appear 'beautiful' in words. A deceptive sculpture seems beautiful from a certain point of view and from far away. But because this beautiful appearance is the result of certain of its parts being larger than the original and others smaller (236a-b), one presumes these distortions would make it ugly from up close. The corresponding technique in speech is likely what Socrates describes in *Phaedrus*, misrepresenting things by small degrees (*Phdr.* 260b, 262a). The rhetorician, perhaps, exaggerates certain aspects of his original and downplays others through assertions of similarity and difference, producing speech that is ugly 'up close', but that appears beautiful to those 'far away' from the truth (234c). That is, his speech is 'ugly' if one hears it with an awareness of its falsehood, detecting how he distorts his topic, while it appears 'beautiful' if this distortion remains undetected and one accepts his speech as true.[9]

The antidote to this technique of deception, therefore, is twofold. On the one hand, one must know what the things in question are really like, just as to judge a statue of a man or a horse one must know what a man or horse actually looks like. And on the other, one must examine the speech of the sophist closely, in order to detect any misrepresentation of similarity or difference in it in comparison with the things themselves. This would correspond to looking at the large sculpture from close up, to gain the 'adequate viewpoint' that lets one see its skewed proportions (236b).

If we compare the result of the final definition to what came earlier, we can see that, although the Stranger himself doesn't explain how the sophist makes his 'ugly' speech appear beautiful, it seems that he has given us an example in the first six definitions. Both the 'insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier' and sophist as he appears in the first six definitions are men who deal with speech. I propose that the 'hunter, merchant, disputer, and purifier of souls' corresponds to the large statue that misrepresents the proportions of the original, while the original is the word-juggling maker of false appearances. Although the six definitions present a beautiful appearance from a certain point of view, a close-up inspection shows that their proportions are ugly. In plainer terms, close inspection shows that the six definitions misrepresent the maker of false appearances, emphasising some aspects of his art and downplaying others. This misrepresentation is 'ugly' when we see how it is a falsification of the original. But it is designed to appear beautiful, for its falsehoods to pass unnoticed, so that the man seems better than he is.

However, it is difficult to get 'up close' to the definitions in *Sophist* to see their skewed proportions. The first thing one is confronted with is that, with the exception of number six, the definitions are presented in an excessively brief manner.[10] Of the terms by which the divisions are made — such as 'by force' vs. 'by persuasion', 'privately' vs. 'in public', 'earning wages' vs. 'giving gifts' (222c-d) — almost none of them get any explanation at all. And the few times we get a supplemental explanation it is very short. So, for example, all we find out about 'giving gifts' is that it is the way lovers hunt (222d-e). More importantly, there is no real explanation of the upshot of each definition. At the end of the first we arrive at a hunter who earns wages from rich young men (223b), but what that actually means, concretely, is not even discussed.

If we compare the divisions made in *Sophist* to those made in *Statesman* and *Philebus*, it is hard not to conclude that this brevity is intentional. While one couldn't say that the description of each option in the divisions in *Statesman* is verbose, at least we get more than a simple name.[11] *Philebus* is on the opposite extreme, taking, for example, five Stephanus pages simply to divide pleasure into three kinds (*Phlb.* 31a-36b). And in both *Statesman* and *Philebus* the divisions are a preliminary to an extended discussion and analysis of what is divided. We get nothing like this with the results of the first five definitions in *Sophist*. Instead, we get about as much information as we do in Protagoras' first response to Socrates, that by studying with him Hippocrates will become "a better man" (*Prt.* 318a-b), or Gorgias' first response, that oratory is knowledge "about speeches" (*Grg.* 449d-e).[12]

I think that this brevity is designed to deprived us of an 'adequate viewpoint' from which to see how the sophist as hunter, merchant, etc. is like a statue with skewed proportions. So in order to get such a viewpoint, we need to look elsewhere. Once we do, we

find that there is a striking coincidence of the first six definitions in *Sophist* and Plato's portrayals of sophists in other dialogues. Principally in *Hippias Major*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, and *Gorgias*, but also in Book I of *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Meno*, and *Apology*, we find sophists either exemplifying or being described in ways that correspond to one or another of the definitions in *Sophist*. So we have a multiplicity of portrayals spread out over a number of dialogues, and in *Sophist* we have this multiplicity gathered together into one place. In neither place are we told explicitly how they add up to a single thing. But if we compare the 'beautiful appearances' in *Sophist* with their corresponding pictures in other dialogues, we can see that they are really ugly distortions, and we can begin to see how they all fit together.

Consequently, in the next four sections I will do the following. First, I will show how the first six definitions of the sophist correspond to Plato's treatments of sophists in other dialogues. This will confirm for us that *Sophist's* hunting, selling, disputing, etc., are accurate descriptions of how Plato's sophists present themselves, and it will give us a fuller picture of what it means to engage in these activities. Second, I will show how the 'original' sophist from the end of *Sophist*, the 'insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier', corresponds to Plato's account of what sophists are really like, in the other dialogues. He shows them engaging in a kind of rhetoric that gives only the appearance of wisdom (233a-c), in *Hippias Major*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, and *Gorgias*, through a violation of the rules of Collection and Division given in *Phaedrus*. Third, I will show how the sophist pretends that his rhetorical technique is wisdom and virtue. This is the principal way that he 'distorts' his own proportions. I will show that in the six definitions in *Sophist* there is an employment of the violations of Collection and Division which characterises the sophist's rhetoric. Each definition enacts a verbal slight of hand designed to skew the sophist's proportions in a manner that corresponds to Plato's fuller treatments elsewhere. In the light of those other treatments, we will see how the proportions are ugly, i.e. how they are a falsification of what the sophist actually does. Finally, I will step back and see how the same distortions of his technique appear 'beautiful' to those ignorant of its true character. This will let us see how the various definitions in *Sophist* are meant to fit together into an appealing false appearance.[13]

3. THE DEFINITIONS IN *SOPHIST* IN THE LIGHT OF OTHER PLATONIC DIALOGUES

The Stranger sums up the first six definitions of the *Sophist* as follows:

> [Stranger] I think we first discovered him as a hired hunter of rich young men… Second, as a wholesaler of learning about the soul…Third, didn't he appear as a retailer of the same things? [Theaetetus] Yes, and fourth as a seller of his own learnings?… [Stranger] I'll try to recall the fifth way: he was an athlete in verbal combat, distinguished by expertise in debating…The sixth appearance was disputed, but still we made a concession to him and took it that he cleanses the soul of beliefs that interfere with learning. (231d-e)

With the exception of the sixth, none of the definitions give much more detail beyond

their division of terms. So to see whether Plato means us to take these definitions in earnest, and so get a fuller picture of what he means by hunter, etc., I propose to look at his portrayals in other dialogues.

(Def. 1) Do we find the 'hunters of young men' in other dialogues? If they are found among the "plentiful meadows of wealthy youths" (222a), then it seems that the sophists present at the 'trade-show' at the home of Callias (*Prt.* 314e-316b) are engaged in hunting. Moreover, as described in the first definition in *Sophist*, although these 'hunters' charge money for their association with students, they "claim that it is for the sake of virtue" (223a). So Protagoras claims he will make Hippocrates a better man (*Prt.* 318a-b). Gorgias, although he says he does not teach virtue (*Men.* 95c), does say that he will make you wise in speaking (*Grg.* 449e). Hippias says his wisdom will make you virtuous (*Hp. Ma.* 281b, 283c). Even Euthydemus claims his association will make you virtuous (*Euthd.* 273d), perhaps by revealing your pre-existent wisdom (*Euthd.* 293b). Hippocrates, for his part, is a youth eager to partake of the wisdom of Protagoras, even though he has no idea what this is (*Prt.* 312c). And according to Callias, Evenus of Paros is the man who can train your sons (*Ap.* 20). So a 'hunter' who associates with youths, ostensibly to train them in virtue, is a common picture in these other dialogues.

(Defs. 2-4) However, in *Sophist*, this association for the sake of virtue costs money.[14] Likewise, in the other dialogues we find the 'merchants of articles of knowledge about virtue' (224c) charging fees. Socrates claims that sophists offer their various wares indiscriminately (*Prt.* 313d-314b), which really seems to be the case with Hippias, who offers memorised recitations of everything from geometry and letters to genealogies and history (*Hp. Ma.* 285b-e). Gorgias sells stock arguments to less able students (*Men.* 70a), and 'success' to more advanced ones like Callicles (Cf. Arist., *SE* 34.183b36-184a7). Protagoras claims to offer 'advanced instruction' in virtue and even offers a sliding scale of payment (*Prt.* 328a-c), while Prodicus offers more or less complete courses for different prices (*Cra.* 384b-c). Thrasymachus expects to be paid for his wisdom (*R.* 337d), as do Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (*Euthd.* 304c). Socrates' defence against the charge of sophistry, conversely, is that he charges no money for his company (*Ap.* 19d). So in addition to being a hunter, the other dialogues also portray the sophists as merchants.

(Def. 5) The 'champion of verbal combat' whose expertise is in "debating" (*tên eristikên technên*, 231e), from *Sophist*, is also found elsewhere.[15] It is present throughout the *Gorgias*. Gorgias calls rhetoric a "competitive skill (*agôn*)" like boxing (*Grg.* 456c-d), and his conversation with Socrates is one such competition, where Socrates forces Gorgias over and over to say more than he intended. In the end, he forces him to reveal that the victory sought by his rhetoric is the enslavement of fellow citizens by their own consent and the control even of their proper arts (*Grg.* 452d-e, 455a457c, Cf. *Phlb.* 58a-b). Polus thinks a rhetor's victory is so complete he can act like a tyrant (*Grg.* 466b-c). For Callicles rhetoric promises victory in the contest of life (*Grg.* 483d-484c), and Socrates' lack of rhetorical skill renders him defenceless against attack (*Grg.* 486a). Consequently, Callicles has no interest in continuing a losing contest (*Grg.* 505c-d). Similarly, Protagoras has no interest in losing his verbal combat with Socrates over who is the more powerful speaker (*Prt.* 335a, 339a, 348b-c). Protagoras' estimation of the value of powerful or clever speech is shared

with Gorgias (*Grg.* 449e, *Men.* 95b, Cf. *Euthd.* 305c).[16] Finally, such champions insist on the rules of the contest, as when Thrasymachus complains that Socrates always attacks but never defends (*R.* 337e), and Protagoras claims he must be refuted by his own admissions (*Tht.* 166a-b). The entire *Euthydemus*, finally, is verbal combat.

(Def. 6) Finally, the 'purifier of the soul' who removes 'beliefs that interfere with learning' is Socrates, I think, when engaged in the refutation (*elenchus*, 230d) necessary as a preliminary to any philosophical investigation (*Men.* 84a-d).[17] As such, the reader can easily fill out the general picture in *Sophist* from any number of dialogues. However, for my argument we do need to examine the specific point of why the Stranger says there is a similarity of this 'sophist of noble lineage' to (def. 5) the verbal athlete (231a), i.e. how the philosopher can sometimes "take on the appearance…of sophists" (216d). Socrates the philosopher can be mistaken for a sophist, first, because the hatred of sophists on the part of someone like Anytus is not based on knowledge, so he probably can't tell the difference between them (*Men.* 91b-95a). Indeed, behind Anytus' prosecution on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians, Socrates claims, is the popular belief that Socrates makes the weaker argument the stronger (*Ap.* 19b-20c), a skill openly claimed by Protagoras (Arist., *Rh.* II.1402a24-27). The unnamed speechwriter who heard the display by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus also thinks Socrates' elenchus is no different from sophistical refutation, which is why he considers all philosophy worthless chatter (*Euthd.* 304e-305a).[18] Meno can't tell the difference between genuine refutation and argumentative trickery (*Men.* 80a-b). And even Adeimantus claims most people whom Socrates refutes think it is due to their inexperience in argument rather than genuine refutation (*R.* 487a-c).

Socrates can also be mistaken for a sophist because, conversely, sophists try to be mistaken for philosophers (233b-c; *Plt.* 291c, 303c).[19] Although they have no real knowledge of what is "fine or shameful, good or bad, just or unjust," they use these words in accordance with the opinions of the many and call "this knack wisdom" (*R.* 493b, *Phd.* 90c). They take on the label of philosophy, whose language is "full of fine names and adornments," but more often than not bring upon it ill-repute (*R.* 495b-d). Both Protagoras and Gorgias claim that their skill in speaking qualifies them to advise the city on all matters, even claiming that politics itself consists in their rhetorical wisdom (*Tht.* 167c, *Prt.* 319a, *Grg.* 455a-456a).[20] Although they are completely *alogos* (*Grg.* 499e-501a), the 'knacks' of sophistry and rhetoric imitate the reasoned skill of legislation and justice, as pastry-baking and cosmetics imitate medicine and gymnastics (*Grg.* 464d-465b). The knacks seek to supplant these arts and often succeed, as shown by Plato's characterisation of Socrates' condemnation for the practice of true, philosophical politics. In the prosecution of a doctor by a pastry-chef in front of a jury of children, it is the pastry-chef who claims to be wise (*Grg.* 521d-522b).

In the light of these other dialogues, then, how should we understand the definitions in *Sophist*? He is a hunter of young men in the sense that he seeks them out as customers and offers them training in virtue for a fee. The virtue that he offers is sometimes merely a collection of edifying speeches about various topics. The more advanced, more expensive virtue is a training in rhetoric, which is explicitly a form of verbal combat, whose aim is domination of one's fellow citizens. In the service of victory, the sophist teaches them even

to make the weaker argument the stronger. Finally, he makes this rhetoric seem like virtue by taking on the language of philosophy, partly by exploiting the apparent coincidence of his own practice of refutation with philosophical refutation, and partly through the simple claim to be wise in all matters, including the business of the city. This is what it means for the sophist to be a hunter, merchant, and disputer. As for purifying souls, it turns out that really isn't part of the sophistical package.

4. THE 'ORIGINAL' SOPHIST AND THE TECHNIQUES OF 'ANTI-COLLECTION' AND 'ANTI-DIVISION'

If the portrayal of sophists from Plato's other dialogues reflect the definitions in *Sophist*, how do these other portrayals also reflect the 'original', the 'insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier' from the end of the dialogue? This word-juggler practices 'making false appearances' (*phantastikê*). He makes the weaker argument the stronger. If the original 'proportions' of his topic will not lead him to victory, he must distort them. To those who know how things really are, these distortions are ugly (false), but his aim is to fool the ignorant into thinking they are beautiful (true).[21] But he must also present his rhetoric itself with skewed proportions. He will claim that it is virtue and wisdom, when in fact it is an empty knack that presents falsehoods as truths to the ignorant.

We can see the way in which Plato thinks the 'original' sophist has only an empty technique if we take Collection and Division as our touchstone. Although this pair of techniques actually constitutes dialectic in the *Phaedrus*, it is the argumentative technique that Plato associates most closely with skill in rhetoric (*Phdr.* 265d-c). The rhetorician in question aims to deceive his audience by small degrees (*Phdr.* 261e-262a) about things where opinions vary greatly (*Phdr.* 263a-b), and to do this skilfully he must have knowledge of the thing in question (*Phdr.* 262a-c). He must make use of Collection to see how certain things that differ from each other are also one in some way because they belong to a single kind. And he must use Division to cut up a single kind into its parts because that single kind is itself also many. However, Plato implies that a man who mastered Collection and Division would not use it in the service of rhetoric, preferring instead "to speak and act in a way that pleases the gods" (*Phdr.* 273e). So although the philosopher's genuine Collection and Division would give him the highest rhetorical skill, he would prefer to investigate the truth rather than practice deception.

Consequently, a sophist who practices deceptive rhetoric cannot be practicing genuine Collection and Division, and Plato does not portray them doing so. What he gives us instead is a remarkably consistent picture of sophists practicing a systematic violation of the rules of Collection and Division, which for simplicity's sake I will call 'anti-Collection' and 'anti-Division'.[22] Protagoras and Gorgias don't actually have wisdom, according to Plato, but they grasp the formal character of arguments well enough to present things clearly or vaguely, accurately or inaccurately, as they please.

What I mean by anti-Collection is a gathering of things together that violates the rule that what is gathered must belong to a single kind by means of definition (*Phdr.* 265d). Anti-Collection uses a vague or inaccurate definition or explanation to pretend that what it has gathered belongs together, or simply offers no definition at all. The point of this method is

that, by multiplying various unclear connotations of the term in question, one can cast one's net as widely as possible, either to include illegitimate things within the anti-Collection or to make a false equivalence between one or more items within it. For example, if one wants to claim that skill in verbal combat is virtue, one might use the term virtue in a vague and loose way to refer to many and various things, so that one's audience accepts one's inclusion of verbal combat.

Anti-Division is the converse. It violates the rule that a kind must be Divided along its natural joints (*Phdr.* 265e). Instead, it pretends no Division is possible, presenting a given term or description as if it can be understood in only one manner, again either by giving a vague or false definition or no definition at all. The point of anti-Division is to zero-in on the single connotation that the rhetorician wants to plant in his audience's mind, while either adding to it or replacing certain of its characteristics with ones drawn from other, unmentioned, connotations, or simply excluding from consideration connotations that would weaken his argument. For example, if, as above, one wanted to claim that skill in verbal combat is virtue, one might instead refer to this skill alone as virtue, either ignoring other connotations of the word or, more likely, pretending that all other connotations are equivalent in meaning to skill in verbal combat. Courage, justice, and wisdom, one might claim, all find their acme in the defeat of one's political enemies for the sake of the good of the city. So while anti-Collection is a sort of unprincipled inclusion of many different things under a single kind, anti-Division is a false univocity that excludes most of the things that should fall under a single kind.[23]

Plato portrays the sophists practicing anti-Collection and anti-Division in four principal dialogues, *Hippias Major*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus*, and *Gorgias*. Anti-Collection is seen in a clumsy way in *Hippias Major* and in a more subtle way in *Protagoras*. Hippias so automatically thinks that a multiplicity can be called by a single name, but without a unifying principle, that he doesn't even understand Socrates' distinction between 'the fine' and 'a fine thing' (*Hp. Ma.* 287d). He thinks the fine is simply a list of fine customs (*Hp. Ma. 286*b), or a fine girl (*Hp. Ma.* 287e), a fine horse (*Hp. Ma.* 289a), gold (*Hp. Ma.* 289e), or riches, health, honour, long life, and a good funeral (*Hp. Ma.* 291d-e). Hippias himself perhaps engages in anti-Collection because he has a simplistic metaphysics in which there actually is no unifying principle of a multiplicity, so even natural kinds are pure aggregates (*Hp. Ma.* 300b-302a).[24]

Protagoras is more calculating. He pretends, for example that 'sophist' refers equally to the poets, prophets, athletes, and musicians, so that Homer and Orpheus are as much sophists as he, but he does so without defining what he means by sophist (*Prt.* 316d-317a).[25] His anti-Collection probably aims at the opposite of what he claims. Rather than these earlier figures hiding their sophistry under the mask of more reputable arts, it is Protagoras who wants to mitigate the bad reputation that 'sophist' has taken on by association with older uses of the name.[26]

Protagoras' main anti-Collection, however, is of virtue. Without ever giving a clear definition of what virtue is in itself, he claims he can 'make you better every day' (*Prt.* 318a), and that virtue is sound deliberation, how to be powerful in speaking and acting in the city, and the art of citizenship (*Prt.* 319a). He claims both that virtue is natural because it is given to men by the gods (*Prt.* 322c), and that it comes through education and custom

(*Prt.* 325c-326d). All men teach virtue, but Protagoras is a better teacher than all men (*Prt.* 328b). Virtue is justice, temperance, piety, wisdom, and courage, but these have no unifying principle (and are unrelated to his other accounts), being related as the parts of a face (*Prt.* 329d-e).[27] Finally, having 'established' himself as an expert in virtue, Protagoras gets to what I think is the point of this anti-Collection, which is his claim that "the greatest part of a man's education (*paideia*) is to be in command of poetry (*peri epôn deinos*)" (*Prt.* 339a). *Paideia* here is probably a continuation of the discussion of virtue. And being *peri epôn deinos*, whose surface connotation is being good at explaining poetry, really means being formidable in verbal contests, as the sparring match over the text of Simonides that follows demonstrates. In other words, Protagoras is insinuating that, because he is an expert in virtue, when he trains you to be a 'champion in verbal combat' he is training you in virtue.

As with Hippias, Protagoras' use of anti-Collection may depend on a particular metaphysical view. He seems to think that words like 'good' or 'advantageous' are just names for sums of disconnected things with no unifying principle, so that the same thing can be both good and bad, as olive oil is good for the hair and bodies of humans but bad for plants and for the fur of animals or when ingested in more than small amounts (*Prt.* 334a-c). Moreover, the reason he doesn't take seriously Socrates' argument that Justice resembles Piety is that he thinks words can make anything resemble anything else, even white resemble black, or hard resemble soft (*Prt.* 331d-e), possibly because the world itself is just a disconnected panoply of appearance. Rather than look for the principle of something like virtue that would explain its various appearances, Protagoras may really think that the 'principle' of Collection is the sophist's rhetoric, by which he can "change the appearances" to whatever he wishes (*Tht.* 166d).

Plato portrays anti-Division, in turn, being practiced in a clumsy way throughout the *Euthydemus*. As Socrates points out to the young Clinias, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus move back and forth between meanings of a single word while pretending that there is only one meaning (*Euthd.* 277d-278b). When Socrates attempts to counter with a proper Division, they get angry with him, forbid him from making distinctions in his answers, and change the subject (*Euthd.* 295c-297b).[28]

Anti-Division is also the main technique in *Gorgias*. Gorgias begins with a vague account of rhetoric that results from a refusal to make distinctions: rhetoric is simply wisdom (*Grg.* 449d-e) in making speeches (*Grg.* 450d). In their combat, Socrates forces Gorgias into a step by step Division of his account of rhetoric, depriving him of the ambiguity of his initial anti-Division. He forces Gorgias to say that rhetoric is about the greatest of human concerns (*Grg.* 451d), i.e. persuading fellow citizens and ruling over them (*Grg.* 452d), about the just and unjust (*Grg.* 454b), without actually teaching them (*Grg.* 454e), and even directs them in the just and unjust use of their own arts (*Grg.* 455d). Because he shows it to be only one particular kind of 'wisdom in making speeches', Socrates deprives Gorgias' rhetoric of the generally positive connotation that initially attached to that phrase. Gorgias' rhetoric is 'wise speech' in a much narrower sense, directed only to ambitious young politicians rather than to the mass of citizens, over whom it promises domination. Further, when Socrates refutes Gorgias' claim that the rhetorician could use rhetoric unjustly, Gorgias remains silent about Socrates' use of

anti-Division against him. Socrates assumes a single meaning of the word 'justice', but this is a meaning Gorgias himself does not share (*Grg.* 460b-461b), as pointed out later by Polus (*Grg.* 461b) and Callicles (*Grg.* 482c), who certainly do not think justice has the compulsive power Socrates attributes to it.[29]

When Polus takes over from Gorgias, he thinks he doesn't need to hear anything more about rhetoric than that it produces pleasure and gratification, and is completely unprepared for Socrates' Division, in which rhetoric takes its place as a knack beside sophistry, over against justice and legislation (*Grg.* 464d-465b). Further, on the basis of a presumed univocity, Polus considers power to be an unqualified good, to which Socrates responds by Dividing 'doing what you see fit' from 'doing what you want' (*Grg.* 467b).

After berating Socrates for defeating Polus by not Dividing what is shameful by nature from what is shameful by convention (*Grg.* 482d, see 474c),[30] Callicles himself attempts a series of anti-Divisions. He pretends that the superior (*kreitton*), better (*beltion*), and stronger (*ischuroteron*) are the same thing and have the same definition (*Grg.* 488b-d). But once Socrates Divides 'superior' in a way that undermines Callicles' claim that the 'stronger' are superior, he drops 'stronger' and claims that by 'superior' he just meant 'better' and 'worthier' (*ameinous*) all along (*Grg.* 489b-e). When Socrates throws in 'more intelligent' (*phronomôterous*), Callicles initially accepts this as univocally good, but then reacts to Socrates' Division by rejecting the knowledge of the craftsmen and shifting its meaning to being "intelligent about the affairs of the city," throwing in being 'brave' for good measure (*Grg.* 491a-b). Callicles is attempting an anti-Division rather than an anti-Collection, I think, because he is not trying to Collect together a number of distinct things by means of a single name. Instead, he is trying to claim that these words are really just different names for one single thing, the 'superior' person whose reason and bravery serve his large appetites (*Grg.* 491e-492a). He downplays, trivialises, or tries to ignore meanings of these words that don't fit his univocal conception. He does the same with pleasure, claiming that it is always a good (*Grg.* 492d, 494b), i.e. that it is a single univocal kind, which is why he loses the argument once he accepts Socrates' Division of pleasure into better and worse (*Grg.* 499b).[31]

That the sophist's use of anti-Collection and anti-Division yields only a sham wisdom is shown by Socrates' successful use of Collection and Division against them. So the response that Socrates gives, both in *Hippias Major* and in *Protagoras*, is to look for the actual principle that would turn each of the multiplicities invoked by the sophists into an accurate Collection.[32] With Hippias, Socrates doesn't reach the principle, but his suggestions of the appropriate, the useful, the beneficial, and the 'pleasant through hearing and sight' are movements in the right direction (*Hp. Ma.* 293d to end). With Protagoras, Socrates spends the entire end of the dialogue arguing that the single principle behind an accurate Collection of the various virtues is that they are kinds of wisdom (*Prt.* 361b). Protagoras leaves the conversation before Socrates can point out that this principle would disqualify skill in verbal combat. In *Euthydemus*, Socrates' few proper Divisions give the lie to the whole affair, and in *Gorgias* his Divisions are so effective against Callicles that he simply withdraws from the discussion and Socrates must complete it himself (*Grg.* 505c).

At this point we can understand how the 'original' that lies behind the hunter,

merchant, and disputer is a 'contrary-speech-making, insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier' (268c). The sophist hunts for young men to whom he can sell a training in rhetoric, which he thinks is a form of combat, i.e. 'contrary-speech-making'. He is aware that this rhetoric is not true wisdom, i.e. that he is 'unknowing'. What he has, instead, is a technique for manipulating appearances with an eye to his audience's ungrounded opinions. Because he knows this, his claim to teach wisdom is 'insincere'.[33] And because his technique depends on illicit inclusions, in anti-Collection, or illicit exclusions, in anti-Division, he is a 'word-juggler'. In other words, the 'original' sophist is a dealer in speeches who knows his rhetoric is a manipulation of appearances, but who pretends otherwise. In the next two sections, we will investigate how this pretence, the claim that his rhetoric is wisdom and virtue and that it brings political success, is the 'distortion' he introduces into his proportions, to continue the statue analogy. We will see how, to the ignorant, this pretence makes him seem 'beautiful'. But first we will occupy a viewpoint where we can detect the ugliness/falsehood of this distortion.

5. THE UGLY DISTORTIONS IN THE DEFINITIONS IN *SOPHIST*

With the 'original' sophist in front of us, we can see how he distorts his proportions to make himself seem better than he is. The extreme brevity of the first five definitions, as I remarked above, make it difficult to do this on the basis of *Sophist* alone.[34] However, we do find in these six definitions examples of anti-Collection and anti-Division. When read together with the fuller pictures Plato gives us elsewhere, these let us detect the means by which the sophist presents himself falsely. The essence of his distortion is to present his rhetoric as if it were the height of wisdom, a kind of philosophy and political science combined. We can see how this distorted image is 'ugly', because we are able to compare it with the original. It is not wisdom. It is only a manipulation of appearances.

The anti-Collection in the definitions turns mainly on the unprincipled inclusion of a multiplicity of items under the term 'virtue'. As we saw above, sophists in many dialogues claim that (def. 1) virtue is something you will acquire by associating with them. But it is also, as in *Protagoras* especially, (defs. 2-4) akin to a trade-good that can be acquired in one city and sold in another. As in *Gorgias*, it is implied that (def. 5) skill in debating (eristics), which is a subdivision of verbal combat, is also virtue. And, in keeping with Socrates' practice in many dialogues, (def. 6) virtue is also the cleansing of the soul's false opinions in order to make it better. As in *Protagoras*, this is an anti-Collection, because the connection of virtue to the various activities described in the definitions in *Sophist* is merely asserted. At no point in *Sophist* is virtue defined. Nor, for that matter, are Gorgias, Hippias, or the rest forthcoming in their dialogues about exactly how what they teach is a form of virtue. Moreover, it is possible that, as in *Protagoras*, the point of the anti-Collection here in *Sophist* is to make what is not virtue (i.e. def. 5) seem like it is virtue, by association with what really is virtuous, namely (def. 6) Socrates's purifying refutations.[35] Socrates really will (def. 1) associate with you for the sake of virtue, and really does (def. 6) refute you for your own betterment, so when the sophist seems to do the same, his (def. 5) art of disputation also seems to be beneficial and (defs. 2-4) worth the money he charges. The vagueness of a

Gorgias or Hippias on this point likely has the same aim, to distort the character of their rhetorical instruction so that they can include it under the umbrella term 'virtue'.

Further, we find within each definition an anti-Division, an ambiguity or unclarity that encourages a univocal understanding of some term. These ambiguities distort the character of the sophist's various activities, making them seem to be in the service of virtue. (Def. 1) The first definition piggybacks on the practice-definition of the angler, so it literally obscures a Division made by the Stranger: only within the angler is acquisition Divided into the opposition of 'taking possession' and 'mutually willing exchange', and only there is it made clear that hunting is a secret taking possession (219d). The first definition of the sophist picks up after that point (221d), so it simply omits the cardinal character of hunting, that the prey does not enter into the association willingly. This distorts the purpose of the sophist's association with his students. He "claims" (223a)[36] it is for the sake of his students' virtue, but, as a form of hunting, it is really a taking possession for his own enrichment. That his promise of virtue is parallel to the pleasure that the flatterer uses as 'bait' (222e) indicates another distortion by which he masks the aim of his association. He pretends it is exchange in order to hide its character as acquisition, and he pretends that he has a genuine article to exchange. But if his teachings are 'bait', then he has nothing of worth. Compare this with Protagoras' claim that Hippocrates will become a better man each day that he studies with him (*Prt.* 318a-b). Protagoras' debate with Socrates, most likely, is a piece of advertising intending to gain fee-paying customers from the rich young men assembled at the house of Callias. But it is clear by the end of the *Protagoras* that the sophist does not know what virtue is.[37] So his claim that he can make Hippocrates better is clearly false. No virtue would be acquired, so no exchange would be made.

(Defs. 2-4) The distortion of the sophist's association in the first definition made it look like exchange, hence we have the second to fourth definitions of the sophist, as a sort of merchant. Here, again, we find an anti-Division. We are given only a single way to think about the goods sold by merchants, namely as separable objects that can be made, procured, and disposed of. Even the goods for the soul are presented in this way, as pieces of music, paintings, or travelling shows (224a). This is in keeping with how, for Gorgias, virtue was something that he could basically throw in as an afterthought if a student happened to need it (*Grg.* 460a). Similarly, when forbidden from selling virtue in Sparta, Hippias simply substituted a different selection of his wares (*Hp. Ma.* 285d-e). But this univocal presentation ignores what Socrates claims about teachings (*Prt.* 313c), that they are not acquired in the same manner as separable goods. They are not the sort of thing that you can carry away in a container. They enter directly into your soul (*Prt.* 314b), such that a man who truly knew justice would never act unjustly (*Grg.* 460c). So the distortion in the first definition made the sophist's hunting seem to be one where the student exchanges money for virtue. The distortion in the second to fourth definitions make virtue seem like a trade-good, the sort of thing the merchant-sophist can plausibly claim to offer.

(Defs. 5-6) The final anti-Division is effected by the juxtaposition of the final two of the six definitions, and consists in conflating the different kinds of refutation in argument. The sophist's most valuable 'trade-good' is a technique of disputation that he distorts

into a semblance of education in virtue (*Prt.* 339a) or wisdom (*Grg.* 449e). He is able to present this technique of refutation as a kind of virtue, even though it aims only at victory, by assimilating it to Socrates' refutation of ignorance. And he can do this because most people don't see that the athlete in contests of words differs from the purifier of souls as a "wolf from a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest" (231a). As we saw above, Socrates is often taken to be a sophist because sophists attempt to make their arguments resemble wisdom (233b-c).

This anti-Division, therefore, presents refutation as a single thing, namely as the sort of thing that Socrates and other philosophers engage in. Hence the distortion that it introduces into the sophist's rhetoric is complex, because depends on the listener's opinion of Socrates and other philosophers. This variety of opinion lets sophistical refutation appear to be three different things to three different audiences, each of whom ends up with a different univocal understanding. The juxtaposition of these last two definitions in *Sophist*, I think, indicates a complex subterfuge that we see played out when sophists in other dialogues present their rhetoric as a kind of 'virtue-for-sale'. Some of their listeners think their rhetoric is a waste of time, others think it is the height of wisdom, while still others think it is a technique for power.

To some, (A) sophistical refutation seems like the 'chatter' of the annoying but harmless man who simply enjoys argument, and who occupies the other half of the division of 'debating' (eristics) with the sophist as verbal athlete (225d). This is the opinion of the unnamed man who, a forensic speechwriter himself, considers the display of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to be an example of philosophical discussion, and so who considers philosophy to have "no value whatsoever" (*Euthd.* 304e-305a). This is a distortion because, while sophistical rhetoric doesn't have the degree of power Gorgias claims for it, it can sway the opinions of citizens about important things and so is not as trivial as this appearance pretends (*Tht.* 167c; *Grg.* 452e, 455b-456c).

To others, (B) the sophist's claim to improve his students (*Prt.* 318a-b) makes him seem like the wise sophist of noble lineage, whose refutation purifies souls of their ignorance (230d). These students listen to the sophist's 'edifying' speeches and enjoy his public verbal contests and think they have been bettered.[38] This seems to be the opinion of young Hippocrates, who is so innocent that he asks Socrates to intercede for him with Protagoras. This is also a distortion, because the sophist has only an empty verbal technique. This is why Socrates, instead of enrolling Hippocrates as a pupil of Protagoras, unmasks the sophist in a complete and very public take-down.

(C) Others really hear the sense of strife and battle in debating (eristics) (225c). This audience is aware of the difference between a sophist and a philosopher, so the anti-Division doesn't fly with them. However, this works in the sophist's favour, because these men have no interest in philosophy. On the contrary, they think sophistical refutation will allow them to enslave their fellow citizens (*Grg.* 452e). Callicles is the prime example of this audience. He considers philosophy admirable in a youth but shameful in a grown man, because it renders such a man helpless in the vicious contest of Athenian politics (*Grg.* 485c-486c). But Plato thinks this appearance directed at the vicious and power-hungry is also a distortion. Although rhetoric is not toothless, Socrates argues that it does not deliver the power over one's fellow citizens

that Gorgias promises. It is merely an artless knack, a flattery that is dependent on its audience, guessing at what will satisfy their prejudices (*Grg.* 463a-466a). Contrary to his expectation, a student of sophistical rhetoric like Callicles does not have the freedom to use words as he pleases, because what he says has to please the *demos*. And if you are going to persuade the people you have to speak like the people (*Grg.* 513a-c; *R.* 487e-488e, 578e-580a; *Tht.* 172e-173b).

Finally, we should notice an important connection between the fifth definition and the first. As in the first, the Stranger obscures the fifth definition by omitting a step in the jump from acquisition to combat. What lies between is that combat is openly taking possession rather than mutually willing exchange. So, as with the hunter, this omission makes the sophist's training in argument seem to be for the sake of his students' betterment. But as with hunting, debating (eristics) as combat is a form of acquisition. But it is an odd sort of acquisition. When one bests an opponent in debating, one doesn't strip them of their armour. Instead, one simply wins a victory. For the sophist, however, his victory in verbal combat gains him a higher reputation, which leads to more students, and hence to the real object of acquisition, his students' fees.[39]

6. THE BEAUTIFUL APPEARANCE OF THE SOPHIST

Let's remind ourselves of the terms in our analogy. There is the 'original' sophist, which, like the sculptor's model, is the sophist as he actually is. This is the 'contrary-speech-making, insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier'. And there is the image of the sophist, the false appearance produced by distorting the proportions of the original. For a large statue, the same distorted proportions seem ugly up close, but appear beautiful when seen from far away. For the sophist, when we compare the sophist's distortions of his rhetorical technique to the actual character of that technique (i.e. get 'up close'), we perceive their falsehood ('ugliness'). But when someone encounters the same distortions without the ability to compare them with his technique's genuine character (i.e. 'from far away), they are fooled. Like the viewer of the large statue, to whom the ugly proportions seem beautiful, to this naïve observer the sophist's false claims about his practice seem true ('beautiful').

The sophist's general 'beautiful' appearance lies in his claim to improve his students (def. 1), because he is a merchant of virtue and wisdom (defs. 2-4). He offers all sort of goods for sale, such as edifying speeches about his audience's existing opinions about virtue (*Hp. Ma.* 286a-b; *R.* 493a-c). He offers more basic (*Men.* 70a, *Cra.* 384b-c) and more advanced courses (def. 5) in wise speech (*Grg.* 449e). And, as with any businessman, he takes no personal responsibility for his students' use of his wares (*Grg.* 457b-c).

More specifically, this false appearance seems 'beautiful' in different ways, as we saw in the last section, depending on the listener's attitude towards what the sophist has for sale. (A) To someone with a low opinion of both philosophical and sophistical debate, (def. 5) the sophist's wares seem like mere chatter. This appearance is useful to the sophist, because he has to be careful of a man like Anytus, who is perhaps suspicious of the idea that virtue is something that can be bought and sold, and who perhaps dislikes being contradicted in public and urged to care more for virtue than profit (*Ap.* 31b), blaming Socrates rather than himself (230b, *Men.* 80a-b).[40] The sophist

knows he is disliked by Anytus, to whom his wares are empty and money spent on them is wasted. So he would like his distortion of his technique, his claim to wisdom, to give Anytus the impression that all philosophy and all sophistry are "worthless and ridiculous" (*Euthd.* 305a). He wants to appear 'beautiful' in the sense that men who might be alarmed by his technique accept its false appearance as harmless chatter, which it is not.

On the other hand, the sophist-merchant appears to be (B) a genuine purveyor of wisdom to someone like Hippocrates (*Prt.* 310d-e), who is young and impressionable, and who knows nothing about what Protagoras teaches, only that "he has a monopoly on wisdom… [and that] everyone says he's a terribly clever speaker" (*Prt.* 310d-311a). Many of the sophist's customers will be like Hippocrates, thinking only that sophists are wise and can argue about everything (232b-233c, 234c). These customers will never make it to the 'advanced course' in disputation, because they don't want to become sophists (*Prt.* 312-a-b). Because the sophist wants to extract money from them, he presents his wares as snippets of wisdom (def. 1) that they acquired somewhere or generated themselves (defs. 2-4). He gives them rhetorical displays (def. 5) that entertain and make these naïve customers consider themselves wise. After listening to Protagoras' "virtuoso performance" on Prometheus, Epimetheus, and the rest, most listeners won't immediately begin interrogating the speaker, as Socrates proceeds to do (*Prt.* 329b). They will simply applaud and think that they have gotten their money's worth from Protagoras, the merchant of virtue. Someone like Callias counts himself lucky to have found a man who can educate his sons for the 'reasonable' fee of only five minas (*Ap.* 20b).[41] Even the 'old late-learners' (251b) Euthydemus and Dionysodorus actually seem to think that the stock technique they have paid for is genuine wisdom, as incredible as that seems (*Euthd.* 274b, 275a, 303b).

Finally, to an ambitious young aristocrat who perceives the agonistic character of sophistical rhetoric and thinks it a worthwhile investment, the sophist appears 'beautiful' as (C) a merchant of success. Although Gorgias claims that he makes his students 'wise' (*phronein*, *Grg.* 449e) in what they speak about, what he means is that he makes men 'formidable speakers' (*Men.* 95c, cf. *Prt.* 339a). Virtue in the sense that Socrates means it isn't part of his instruction (*Grg.* 460a). Instead, Gorgias wants his prime customers to hear 'virtue' in 'merchant of articles of knowledge about virtue' (224c) in a very different sense, namely as the 'excellence' that will make you a successful man by making your fellow citizens your slaves (*Grg.* 452e).

As we saw above, Gorgias is initially cagey about what he teaches, saying only that it is about "the greatest of human concerns" (*Grg.* 451d), and likely doesn't broadcast too widely that the 'wisdom' he offers is a technique for dominating others. It is likely that Gorgias has to be careful, even though his conception of virtue as a kind of domination is a lot closer to the mainstream than is the virtue of Socrates. Polemarchus' 'helping friends and harming enemies', for example, seems the obvious way to order one's life to one of the richest men in Athens, who, although a foreigner, feels at home among its aristocratic elite (Blondell, 1989, pp. 26-28). But even though he claims justice is a kind of factionalism among powerful men by which you amass as much for your side as possible (*R.* 332a-b), Polemarchus doesn't seem to realise that he is only a hair's breadth away from Thrasymachus' egoism. And although many men think success in life consists in dominating others, they don't often say so openly,

and instead praise justice for the "reputations, honours, and rewards that are its consequences" (*R.* 366b-367a).[42] Their praise of justice, in other words, doesn't indicate an acceptance of Socrates' virtue, which demands an admission of your own ignorance and a willingness to change your whole life, but neither does it indicate a tolerance of Thrasymachus. What Gorgias sells young aristocrats, on the other hand, is the promise that they can in fact take their culture's version of 'success' to its logical conclusion: a naked pursuit of power that doesn't require them to change their character one bit. Although he is a bumpkin, Meno is an aristocratic bumpkin and serves as an extreme example. When asked what virtue is, this less-than-gifted student of Gorgias essentially answers 'power' all three times (*Men.* 71e, 73c, 77b). For their part, Callicles and Thrasymachus are clear that 'virtue' is the pursuit of power (*R.* 348c-d; *Grg.* 483a-d). And Alcibiades is such a singular character because, while rejecting Socrates' company in favour of his unscrupulous political career, he is perfectly aware that he is rejecting real virtue (*Smp.* 216b-c).

This polyvalence of the sophist's 'beautiful' appearance affords him a measure of protection. He is able to appeal to a Meno or a Callicles, I think, while at the same time not alienating a Polemarchus or alarming an Anytus, because the 'beautiful' false appearances (A) and (B) serve as a sort of screen for appearance (C). Not everyone has the ambition or the lack of scruples of Meno, or the wealth and connections to devote themselves to politics. And to these men who are not his 'preferred audience', the sophist hides behind his merchant persona, letting himself seem either as (A) a quibbler or (B) fount of wisdom, depending on the prejudices of others. But the sophist wants the rich, ambitious young man to think that they are seeing the sophist as he is, and that (C) for a fee the sophist can make him too into an athlete in contests of words.

Underneath these 'beautiful' false appearances is still the original, the 'insincere, unknowing, word-juggling falsifier'. He wants his customers to think they receive something of value through their association with him. But he is, at bottom, a hunter for his students' money, and hunting is a taking possession done in secret. So, as we saw, the sophist is only pretending to be a merchant with a valuable product for sale, when in actuality his 'virtue' is merely bait. His first prey, those who mistake his 'word-juggling' for wisdom and edification, lose only their money. His preferred prey, however, an advanced student like Callicles, loses more than that. Plato thinks that Gorgias cannot deliver the 'success' that Callicles wants, and when Callicles tries to put this rhetoric into practice it actively makes him ignorant and vicious.

As we saw in our examination of anti-Collection and anti-Division, and as the Stranger shows in the seventh definition, the sophist does not make men wise. Rather, he merely takes advantage of an opponent's ignorance to score points over them in argument. That his technique is unknowing, the Stranger takes to be demonstrated by the impossible breadth of subjects that they are "clever at contradicting" (232c) men about: the gods, things on the earth and in the sky, being and coming to be, laws and political issues, and "anything you need to say to contradict any expert himself, both in general and within each particular field" (232d). Because it is impossible for any human being to know everything, the sophists only "appear to their students to be wise about everything…without actually being wise" (233c).[43] Far from being true education (*paideia*), the Stranger concludes, claiming to know everything and

to be able to teach it cheaply and quickly is merely "a game for schoolchildren (*paidia*)" (234a). The pitiful effect of this can be seen in the clumsy show of argument of a Meno, Euthydemus, or Dionysodorus.

In addition to ignorance, if a student actually tries to use the sophist's technique to gain political power, it instils vice in his soul. Speaking to the *demos* is not the same as conducting a debate in a sophist's school. While the technique seems to give power to the speaker, letting him choose whichever ambiguous meaning works to his advantage, the actual scope of his speech is very limited. Because his rhetoric is a form of flattery (*Grg.* 463a-466a), he has to conform his speech to the opinions of his audience. The effect of this, according to Socrates, is that rather than enslaving your fellow citizens this technique makes you the slave of their ignorance and vice and ultimately makes you as vicious as they are (*Grg.* 513a-c). As the readers of *Protagoras* would have noticed, the prospective customers at the sophist trade-show became some of the worst men in Greece, whose ambition and vice led many of them to bad ends.[44]

7. CONCLUSION

These first six definitions in *Sophist*, I have argued, are an enactment of the sophist's application of his technique to himself. They present a calculated false appearance, a distortion of the sophist's actual rhetorical practice. Seen 'from afar', without an awareness of his rhetoric's true character, this distorted image seems 'beautiful'. It appeals to potential students without alarming other citizens. The sophist seems merely to be a businessman who 'hunts' for rich young men, selling them a collection of fine opinions or a training in disputation. This appears to a Callicles as the means to political power, but to most it seems like the harmless quibbling of a Euthydemus, even if to some it seems like the beneficial refutation of a Socrates. When compared to the actual character of his rhetoric, which is an unknowing manipulation of words, the ugliness of this image becomes apparent. He is neither a businessman nor a trainer in success. He is essentially a hunter in the core sense of the word. His promise of edification or of political power is the bait he uses to acquire his students' money, and all he gives them is an empty and childish technique. At best they part with their money for a sham sort of wisdom and entertainment. But if they put his rhetoric into practice they look foolish. At worst, this rhetoric enslaves them to the vice of the *demos*.

The strength of this interpretation of *Sophist* is that it gives a plausible explanation of how the six definitions fit together, something that I don't think has yet been offered in the literature. It also gives a plausible explanation of how they relate to the seventh definition, which occupies the rest of the dialogue, insofar as it implies that the first six definitions are an example or enactment of what is later investigated philosophically. That false speech is possible is what allows the sophist to present himself as he 'is not'. This reading also suggests that *Sophist*, in spite of its metaphysical and linguistic concerns, is also a genuine investigation of sophistry. This draws it closer to the other dialogues in its dramatic sequence, because sophistry also holds a prominent place in both *Theaetetus* and *Statesman*. Finally, insofar as this interpretation discerns concrete connections between *Sophist* and so-called middle dialogues on sophistry, it should be welcome by those who favour a Unitarian reading of Plato.

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ENDNOTES

1 (A) Seligman ignores the definitions, writing them off as student practice in dialectic (Seligman, 1974, p. 12). (B) Zuckert thinks the definitions are inconclusive (Zuckert, 2009, p. 691). (C) Rickless thinks they collect together the sophist's appearances and are all completely wrong, but are useful in order to rule out the idea that he practices acquisition (Rickless, 2010). (D) Cornford thinks that they variously describe different historical persons, such as Protagoras, Gorgias, and Hippias (Cornford, 1935, p. 173), and that taken together the five initial definitions serve as a Collection (187), referring to the method of Collection and Division, for the authoritative seventh definition, and is followed in this by Bluck (1975, pp. 52-53). However, Cornford also seems to think that none of the people described in the first six definitions are actually sophists in the fullest sense (187). He also has no idea why the sixth definition, which he thinks describes Socrates, is included, suggesting it was part of an unfinished plan and would have made sense had Plato written Philosopher (181-182). Wolff emphasises the broad scope of the name 'sophist', and thinks the definitions refer to various functions that received this name, practiced by people like Protagoras and Gorgias, but also by the Cynics or Megarians (Wolff, 1991, pp. 31-37). (E) Some think that the definitions, taken together, display all of the sophist's characteristics (Notomi, 1999, pp. 47-48, 65-66; Ambuel, 2007, p. 46). Narcy analyses each definition closely and connects it with a portrayal of sophistry from other dialogues (Narcy, 2013). But he takes this panoply of characters at face-value and does not connect them to the idea of false appearance. Dixsaut connects the multiplicity of appearances in the first six definitions with the preamble of the seventh, that the sophist can make himself seem wise in all branches of knowledge. The name sophist, she holds, doesn't have a fixed denotation, having only a relative meaning, dependent on how he appears to others. But Dixsaut doesn't explain why the Stranger articulates just these six aspects or how they fit together (Dixsaut, 2022, pp. 425, 429).

2 Some interpreters notice that the definitions present changing appearances, but simply remark that this shows that the sophist really is a maker of images (Rosen, 1999, pp. 107, 133-136; Benardete, 1984, p. II.84; Notomi, 1999, p. 81; Ambuel, 2007, pp. 46-47). Benardete, strangely, also thinks they show the sophist exhibiting all virtues, in order to show that they are not a unity (II.100-101). I think Bordoy is correct in seeing the sophist's many appearances as his attempts to evade capture, but Bordoy's interest is merely to establish this fact, with reference to Plato's allusions to false appearance in Homer. He doesn't actually discuss the appearances themselves (Bordoy, 2013).

3 Here and below single quotes will indicate a paraphrase rather than a quotation of the text.

4 "Imitation (*to mimêtikon*) of the contrary-speech producing (*enantiopoiologikês*), insincere (*eirônikou*) and unknowing sort (*doxastikês*), of the appearance-making kind (*phantastikou*) of copy-making (*eidôlopoiikês*), the word-juggling part (*en logois to thaumatopoiikon*) of production (*poiêseôs*) that's marked off as human and not divine..." (268c-d). Note that references to *Sophist* will be by Stephanus number only. References to all other dialogues will be by abbreviation and Stephanus numbers. The Greek text is Plato (1900-1907) and translations are taken from Plato (1997), occasionally modified.

5 This kind of enactment of what is analysed appears in a few other dialogues. Socrates states explicitly in the *Phaedrus* that the speeches Collect and Divide kinds of madness and kinds of love before he gives a technical discussion of Collection and Division (*Phdr.* 265e-266a). The inconclusive investigation of virtue in the *Meno* from *Men* 86c on is an example of what Socrates explicitly says is impossible, an investigation of the properties of something before one knows what that thing is.

6 Cf. Crivelli (2011, p. 22) and Tusi (2019, pp. 150-151).

7 My aim is to examine Plato's presentation of sophistry, which may or may not be accurate. For a similar approach, but with different conclusions, see Corey (2015, p. 7). See also Tusi (2019, p. 134).

8 White translates it as "appearance-making," in (Plato, 1997, p. 256).

9 Cf. 260c-d: "When he says that what's different is the same in a certain way or that what's the same is different in a certain way, we should understand just what way he means, and the precise respect in which he's saying that the thing is the same or different. But when someone makes that which is the same appear different in just any old way, or vice versa, or when he makes what's large appear small or something that's similar appear dissimilar—well, if someone enjoys constantly trotting out contraries like that in discussion, that's not true refutation. It's only the obvious new-born brain-child of someone who just came into contact with those which are." See also 263d: "But if someone says things about you, but says different things as the same or not beings as beings, then it definitely seems that false

speech really and truly arises from that kind of putting together of verbs and names."

10 The fuller character of definition six is discussed below.

11 See, for example, the division of theoretical knowledge at *Plt*. 259d-260b.

12 Although my intention is to discuss Plato's presentation of sophistry rather than historical sophists, it is worthwhile to compare the brevity of the first five definitions in *Sophist* with Gorgias' technique in his *Defence of Palamedes*, (Graham, 2010, Grg50[F11], pp. 762-775). For example, "Someone might say that we guaranteed our actions by money — he paid me and I took his money. So, a little money? It is hardly likely I would take a little money for such big services rendered. A great deal of money then? How was it conveyed? How could <one man> convey it? Many then? If many conveyed it, there would be many witnesses to the plot; if one conveyed it, the payment could not have been much" (p.765). The options and the reasons for each option are presented so briefly that the listener doesn't have enough purchase on what is being proposed to object. Is there an amount small enough for a single man to carry, but large enough to entice Palamedes to betray the Greeks? We are not given time to speculate. Is it really impossible, as this argument suggests, ever to bribe someone into doing something shameful or illegal, simply because a large enough amount of money would necessarily involve witnesses? We are not given time to speculate. Similarly, in the first six definitions in Sophist, the divisions are so spare and made so quickly that we don't have the cognitive time to evaluate them.

13 It is tempting to read Plato's analogy in *Sophist* as claiming that (a) the sophist's true nature is what is ugly and (b) his false self-presentation is to make himself seem beautiful. But there are three terms in the sculpture analogy: (i) original, (ii) the distorted proportions of the sculpture that are ugly when seen up close, and (iii) the same proportions that seem beautiful from far away. So we have the (i) sophist, (ii) the distortions of the sophist's nature that are 'ugly' when investigated closely, and (iii) the same distortions that make him seem 'beautiful' if they are accepted uncritically.

14 For my argument, I will treat definitions 2-4 together: retailers, wholesalers, salesmen of their own production.

15 Unfortunately, White's translation of *eristikon* as 'debating' makes it sound innocuous (225c). Its denotation is 'eager for strife or battle', as between Achilles and Agamemnon in *Iliad* I.6, which is why it is a subdivision of the *machêtikês* and *agônistikês* (226a). But because most of the more appropriate English words also appear in his translation, I will retain White's term but render it "debating (eristics)."

16 Cf. also Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, in (Graham, 2010, Grg49[F10] (DK B 11), pp. 758-761).

17 For others who think this is Socrates, see Notomi (1999, p. 65). See also Ambuel (2007, p. 57), Zaks (2018), and Tusi (2019, p. 155). Dixsaut thinks this is Socrates, but she also thinks there is no difference between Socrates' 'elenchus' and sophistical 'antilogic', as opposed to 'eristic', even if what happens after the refutation is different (Dixsaut, 2022, pp. 414-418).

18 He uses a different term, but probably also assimilates the sophist as an athlete in contests of words to the chatterer, who is distinguished from him only by not making money (225d).

19 See Lachance (2017, p. 58) for a discussion of the 'antilogic' of the sophists: "[Les Antilogiciens] utilisent l'un des outils préférés de Socrate, à savoir l'*elenchos*. Or, ils l'utilisent de façon dévoyée : leur objectif est de vaincre leur interlocuteur, tandis que Socrate, lui, ne vise que la vérité. Les antilogiciens empruntent donc le masque du philosophe véritable et pervertissent ainsi la philosophie." See also Lachance (2018, pp. 152-153) and Ambuel (2011, p. 280).

20 Cf. the assimilation of "the compelling contests of words" and "the verbal competitions of philosophers" in Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, (Graham, 2010, Grg49[F10] (DK B 11), pp. 758-759).

21 For example, Cleon's claim about the attempt of the Mytilenians to defect to Sparta (the original) is that "no one state has ever injured [Athens] as much as Mytilene" (3.39). This is false/ugly, but Cleon wants his audience to think it is true/beautiful, to justify his contention that only their utter destruction can preserve the Athenian state (3.40). See Thucydides (1996, 3.37-3.40, pp. 176-179).

22 For an argument that sophistical and philosophical methods cannot be so easily distinguished, see McCoy, who thinks that what primarily differentiates a sophist from a philosopher is their moral character (McCoy, 2008, p. 5). Corey, as well, thinks that there is a strong affinity between Socrates and the sophists, and that Plato depicts various sophists in order to lead his readers to philosophy (Corey, 2015, pp. 5-6). However, Corey distinguishes sharply between sophists and rhetoricians, so he does not include among them "Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Callicles, Polus, Antiphon or Critias" (3, 29-33). A useful corrective to this position is Tusi, who, recognising the difference between rhetoric and sophistry in the classification in Gorgias, argues that in Plato's mind this distinction is less important than the fact that both professions corrupt human souls (Tusi, 2020, pp. 75-76). Note that Aristotle seems to consider Gorgias to be a sophist (*SE* 12.173a7-19, and perhaps 34.183b37).

23 Both are techniques for saying "different things are the same" (263d), the first by direct assertion and the second by implication. Compare Aristotle's final sort of merely apparent enthymeme, *Rh*. II.24.1402a3-1402a29: "[It is] based on a confusion

of the absolute with that which is not absolute." He gives examples of univocal senses of being and probability. "As, in eristic, the imposture comes from not adding any clause specifying relationship or reference or manner…This sort of argument illustrates what is meant by making the worse argument seem the better. Hence people were right in objecting to the training Protagoras undertook to give them. It was a fraud; the probability it handled was not genuine but spurious, and has a place in no art except Rhetoric and Eristic." Compare also Aristotle's classification in Sophistical Refutations, especially homonymy, ambiguity, accident, expressions used either without qualification or with illicit qualification, and ignorance of what refutation consists in (*SE* 4.165b23-166a23, 5.166b37-167a37). See 7.169a22-25: "The error comes about in the case of arguments that depend on homonymy and the account because we are unable to distinguish the various senses (for some terms it is not easy to distinguish, e.g. one, being, and sameness)…" Aristotle claims that, while rhetoric was fairly advanced in his day, the systematic study of sophistical refutation was haphazard. It is possible, therefore, that even if Plato's characterisation of the sophists is accurate, their techniques of anti-Collection and anti-Division were not used systematically, and that his portrayal of them in this manner is the first step towards Aristotle's thorough treatment. See *SE* 34.183b34-184a4. Note that translations are from Aristotle (1984).

24 I take this to be implied by Hippias' manner of speaking about 'the fine', as well as by his complaint that Socrates "cuts up with words" things like 'the fine', things which are "naturally continuous bodies of being (*dianekê sômata tês ousias pephukota*)" (Hp. Ma. 301b). Admittedly, this phrase is unclear, but it seems to be marshalled against Socrates' practice of making distinctions within a single kind.

25 The unprincipled anti-Collection is displayed dramatically by the various appearances of the sophists at the house of Callias. Protagoras walks around giving speeches; Hippias sits on a high seat answering questions; Prodicus is still in bed, and what he says can't be made out by Socrates (*Prt*. 314e-315e). On the surface, these activities seem to have nothing in common.

26 Although the term sophist had had a wider application, in the *Protagoras* Plato makes it clear that Protagoras is aware of its current more specialised, negative connotation (*Prt*. 316d). See also Wolff (1991).

27 Later Protagoras will claim that wisdom, temperance, justice, and piety are "reasonably close" to each other, but courage is different. However, even there he gives no reason or principle that explains his assertion about these four virtues (*Prt*. 349d).

28 Cf. Aristotle, *SE* 17.175b28-175b39, where he points out that one must be able to make distinctions when replying to an argument dependent on ambiguity.

29 Technically, they say Gorgias should never have admitted that a rhetorician should teach justice to a student who is ignorant of it. But they hold this because of their conception of justice as something onerous.

30 Cf. Aristotle, *SE* 12.173a7-19, where he points out that the *nomos-physis* distinction was a common way of drawing men to make paradoxical statements, referring to the *Gorgias*.

31 Thrasymachus uses the same technique, not Dividing ruling from merely holding power in the city, and has to be forced to admit that those who hold power will not practice the art of ruling (*R*. 343b-347d). See also the historical Gorgias' use of the technique in his *Defence of Palamedes*, (Graham, 2010, Grg50[F11], pp.762-775), which presents a total system of possibilities where every case allows only a single meaning of the terms involved, in order to shut down any response. See also his *On What is Not*, (Graham, 2010, Grg38[F1a] and Grg39[F1b] (DK 16 B3), pp.740-751), where the term 'unlimited' shifts in meaning from time to space, without this being indicated (see pp.741, 747). In general the 'antilogic' argument form makes use of a univocal understanding of terms. See Brémond (2022, pp. 109-114) for Gorgias as the model for this sort of argument in *Parmenides* and for the reliance of antilogic on a univocal use of terms. See also Brémond (2019).

32 Cf. Aristotle, *SE* 23.179a11-25: "It is a general rule in dealing with arguments that depend on language that the solution always follows the opposite of the point on which the argument turns: e.g. if the argument depends upon combination, then the solution consists in division; if upon division, then in combination. Again, if it depends on an acute accent, the solution is a grave accent; if on a grave accent, it is an acute. If it depends on homonymy, one can solve it by using the opposite word; e.g. if you find yourself calling something inanimate, despite your previous denial that it was so, show in what sense it is animate; if you have declared it to be inanimate and he has deduced that it is animate, say how it is inanimate. Likewise also in the case of ambiguity. If the argument depends on likeness of expression, the opposite will be the solution. 'Could a man give what he has not got?' No, not what he has not got; but he could give it in a way in which he has not got it, e.g. one die by itself. 'Does a man know either by learning or by discovery each thing that he knows, singly?' Yes, but not the things that he knows. Also a man treads, perhaps, on anything he walks through, but not on the time he walks through. Likewise also in the case of the other examples."

33 Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are clear that they have only a technique for contradiction, although they seem to think this is wisdom (*Euthd*. 275e, 276e). Protagoras, in spite of his claim to be wise, clearly knows what he is doing. His contest with

Socrates about Simonides' poem doesn't aim at a true interpretation. Instead, he quotes the poem selectively in order to make his false interpretation seem true (*Prt*. 339a-d). Gorgias claims that he can persuade a patient far more effectively than a doctor, even though he has no knowledge of medicine (*Grg*. 456a-c). In contrast, Hippias genuinely does seem to think he is wise, and he certainly has a prodigious memory. But he seems to take seriously Socrates' ironic equivalence between financial success and wisdom, indicating that his conviction of wisdom is due to his lack of it (*Hp. Ma*. 281d-283b).

34 The exception is the sixth definition, which I argued above isn't really of a sophist.

35 For someone who is convinced of this, see Dixsaut (2022, pp. 414-418).

36 "Claims" is *epaggellomenon*. I think the connotation is 'merely claims', i.e. claims falsely.

37 This is why Protagoras is so keen to leave the discussion at various points. He realises that, as advertising, his discussion with Socrates is a disaster.

38 See the applause for Protagoras' performance at *Prt*. 334c and 339e.

39 Dixsaut also thinks the six definitions exhibit the sophist presenting himself falsely, but differs in her analysis of what the falsehoods consist in: "Car le sophiste possède effectivement tous les arts qu'il prétend avoir, mais il les pratique à sa façon. C'est un chasseur qui pratique une chasse qui n'existe pas, une chasse aux animaux paisibles; un commerçant qui vend, de toutes les façons possibles, une marchandise qui n'en est pas une; un lutteur qui déploie une habileté sans pareille lorsqu'il jongle avec les mots, pour en arriver à ce que rien ne soit dit. Éducateur de jeunes gens riches, trafiquant de biens culturels en tous genres, virtuose inégalable du langage, le sophiste à la fois l'est et ne l'est pas, car en éduquant il pervertit, en diffusant la culture il la corrompt, et quant à sa maîtrise du discours, elle ne lui sert qu'à démontrer l'incapacité du langage à dire ce qui est vraiment" (Dixsaut, 2022, p. 421).

40 *Prt*. 316c-d: "Caution is in order for a foreigner who goes into the great cities and tries to persuade the best of the young men in them to abandon their associations with others, relatives and acquaintances, young and old alike, and to associate with him instead on the grounds that they will be improved by this association. Jealousy, hostility, and intrigue on a large scale are aroused by such activity."

41 Nails (2002, p. 153) tells us that Evenus was probably not a sophist, but Callias' uncritical willingness to sink five minas, "the net worth of all of Socrates' property," into expert training for his sons is of a piece with the vast sums he has already spent on sophists, "more money…than everybody else put together" (*Ap*. 20a).

42 Even in the *Encomium of Helen*, when Gorgias asserts that speech is a "great potentate" and like a drug for the soul, and that persuasion is effected by false speech, he stops short of advocating the use of this power. Ironically, although he himself teaches this technique, his *Encomium* pretends that Helen should be acquitted if she were the victim of pernicious persuasion. See (Graham, 2010, Grg49[F10] (DK 16 B11), pp. 758-761).

43 As we have seen above, the paired techniques of anti-Collection and anti-Division don't aim at knowledge. Rather, they are techniques for falsifying while escaping detection.

44 See their stories in Nails. See especially the entry for Meno, who was considered to be such a bad man he was tortured for a year before his execution (Nails, 2002, pp. 204-205).