

The Science of Philosophy: Discourse and Deception in Plato's *Sophist*

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Abstract: At 252e1 to 253c9 in Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic Visitor explains why philosophy is a science. Like the art of grammar, philosophical knowledge corresponds to a generic structure of discrete kinds and is acquired by systematic analysis of how these kinds intermingle. In the literature, the Visitor's science is either understood as an expression of a mature and authentic platonic metaphysics, or as a sophisticated illusion staged to illustrate the seductive lure of sophistic deception. By showing how the Visitor's account of the science of philosophy is just as comprehensive, phantasmatic and self-concealing as the art of sophistry identified at the dialogue's outset, this paper argues in favor of the latter view.

Introduction

At 252e1 to 253c9 in Plato's *Sophist*, the Eleatic Visitor¹ explains what he means by philosophy. Like the art of grammar, philosophy is about parts: All things can be analyzed. But not all parts fit together. Just like the letters of the alphabet, some can be combined and some cannot. According to the Visitor, it is knowledge about this that constitutes philosophy (253d1-e2) – a science he classifies as the greatest of them all (253c4-9).

In the literature there are two main takes on this. Either the Visitors' philosophical science is taken to be an expression of an authentic and mature platonic metaphysics; or it is said to be a sophisticated illusion staged to illustrate the seductive lure of sophistic deception. Of those that prefer the former view, some claim that the Visitor's science of philosophy includes solutions to a set of logico-linguistic problems raised in earlier dialogues – such as the problems of naming in the *Cratylus* or the problem of false statements in the *Theaetetus*² – and that this indicates that the *Sophist* represents a development of Plato's philosophical doctrine.³ Others are less persuaded by the alleged linguistic significance of these passages, yet they still take the metaphysics involved to be authentic and platonic.⁴

Those, on the other hand, that find the Visitor's scientific notion of philosophy less persuasive tend to stress the fact that many of the sophistic strategies identified in the

dialogue are employed by the Visitor himself. Accordingly, it is suggested that there are reasons to doubt that the Visitor's argumentative strategies are meant to be taken as authentic platonic philosophy⁵ and that he does not represent Plato's views.⁶ To go even further, it has been suggested that the analytic rigor of the Visitors' method in fact reduces Plato's dialectical procedure to mere calculation and that this "represent the capitulation of philosophy to sophistry".⁷

In this paper I offer a further argument for the latter view. In part one, I identify three basic features of sophistic discourse: that it is comprehensive, phantasmatic and self-concealing. In part two, I submit that these features play a subtle yet noteworthy part in the Visitor's critique of his predecessors. In part three, I argue that the Visitor's notion of a philosophical science bears important signs of being just as comprehensive, phantasmatic and self-concealing as the art of sophistry identified at the dialogues' outset and I conclude that this necessitates a reassessment of the Visitors' credibility.

1. To Know Everything

In the dialogue's initial discussion, the Eleatic Visitor's identifies three central characteristics of sophistic discourse: its comprehensiveness, its phantasmatic nature and its strategies of self-concealment. Let us begin by taking a brief look at these, one at a time.

First, at 233a3, the Visitor asks whether it is possible for a human being to know all things (πάντα). Theaetetus, the Visitor's assigned partner in conversation (218a1-3), ironically suggests that this indeed would make our race blessed. The Visitor's agrees. When someone claims to know everything about everything (πάντα πάντων) there are reasons to ask if we are dealing with the deceptive wonder (θαῦμα) of sophistic discourse (233a4-b2).

This would perhaps be a negligible passage were it not for the fact that questions about everything (πάντα), about the universe (τὸ πᾶν) and about all real and existing things (τὰ πάντα, τὰ ὄντα) is a persistent theme in the dialogue from this point on.⁸ The argument is familiar and can be found, in a variety of forms, throughout Plato's works.⁹ Here, it begins at around 232b where the Visitor famously explains that the sophists make "images about everything in words" (234c6: "εἰδῶλα λεγόμενα περὶ πάντων"). According to the Visitor, this allows the sophists to appear to be wisest in all things (234c7: "σοφώτατον πάντων ἅπαντ' εἶναι"): Even if the deceptive charm of their illusions will eventually be disclosed by the sufferings of old age (234d1-5), the young ones may still believe. But also here there is a

solution. Deception can be prevented. One can move closer (234e5-6) and learn how the sophists operate:

In order to explain this point, the Visitor returns to the subject matter of the all-encompassing art of disputatious (ἀντιλογικός) conversation (232b6), touched upon earlier (225b10). In reply to the Visitor's question about what one should think of an art that could make everything (συνάπαντα), Theaetetus asks what the Visitor means by everything (πάντα, 233e1). In a failed attempt to make a joke, the Visitor replies that "you do not, as it seems, know everything (τὰ σύμπαντα)" (233d9-e3). Theaetetus, in a clueless moment of self-reflection, admits that he does not, and the Visitor goes on to explain what everything is: It is you and me and all animals and trees, he says; and eventually Theaetetus gets it. It must be a joke, he says (234a6). No one can make all such things (234a1-5, cf. 256b-d), and if, the Visitor goes on, someone would claim that he also *knew* all such things, would not that too be a joke? Theaetetus agrees (234a7-10); and accordingly, the Visitor has not only managed to argue that comprehensive knowledge is impossible and absurd. By so doing he has also cleared the ground for the ensuing discussion of non-being, that is, by showing Theaetetus how the problem of knowledge of everything connects to the problem of appearance.

Second, at 236c3-7, the Visitor distinguishes phantasmatic from iconic image-making. Although he at this stage in the dialogue has some problems of placing the sophist's art, it eventually becomes clear. It belongs in the former (268c9). The sophist is someone that can make the small appear to be great and the great appear to be small. The example we get is a large or great (μέγας) statue or painting (235e5-7). By making the lower parts of the image proportionately smaller than the object depicted and the upper parts larger, a phantasmatic image will falsely appear to have the proportions of the thing it is an imitation of.¹⁰ The example also works the other way around: If one wants a small image (appear to be) of something great, one makes the lower parts of the image larger and the upper parts smaller.

Third, at around 239c9 to 240c6 we learn something more about the phantasmatic artists. They hide the means of their deception by denying its existence. By an alluring gesture of self-concealment and by arguing that there are no such things as images, the sophists refuse to acknowledge that they operate by images in words:

After a shorter outburst of how perplexed he is over the subject matter of non-being that all talk about images has provoked, the Visitor explains what happens when one meets a sophist. Not only will the sophist (a) renounce his knowledge of images and (b) express his perplexity about the matter. He will also (c) ask you what you mean when you talk about such things (239e5-240a2). How so? Theaetetus asks, and the Visitor explains: First, the

sophist will ask you what you mean by the word “image”. If you answer that you mean mirrors and waters and such, the sophist will retort: Echoing Socrates’ famous words in the *Meno* (72a-b), he will ask you why you talk about many when you are supposed to talk about one.¹¹ If you then adapt to the sophist’s objection and offer a definition – by suggesting that an image is something that is similar to a true thing, but still other than that thing – the sophist will ask if you by true thing mean something that really exists. Since you cannot deny this, you will be forced to accept that an image is not the same as a true thing. But then, the sophist will go on, since an image is not something that truly is, it is the opposite of what is, and thus there is no such thing as an image.

In reply to this line of reasoning, Theaetetus says that the whole matter is absurd. The Visitor cannot but agree. Just like the sophists, he not only (a) declares his confused ignorance about images (228c10-d2) by (b) claiming that the whole matter is perplexing and absurd (240c3-4). He also (c) goes on to insist that they should recapitulate the question, and again ask what they mean when they talk about such things.

2. The Myth of Everything

With these three basic characteristics of sophistic discourse roughly sketched out – its comprehensiveness, its phantasmatic nature and its strategies of self-concealment – let us now for a moment turn to the Visitor’s critique of his philosophical ancestors. As we shall see, there are reasons to think that the Visitor’s discussion is based on his account of sophistic discourse. Although it is not at all clear that the Visitor is accusing Parmenides and his colleagues of being sophists, it is nevertheless important to note that he classifies their views as illegitimate partly on the same grounds as he classifies discourse as sophistic. There are three relevant passages.

First, culminating at around 242c9, the Visitor sets out to analyze his predecessors’ claim of knowledge of it all (e.g. τὸ πᾶν, 243e3; τὰ πάντα, 243d9; cf. 245c-246a, 249e)¹² and their talk about being and the things that are (τὸ ὄν, 243d3; τὰ ὄντα, 242c5). The Visitor does not specify who these people are, but they are sure to include “Parmenides and all who ever undertook to distinguish the number and nature of the things that are” (242c4-5). It is well known that this analysis soon develops into a refutation. However, and clearly in line with the preceding argument – that no one can know everything – the Visitor does not only refute their theories on an individual basis, he also claims that their general comprehensiveness makes them impossible to understand:

It begins with a conclusion. All his predecessors were telling myths (242c9). Whatever they wanted to say with their great stories of the unity, duality or trinity of all things (τὰ πάντα, 242d6, cf. 245b9-8), it is just as difficult (χαλεπόν) as it is improper (πλημμελής)¹³ to value (ἐπιτιμᾶν) the truth of their words (243a2-4).¹⁴ But one thing, the Visitor goes on, we can say: Whatever they were talking about – i.e. the universe (τὸ πᾶν), all things (τὰ πάντα), being (τὸ ὄν) or all existing things (τὰ ὄντα) – it is not possible for us (ἡμεῖς) to understand (243a6-b1).¹⁵ Echoing Socrates' characterization of philosophy at the dialogue's outset (216c), the Visitor explains that the mythmakers are above us: They look down (ὑπεριδόντες) and pay little heed to us the many (243a6: “τῶν πολλῶν ἡμῶν”) below. Their all-encompassing myths are too high for us to reach and their arguments are not made for us to follow (243a6-b1, cf. 234b3-c5). For us, the common man, knowledge of everything is impossible and any claim with such a scope is beyond our grasp.

Second, as the Visitor's ensuing account goes on to show, this does not leave him stranded. Even if the scope and status of the myths locate their message above the reach of human evaluation, it is apparently still possible to determine their truth through an analysis of how they are expressed. The Visitor's critique of Parmenides is a telling example. Although not explicitly identified as a phantasmatic line of argument, the Visitor's critique suggests that Parmenides' theory contains presumptuous claims about the great universe similar to those analyzed at around 233d-234d. By presenting the universe as a single and thus comprehensible unity (244b6-7), Parmenides can make claims about a subject matter that in truth is beyond the capacity of his human mind. It is to such claims that the Visitor turns, when he, for example, shows (a) that Parmenides' statement “all is one” presuppose that unity *is*, (b) that this presupposition implies that both the name “the one” and the name “being” apply to the universe, and (c) that Parmenides, despite opposite appearance, acknowledges that there are two existing things (i.e. the names) – which, of course, is absurd, if one only accepts that there is one existing thing.¹⁶

Third, from this example it is fair to conclude that the Visitor's critique is not aimed at what Parmenides means, but only at what he says (cf. 239e5-240a2). That the critique operates on this level is also confirmed by his account of Parmenides' choice of words – or rather, his choice to use words at all. Corresponding to the Visitor's earlier characterization of sophistic self-concealment and the strategy of denying the existence of one's own means of operation, the Visitor shows how Parmenides' theory denies the existence of the medium in which it operates. The argument is as simple as it is efficient. If being is one, its name (“one”) cannot exist: If the name and the thing are different things and nothing exists besides the one,

then its name (“the one”), which is not the same as what it names, is not a part of what is (244c11-d5, cf. d5-12). Thus, if Parmenides is right, and *all is one*, the name (“the one”) does not exist, and Parmenides is not entitled to say: *all is one* – or anything at all for that matter.

3. The Science of Philosophy

With these brief examples in mind, let us now turn to the Visitor’s own take on the matter. As we shall see, there are several reasons to suspect that the Visitor’s own account – an account he introduces as a better alternative to those of his predecessors – is no less comprehensive, just as phantasmatic and equally self-concealing as the sophistic myths of his predecessors. This does not necessarily mean that the Visitor is a sophist. But it shows that there are reasons to doubt his sincerity. There are at least three factors that point in this direction.

First, the framework for what eventually shall be described as a science of philosophy is introduced at around 252e. Here we learn that reality can be analyzed in parts.¹⁷ These parts are likened to the letters of the alphabet (τὰ γράμματα, 253a1) and they are identified as a number of distinct kinds (γένη, e.g. 253b8)¹⁸ or forms (ιδέαι, e.g. 253d5, εἶδη, e.g. 254c2).¹⁹ While some of these kinds and forms are said to be able to intermingle or combine with one another, others are described as unable to enter such relations.²⁰ As the former are ontologically compatible,²¹ their names can also be predicated of one another, while the latter are not and cannot.²² In order to see how these parts of reality relate, and what principles govern their interaction, the Visitor insists that there is need for a particular type of science or knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 253c4). Likened to the arts of grammar (253b12) and music (253b1-3), this science, we learn, has to do with what sounds good together. Knowledge of how reality is to be analyzed and of how its constitutive parts relate has with harmony to do, it seems, and, as such, with what is in tune (259d9-e2: ἐμμελής).

It is also in this context that the Visitor introduces the notions of philosophy and dialectic. Philosophy – the greatest science of them all (253c4-9) – pertains to all things that are, and its application, in the form of dialectical division, is a matter of knowing how reality falls apart and fits together. The philosopher does not confuse the kinds, because he knows how they correlate (253d1-e2).

In order to explicate what this type of philosophical science amounts to, the Visitor discusses several examples. He discusses change, stability, being, sameness, difference, non-being, language and belief. Of these, the first five are given special attention. They are called the greatest (254c3) and are subjected to detailed scrutiny (254b7-c4).

The analysis begins at 254d4, first by identifying the distinguishing marks of being (τὸ ὄν), change (κίνησις) and stability (στάσις); and then, by isolating the distinctness of their relational features: sameness (ταὐτόν) and difference (τὸ ἕτερον). After having argued for the discrete nature of each of these five kinds, the Visitor goes on to spell out how they participate in and with each other.

I shall not here attempt to elucidate the complex combinatory relations of these kinds – others have done this sufficiently²³ – but merely point out that despite the special attention given to these great kinds, it is important not to misconstrue their function. They are examples. It is clear that the Visitor’s analysis of them is instrumental to the task of explicating the scope and nature of his science of philosophy. And, in addition, we must not forget what the Visitor’s science is about. It concerns everything (τὰ πάντα, e.g. 243d9) – including the universe (τὸ πᾶν, e.g. 252a7), being (τὸ ὄν, e.g. 243d3) and all real things (τὰ ὄντα, e.g. 252a9, 255c12). As we shall see, it is, in fact, only with such a scope that his detailed analysis can make any sense at all. It is only as parts of a comprehensive and coherent whole that it can have any explanatory validity. But in order to see how this works, it is first necessary to look at the broader context.

In the literature, there has been a long running debate concerning the object and purpose of these passages.²⁴ In recent years – with some important exceptions – there has however emerged a fairly broad agreement.²⁵ Even if the details are yet to be settled, it is often argued that what distinguishes the Visitor’s science of philosophy is its level of analysis. In contrast to his predecessors, the Visitor is not taken to make any direct claims about reality. Instead his analysis is said to operate on a logico-linguistic level. The kinds or forms are not some invisible metaphysical entities identified as Forms, but generic names used to pick out the result of a linguistic analysis.²⁶ On this view, the Visitor does not explain the being and nature of the universe. He merely analyzes the terms we use in so doing. According to Lesley Brown, the object of the Visitor’s discussion is not reality, but “the issue of speaking correctly”.²⁷ Evidenced by the incessant attempts to resolve discursive tensions in the way we speak, the Visitor’s endeavors are primarily oriented towards establishing conceptual coherence. 256a10-b4 is telling.

Change, then, is both the same and not the same – we must agree and not dispute it. For when we said [it was] the same and not the same, we were not speaking in a similar way, but when [we say it is] the same, we say so because of its sharing in the same in relation to itself, but when [we say it is] not the same, that, by contrast, is

because of its communion with the different, through which it is separated from the same and isn't it but different, so that once again it's rightly said to be not the same (256a10-256b4).²⁸

As a part of the Visitor's analysis of the great kinds, he here sets out to solve an apparent contradiction in how we use the term "change". There are a number of different interpretations of this passage. While some scholars argue that the solution offered is to be understood in terms of a disambiguation between different uses of the term "being", others, such as Brown, thinks that the disambiguation is better understood, either in terms of different senses of the term "the same", or of different senses of the whole section.²⁹

Despite the differences, most interpreters engaged in this type of debate do however share a pair of basic premises.³⁰ Not only do they agree that the immediate purpose of the Visitor's analysis is to dissolve apparent incoherencies in certain exemplary linguistic expression (e.g. "[Change] is both the same and not the same"). They also agree that the analysis only has bearing on a logico-linguistic level. Accordingly, it is also possible to further specify what sort of knowledge the Visitor, on this view, equals to philosophical: The knowledge pertaining to the science of philosophy is not metaphysical knowledge, but knowledge about an all-encompassing system of interrelated kinds or forms whose principle of legitimacy is its conceptual coherence. The validity of this system is not established by corresponding to some observable extra-linguistic state or action, but by being a complete and comprehensive whole. Ideally, all of its parts are in tune with all other and all are in harmony with the whole. Indeed, it is only by the support of such a system that it, in principle, is possible to distinguish a disharmonious proposition from one that is in tune. As we have seen, on this point the Visitor's is quite explicit. The science of philosophy is likened to both grammar (253a12-c5) and music. It involves hearing what parts concords (253b1-3). The Visitor evaluates the harmony of our words (253b1-3). He identifies when we are out of tune (259d9-e2) and he corrects our language (e.g. 255b5) by offering coherent explanations (256a10-256b4).

Second, with the necessary comprehensiveness of the Visitor's science of philosophy thus outlined, let us now turn to his phantasmatic strategy of defense. As we shall see, the Visitor does not only make low and common speech appear to be a great and invaluable source of knowledge. He also turns the upper parts of traditional knowledge into incomprehensible and unimportant myth. In line with the Visitor's introductory account of phantasmatic argumentation, this is a sophistic strategy of an exemplary kind.

As we have seen, the Visitor never claims that the being of the universe can be understood by an analysis of how we talk about it. Indeed, the Visitor makes it quite explicit that language is a kind of being (260a5-6).³¹ As such, he should also think that knowledge about being has a different source than words.³² Yet, despite this ontological orientation of the argument, his investigation incessantly gravitates toward an analysis of how things are said. The problem seems to be this: The Visitor's analysis arguably operates on a logico-linguistic level, yet his claims concerns reality and its constitutive parts. Again, consider 256a10-256b4. Here, the Visitor makes claims about the being of change and sameness. Yet, his argument lacks ontological foundation and is instead based on a discussion of how the affected terms relate to each other in common speech.³³ This raises two fundamental questions: What is the Visitor trying to accomplish? And how is he trying to do it?

Before answering these questions, there is a related observation that will prove to be explanatory. Throughout the Visitor's analysis of the great kinds, there is one form of expression that occurs in excess: The first person plural of various expressions for saying.³⁴ When the Visitor sets out to analyze how change, stability, being, difference and sameness intermingle, he does not turn to reality for reference or to his own reason for guidance. Instead he turns to this *we*.³⁵ Again, consider 256a10-256b4. The Visitors does not ask what change is. Instead he asks what *we* mean when *we* say change. As such, his *we* serve both as the source and as the judge of what can and should be said. But who, then, is this *we*?

As should be clear from the above, the Visitor is not reluctant to explain. As a part of his critical evaluation of Parmenides and "all who ever undertook to distinguish the number and nature of the things that are" (242c4-5), he explicitly identifies this *we* (ἡμεῖς) as the general public (243a6: "τῶν πολλῶν ἡμῶν"). Contrasted to the lofty heights of Parmenides and the mythmakers, the Visitor's *we* is the common man. Looking at this in the light of Socrates' sharp distinction between the philosopher and the common man – someone who lives below, "in the cities", together with the rest of us (216c5-8) – we can discern two important aspects of what the Visitor may be trying to accomplish here. Not only is it clear that his notion of philosophy and philosophical science is importantly different from Socrates'. As this notion builds on a displacement of the epistemic proportion of traditional knowledge and myth it is also clear that the Visitor's argument has assumed a phantasmatic form:

While Socrates claims that the philosophers look down at the common man and his life (216c5-7), the Visitor locates the source of the philosophers' knowledge in the common man's speech. As Socrates holds the philosophers to be hard to discern for the man in the city (216c4-6), the Visitor identifies this man as an important authority. For the Visitor, this *we* is

important, both because it is as the critical evaluation and clarification of its talk that the science of philosophy gets its validity, and because the coherence that orients this endeavor is the judge of proper speech.³⁶ Evidenced by his critique of Parmenides and of the mytho-ontological type of discourse he represents, the Visitor's goal should be as clear as his strategy: He wants to replace traditional mytho-ontology with logico-linguistic analysis. By displacing the established epistemic hierarchies, he does not only treat the lives of those below (τὸν τῶν κάτω βίον, 216c6-7) as a great and important source of information. He also reduces the words of those traditionally considered to be above – those who look down (καθορῶντες, 216c6, ὑπεριδόντες, 243a6) – to negligible numerology and incomprehensible myth (243a6-b1). In line with his own characterization of sophistic argumentation at the dialogue's outset, the Visitor makes the lower parts bigger and the upper smaller.

Third, with the Visitor's phantasmatic defense of his philosophical science thus outlined, we may now turn to the final point I want to make about the sophistic character of his argumentative strategy: His attempt to conceal the principles of his own account by hiding them in a denial of their existence. This may seem to be an odd strategy, but, as we have seen above, put in the right way, it may turn out to be quite effective. As the sophists deny that there are such things as images, for example, they can safely entangle their adversaries in an inescapable web of paradox without risking being caught themselves (239c9-240c6). As we shall see, the Eleatic Visitor is not much better. Although he may consider them important, he never defends the principles that support his science. Instead, he denies their existence and hides them in shadow. As I hope to make clear, not only does his account of language (λόγος) cover over the discursive ideals of a comprehensive and coherent whole by a simple, but efficient, theory of language; he also shows that all collections of words without correspondence to some observable extra-linguistic *action or state* cannot be counted as λόγος and does therefore not exist, as such, at all.³⁷

The context in which the argument to this end appears is complex and all the details cannot be untangled here.³⁸ But there are a few distinct features of the relevant passages that hopefully will serve to make the point sufficiently clear.

At around 261d, the Visitor has managed to reach a point in the argument where he is required to introduce some criteria for what makes a collection of words into a proper λόγος. His suggestion is twofold. A proper λόγος is a weaving together of nouns and verbs (262b9-c7)³⁹ and it is about something (262e5-6). Just like the kinds or forms, he explains, some parts of λόγος can be combined and some cannot (262a1-e1). In combination with the second criterion, this is said to mean that a λόγος always has some quality (ποιόν, 262e8).⁴⁰ Either it

answers to some extra-linguistic reality or not. If it does, it is true. If it does not, it is false. No other alternatives are made available (263c9-11). The famous examples are “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus, with whom I am now talking, flies” (263a2, 262a8). According to the Visitor, these are good examples, first, because they make it clear that a λόγος is a weaving together of nouns (‘Theaetetus’) and verbs (‘sitting’, ‘flying’) and, second, because they show how a λόγος always is about some observable state of affairs that can be verified or denied by extra-linguistic means.

As it comes to the details, there has been a long running debate. In a recent article by van Eck (2014) the problems are summarized in terms of how we should understand the theory of falsehood here set forth: Commentators have not manage to settle whether the Visitor wants to say that a sentence (λόγος) is false because it fails to correspond to all the features of what it is about – the so-called the Oxford interpretation – or if it is false by failing to correspond only to some of the features of what it is about – the so-called incompatibility range interpretation.⁴¹ For my present purposes, it is not necessary to settle this debate. But the debate is still important; not only because it shows what is often assumed about these passages, but also because it confirms the interpretation sketched out above: On both sides of this debate, it is taken for granted that the Visitor claims that the truth value of a proposition is acquired by corresponding to some non-metaphysical, extra-linguistic states or actions,⁴² and that a statement that cannot be evaluated in these terms is not a λόγος at all (263c9-11). I have no objections to this. On these points both the Oxford and the incompatibility range interpretation are presumably right. But what both these types of interpretations fail to acknowledge is the consequence this has for the Visitor’s science of philosophy.

According to what we have seen above, there are reasons to think that the Visitor’s science of philosophy corresponds to systematic knowledge of how reality can be analyzed in parts. On the view analyzed, his science of philosophy is explicated by a detailed scrutiny of a set of linguistic entities, called forms or kinds and defended in terms of their internal coherence as parts of a comprehensive whole. The kind of knowledge thus at stake is neither taken to be acquired by some mysterious acquaintance with the so-called Forms nor by the observation of some extra-linguistic states or actions, but by conceptual analysis alone. Yet, if this is on target, even only partly, we need to draw two somewhat uncomfortable conclusions.

On the one hand, we need to conclude that if the Visitor’s theory of λόγος is correct, his science of philosophy cannot exist. Insofar as his theory of language denies that a proposition can be true by any other means than as corresponding to some observable, extra-linguistic state or action, it must also deny that systematic coherence within a functional and complete

whole can function as a basis for the ascription of a truth value. Insofar as this is a criterion for what it means to be a λόγος, no λόγος within the Visitor's science of philosophy would do. Accordingly, there cannot be such a thing as a science of philosophy. Its propositions can neither be true or false – because they do not correspond to any observable, extra-linguistic state or action, such as “Theaetetus sits”.

On the other hand, insofar as this tension between the Visitor's science of philosophy and his theory of language has managed to escape the vision of the most scrupulous readers, it may also seem as if his dissembling strategies have worked. The Visitor has not only managed to hide the operating mechanisms of his philosophical science by denying the principles upon which they rests. Just like a sophist would, he has also renounced all knowledge of how coherence can make a proposition valid (cf. 239e5-240a2). The idea of a fully integrated system of knowledge held together by internal concord (253b1-3) is hidden in the shadow of a theory of truth-by-correspondence (263a1-263c11); and insofar as the Visitor has managed to conceal this, he can safely entangle his addresses in an endless discussion of oxford-falsehoods and their incompatibility-range alternatives.

Conclusion

Plato's *Sophist* is a troublesome dialogue. Not only does its explicit subject matter – the sophist – withdraw into the shadows of non-existence. Its dramatization of the complex and forceful strategies of sophistic discourse is also so efficient that it is hard to distinguish the dialogue's means from its ends. Even if it is reasonably clear that Plato is not out to explain how the universe hangs together, but to disclose the deceptive language of someone that is, the Eleatic Visitor's science of philosophy is made so sophisticated that it is hard to discharge. The challenge is real. The *Sophist* is not a simplified and illustrative example, but a test and a watershed. In the literature the opinions part. While some believe that the Visitor's views represent Plato's, some deny this. In this paper I have offered an argument for the latter view. Departing from the dialogue's introductory discussion of the impossibility of comprehensive knowledge, I have suggested that there are at least three good reasons to question the Visitor's reliability and his science of philosophy. First, since he has made it clear that knowledge about everything is impossible, it doubtful that his science can be as comprehensive as it is made to appear. Second, insofar as this appearance is sustained by phantasmatic strategies, the Visitor's argument is just as deceptive as any sophistic image in words. Finally, insofar as the Eleatic Visitor hides the principles of his logico-linguistic

ontology in the shadows of extra-linguistic reality, the sophistical character of his argument cannot be denied.

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¹ *Visitor* translates ξένοϛ. For discussion of the significance of this name, see McCoy (2008, esp. 140ff), Zuckert (2000), Blondell (2002) and Gonzalez (2000).

² So Gill (2015) and Sedley (2013).

³ E.g. Friedländer (1958-69) or Sayre (1983). Cf. Zuckert (2000). See also Frede (1967) and Owen (1971), both discussed by Brown (2008). Plato's choice to replace Socrates as the main speaker is often taken to be an important sign of development. So Blondell (2002, 315ff), but cf. Hamilton (1963). See also Benitez (1996).

⁴ Miller (1990, 10ff) suggests that the Visitor represent a middle ground position, between Socratic negativity and "nonphilosophical" positivity or dogmatism. In line with, e.g., Rosen (1983, esp. 252f), Noriega-Olmos (2012), Lobo (1977), Notomi (1991, 235-237) and McCabe (1993, e.g. 236ff), Miller (1990, 12) does not acknowledge the sophistic-linguistic and eristic stance of the Visitor's argumentative strategy (1990, 11). But cf. 216a-c with Benitez (1996, 38). See also n.24 & n.25.

⁵ Benitez (1996, 36-37) has a list. Benardete (1993, 762) adds some instances.

⁶ McCoy (2008) and Zuckert (2000) maintain that Socrates and the Visitor are importantly different, but none of them go as far as Howland (1998, e.g. 187) or Benitez (1996, 38) who both argue that the Visitor is a sophist. For discussion, see also Benardete (1993, esp. 762). Cf. also Altman (2016, 72).

⁷ Howland (1998, 187). Sallis (1996, 512) makes a similar point.

⁸ So, e.g., Karfik (2012).

⁹ See, e.g., *Rep.*, 598c-d, *Apol.*, 22c or 22d, *Gorg.*, 464c and 501a-b, *Phaidr.*, 275a-b, *Laws*, 811b or 819a.

¹⁰ Pace Griswold (1977, 560).

¹¹ Cf. *Soph.* 251b3. See also Brown (2008, 441f).

¹² Cf. Karfik (2012, e.g. 122).

¹³ The word *πλημμελής* means ‘out of tune’ and is the opposite of *ἔμμελής*. The latter is used at 259d9-e2 in characterizing what is *ἀφιλόσοφος* (unphilosophical) and *ἄμουσος* (unmusical).

¹⁴ Thus the Visitor shows some respect for his predecessor. So e.g., Brisson (1998, 91), Heidegger (1997, 306) or Benardete (1984, II.123). Cf. Rosen (1983, 205).

¹⁵ Pace Notomi (1999, 212).

¹⁶ Both Cornford (1932, 218) and Hülsz (2013, 111) argue that the Visitor misrepresents Parmenides’ view.

¹⁷ Although the Visitor after 252e1 prefers to speak about kinds (*γένη*, e.g. 253b8) or forms (*ιδέαι*, e.g. 253d5, *εἶδη*, e.g. 254c2), no distinction is made between *τὸ πᾶν* (e.g. 243e3, 244b3, b6, 249d1, d4, 250a2), *τὰ πάντα* (e.g. 245b9, c8) and *οὐσία* (e.g. 246a5-c1, 248a7), terms denominating the reality of which the kinds or forms are parts.

¹⁸ The term *γένη* is introduced at 216a3. For discussion, see Benitez (1996, 28).

¹⁹ The terms *ιδέαι* and *εἶδη* are used throughout the dialogue in ways that do not indicate that they refer to separate intelligible entities. At 253d2 the terms *εἶδος* and *γένη* are used interchangeably. At 219a8 the Visitor says that there are *εἶδη δύο* of art. At 219c2 he talks about the *εἶδος* of learning and of acquiring knowledge, of money making, fighting and hunting. At 235d1-2 he says that he sees two *εἶδη τῆς μιμητικῆς*, but that he is not sure in which of these two the *ιδέα* of what they are looking for (i.e. the sophist) is to be located.

²⁰ In the ensuing discussion, the Visitor uses a set of terms to describe how the kinds combine, interact and are mixed, e.g. he discusses their *κοινωνία*, *ἐπικοινωνία*, *μειζις* and *σύμμιξις*; how they *συμμιγνυσθαι* or *συγκεράννυσθαι*. He also uses the well-known terms *μεταλαμβάνειν* and *μετέχειν*. As pointed out by Rosen (1983, 243) there is no explicit distinction between the terms. But, see Karfik (2011, 131ff).

²¹ E.g. speech can intermingle with being, but motion cannot intermingle with rest.

²² E.g. ‘speech is’ or ‘being can be said’. The problem with both of these relations, i.e. the ontological and the predicative, is that they are not always balanced or reciprocal. This causes some troubles: Being, for example, is not only motion, but also rest, although motion is nothing but being. In this sense being both is and is not motion, which may seem to be a contradiction. For discussion, see below.

²³ Brown (2008) has an excellent schematic layout of *κίνησις*. See also Cornford (1932).

²⁴ Following Brisson (2011, 162-3) we can note that most commentators assume that there is some type of intelligible entities at stake. Those scholars that share this view fall apart in two camps: Ontologists and logicists. While the logicists argue that the kinds or forms are linguistic entities, such as concepts or names, the ontologists take them to be more. In reference to 260a5-6, for example, the ontologists argue that the text cannot merely be about linguistic entities because the Visitor claims that discourse is a kind of being. So, e.g., Rosen (1983, esp. 252f). McCabe (1993, e.g. 236ff) defends a related claim. Cf. also Noriega-Olmos (2012) or Lobo (1977). Notomi (1991, 235-237) follows Lobo (1977). The logicists, on the other hand, take the kinds or forms to be linguistic entities, as e.g. Peck (1952) or Hackforth (1945). In addition, many logicists argue that the point is purely logico-linguistic. Frede (1990, 397-424) claims that what is at stake is a distinction between two different ways of using the word *is* (*ἐστὶ*). In contrast to many other logicists, however, Frede argues that Plato does not distinguish between two kinds of *meanings* of the verb, but merely between two types of *uses*, and that the point of this is to explain that it makes sense, both to say “motion is the same” and to say “motion is not the same” without self-contradiction, as at 256a10-b4. In the first case, “is” is used in the sense of identity: motion is the same as itself by partaking in the kind of the same. In the second case, “is” is used in the sense of copula: motion is not the same, because it is not the same as, for example, rest. Most logicists do however defend a stronger claim and argue that Plato thinks that there are two distinct and separate Forms of being at stake. For

defense of this stronger version of logicism, a version that Brown (2008, 440) classifies as optimistic, see, e.g., Akrill (1951), Vlastos (1981) or van Eck (2014). Among the logicists, there are also pessimists: Instead of acknowledging that Plato anticipates the discoveries of Gottlob Frege by identifying the two meaning of the word “is”, they claim that Plato fails to do so, but that he should. This type of pessimistic logicism is defended by Bostock (1984) and Gosling (1973). For discussion, see Brown (2008) and Brisson (2011, esp. 162-165).

²⁵ One important view that falls outside this general agreement is Rosen’s (1983). Another is Miller’s (1990, 10ff). McCabe (1993, e.g. 236ff) makes their common premise explicit: “What is going on here is an analysis of the way things are. This may have semantic or syntactic consequences [...] but the real issue is the relations between things”. While Miller takes the style and semantic consequences of this analysis to be signs of the Visitor’s need to “cover himself with [...] the perspective of the nonphilosophers”, in order to lead such men into the truth (1990, 14), McCabe thinks that it represent Plato’s view quite explicit: the Visitor’s account of the forms or kinds are no longer the austere Forms from the middle dialogues – where they were introduced to avoid a type of knowledge skepticism caused by the overly generous nature of the sensible particulars and their tendency to welcome a plurality of properties – but a kind of Forms here rearticulated in terms of the communion of the kinds (1993, 233). These new Forms, according to McCabe, are better equipped to avoid the problems of individualization discovered by Plato while writing the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* and they are both stable and knowable without being isolated and epistemically austere (1993, 193). Despite the differences between Rosen, Miller and McCabe, their type of ontologicistic position is well represented in the literature. For references, see n.24.

²⁶ On the use of ἰδέαι and εἰδή in this context, see n.19.

²⁷ So Brown (2008, 439). Pace Notomi (1999, 193) or McCabe (1993, e.g. 236ff). See n.24. Eklund (2013) sees a similar ontology in Carnap.

²⁸ Translation from Brown (2008, 446).

²⁹ Brown (2008, 446-8). For references, see n.25.

³⁰ Ontologists, such as Rosen (1983), McCabe (1993), Noriega-Olmos (2012) or Lobo (1977), argue that this passage is about more that the different uses of words and do not engage in this type of debate. Cf. n.24 & n.25.

³¹ So Rosen (1983, 229ff). Pace Owen (1971, 237) and Frede (1967, 15).

³² As Socrates makes clear in the *Cratylus* (436a9-439b8).

³³ I.e. “when we say...”, e.g. 256a11 or 256b1. I shall return to this point below.

³⁴ E.g. φαμέν, 254d, 255e5; εἰρήκαμεν, 254e2, 256a12; εἴπωμεν 257b6; προσείπωμεν, 255a7; λέγωμεν, 255b5, 255e12, 256b1, 257b3.

³⁵ Peck (1952) and Brown (2008, esp.438) considers this noteworthy. Griswold (1977, 559) generalizes.

³⁶ E.g. 254d1: “παρειακάθη [...] λέγουσιν”. So Brown (2008, 438). Pace Notomi (1999, 193).

³⁷ I borrow from van Eck (2014, 276): “an action or a state”.

³⁸ The Visitor’s explicit aim in this section is to show that the kind non-being intermingles with the kind λόγος and that false belief (δόξα) and appearance (φαντασία, 260e4) therefor exists. For discussion of the relation between being and λόγος in this context, see Rosen (1983, 229). For recent discussion of false opinion in the *Sophist*, see van Eck (2014) or Crivelli (2012). See also Brown (2008) and Hackforth (1945).

³⁹ A λόγος is neither a list of names (as “lion, stag, horse”) nor a list of activities (as “walk, runs, sleeps”).

⁴⁰ Here I follow Brisson (1998, esp. 93f).

⁴¹ van Eck (2014, 275).

⁴² I borrow this expression, ‘extra-linguistic’, from Brisson (1998, 93f).