



**Plato's *Sophist***  
*The Drama of Original &  
Image*

STANLEY ROSEN

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# Plato's Sophist

The Drama of Original and Image

Stanley Rosen



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To the Memory of  
Robert Earl Charles  
άνηρ καλὸς κάγαθός

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have made substantial contributions to the final version of this book. Let me also thank here the anonymous reader of a still earlier version, who persuaded me of the need to discuss the secondary literature on the *Sophist* more extensively than I had. This is the place to make a further remark. A number of my views on the *Sophist* are different from those which seem to be widely accepted by contemporary students of Plato. In particular, one of the major themes of this study is that one cannot employ, or assume, the paradigm of predication to explain the Eleatic Stranger's doctrine of formal elements and their combinations and separations. In order to make the strongest possible case for my approach, I have thought it wise to analyze at some length a number of the most distinguished contributions to ways of reading Plato that differ from my own. A close study of these books and essays proved invaluable to me in formulating my own views. The fact that my analysis of the secondary literature is often critical should in no way obscure my debt to the authors involved. Plato's text is extraordinarily difficult, sometimes perhaps intractable. I have done all that I can to make my own interpretation persuasive and to engage in elenctics without eristics. If I have not succeeded in this respect, the failure is unintentional, and I apologize in advance to those concerned.

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## PROLOGUE

### ORIENTATION

Plato's *Sophist*, like any of his dialogues, may be approached from two more or less contrasting perspectives.<sup>1</sup> For purposes of convenience, I shall refer to these as the ontological and the dramatic perspectives. The dramatic perspective regards the dialogue as a unity, and more specifically, as a work of art in which the natures of the speakers, as well as the circumstances under which they converse, all play a part in the doctrine or philosophical significance of the text. The most obvious motivation for the adoption of this perspective is the dialogue form itself; perhaps the most important textual justification is the discussion of rhetoric and writing in the *Phaedrus*, and to a lesser extent, in the *Republic*.<sup>2</sup> From this standpoint, it is not finally satisfactory to dismember the *Sophist* into a collection (even a heap) of fragments and to study just those fragments which seem to contain "technical" discussions of a "philosophical" as opposed to an "artistic" nature. A comprehensive understanding of the "technical" passages, to the extent that such is possible at all, depends, according to the partisans of the dramatic perspective, upon grasping their function within the organic dialogue. In terms of the discussion in the *Phaedrus*, the perfect writing is alive to the extent that it accommodates its speech to the nature of the "listener" or

1. With the following remarks, cf. the interesting article by Y. Lafrance (1979). I agree with him that one cannot contrast "la lecture continentale" and "la méthode analytique" in the way that he criticizes. I link them together as distinct versions of an approach that cuts across Lafrance's own distinctions with respect to Plato scholarship.

2. *Phaedrus* 257b7ff, *Republic* III, 392c6ff.

reader. The dialogue thus represents the intentions of the speaker with respect to this or that presentation of a technical doctrine.

In slightly different terms, the power or work of discourse is *ψυχαγωγία*, which we may translate as the guidance or education of the soul (including one's own). But souls differ in nature, and can be led only through different kinds of speeches. Let us call the knowledge of which speeches lead which kinds of soul "philosophical rhetoric." The dialogue, regarded as a dramatic unity, is thus an image, albeit one of a peculiar kind, of the author's comprehensive intentions. It is via the dramatic form of the dialogue that the author accommodates his doctrines to the natures of different readers (*Phaedrus* 271a4–272b6). Since rhetoric in this sense (as opposed to the mere persuasiveness of sophistical rhetoric) is a *τέχνη*, in the precise sense that it is based upon genuine knowledge of natures or forms, we must extend the sense of the term "technical" to include the dramatic form of the dialogue itself, as well as such "technical" issues as being, non-being, falsehood, and the like. (It should not escape our attention that part of the art of rhetoric is knowing when to keep quiet: *Phaedrus* 272a4). That philosophical rhetoric is indeed a *τέχνη* is emphasized in the *Phaedrus* at, among other passages, 272b7–274b5. There is then a close connection between philosophical rhetoric and diaeresis, or the division and collection in accordance with kinds, a method that will play an important role in the *Sophist*. Philosophical rhetoric, as rooted in a knowledge of kinds or forms, speaks the truth, if in an accommodated sense. Sophistical rhetoric speaks the likely. This distinction also figures prominently in the *Sophist*. We note that, whereas "the likely" (*τὸ εἰκός*) must differ from the truth in that it is not based upon a vision of forms, nothing is said in the *Phaedrus* of a "logical" or analytical nature to explain how we "see" forms. To the contrary, the language is accommodated or rhetorical in the extreme on this point. Socrates employs imagery to describe the perception of forms. Unfortunately, we cannot distinguish between philosophical and sophistical images unless we have ourselves perceived the forms. Once again, this is a problem of the utmost importance in the *Sophist*.

This last difficulty is alluded to indirectly by Socrates when he says that perfect speech may be impossible, but if it is possible, it must be addressed to gods, not to human beings (*Phaedrus* 273e4ff). Socrates does not say that the gods will reply; he does not identify perfect speech as dialogue. Certainly there are no conversations between philosophers and gods in the Platonic dialogues (although the possibility is raised that the Eleatic Stranger may be a god). Such

conversations are apparently the subject matter for comedies, or dramas, but not for dialogues. This establishes an interesting difference between "drama" in the usual (Greek) sense and philosophical dialogue. If properly worked out, it should go some way toward erecting a distinction between poetry and philosophy. But that distinction, for Plato, does not preclude the use of poetry (for example, of philosophical rhetoric, or dialogues) by the philosopher.

We need to make one more point with respect to the discussion in the *Phaedrus*. A writing is perfect to the extent that it imitates the speech of a living person; in other words, writing is inferior to conversation. More than one reason is given to explain this inferiority. For example, reliance upon writing weakens the memory. Perhaps the most important reason, however, is this. Writing is like painting; at least this is true of those writings whose form is monologic. Just as a painting does not answer the questions put to it by its viewers, so too a monologue does not reply to the questions of its readers. (I note parenthetically that the difference between paintings and writings will play an important role in the *Sophist*. With the passage in the *Phaedrus* (275c5–276a9), one should carefully compare *Philebus* 39a1ff.) Whereas the philosophical rhetorician knows when to be silent, monologues are always silent; that is, they lack this knowledge. The relation of this point to the previous remarks about analyzing "technical" passages in isolation from the whole should be plain. The extraction of certain passages as philosophically important, and the disregard of the context, hence of the dialogue as a unity, is an interpretation on the part of the reader. This is not to say that interpretations are unnecessary. But surely it is prudent, and hence reasonable, to ground one's interpretation in that provided by the author. The comparison between philosophical rhetoric, or dialogues, and living conversation is intended to make the point that the dialogue form contains Plato's interpretation of the significance of the "technical" (in the narrow sense) themes discussed by his characters. It does not replace a technical analysis of those passages, but it supplements such an analysis.

I turn now to what I call the ontological perspective. As the term suggests, the primary concern of this perspective is with the technical content of the dialogue; in the case of the *Sophist*, this content is understood as a theory of "being," in one sense or another of that term. However, the extent of these senses is not so wide as to include the dramatic, mythical, or "literary" elements of the dialogue. Though they may vary on other matters, representatives of the ontological perspective agree upon the need to enforce with rigor the

distinction between philosophy and poetry, sometimes called the distinction between the ontological and the ontic. In either case, however, the distinction is based upon a conviction that philosophy is a science, or (to put it with slightly more caution) that philosophy is scientific. As I have just noted, this conviction is originally joined to the equally fervent belief that philosophy must be distinguished from poetry. Unfortunately, the virtual identification of philosophy with "conceptual analysis" or "technical thinking" (even by those ontologists who reject technical thinking as ontic, or as wedded to a conception of being as *produced*) leads inevitably to a blurring, and perhaps to an erasing, of the distinction between philosophy and poetry.

This last point requires more careful elaboration. Let us here inspect the two main schools in our century of the ontological perspective. These are the phenomenological and the analytical schools. I use the term "phenomenological" in the sense of the early Heidegger, for whom it designates the method of the science of being. I refer to Heidegger rather than to Husserl because Husserl was not concerned with Greek philosophy, or with the history of philosophy in general, with some exceptions (for example, Galileo, Hume, Kant). For Heideggerean phenomenology, Plato enjoys a crucial (if somewhat pejorative) role. To this, one could add that the great majority of phenomenologists in contemporary philosophy derive, either directly or indirectly, from Heidegger's revision of Husserlian phenomenology. Apart from Heidegger's interest in Plato, there is another reason which makes his version of phenomenology more important to the student of the *Sophist* than is the Husserlian phenomenology. Despite his emphasis upon phenomenology as a scientific method, hence as a laying bare or uncovering, and so a kind of exact describing of what shows itself, Heidegger unites the descriptive task of phenomenology with the task of interpretation. I shall return to this point below, but its significance is already visible in Socrates' comparison between painting and monologue in the *Phaedrus*.

By "analytical," I refer to those students of Plato who follow primarily in the tradition of Frege, but secondarily (and not negligibly) in that tradition as modified by the later Wittgenstein, Austin, Ryle, and others. There is an interesting analogy between the Husserlian and Heideggerean phenomenology on the one hand, and the Fregean and "ordinary-language" analysis on the other. Whereas it would be technically wrong to say that Heidegger "subjectivizes" Husserl's "objective" or scientific phenomenology, it is neverthe-

less true that Heidegger makes the method of ontology a function of *Dasein* (or what used to be called human nature), which is in turn interpreted in terms of historicity and temporality. It is open to discussion whether Husserl himself finally was led to a subjectivist doctrine (as for example in the thesis of the transcendental ego understood as intersubjectivity). But the pervasive intention of Husserl is to give a scientific description of the "phenomena" (in his sense of that term), and not an interpretation which is rooted in the historically conditioned nature of human thinking. Heidegger's "science" of human nature is intrinsically a doctrine of the interpretation, as distinguished from the description, of the "phenomena." This becomes especially evident in the later Heidegger, and in the unending progeny of hermeneuticists spawned by these later writings.

With respect to the formalists and the ordinary-language analysts, a similar point obtains. Frege's devotion to a mathematical science, rooted in exact concepts and eternal senses, has been gradually diluted, not to say dissolved, by the "hermeneutically" inclined ordinary-language philosophers, for whom one's language (including its categorial structure) is a horizon and a historical creature. This creature shapes whatever is thought or said within that language and so is as contingent as the language itself. One may therefore observe a serious flaw in analytical Plato scholarship. Its practitioners tend to employ formal logic and set theory on an *ad hoc* basis in explicating the technical doctrines of Plato's dialogues. But they normally do not inform us about the ontological status of their formal techniques. Are these techniques "Fregean" in the sense of being eternally valid, and in that sense are they simply the rectification of Plato's attempt to achieve an eternally true doctrine? Or are these techniques merely "up-to-date," and so the currently fashionable, but soon to be replaced, tools for producing concepts, and hence presumably having nothing to do with (what I shall later define as "official") Platonism? Differently stated, was Plato a Fregean, and so a Platonist, or was he a late Wittgensteinian? In terms taken from the *Sophist*, does Plato acquire or produce being? As we shall see very shortly, this is a critical question, since, on the Stranger's explicit doctrine, it is the sophist, but not the philosopher, who asserts that man produces being.

The phenomenologist of the Heideggerean variety tends not to be interested in the dialogue form,<sup>3</sup> with the exception of certain iso-

3. An important exception here is H. G. Gadamer.

lated passages like the myth of the cave, which are employed to establish the ontological interpretation, that is, to support an ostensibly "average" concept of being as a *res*, *Vorhandenes*, *Seiendes*, or thing. The same point can be made in an apparently opposite manner. The phenomenologist *exaggerates* the unity of the Platonic dialogue, or reads all parts of it as contributing to a homogeneous concept of being. However, this amounts to a failure to allow any independent status to the dramatic or ontical elements in the dialogue; it amounts to a denial that Plato had a more nuanced doctrine of being than the phenomenologist allows. I cite a typical statement of this position from Heidegger's 1927 lectures, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*:

As early as antiquity a common or average concept of being came to light, which was employed for the interpretation of all the beings of the various domains of being and their modes of being, although their specific being itself, taken expressly in its structure, was not made into a problem and could not be defined. Thus Plato saw quite well that the soul, with its logos, is a being different from sensible being. But he was not in a position to demarcate the specific mode of being of this being from the mode of being of any other being or non-being. Instead, for him as well as for Aristotle and subsequent thinkers down to Hegel, and all the more so for their successors, all ontological investigations proceed within an average concept of being in general.<sup>4</sup>

This "average concept of being," as Heidegger goes on to state, is that of the εἶδος or what is shaped, and hence *produced*, by *Dasein*.<sup>5</sup> Two pages later, Heidegger generalizes: "Ancient ontology performs in a virtually naive way its interpretation of beings and its elaboration of the concepts mentioned."<sup>6</sup>

I will not here cite sample passages from the analytical ontologists, as I plan to subject their characteristic doctrines to close scrutiny in what follows. Suffice it to say that, in one sense, the analytical thesis is the inverse of the phenomenological thesis. According to the latter, Plato adheres to an average concept of being. According to the former, there are instead to be found in Plato attempts to eliminate such a general concept (culminating in the pure detached

4. Heidegger (1982), p. 22.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 110. For a detailed criticism of Heidegger's interpretation of Plato, see Rosen (1969), chap. 5.

forms of the "middle" period) in favor of more sophisticated articulations of syntactical structure. In another sense, however, these two theses are the same. For the analyst, the "general concept" of being is now that of predication (although, as we shall see, part of the apparent Platonic doctrine of being is assimilated into the modern notion of identity). Furthermore, whereas the late Plato is more "sophisticated" than the early Plato, this sophistication is just a naive, because ancestral, anticipation of doctrines to be given their perfected form by Frege and his successors. Finally, both phenomenologists and analysts tend to agree that being is for Plato produced. I say "tend," because the analysts make no explicit pronouncements on this crucial point. But if being is a "concept," and more specifically if being is just the fact of possessing a certain predicate, since a predicate is a linguistic distinction, being is finally a linguistic construction. One could object to this that predicates correspond to properties, but this objection is beside the point. On the analytical interpretation, it is exactly the case that *being is not a property*. To the contrary, being is how we talk predicatively, and so, which properties we choose as significant, or even which properties become significant for language users like ourselves, in our historical epoch, and so on.

It is of striking interest that both ontological schools have been decisively influenced by Aristotle. Whereas it is true that the Eleatic Stranger speaks of a science of dialectic or diaeresis, he does not speak of a science of being, or of an ontology. It is Aristotle who first puts forward a science of being *qua* being. And it is Aristotle who first develops a doctrine of predication as one of the pivotal features of how we talk about being. In other words, Aristotle points out that "being is spoken of in many ways" (πολλαχῶς λέγεται τὸ ὄν), but he attempts to grasp comprehensively these ways in one (or perhaps two) scientific discourse(s). Plato makes no such effort to reduce the ways in which we speak of being to a science, or even to two sciences of ambiguous relation. One of the theses of the present study is that it is not the naivete of Plato, but perhaps of his interpreters, to reduce being to an average concept. Aristotle's rejection of the dialogue form is at the same time an attempt, or part of an attempt, to transform the various senses of being pointed out by Plato in his dialogues into a homogeneous or general and conceptual account. The first step in reading Plato is to put aside our Aristotelian spectacles. To this extent, and in a sense that requires considerable modification, I prefer the dramatic to the ontological perspective.

Let me now turn to the needed modification. The most striking

dramatic feature of the *Sophist* is the difference between the Eleatic Stranger and Socrates. This difference is both personal and doctrinal or methodological. Plato draws our attention to this difference by the dramatic connection between the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. We are expected to listen first to Socrates' interrogation of the brilliant young mathematician and then to the discussion between Theaetetus and the Stranger. Our first impression is that the Stranger is, so to speak, a prototypical Cartesian who rejects the history of philosophy in its entirety, as he makes apparent in his account of his predecessors (including Parmenides), in favor of the universal method of diaeresis. A more careful reading leads us to modify this impression. The use of diaeresis in the dialogue is problematical and is explicitly subordinated to an investigation of pure "concepts" or "senses" together with an analysis of natural language that reminds us of Frege. Whereas one cannot agree that the Stranger is primarily concerned with problems of "reference and predication,"<sup>7</sup> the comparison with Frege is at certain points valid. Putting to one side for the moment the exact nature of the Stranger's positive teaching, it is evident that he is guided in his analytical work by mathematical principles of reasoning. These principles indeed issue in a positive and highly technical doctrine that is explicitly stated. This fact sharply distinguishes the Stranger from Socrates.

At this stage in our reflections, there is a sense in which the dramatic and the narrowly technical features of the *Sophist* coincide. It now becomes necessary to read the text in two different "directions." Suppose that we begin with a close dissection of the narrowly technical doctrines of the Stranger. Very far from articulating an ontology or science of being understood as a general concept of εἶδος, the Stranger proceeds in a variety of ways and uncovers various senses of "being." Despite the exercises in linguistic analysis, the Stranger does not explain these senses by means of a theory of predication. Instead, he begins rather arbitrarily (and not at all by way of diaeresis) with an incompletely specified "alphabet" of pure forms, which is accepted by Theaetetus without surprise.<sup>8</sup> These elements are said to combine with one another to form the fundamental structures of intelligibility and, derivatively, of rational discourse. The Stranger uses at least two models, neither of them predicational, to illustrate the combinatory process, and a variety of verbs. In addition to the alphabet of forms, the Stranger treats the being of images and "being" (οὐσα), or "the whole" (τὸ πᾶν), understood as

7. Owen (1971), p. 225.

8. Perhaps this is because of his earlier conversation with Socrates; cf. *Theaetetus* 185c4ff.

the living and divine cosmos. Nowhere does he unify these senses of "being" into a discursive account or scientific λόγος. The closest he comes to offering a comprehensive definition of "being" is when he speaks on behalf of a sect of his predecessors, the improved materialists. And this definition of being as *power* is itself never developed into a comprehensive or general account. But even if it were, it could be equivalent neither to εἶδος on the one hand nor predication on the other.

Let this suffice for the moment as an indication of the diversity of the Stranger's methods and doctrines. I have intentionally omitted the use of diaeresis from this sketch because, as is to some extent obvious, and as closer study confirms, the method of diaeresis, despite the praise bestowed upon it by the Stranger, plays no role in the development or statement of his narrowly technical doctrines. The most that can be said for diaeresis, as it is actually employed by the Stranger, is that it serves as a method for exposing the many aspects of the nature of the sophist, which aspects are directly visible to us in daily life, if they are visible at all.

This reference to diaeresis serves as a transition to the second direction in which we must read the *Sophist*. Our scrutiny of the "inner" nature of the Stranger's doctrines leads us "outward" toward the occasion and circumstances under which these doctrines are elaborated. Given the diverse procedures of the Stranger, what is the connection between his narrowly technical doctrines and the mathematical aura of the dialogue as a whole? To what extent is the *Sophist* a mathematical drama? And how are we to understand the shift from Socrates to the Stranger as the principal speaker in our mathematical drama (if that is an accurate description)? What is the mathematical basis, if any, of the nature of the sophist, the definition of which is the pervasive theme of the dialogue? Is not the sophist, as a human type, the antithesis of a quasi-mathematical form? Let us grant that, in order to define the sophist, we require an explanation of the nature of likeness, and thus of the difference between accurate and inaccurate images, or more generally, of the difference between images and originals. It soon becomes evident that no such explanation is provided by the Stranger. The distinction between the sophist and the philosopher cannot be made on the basis of a "scientific" or "technical" definition. Would we not have done better to pursue the definition of the sophist in terms of the art of rhetoric in its practical dimension or, in other words, on the basis of the distinction in the *Phaedrus* between philosophical and vulgar rhetoric?

The Stranger's treatment of the puzzles of being, non-being, and

false statement is intimately connected to the puzzle of the nature of likeness. If we cannot distinguish between originals and images, our direct perception of pure form is not sufficient to resolve the paradoxes of natural language identified by the Stranger; it is not sufficient to supply a λόγος of non-being (and hence of being). Once we have understood the technical inadequacies of the Stranger's views, both internally and as a basis for defining the sophist, we are led to ask why the Stranger proceeds with a "technical" paradigm of sophistry. Is the sophist a false geometer, or something entirely different? Assuming for the moment that we had a precise mathematical grasp of formal structure, and hence of sound linguistic behavior with respect to being and non-being, would this resolve the problem of sophistry? Is sophistry a τέχνη in the narrow sense, or is it a comprehensive interpretation of the significance of τέχνη? Is not sophistry an interpretation of the good life, and in this sense an imitation of philosophy?<sup>9</sup>

By reasoning of this sort, we are led to encompass the entire dialogue, and in this manner to return to the point at which we began our survey: the difference between Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger. Can the shift from the former to the latter be understood as a signal from Plato of a shift in his own thought? How we answer this question will depend upon a number of factors. Not the least of these is the fact that advocates of a shift in Plato's thought are usually also believers in the importance of the order of composition of the dialogues. The *Philebus*, however, was written after the *Sophist*, and in it Socrates is once more the main speaker. Whereas there are some differences in emphasis between the Socrates of the *Philebus* and, say, the Socrates of the *Republic*, it is hardly the case that, in the *Philebus*, Socrates continues the doctrines and methods of the Eleatic Stranger. Beyond this, it will not be difficult to show the methodo-

9. One finds occasionally in the secondary literature the view that Plato does not intend seriously the Stranger's "refutation" of sophistry via the συμπλοκή ειδῶν, e.g., Peck (1952); Marten (1967), pp. 223–24; Kojève (1972), pp. 169–70. However, these authors do not explain adequately (or at all) why Plato assigns these defective analyses to the Stranger. My own view, to be developed in the text, may be stated summarily as follows: the character of the Stranger is Plato's way of providing a philosophical commentary on the charges levelled against Socrates by his Athenian accusers. The Stranger in effect charges that Socrates is a sophist with no positive doctrine, who corrupts the Athenian youth. The Stranger attempts a technical refutation of sophistry which is also the expression of a positive doctrine of his own. This refutation fails on technical grounds, but the very attempt to reduce sophistry, and thus philosophy (of which sophistry is a fantasm), to τέχνη is an error. I have no doubt that Plato was aware of all this, as is apparent in the Stranger's tacit recantation in the *Statesman*. None of this, however, means that the Stranger's technical doctrines are sheer irony, or that they do not require the closest analysis.

logical deficiencies in the Stranger's way, or somewhat more accurately, his recommended way, of pursuing the sophist. On at least one crucial point, it is patent that Plato must have been aware of the inadequacy. Whereas the difference between the sophist and the philosopher is that of worse and better, the Stranger asserts that, as partisans of diaeresis, we must ignore the difference of worse from better and concentrate exclusively on the difference of like from like (that is, of like "kinds" or like "looks").

This pervasive problem is accentuated if we contrast the *Sophist* with the *Protagoras*. At *Protagoras* 319a4, Socrates makes a clearly ironical attribution to the sophist of the τέχνη of politics. I shall have more to say about this point below. Here the following introductory remark is in order. Socrates' usual procedure (and the *Protagoras* is no exception to this general rule) is to deny that sophistry is a τέχνη or genuine knowledge. He does, however, regularly (if not invariably) treat sophistry as a practical or political activity closely akin to oratory. If there is a scientific analysis of sophistry, then it must take its bearings from the nature of rhetoric. In a sense, the Stranger does this; but the difference between his treatment of rhetoric and that of Socrates is plain by a comparison of the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*. According to Socrates, a genuine understanding of rhetoric entails not just knowledge of the forms (via diaeresis), but also, and comprehensively or in a regulative sense, knowledge of the human soul. According to the Stranger, knowledge of the nature of sophistry does not require an understanding of rhetoric so much as of the structure of natural language. Hence it requires an understanding not of the human soul but of forms and syntax. In dramatic terms, this is closely connected to the Stranger's relative lack of interest in the nature of his interlocutor, especially in contrast to Socrates. Socrates is interested in himself, and more generally, in the differing kinds of human souls, as well as the different kinds of speeches which are required to "guide" or "educate" them. Despite his doctrine of the ideas, Socrates is anything but an ontologist, in the sense of one concerned primarily, if not exclusively, to develop a doctrine or a general concept of being. I have already indicated that the Stranger is also not an ontologist in this sense. Yet he comes much closer to being a man of pure theory than does Socrates in the *Sophist* (but not, we should remember, in the *Statesman*).

To draw one immediate inference from these observations, the difference between Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger is reflected in the difference between the dramatic character of the *Protagoras* and of the *Sophist*. Is there any evidence to persuade us that Plato, the

author of both dialogues, gave up his interest later in life in the human soul and philosophical rhetoric, on behalf of a proto-Fregean philosophy of language? The evidence that we have, to over-simplify for the sake of initial clarity, is the *Protagoras* and the *Sophist*. Even if one gives some credence to the hypothesis of a development in Plato's interests and views, he never disowned his earlier work in the manner of Kant or Bertrand Russell. Nor is there any evidence of such a radical shift in views, or *any* such shift, in Aristotle. But it is hardly necessary for us to resolve this issue by turning to Aristotle. What we need to do instead is study the Platonic dialogues; in the immediate instance, we need to study the *Sophist*, all of it, and in minute detail. It should soon become evident whether the *Sophist* disavows the dramatic format, and whether Socrates is no longer of crucial significance to an understanding of Plato's teaching.

#### DRAMATIC PHENOMENOLOGY

I said previously that I prefer the dramatic to the ontological approach to the *Sophist*. It should now be clear that this does not require a suppression of the narrowly technical themes in the dialogue. On the contrary, it requires their meticulous analysis, both in themselves and as elements in a comprehensive dramatic structure. In this section, I should like to clarify this view from a somewhat different angle and to introduce a term to describe my reading of the *Sophist*. The term in question is *dramatic phenomenology*. Whereas a dialogue is not a "drama" in the sense of a poetic play written to be performed in the theater, it has a manifestly dramatic form. A dialogue is a poetic production in which mortals speak neither to gods nor to heroes, but to each other. At the same time, there is a hierarchy of mortals within a Platonic dialogue that is rooted, not in the contingencies of birth but in the natures of diverse human souls. Similarly, a dialogue is not a phenomenological description, but an interpretation of human life. As a poetic production, it so orders its scenes of human life as to provide an indirect commentary on the significance of the speeches delivered within those scenes. Adapting a distinction of the Stranger's to our own purposes, we may say that a dialogue is centrally concerned with the better and the worse, the noble and the base.

It may be possible to give a phenomenological *description* of a philosophical dialogue, but a dialogue is not itself such a description. Dramatic phenomenology is the artistic reformulation of phenomenological descriptions of speeches and deeds within the con-

text of a unified statement about the good or philosophical life, and hence about the noble as distinct from the base. Such a unified statement is an interpretation of human life. It is not an ontologically neutral interpretation, or one that does nothing but render explicit the intentional, uncovering, or hermeneutical, and hence temporal and historical, nature of *Dasein*. This is of course not to deny that a philosophical dialogue uncovers something about human nature. But, to repeat, the intrinsic unity of this uncovering is not that of an "average concept of being." It is that of the superiority of the philosophical to the nonphilosophical life. Such a unity is entirely compatible with, and in fact requires, representations, or images, of the most diverse types of human existence, hence of the most diverse human speeches.

No interpretation will be uniformly acceptable to all competent persons. Perhaps the same is true of a phenomenological description. In principle, however, the intention of the orthodox phenomenologist is to provide a scientific or "objective" description that is the same for every person who is able to see the object from the perspective of the phenomenologist himself. This perspective is again in principle accessible to every person able to undergo the askesis of phenomenological purification. Despite their initially scientific pretensions, Heideggerean interpretations, as we have already noticed, inevitably evolve into *historical* perspectives; and the perspective of a past historical period is no longer accessible in principle to anyone able to undergo the phenomenological purification. Not even a precise study of the relevant documents can overcome this historical shift in perspectives. How one interprets the past is thus a function of one's vantage point. To a limited but noticeable extent, there is an analogy here with mathematical interpretations. A mathematical interpretation, like those in the natural sciences, is judged finally on pragmatic grounds. These grounds, however, cannot be purely technical. What counts is the intention of the investigator. We construct models in order to understand something. The value of the model resides finally in the value of what it enables us to understand, and so, in our intentions.

The problem of the relativity of interpretations applies with special force to a Platonic dialogue. To say that Plato's doctrines are exactly the same as the views of his principal dramatic figures is to say that an exact description is an explanation. It amounts, perhaps unintentionally, to the thesis that in order to understand the *Sophist* all we need to do is read it aloud, without making any slips of the tongue. But this will not do. As an interpretation of the episodes it

recounts, a dialogue is an image of images. An image looks different from different perspectives. If Plato possessed a homogeneous doctrine of a fundamentally scientific nature which he wished to communicate in a univocal and explicit manner to all readers, then his choice of the dialogue form betrays a singular incompetence. This is not a charge with which I care to associate myself. Nor is it necessary to take such a charge seriously, as a reflection on the nature of the dialogue form makes evident.

I want to connect this problem of the relativity of interpretations with one of the most important themes in the *Sophist*: the distinction between acquisition and production. The Stranger attempts to define the sophist as a producer of false (i.e., inaccurate) images. A false or inaccurate image fails to reproduce accurately the proportions of the original. A true image does reproduce those proportions accurately. This distinction gives rise to a variety of technical problems, which will be examined more closely in the following pages. Let us note here one main problem with respect to true and false images. If the true image exhibits the exact proportions of the original, then *qua* image of that proportion, it seems to be the same as the original. But if the false image exhibits proportions which are not exactly those of a given original, they remain proportions, hence presumably the imaged proportions of some other original, from which in turn they cannot be distinguished. In other words, we have to disregard the medium in which the image is manifested as here irrelevant. Either the image *qua* proportion is the same as the original or it is different from it. If it is the same, then there are no images but only originals that recur. If it is different, then it cannot be a true or accurate image. On either alternative, it follows that the distinction between truth and falsehood is impossible to maintain. We have no discursive access to original or to genuine being, except in the sophistical sense that every statement is true. Philosophy is then assimilated to sophistry. The sophistical thesis is thus the assertion that man produces being in his capacity as talking animal.

Let us introduce the following distinction between orthodox, or "official," and unorthodox, or "unofficial," Platonism. Official Platonism may be equated here with the thesis that human beings in general, and philosophers in particular, have access to the true natures of things. Platonism in this sense asserts that vision of pure form is the acquisition, not the production, of truth. Unofficial Platonism is the doctrine that follows from the assimilation of philosophy to sophistry. It is the version of Platonism that is read into the dialogues explicitly by the Heideggerian phenomenologist and

implicitly by the analytical ontologist who assimilates being into the linguistic function of predication. Whereas I reject the technical content of these two versions of "unofficial" Platonism, I am very far from dismissing their thesis (explicit or implicit) as indefensible. At least with respect to the analytical version, one could say that I take it more seriously than do those who, perhaps unintentionally, imply it. The thesis becomes defensible, not by a close study of the Stranger's narrowly technical doctrines, but rather from a reflection on the nature of the dialogue.

A dialogue is a production, and more sharply stated, an image of images. Whereas some of the subordinate images may be of pure forms, the same is not the case with the comprehensive image. As an image of images, the dialogue represents a determinate perspective from which Plato understands the whole. But is it an accurate image (an icon) or an inaccurate fantasm? In considering this question, we may assume that Plato means exactly what he says. His intention, so to speak, is *iconic*. There are, however, two restrictions intrinsic to the execution of the intention which we may call *fantastic*. The first is pedagogical. Sound pedagogy, as the *Phaedrus* explains, requires that all speeches, and hence comprehensive speeches especially, must be accommodated to a variety of possible listeners. Not everyone can understand the philosophical life in the same way, because we do not all understand life in the same way. Even those of us who would agree that there is a distinction between the noble and the base, or between philosophy and sophistry, would not draw the distinction in the same place. This is the second restriction: life itself is "fantastic" in the Stranger's sense that it adjusts its presentation of original proportions to accommodate the differing perspectives of its audience. The metaphor of an audience is of course not entirely sound; we live life, we do not observe it. But the difference between living and observing simply accentuates the fantastic nature of the phenomena of the everyday. The world as it appears is a sophist, continuously changing its looks as we interrogate it.

Each Platonic dialogue, to vary our formulation, is an image of the soul. The soul is in turn a microcosm or image of the whole. But the whole is not a formal structure. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger refers to the whole as a god. Whatever this may mean, each human being is a part of the whole who interprets it as a whole. This is true of all of us, but especially of the philosopher, and especially of the philosopher who attempts to provide a λόγος of the whole. The relativity of interpretations stems most directly from the varying na-

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