



Plato on Art, Perspective, and Beauty in the *Sophist*¹

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With only a few exceptions, readers of Plato's later dialogue, the *Sophist*, have not usually associated it with Platonic aesthetics.² But this is to overlook two important features of the dialogue. First, the unfavourable contrast, built up throughout the dialogue, between the practice of sophistry—likened to the practice of the mimetic arts (235c-236e)—and the practice of philosophy. Only the latter, the Stranger implies, affords the possibility of what we might call an aesthetic experience, i. e., the experience of beauty in the soul, while the former results in ugliness (230d-e).³ Second, it overlooks the argument at 235d-236c, offered by the main speaker in the dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger, for the claim that certain artworks, such as monuments and large paintings, are necessarily illusory. The argument is brief but important, since it introduces the idea that the success of these artworks depends on their being at once perspectival—producing for the viewer or audience an appearance of something *via* a representation designed to adjust or correct for the viewer's perspective—and at the same time hiding or concealing this perspectival nature. This has the result that the audience thinks only of the object that appears, the object depicted in the representation, not the artwork or representation itself, or its adjustments and corrections. In this sense, the artwork is a distortion, and false. The implication, we will see, is that sophistry produces appearances or images in words in just the same way, and they too are distortions, falsehoods.

The contrast between sophisticated and philosophical practice together with the analogy between sophistry and artistic production is reminiscent of the unfavourable treatment, in book X of the *Republic*, of mimetic poetry in the ideal city, an ideal city structured by and ruled according

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to philosophical practice (595a ff.). So the *Sophist*, too, confronts us with the following troubling problem: As Michael Frede once stated, 'Plato's dialogues are works of art ... pieces of powerful dramatic fiction.'⁴ Is not his own work, then, vulnerable to the criticism he levels against the mimetic arts and sophistry: that they are illusory, false and harmful? If not, in virtue of what are Plato's dialogues to be distinguished from other depictions of reality, dramatic or otherwise? My central claim in this paper is that in the *Sophist* Plato furnishes the reader with the means for a solution to the problem, by distinguishing the practice of philosophy—conceived of as dialectic—from the practice of sophistry and the mimetic arts. I will suggest that the *Sophist* provides reason to think that the dialogues escape this criticism since they do not offer authoritative claims to truth. That is, they do not offer claims presented as beyond revision, but on the contrary, claims that draw attention to their own perspectival nature.

I mentioned above that the conception of a beautiful soul figures in the Stranger's remarks on the benefits of knowledge, as contrasted with the deleterious effects of submitting oneself to the teaching of sophists. However, the conception of beauty at work here, and its relation to truth and knowledge, is not argued for or defended in our dialogue, but instead appears to be presupposed: there is nothing in the *Sophist* that counts as an advance in Plato's thought on the conception of beauty. Nonetheless, as a preliminary, I want first to review this conception in the corpus, and its connection to truth, knowledge, and virtue, in order to provide a broader context within which to situate the importance accorded to a beautiful soul in the *Sophist*. We will see that the experience of beauty generally, and coming to have a beautiful soul in particular, is desirable because it has *moral* value. We will also see, however, that aesthetic value is not thereby reduced to moral value, since it will emerge that the soul's beauty is for Plato a constituent of the good life, of *eudaimonia*, and not simply a means towards that end.

I. Background: Truth, knowledge, virtue and the role of the aesthetic in Plato

The connection between virtue (or excellence, *aretê*) and beauty (or

the fine, *to kalon*) is a common enough one in Greek, and that between truth and beauty a common enough one in the history of aesthetics, but in Plato these connections are especially prominent. For him, the aesthetic experience—the experience of beauty—serves to inspire the soul towards what is for Plato an exemplary goal: the attainment of truth, and knowledge of the Forms.⁵ But the aesthetic experience also plays a constitutive role in the good life for Plato, or so I shall argue later in this section. It is only once we pay attention to this role for the conception of beauty and its relation to the soul in Plato that we can fully appreciate the seriousness of Plato's worries about sophistry, and certain mimetic arts, as well as his interest in dialectical philosophy, in the *Sophist*.

It is in the 'erotic' dialogues that the instrumental role of beauty in the process of acquiring knowledge—as that which moves us to seek knowledge and become virtuous—is emphasised. In the *Symposium* Diotima paints the startling image of people who are pregnant in their souls through the overarching desire to 'beget in beauty' (206e, 208e-209a). According to her, it is *this*, and not the actual possession of the beautiful love object, as the young Socrates had thought, that is the ultimate driving force of love (204d, 207d-e). Lovers of this kind, she says, are pregnant with what 'it is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue ...' (209a). If such a lover

... has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty. (209b-c)

A little later on, Diotima famously describes the ascent of the soul of the lover, as it progresses from loving beautiful bodies all the way to loving the Form of Beauty itself, which remains forever beautiful and the same, and in which all other beautiful things share (211a ff.). Along the way the soul directs its attention to 'various kinds of knowledge', so that it sees 'the beauty of knowledge', experiences a great variety of beauty in 'beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom',⁶ and finally comes to have, though perhaps through glimpses, knowledge of the Form

of Beauty itself.⁷

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates focuses more keenly on the relation between beauty and truth. There, in his second speech, he endeavours to explain varying psychological types by delineating which god different souls followed in the divine procession of the pantheon, prior to mortal birth. Each one of these souls strains to get a glimpse of 'reality' (*ta onta*, 248a5, 248b4 cf. 247e1-3), which Socrates goes on to describe as located on 'the plain where truth stands' (248b). 'This pasture,' he says,

... has the grass that is the right food for the best part of the soul, and it is the nature of the wings that lift up the soul to be nourished by it ... [A] soul that has seen the most [truth] will be planted in the seed of a man who will become a lover of wisdom or of beauty, or who will be cultivated in the arts and prone to erotic love. (248c-d)

The image of wings of the soul nourished on truth is augmented in the following lines, where the soul of a man who practices philosophy begins to grow wings that return him to the divine realm more than three times faster than the man who does not (249a; cf. 249c-d). Though the role of truth is at the fore in the telling of this myth, beauty and the virtues also play their part in the soul's progress back to heaven. Socrates says that justice and self-control, and the other things the soul admires do not shine brightly in their 'images' (*homoiōmata*, 250b3) in the sensible realm, so that only a few people, with difficulty, can grasp the corresponding Forms (the 'originals') themselves. In contrast, because it often characterises what is visible in the sensible world, beauty is striking, and more easily apprehended by mortal souls. When a person encounters another who is beautiful in soul or body, he is consumed with desire. Now, if the lover is sufficiently self-aware and self-controlled (i. e. possesses *sophrosunê*), the psychology of this desire will see the lover remain ardent yet concerned with the beloved's best interests, and the pair will embark on a jointly beneficial lifelong quest to engage in philosophy, and pursue the acquisition of knowledge and shared understanding (253d-256e). This, in turn, enables their souls to grow the wings that will eventually lead them back to the divine realm after death (256b).

Beauty, therefore, clearly plays a significant role in driving and inspiring the soul to acquire knowledge and attain virtue and *eudaimonia* for Plato: the aesthetic experience has clear instrumental moral value. However, there is reason to think that the value of the aesthetic is not, for Plato, *merely* instrumental. For, the amelioration of the soul engendered by the process of coming to knowledge and virtue ends in the production of two distinct things, each of which is characterised by beauty. One, we have seen, is the production of knowledge of beautiful things in the soul (e. g., people, constitutions, theories, Forms). The other is the production of a soul that is itself beautiful: the process of the soul's coming to know is at the same time a process of its becoming beautiful. A number of passages in the corpus bear this out. In the *Republic*, e. g., the young guardians are made beautiful in soul as well as body by education in music and in poetry, which involves, we are told at 402c, knowledge 'of self-control, courage ... and all their kindred'.⁸ In the dialogue named after him, it is said that if the young Charmides were as beautiful of soul as he were of body and face he would be temperate or self-controlled, and, Socrates implies (and Critias agrees), he would have the other virtues as well (157d-e, cf. *Tht.* 185e). In the *Phaedrus*, the love that is enjoyed between lover and beloved when they follow the dictates of philosophy—engage in philosophical discussion in the search for knowledge—is represented in terms of their common beauty: Plato makes use of a mirror analogy to describe how the beauty of their souls flows back and forth between them in the course of this kind of relationship (255c-e).⁹ In the *Protagoras*, Socrates declares (somewhat facetiously, we might think) that Protagoras is much more beautiful than Alcibiades, on the grounds of his superlative wisdom (309c).¹⁰ And in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades does not give an encomium of love but a speech in praise of Socrates, as a person of outstanding courage (219e-221c), as well as strength and wisdom (219d; 221d-222a)—but he also tells how Socrates, when he heard the gorgeous young man's high opinion of his character, remarked that if that were true then his (i.e. Socrates') soul would have an almost indescribable beauty (218e).¹¹

Both products of philosophical discourse—a virtuous soul and the knowledge it comes to possess—are characterised as beautiful.¹² We are

also clearly told in the *Symposium* that these kinds of beauty—beauty of the soul and beauty of knowledge—are kinds that are instantly recognizable to the soul as beauty (209b-c, cf. *Phaedrus* 250d-e). So we may conclude, I submit, that the virtuous, knowing soul *knows its own beauty* as well as the beauty of the knowledge it has acquired. Finally, these beautiful products of philosophical discourse, virtue and knowledge, and the aesthetic experience that characterises them, are themselves ends, not pursued for the sake of anything else.¹³ That is, they are each elements in the good that is, when it is achieved, constitutive of *eudaimonia* (*Symp.* 204e-205a, cf. 212a). Neither is, therefore, purely an instrumental good for Plato.¹⁴ The production of beauty, and the soul's experience of this beauty, are not merely tools that aid in the individual's attainment of happiness—they are rather themselves parts of a flourishing human life, and so can arguably be classified as intrinsic goods for Plato.¹⁵ At any rate, given that the aesthetic plays a constitutive role in Plato's conception of *eudaimonia*, such that the virtue and beauty of a soul are mutually entailing, and both presuppose the possession of knowledge and truth, the Stranger's characterisation of a clean—and, he implies, knowing—soul as beautiful at 230d-e is hardly surprising. What is perhaps a little surprising is his further allegation that the opposite sort of soul, one that is ignorant of its own state of ignorance, should be characterised so harshly in opposite terms, as distorted and ugly. For, it's not immediately obvious why a soul that lacks beauty should be ugly, rather than be characterised in more neutral aesthetic terms. We might also want an argument for the admittedly familiar, but no less serious, claim that what the sophist produces and sells is falsehood. It is to a study of these allegations and the arguments for them, which ultimately turn on the analysis of perspective, that we now turn.

II. The threat of sophistry: ignorance and ugliness, knowledge and beauty

The Stranger and Theaetetus set out, at the beginning of the *Sophist*, to give an account of sophistry, a task that busies them for fully a third of the dialogue, and which sees them produce no less than seven different formulations of what this art consists in. In their fifth attempt to define

the eponymous sophist, the Stranger directs Theaetetus to the art of discrimination that is concerned with separating out the better from the worse and discards the worse, which art he labels 'cleansing' (226b-d). They agree that cleansing of the body is distinct from cleansing of the soul, the former being concerned with medicine, gymnastics and bathing, the latter with a kind of thinking. Just as body-cleansing sometimes treats disease, soul-cleansing treats wickedness, the two forms of which are viciousness and ignorance (228d-e).

Ignorance is characterised as a kind of ugliness of the soul, since it comes about when the soul is discordant and out of proportion within itself (228a-b). This discord or disfigurement of the soul, strikingly characterised by the Stranger in the next lines as 'derangement' or 'being beside itself' (*paraphrosunê*, 228d2), is analysed as a psychological state that comes about when one aims at truth and understanding but swerves aside, leaving one beside oneself. As I understand it, the point here is that despite the soul's own best efforts, it arrives at a state it did not desire—ignorance, which state is incompatible with what it does desire, namely, the truth, or understanding. The soul defeats the satisfaction of its own desire for knowledge. Thus in the souls of such people there is dissention between 'belief and desire, anger and pleasure, reason and pain, and of all these between each other' (228b2-3).¹⁶ The Stranger then identifies one major kind of ignorance that is large and overshadows the others—thinking oneself to know when one does not. The kind of cleansing most important and effective for this sort of ignorance, he says at 230d7-9, is cross-examination or refutation (*elenkhein*), which ends in placing conflicting opinions next to one another. Seeing his beliefs conflict, the person being examined realises his lack of learning and (unwitting state of) ignorance, and his soul is thereby cleansed. The implication is that he is now in a position to learn and to acquire knowledge: anyone who has not undergone this process is 'uneducated and ugly, in just the ways that the one who is really going to be happy is most clean and most beautiful' (230e2-4, tr. after White).

This kind of cleansing education, if it is any kind of sophistry at all, is a 'noble' sophistry (231b). The Stranger emphasizes that he is hesitant

to conclude that this art is a genuine sort of sophistry, lest they pay the sophist a compliment he doesn't deserve, although he lets the description stand 'for now'. He notes that to dispute the point would be to debate what sophistry is as no trivial matter, adding that when the sophist is at the top of his game, the business of hunting him down with an accurate description will involve disputing an important distinction (231a-b). I interpret these provocative yet vague remarks of the Stranger in a twofold way. On the one hand, it can hardly be overlooked that Socrates, the most famous practitioner of *elenchos* in Greece, is sitting right there, observing proceedings in silence.¹⁷ So the Stranger is communicating to those present, but most pointedly to Socrates, that he appreciates the great value of discovering the conflicting beliefs that underpin a pervasive and powerful (though unwitting) form of ignorance, while at the same time qualifying his praise by making it clear that this negative process does not itself end in the positive state of knowledge acquisition. On the other hand, I take it that he is deliberately foreshadowing the tension between the boasts of sophistry and its accomplishments, by suggesting that the cleansing art of cross-examination is not in fact an art the sophist practices. Indeed, as we will see shortly, the sophist falsely claims to know an enormous number of things he does not know. It follows that under sustained questioning, the sophist will find himself faced with his own conflicting beliefs, either because his knowledge claims turn out to conflict with the phenomena (234d-e), or with each other (e. g., *Gorg.* 460e-461a). Thus, despite his claim to expertise, the sophist too is infected by this pervasive kind of ignorance, and far from possessing the cleansing art, in fact possesses an ugly soul that stands in need of the art's application.

At 234c-d, the Stranger depicts the sophist as using words to trick young people about reality, since they stand far from the truth, 'by putting words in their ears, and by showing them spoken images of everything, so as to make them believe that the words are true and the person who's speaking to them is the wisest person that there is' (234c, cf. 233b). In consideration of the sophist's claim to know so much about so many domains of knowledge, the Stranger and Theaetetus agree that he cannot possibly possess knowledge about all the things in the cosmos,

as he claims (232a-e; 233a-b; 233d-234b). On the contrary most, if not all, of his knowledge claims must be false (233a; 235a).¹⁸ Now, sophists profess to teach virtue (224b-c; cf. *Rep.* 493a-d)—as well as a host of other things—though now they are revealed to lack knowledge of this subject. Therefore both patrons and students of sophists alike, to the extent that they take themselves to have knowledge as a result of the sophist's teaching, think they know when they do not, and so are characterised by the worst and largest kind of ignorance. It is the worst kind because, we may speculate, in mistakenly thinking themselves to know when they do not, these people will reject claims that conflict with their own beliefs, even when they are true, and will no longer engage in inquiry or seek out knowledge. But, just as we would expect in light of the remarks on truth, knowledge and beauty in the Platonic corpus surveyed above, without knowledge these people cannot, by Plato's lights, flourish or achieve happiness. In spite of their efforts to the contrary, it seems, these people have ended up with deformed, ugly souls, and are in fact prevented from attaining *eudaimonia* (230e).

As they get older, however, the sophist's students have immediate experience with real things (*tôn ontôn*, 234d4), and their direct encounter with the facts causes them to change their earlier beliefs, instilled in them by the sophist, which 'made large things appear small and easy things appear hard' (235d). Maturity and experience combine, it seems, to bring about some measure of the soul's self-cleansing on the part of these former students. The sophist, nonetheless, is concerned only that the appearances—the images he creates in words—strike his audience as accurate depictions of reality, and not whether they are so. He is also concerned with his own appearance: we are told at the end of the dialogue, at 267c, that the sophist works hard to make others believe that the character of justice and all the virtues together are present in him, and that he is adept at appearing to be so, while he is not in fact so (cf. 233b; 234c).

But why should we be convinced by Plato in the *Sophist* that what the sophist teaches is false? The Stranger suggests that one reason is that the sophist professes to be able to instruct on every possible subject (232b-233c; 234b-235a). The implication is that since it would be impossible for

anyone to know so much, the sophist must lack knowledge and so teach falsehoods. Of course, the reasoning is hardly persuasive, and the claim is at best a weak one. Even if the sophist does not have knowledge of much of what he teaches, or claims to be able to teach, he may nonetheless have knowledge of some subject areas. Moreover, supposing we grant Plato the claim that truth is a necessary condition for knowledge, it nevertheless does not follow that a person who lacks knowledge does not possess or believe true propositions. The key, I suggest, lies in the Stranger's analysis of the product of the sophist's art as an appearance that, in contrast to a faithful likeness, is necessarily illusory.

III. Illusory appearances, faithful likenesses, and perspective

Having depicted the sophist as a cheat and an imitator, the Stranger goes on to effectively acknowledge that he has not yet given a satisfactory account of sophistry. For imitation can be faithful, and preserve such things as correct proportion and proper colouring (235d-e). The task, then, is to analyse that feature of sophistry that distinguishes it from faithful imitation and in such a way that explains its (alleged) faithlessness, and it is the task that Stranger now turns his attention to.

In the passage from 235c to 236d, the Stranger elaborates on the nature of the products of sophistry, which he had earlier, at 234c5 and 234e1, characterised as images (*eidôla*) and appearances (*phantasmata*) respectively. At 235eff., he contrasts the (faithful) type of imitation called likeness-making with another type of imitation involved in the production of the sculpting or drawing of large artworks. These imitations alter the proportion of the parts of the object in the appearance of it, to take into account the distance of the viewer from the various parts, so that it in fact appears to have the correct proportion. Michelangelo's statue of David, for instance, has a disproportionately large head, and one of the hands of the boy is noticeably larger than the other. The sculptor made the statue this way because it was originally intended that it be viewed from a distance, the viewer standing on the other side of the Piazza della Signoria in Florence (where a replica stands today). In adjusting for the viewer's distance from the head, as compared to her distance from the

feet and the rest of the torso, which would be slightly less, the appearance of the statue would be, for the viewer, of normal proportions. Moreover, the enlarged size of the hand (that in the myth let loose the rock that killed Goliath), is designed to draw the viewer's gaze, emphasizing its significance. The opposite effect is regularly produced in (regular sized) paintings, with which we are more familiar in contemporary times. Since a painting of a view of the acropolis from the port of Pireas, for instance, is designed to reproduce the appearance of the monument from the point of view of someone actually standing at the port, the part of the painted building that has the appearance of being furthest away from the viewer has considerably shorter columns, on the canvas, than those that make up the part of the building in the painting that appears nearest. And if a painter were to produce a very large painting, of the kind of scale of works still found on the walls of the Vatican or other galleries and palazzo elsewhere in Italy, he or she may well adjust for viewer perspective by making what is large appear small and *vice versa* (cf. 235e-236a).¹⁹

Now, the Stranger's remarks here could be intended to have a fairly restricted scope—covering only such works or artifacts that require the craftsman to consider viewer perspective, such as the large sculptures or drawings he mentions. However, at 236b-c the Stranger says the illusory practice found in these sorts of arts is indicative of many artistic products and the mimetic arts generally. Further, the context of the analysis of perspective in these mimetic arts—embedded within the Stranger's criticism of sophistry as productive of falsehoods—strongly suggests that the analysis is to be applied to sophistry. If this is right, then the allusion to these artisans is intended to show that their art is analogous to sophistry in the respect of the production of certain sorts of representations or images. The production of certain paintings, or the construction of a monument or statue in order that it appear a certain way, is called the appearance-making kind (*phantastikê*, 236c4) of imitative art (*mimêtikê*), and is distinguished by the method of collection and division from likeness-making, which faithfully reproduces proportion, colour, etc. The suggestion, therefore, is that appearance-making ought to be associated with the art of sophistry as much as it is associated with a great deal of mimetic production, since

both rely on the production of what is false while retaining the impression of not being so.²⁰ And again, the Stranger had already characterised the products of sophistry as appearances (*phantasmata*) at 234e1 (and also refers to them by way of *phainesthai* at 236e1). So the analysis of certain mimetic arts as illusory appears to present Theaetetus (and the reader) with what is meant to be an illuminating analogue to sophistry. The suggestion is reinforced—I think decisively—by the observation that in the closing statement of the dialogue, the Stranger describes sophistry in terms of a string of differentia, one of which is ‘the appearance-making kind of image-making’ (268c9-d1).

The key point about the nature of what is produced by this kind of artistic imitation, (which, again, we are told covers a great part of painting and the imitative arts generally at 236b-c) is that it is an appearance of a thing of a certain sort (e. g. of a certain proportion), which seems to be of that sort while it is in fact not of that sort (235e-236c). I take this to mean that the product of this sort of imitation is a depiction or representation of the original object according to which it *appears* thus-and-such, though the features of the imitation itself, considered as an object on its own and apart from what it represents, are *not* in fact thus-and-such (235e-236c). Some features will, it seems, need to be preserved in the product of imitation in order for it to be imitative—so Michelangelo’s statue had better be recognisable as *David* if it is to invoke a sense of the small population’s spirit of defiance and willingness to defend Florence’s seat of government from encroaching external powers. But the point is that the vast majority of the appearances that are the products of the imitative arts depend for their success on representing the original object falsely. So while the statue has some characteristics in common with the character, David, a young shepherd (youthful physique, appropriate clothing), it also has characteristics not attributable to him (an overly large head and right hand).

It is thus possible for an imitation to appear beautiful to the viewer of the imitation in the same way the intentional object itself appears beautiful to the apprehension unmediated by imitation, e. g. as the (mythical) David, or the (actual, physical) acropolis appears beautiful, without preserving

the characteristics—in this case, proportion—in virtue of which the original does appear beautiful (235e). In such cases, it is in virtue of the relevant visual device that the appearance appears beautiful (236a). Necessarily then, what the Stranger has called an ‘appearance’ and has distinguished from a ‘likeness’, is something that appears like the object it imitates with regards to a certain characteristic, but is not in fact like that object in itself preserving and possessing that characteristic.

The point is key because this is the respect, I submit, in which the nature of sophistry is analogous to the nature of the mimetic arts. That is, the products of sophistry are appearances, or particular sorts of images in words (234c). They are appearances in the sense that they are designed in such a way as to cause an appearance, in the mind of somebody ‘far away from the truth’ (234c), of an object characterised a certain way, though which appearance does not in fact preserve this characteristic. So, e. g., a sophist might present an appearance of a just person as someone who always obeys the law (*Rep.* I, 339b-c)²¹, or of the human good as the power to do as one sees fit (*Gorgias*, 466b-c; cf. 452d, 469c). Or he might teach that virtue is one thing for a man, another thing for a woman, and yet another for a slave or child (*Meno*, 71e-72a). He might even argue for the idea that to wish for someone to become wise is to wish for their death (*Euthyd.*, 283b-d), or that the two virtues, courage and wisdom, are so distinct that courage should be considered non-cognitive in the sense of not requiring knowledge or wisdom (*Prot.* 330a-b, 349d, 359a-c, 360e). In the first three examples, where the sophist succeeds, the intentional object of the appearance appears to be just or good or virtuous to the intended audience, though in each case it turns out that it is not. In the last two examples, the prospect of a person becoming what he is not appears to be the prospect of death, and the virtues appear related to one another as the parts of a face to one another, though again, in both cases things are not this way (at least according to Socrates). That these various intentional objects appear these ways is, analogously with the imitative arts, a function of two features of the appearance: the false characteristics of the appearance, and facts to do with the audience’s perspective.

First, consider the claim that the appearance is constituted by false

characteristics in a way that is relevantly analogous to the mimetic arts discussed. These are characteristics that are not in fact characteristics of the intentional object (so the appearance is not like the object in the way we have seen a faithful likeness to be), though they can plausibly seem to be characteristics of it. Thus, it can appear that someone who conforms to the law is just, just as it can seem that the good life is underwritten by the ability to do as one wishes, when one wishes, and that being an excellent (i. e., virtuous) person involves distinct behaviour or character states for a man, woman, slave, and child. It can also appear that becoming something you are not involves ceasing to be who you are, and would therefore seem to imply death, just as it can appear that courage does not in every instance involve some prior deliberation, so that it is not an intellectual virtue, and so separate and independent from wisdom.²² These appearances that the sophist produces, or could produce, are propositions, or images in words (234c). And like the large artworks of the painter or sculptor, they depend on certain facts about the perspective of their audience. In the case of sophistry, however, these are facts about the audience's intellectual perspective, not their physical, perceptual perspective.

I have already noted the audience's distance from the truth is one feature of the cognitive perspective of the students of sophistry, according to the Stranger (234c, cf. 234e). That is, the considerable ignorance of the audience contributes significantly to the success of the propositions or accounts put forward by the sophist. That ignorance is indeed necessary for the *logoi* of sophistry to appear in the desired way, and so to have the effect of being persuasive to the sophist's audience, is conceded by Gorgias in the dialogue named after him at 459a-b (cf. 456b-c.) There, Gorgias agrees that the (ignorant) orator, who Socrates groups with sophists and other flatterers (463b-c), will only be more persuasive than the (knowledgeable) doctor on the subject of medicine if the audience is ignorant about such matters, since those who already have knowledge will not be more persuaded by the orator than by the doctor.

The Stranger can also be seen to suggest two other features of the particular cognitive perspective most desirable to the sophist in his audience. One is the possession, on behalf of the audience member, of false

beliefs that are popular, or at least have a certain currency at the time. For when presented by the sophist with views or assertions that are familiar and well-regarded by others, the student is more likely to be persuaded, either because it is easy and pleasant to hold the same view as others, or because it's less risky to assent to something one has at least heard of before than to some suspiciously new idea that nobody believes. The Stranger suggests such a role for false popular belief in his characterisation of the craft of sophistry at 223e-224e as the expertise involved in traveling from one place to another and buying and selling items he (the sophist) describes as knowledge or 'learnings' (*ta mathêmata*) concerning virtue, either items he has purchased or has himself 'made' (*tektainomai*). In doing so, Plato has the Stranger paint a picture of the sophist as primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with the marketability of an account or claim about virtue, at the same time as being wholly unconcerned with the inconsistency that is certain to show up between his seemingly vast store of such items of 'knowledge' at any time. This picture is confirmed a little later on when the Stranger points out that the sophist is willing to engage in controversies about anything at all (232b-e). And his remark at 234a that the sophist sells a kind of belief-knowledge about every subject, which is not true but that is quickly made, easy to learn and inexpensive to buy, further reinforces the notion that he deals in claims and ideas that are popular and highly persuasive.²³

The other feature of the audience's cognitive perspective that the Stranger suggests is desirable to the sophist is the desire, on the part of the audience member, for pleasure or gratification, in exchange for cash. At 234b, the Stranger and Theaetetus agree that sophistry is a kind of a game of controversy and debate (*eristic*) and that no other game is more engaging (*khariesteron*). The remark echoes the huge entertainment value accorded to the highly profitable sophistic displays of eristic and oratory in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere (458c-d; cf. *Euthyd.* 274b; *Prot.* 315a-c; *Hipp. Maj.* 282b-e).²⁴ It also echoes, of course, Socrates' deeply insulting suggestion to Polus and Gorgias that oratory and sophistry are each a knack for producing pleasure and gratification, on the grounds that each flatters the students of sophists into thinking themselves wise because

they appear wise.²⁵ The same sentiments are expressed in the *Sophist*, albeit more briefly, by the Stranger. The remark that sophistry is the most engaging of games follows immediately after the assertion that what the sophist teaches can be taught quickly, suggesting that part of the delight of studying with a sophist is the speed and ease of it, and this is surely pleasurable. At 237b-c eristic or game playing is sharply contrasted with giving serious consideration to a question, again implying that sophistry is designed to be fun, a sort of pleasure. Finally, as we have seen, the sophist promises to be able to teach his students to controvert and debate others on whatever subject he chooses (232a-e), and so, since the sophist appears amazingly knowledgeable and most wise to his students (233a-c, 234c), they too can expect the pleasure of appearing knowledgeable and wise to others, once they have digested the sophist's lessons.

The claims or accounts produced by sophists, then, appear to their audience to expound upon the nature or characteristics of certain subjects of debate or discussion, especially the virtues (224b-e). They have this appearance because the sophist deliberately fashions them to be (i) *prima facie* plausible, and therefore appealing, to the ignorant, (ii) resonant with popular views, and so more acceptable to those who already hold those views or those who are familiar with them, and (iii) a source of pleasure and gratification to those who are amused by, and who admire as wise, those who contradict and confuse others and who will take pleasure in thinking themselves wise in learning how to do the same. In a sense, then, the appearances that are the product of sophistry are jointly produced by the sophist and the audience, though it should be stressed that in the *Sophist* the audience members are depicted as innocent youth exploited for their cash, whose ignorance and inexperience are taken advantage of by the sophist, who knowingly deceives them.²⁶

The moral of the analogy, then, is that what the sophist produces is analogous to the products of the artisan, who is wholly concerned with the way his representation seems, not how it really is, or how the thing it represents really is. This manufacture of falsehood is essential to the craft of the kind of artisans the Stranger has mentioned because they are in the business of producing a certain visual effect, and so must compensate for

viewer perspective. If they did not, the visual experience of the intended audience would not be pleasing or gratifying, since the appearance would no longer be a beautiful one, and so they would have failed to bring about the desired effect.²⁷ For the sophist, the manufacture of falsehood is similarly connected to the appearance of beauty in the service of illusion, and gratification or pleasure. Sophists, like artists, are in the business of providing an appearance that is false, but which is designed not to draw attention to its essentially illusory nature. If they did not succeed they would have no followers and no income (232d; 233b). Unlike artistry, however, the practice of sophistry is disingenuous in the sense that it aims to deceive the audience about the intentional object (240c-d). This is borne out in the observation that it is necessary for the sophist to produce what appears to be thus-and-such but is not, i. e., produces what is false, and which serves to please and gratify his audience, but he can never boast or take pride in his ability to create an illusion. So while the mimetic artistry discussed is analogous to sophistry in the respect that they produce appearances—representations that are necessarily false (or the contents of which are false)—that are designed with facts about the audience’s perspective taken into account, it is disanalogous in the respect that artistry, unlike sophistry, aims to put the audience in mind of a true or accurate idea of the intentional object. Where artists skillfully craft their false appearances so as to correct for brute physical facts about the audience’s perceptual perspective, sophists take advantage of contingent facts about their audience’s intellectual perspective in order to produce their false appearances.²⁸

There is, however, a major obstacle to this reading of this section of the dialogue. If, according to Plato, it is the acquisition of actual and not ersatz knowledge, especially knowledge of virtue, that leads a person to have a beautiful soul and achieve *eudaimonia*, why does he not transmit knowledge by writing treatises, as his most gifted pupil was to do? In producing dialogues instead, is he not derelict in his duty to tell us the truth unadorned, according to his own cherished philosophical goals, as I have understood them? What is more, is he not, insofar as he fashions an image or imitation (i. e. of philosophical conversation) producing the



very thing he is critical of at 236b-e as necessarily false and productive of ignorance (and so, not of beauty but ugliness in the soul)—a mere appearance of something, that seems to be like the beautiful thing of which it is an image, but in reality is not? Plato cannot avail himself of the artist's defence, that he is merely adjusting for brute physical facts about his audience's perceptual perspective, since in his case, as with the sophists, it is the audience's contingent and mutable intellectual perspective that is relevant. The question, then, is this: in his use of the dialogue form, involving as it does character depiction, literary flourishes and devices, and depiction of drama, is not Plato choosing to make art and falsehood instead of imparting knowledge?

IV. The problem of writing and the dialogue form

The objection just formulated depends on the assumption that Plato thought that one could simply impart or transmit knowledge from one person to another by presenting, in the form of a treatise, a series of straightforward knowledge claims written in the voice of the author, for anyone to read and absorb. As many scholars have recently observed, however, there is very strong and considerable evidence that Plato did not share the view, common today, that this is easily achieved—namely the fact that his not inconsiderable life's work was written in dialogue form, in which he himself never appears as a character.²⁹ That is, Plato never presented straightforward theories or claims to knowledge in his own voice. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates relays a mythical attack on writing that suggests a reason why Plato eschewed writing treatises. Far from being an elixir for memory, written texts serve to impoverish people's memories, because they trust too readily in the text as authoritative (275a). Treatises up until Plato's time had been written as pronouncements of claims presented as certain and as constituting knowledge on the topic in question.³⁰ Frede has argued that behind Plato's concern with the authority of a treatise lies an 'elevated' conception of knowledge, likely as a result of (the historical) Socrates' influence, according to which only a view or account that is not open to further questioning and is beyond doubt is one that can be simply laid out for others, as a *fait accompli*.³¹



In the *Phaedrus* Socrates also suggests that the necessarily static character of a written text further compounds the problem of the text's assumed authority—a reader cannot ask the text questions, communicate when she is not following the line of argument, or challenge assumptions (275c-e, 276c; cf. the 'Seventh Letter', 341c-e; 344b-c). In the *Sophist*, Plato has the Stranger echo precisely this worry in his criticisms of Parmenides and other Presocratic philosophers who presented their thought in the form of straightforward, authoritative claims. The Stranger says to Theaetetus at 242c that 'they each appear to me to tell us a story, as if we were children ...' He later qualifies the remark at 243a-b: '... they've been inconsiderate and contemptuous towards us. They've simply been talking their way through their explanations, without paying any attention to whether we were following them or were left behind.'

How was Plato to proceed, then, given the enormously high value he placed on knowledge? A strong clue is given in the Stranger's response to Socrates' question how it is best to explain something to somebody, right at the beginning of our dialogue (217c-e). There he says that it is best to proceed by the method of question and answer, so long as he has a tractable interlocutor, and that the second best method is to give a long speech.³² Giving a long speech is the equivalent of reciting a treatise, and we have already seen the drawbacks of a treatise. The question now, then, is what has Plato accomplished in having the Stranger employ the 'best' method in a *written* text?

The answer, I would like to suggest, is that he has produced in his dialogues a literary form by which he is able to instruct the reader, not only in the positive views put forward by the Stranger, but also in how to come to her own reasoned judgment about the issues, to 'give birth' in an intellectual sense, and so to facilitate her coming to knowledge. He has achieved this, I will try to show, by presenting in his portrayal of the interlocutors a carefully fashioned model to the reader of how to critically examine a series of claims and assess their merit on her own. Now since this undeniably involves Plato in presenting an *imitation* of critical inquiry, he has in fact provided the reader with an image or representation of something, and not the thing itself. It is, moreover, an

imitation that is impressionistic and open to interpretation, the production of which requires a certain literary talent and flair. Plato has, therefore, produced the kind of thing that he and others down the centuries have associated with art and artistic endeavour. I will argue, however, that he has not produced a work that is characterised by that feature he was so critical of in the case of art (and, as we have seen, in the case of sophistry), namely, that it necessarily represents falsely. He does this, I will claim, by producing a work that systematically draws attention to itself as presenting a particular 'perspective' or critical response to the positive views tendered by the Stranger. In this sense it presents itself as providing a provisional yet positive view of the issues, open to further examination should the need arise, and which at the same time demonstrates how to come to one's own similarly provisional view. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the *Sophist* as a model of critical examination, before turning to the question of the status of the dialogue as art.

Theaetetus' role in the dialogue strikes one as significant in modeling appropriate dialectical behaviour in a number of respects. As a precursor to Theaetetus' being able to properly evaluate the series of claims he offers for consideration, the Stranger ensures that the young man manages to understand him as he progresses through the arguments. From early on, Theaetetus is confident enough to say when he doesn't understand (e. g. 222d9)³³, and the Stranger carefully monitors his comprehension at certain points (e. g. 238d-e). Next, we notice that the Stranger continually challenges Theaetetus to be actively involved by thinking hard about the questions he poses during the discussion. Their task is to identify the sophist 'by means of a verbal explanation (*logos*), rather than doing without any such explanation and merely agreeing about the name' (218c). And he often presses Theaetetus to answer with what he thinks is the right answer, not to simply agree with him out of habit,³⁴ even causing him to protest at one point, 'you're demanding some quick thinking on my part!' (226c12).

Noteworthy, too, is the Stranger's demand that Theaetetus remain aware of what has already been agreed upon in their conversation, in order to maintain logical consistency throughout (240c). The dialogue

is peppered with his insistence that Theaetetus recall something that has been said earlier, and to examine in detail the frequently complex question whether or not it conflicts with what they have just assented to.³⁵ Finally we observe that Plato has the Stranger instruct Theaetetus on how to engage in conceptual analysis and a priori reasoning through demonstration, thereby offering instruction to the reader as well. For example, at 251d, the Stranger asks him whether they ought to 'refuse to apply "being" to change and rest, or anything else' on the grounds that they are incapable of sharing in one another, or whether they ought to say that some kinds are capable of sharing in some other kinds, or all kinds in all. When Theaetetus cannot offer any answer, the Stranger directs him to consider the three logical possibilities one by one, and in particular to examine what consequences would follow from each (251e), thereby illustrating the *kind* of analysis he thinks it best to give (cf. 237b).

In making Theaetetus an active participant in the discussion in these ways, the Stranger is portrayed as indirectly teaching Theaetetus to critically examine a proposition by searching for the conditions under which he would judge it to be false. Theaetetus shows that he has learnt how to discern these conditions at least once in the dialogue. When considering the possibility that all kinds partake of all kinds at 252d, Theaetetus jumps in, confidently announcing 'even I can solve that one'. He says that Motion itself would absolutely rest and Rest itself, in turn, would absolutely move, if they came about in reference to one another.³⁶ Theaetetus clearly presents this state of affairs as a counterfactual, which the Stranger affirms by adding 'but this is by the greatest necessity impossible, that Motion be at rest and Rest be in motion' (252d9-10). Here, Theaetetus has lighted upon what he and the Stranger take to be a conceptual truth, and since it contradicts the proposition under consideration, it is taken by the pair as sufficient reason to discard it as false.

Since the *Sophist* contains a number of positive theoretical claims about both sophistry and metaphysics,³⁷ it seems certain that Plato considered this set of claims worthy of serious consideration. Moreover, they are articulated by the Stranger, a character who is depicted as an authority several times over: He knows well the complex account of sophistry

that he has heard many times before in his native Elea; he is greeted with a certain amount of awe by Socrates, who suspects he might be a god of refutation; and though Socrates' worry is allayed by Theodorus, he nonetheless attributes a measure of divinity to the Stranger, since he calls all philosophers divine (216a-c). But far from having the Stranger deliver a lecture—a verbal treatise—to those present, Plato has him guide Theaetetus through his lengthy set of questions and proposals. If, as I have urged, we pay attention to the dramatic features of the portrayal of the interlocutors in the *Sophist*, a picture emerges of an exceptionally bright young man being taught how to be actively involved in the production of the accounts of sophistry and being—concentrating hard throughout, and straining to articulate considerations that are both defensible and decisive at each point in their lengthy conversation.³⁸ The Stranger offers Theaetetus and the others positive claims and views as well as a model of a method for examining them, and coming to one's own evaluative judgment about them. Of course this is what Plato offers the reader as well, the opportunity to formulate, examine and come to reasoned conclusions about the issues on her own. The *Sophist* is in this sense a 'maieutic' or midwifely dialogue.³⁹

V. Images, falsehood, and the question of art

Let's now return to the question of the potential problem for Plato of not writing a treatise but instead fashioning an impressionistic and imitative depiction of characters in conversation that is open to interpretation. We saw above that Plato had the Stranger assert that an essential feature of sophistry was the production of falsehoods. This production was said to be analogous to the creation of paintings and monumental buildings, which are false appearances in the sense that they are deliberately designed to take viewer perspective into account. In producing an imitative representation, a picture or image of a particular type of philosophical conversation, is not Plato doing the same thing, namely, producing a false appearance?

I do not think he is. The crucial difference between the appearances that the sophist and the architect or painter produce on the one hand

and the dialogues that Plato produces on the other is that it is necessary to the former, but not the latter, to conceal the discrepancy between the imitative representation and the reality it represents. It is necessary that the artisan conceal the discrepancy in order to produce the visual illusion of correct perspective, in order to achieve the goal of compensating for viewer perspective. It is necessary that the sophist conceal the discrepancy in order to preserve the impression that he is knowledgeable about a vast range of subjects and so qualified to teach them in his entertaining way and receive payment for it. By contrast, there is no necessity for Plato to produce a piece of writing that appears to be some thing, or in some way, but is not. He does not present something that purports to present the truth or a piece of knowledge about something (in the 'elevated' sense of being beyond revision), so there can be no falsehood on that score. What is more, Plato has self-consciously produced a piece, in the *Sophist*, that is ostentatiously perspectival, i. e. a depiction of a critical response to the Stranger's propositions and questions that is specific to one person—Theaetetus.

For it is *Theaetetus'* requests for further explanation that the Stranger responds to, *Theaetetus'* queries that are answered, and *Theaetetus'* puzzlement that gives the Stranger pause and causes him to monitor the young man's progress. It is also Theaetetus' easy comprehension—and the consequent lack of further explanation at certain points—that the reader has to live with. And no one who has spent any effort trying to come to grips with the dialogue will have failed to groan inwardly at some point in their reading when Theaetetus, faced with a difficult and nearly impenetrably terse bit of reasoning from the Stranger (e. g. 255c13-d7), agrees without question, responding merely with an infuriating 'how not?' or 'it is just as you say'. In these ways and others, Plato reminds the reader that she is reading a depiction of a particular conversation between particular characters that almost certainly would have been different with different participants.⁴⁰ In those dense and difficult passages not queried by Theaetetus, I submit, Plato is attempting to force the reader to take an active part in the dialogue just as the reader has seen the Stranger encourage the young man to. In doing so, I suggest, Plato has produced a



work that deliberately draws attention to itself as merely a representation of one particular philosophical conversation, in which the skills for correct analysis are accurately depicted but the conclusions drawn and analyses offered are not intended as final, or to be accepted unreflectively by anyone. Plato has, in producing a work that draws attention to its imitative status and demands interpretation in these ways, produced an artwork that facilitates the process of coming to knowledge, and the aesthetic experience that comes with it, rather than thwarts it.

This last claim will seem to some readers to be a problematic one to attribute to Plato. For Plato is notoriously disparaging about artists and their works, going so far as to have Socrates banish them from the ideal city described at length in the *Republic* (595a ff.). I cannot hope to debate the issue adequately here, but in defense of my claim I offer two considerations. At 235d-e, the Stranger delineates one kind of image-making that is called 'likeness making' (*eikastikê*, 235d6 ff.). Unlike the production of appearances, likeness making produces images that are faithful to that of which they are images. In the following passages, as we have seen, appearances are images that are characterised by being false, in the case of artists and sophists. The strong implication is that likenesses are images or representations that are not false. And since Plato has deliberately pointed out that there are such faithful representations, it seems reasonable to entertain the idea that this is what he is taking himself to produce in his depiction of dialectic.⁴¹ If this is right, then it will turn out to be more strictly correct to characterise Plato's dialogues as *eikastic* imitations, the kind of imitations that produce faithful likenesses, at least to some extent. Perhaps, then, a dialogue is analogous to a draftsman's blueprint in the sense that it faithfully depicts a type of conversation-philosophical dialectic-but unlike it in presenting a particular token of such a conversation, between particular people and on a particular topic, i.e. a conversation from a particular perspective.⁴²

Second, in the *Republic* itself not all mimesis is excluded from the ideal city. At least, Socrates allows some poetry and drama in the education of the young in books II and III (377b-398b, cf. 607a), and although he declares that the poets will not be permitted in the *kallipolis* he does say



that if an argument can be made for the usefulness of the mimetic craft it will be allowed some part in the city.⁴³ Nehamas has also pointed out that Plato's hostile stance towards art and artists ought to be taken in its historical context, as an attack on only a particular kind of art, dramatic poetry. As such, Plato's criticisms are aimed at art that seeks to entertain and gratify its audience and which, importantly for my purposes, presents itself in a transparent way, not as a (perspectival) representation or impression that stands in need of interpretation, but deceptively, as though it were a faithful image of what it represents.⁴⁴ This leaves room for the production, in writing, of an imitative representation of what Socrates tells us in the *Phaedrus* that the dialectician does, when he 'chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge—discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it ...' (276e-277a).

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have been arguing that even though neither beauty nor art are in the forefront of the conversation between the Stranger and Theaetetus, the *Sophist* can be read as significant for our understanding of Plato's contribution to aesthetics. This is in part due to the central—and, I argued, constitutive—role accorded to beauty and the aesthetic in Plato's thought, since that role is inextricably tied to the process of coming to knowledge for Plato and the *Sophist* betrays a deep concern with that process, in both its genuine and ersatz forms, in philosophy and sophistry. But it is also in part a result of Plato's analysis of the necessarily illusory nature of sophistry and certain mimetic arts, in their respective production of appearances, in contrast to the practice of philosophy. The contrast, I argued, did not turn on the claim that while sophistry and these forms of mimetic artistry produced false images, or ideas or assertions, philosophy produced straightforwardly true versions of the same. Rather, the contrast depended on the claim that while sophistry and certain mimetic arts by their very nature conceal their perspectival nature, dialectical philosophy is conducted in such a way—that is, by way of critical conversation informed by reason—that attention is drawn to the particular intellectual perspective



from which any view is put forward. I further argued that this analysis in the *Sophist* suggests an explanation for why Plato deliberately chose to write in dialogue form: this literary form represents an effort to draw the reader's attention to the perspectives from which the various claims and accounts offered by the Stranger, and queried and discussed by Theaetetus, issue.

Finally, the *Sophist* adds to our understanding of Platonic aesthetics by presenting the reader with a work that we can characterise as mimetic (even if it should be strictly characterised as a likeness or as *eikastic* imitation) and is to this extent an artistic work, at least by contemporary standards. It is, however, a work of art that models the process of critical examination, at the same time as offering a series of positive theoretical claims for the reader's consideration in the accounts of being and of sophistry. In purposefully creating a written work that systematically alerts the reader to its status as a representation of one particular character's critical response to the Stranger's questions and propositions, I have argued that Plato has created a work that invites the reader's own interpretation and her own exploration of the conditions under which a particular assertion or denial may be shown to be false. In contrast to other products of the mimetic arts and sophistry, the *Sophist* does not represent falsely, and in contrast to treatises written in the voice of the author, it does not implicitly claim an authority for itself that seeks to render its contents as beyond revision. Instead, I have argued, it urges the reader toward dialectical understanding, and, with it, the aesthetic: near the end of the dialogue, the Stranger tells Theaetetus that one should aim to follow what a person says and carefully examine it at each step, discerning the precise respect in which he says that something is the same or different. But he has described no mean feat, for accomplishing it is, he says, both difficult and at the same time beautiful (259c4-5: *ekeino d'êdê kai khalepon hama kai kalon*).

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Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Peter Adamson, Eugenio Benitez, Anne Hewitt, and Richard Sorabji for providing critical and constructive comments on earlier versions of this paper. I also owe a debt of thanks to Verity Harte, who was kind enough to let me read a penultimate version of her paper on a similar topic in *Republic X, 'Republic X and the Role of the Audience in Art'* (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, forthcoming), which helped me to clarify my own thoughts about appearances, perspective, and the analogy between artistry and sophistry at *Sph.* 235d-236c.
- 2 The exceptions include Seth Benardete (1984); Eugenio Benitez (1996). Note that neither Stanley Rosen (1983) nor Noboru Notomi (1999), argue that the *Sophist* has aesthetics as one of its themes, or focuses on the dialogue as making an important contribution to our understanding of Plato's views on art or aesthetics.
- 3 At 230c-e the Stranger describes a 'cleansed' soul as one that belongs to a person free of false opinions and who believes it knows only what it does in fact know, and a most clean and beautiful soul as one that will really be happy (*eudaimonia*). Even though the context is a discussion of the kind of process of cross-examination that results in the person being questioned being disabused of their hitherto firmly held beliefs, and so of a process or method strongly associated with Socrates, who is present, the formulation of a clean soul at 230d leaves it an open question whether or not a cleansed person in fact has any knowledge. But if Socrates implies, through his repeated denials that he possesses any knowledge in other dialogues, that knowledge is not possible, the Stranger surely does not. On the contrary, he proposes that knowledge amounts to getting it right about which forms mix with which, which go through all, if some make others capable of blending through mixing with them, and whether others always cause divisions among kinds (253b-c). The person who has this knowledge, he says, is none other than the philosopher, who stands close to being, though divine being is so bright that his proximity to it leaves him difficult to make out (253c-254b). The Stranger then goes on to provide what looks like a series of proofs concerning precisely these relations among kinds or Forms, strongly implying that he takes it that knowledge about these is perfectly possible.
- 4 Michael Frede (1992: 201).
- 5 Plato makes it clear in the *Republic* that knowledge of the Forms, including those that correspond to justice, wisdom, courage, self-control, and piety, is integral to the guardians' development into virtuous people (475d-487b, 504c-d, 513b-c, 520c, 536a, cf. 520a-b, 521a, 506a-b, 540c). Thus, to the extent that the flourishing of the city is mirrored in the individual who achieves *eudaimonia*, the attainment of knowledge of the Forms, including the virtue Forms, is necessary for happiness.
- 6 *Symp.* 210c-e (translations from the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are those of Nehamas and Woodruff, in Cooper (ed.) (1997)).
- 7 Diotima says that the lover's soul is '... turned to the great sea of beauty, and, gazing upon this, he gives birth to many gloriously beautiful ideas and theories, in unstinting love of wisdom, until, having grown and been strengthened there, he catches sight of such knowledge, and it is the knowledge of such beauty [i. e. the Form of Beauty] ... (210d-e).
- 8 Later, Socrates declares that the philosopher, '... by consorting with what is divine and orderly ... himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can' (500c-d), and it is hard to imagine that this does not entail his being beautiful.
- 9 As if to echo the above mentioned claim in the *Republic* (see the previous n. 8), Socrates says that the soul of the philosopher, the person who has erotic relationships of this sort, is 'as perfect as perfect can be' (249c), an accolade that again strongly implies beauty.
- 10 I take it that the irony here lies in the attribution of wisdom to the famous sophist, and is not directed towards the strong association between beauty and wisdom in the soul.
- 11 Again, I take it that the irony is directed towards the attribution of such excellence to Socrates, not

- to the connection between virtue and beauty in the soul as such.
- 12 Is Plato sliding here from the claim that knowledge is of beautiful things (cities, theories, Forms, etc.), to the claim that knowledge is itself beautiful? If we grant Plato the distinction between knowledge as a state of the soul and knowledge as the set of propositions etc., that is the object of intellect or *nous*, but independent of any particular soul or intelligence that might come to be cognizant of it, and suppose that in the ascent passage of the *Symp.* he is availing himself of the latter, then the move may be less worrying. At least, it seems to me at any rate to be a short step from the idea that a mathematical proof is of something beautiful to the idea that the proof itself is beautiful—though there is no scope here to discuss the question, or its implications, in proper detail.
 - 13 I have deliberately left truth off this list, in order to claim only that truth is for Plato a necessary condition for knowledge, and avoid a stronger claim about the value of truth for Plato in the corpus generally, that it is valuable for its own sake. One obvious problem for the stronger claim is found in the *Republic*, where Socrates' claims about the general goodness and desirability of truth in books II and III (382b; 413a) is at least in tension with (and at worst contradicted by) his claim in book III that it is useful sometimes to lie, to produce a 'noble falsehood' (414b-c, cf. V 459c-d, II 378c-d). How to resolve the tension is a point of debate in the current literature. For example, Rachana Kamtekar (2006: 199) argues that the problematic reference to the 'noble falsehood' can be rendered less problematic by appeal to the notion of a deeper moral truth, while Raphael Woolf (2009: *passim*, but esp. 11-16) argues that the tension is best resolved by restricting the set of truths that are valuable in and by themselves, to a set of 'philosophical truths', truths about Forms, especially virtue Forms. I shall have nothing to say about that debate here; it is sufficient for my purposes if we take it that in the corpus generally, truth in general has an instrumental value with respect to knowledge acquisition and is valuable in itself in the case of truths about virtues. By the time he wrote the *Sophist* I am inclined to think that Plato would have endorsed the stronger claim about truth in light of the causal connection between falsehood and the ugliness of the soul argued for at 228a-d, which is not restricted to a discussion about propositions concerning the virtues (or Forms), discussed above. Nothing, however, depends upon the point.
 - 14 Cf. Frisbee Sheffield (2001)
 - 15 For a fuller discussion of goods that are not purely instrumental but also have intrinsic moral value for Plato, see Daniel Russell (2005: *passim* but esp. 21-42), though it should be noted that Russell prefers to speak of non-conditional and conditional goods rather than deploy the intrinsic / extrinsic distinction, as, e. g. it appears in Christine Korsgaard (1983). See also M.M. McCabe (2005: 199-200), for an examination and defense of a similar relation between wisdom and goodness and happiness in the *Euthydemus*.
 - 16 I take the Stranger to mean here that the members of these pairs thwart each other as a result of ignorance, and that the pairs sometimes even act against other pairs for the same reason.
 - 17 Cf. Benardete (1984: II.105), Benitez (1996: 36).
 - 18 As it stands, the reasoning here is poor. It needs to be supplemented by the later implication at 236c-e that the sophist is only concerned with appearances, and their suitability to persuade this person or that, rather than with the truth. Then it would follow that the sophist would only light upon the truth by sheer good fortune, but happily dispense with the truth-bearing or veridical appearance as it becomes expedient for the refutation at hand (cf. *Euthyd.* 272a-b).
 - 19 How should we understand the reference to colour at 235e? It is not clear from our dialogue, but perhaps Plato has in mind the practice of painters, reported by Aristotle at *de Sensu* 3 (440a7ff.), in which different colours are overlaid or superimposed upon one another to give the viewer the desired effect of the appearance of a different colour altogether. I am grateful to Richard Sorabji for drawing my attention to this passage.
 - 20 The Stranger seems at 236d to be expressing uncertainty as to whether to associate the sophist

- with appearance-making or likeness-making. However, he goes on at 236e, 240d, and again in the closing moments of the dialogue (see below) to do just that.
- 21 Note that Thrasymachus demands payment before answering Socrates' question 'what is justice?' (337d), and is prone to giving long speeches, as sophists were known to do (e. g. 343b-344c).
 - 22 I take Plato's point here against the sophists to be roughly consistent with Aristotle's view of courage in *Nic. Eth.* 3. Courage belongs, for Aristotle, in the realm of voluntary action and requires deliberation to the extent that courageous action and feeling is a consequence of a particular settled state of character, and this is something that is, in the long term, up to us (1114b21ff; cf. 1112a17-1113a12). Therefore in situations of sudden danger, the brave person behaves properly by being 'fearless and undisturbed' because of his state of character, rather than as a result of calculation and deliberation that is immediately prior (1117a17-22). Now, deliberation that produces the settled disposition of courage, for Aristotle, concerns things about which we should be fearful or confident (1113a30ff.). The courageous person understands the truth about these things, and so has a certain kind of practical knowledge of them, we learn in book 6, in virtue of possessing practical wisdom (1138b35ff.). To be sure, this knowledge is mere practical knowledge, not the higher knowledge of first principles that underpins the intellectual virtues, and so courage is by Aristotle's lights only a moral virtue, not an intellectual virtue. Nonetheless, the connection for Aristotle between courage and wisdom is clear enough (cf. 1117a22-8).
 - 23 Cf. the creation myth that Protagoras relates near the beginning of the *Protagoras*, in response to Socrates' question how virtue is teachable, which seems to trade heavily on popular beliefs (320d-328a). I do not mean to suggest, here, however, that sophists were simple slaves to popular opinion, which clearly they were not (see e. g. *Prot.* 352c-353b), but rather that they exploit popular opinion in cases where it will make whatever argument they are putting forward more persuasive.
 - 24 At 458c-d Callicles declares, having persuaded Gorgias to give a further public display of oratory (*epideiknusthai*, 447a) to Socrates and Chaerephon, who have just missed his presentation, that though he has attended many discussions before, the one currently being conducted between Socrates and Gorgias is giving him as much pleasure as any other, and he would be gratified if they would continue. I read Plato here as making it clear that the audience delights in the sorts of performances sophists routinely give, suggesting that, *inter alia*, it is pleasurable to see somebody outdone or confounded. This in turn gives further reasons for the enormous popularity of sophists among the youth of ancient Athens: their practice of sophistry is pleasurable to watch, and any audience member who manages to reproduce their arguments on his own later will manage to gratify himself with his abilities to confound others.
 - 25 *Gorg.*, 262d-e.
 - 26 For the view that in *Republic X*, the target of Plato's criticism is the audience, whose complicit role as cogenitors in the production of false appearances in the imitative arts makes them doxastically responsible for the harmful effects of this kind of art, see Verity Harte, 'Republic X and the Role of the Audience in Art', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (forthcoming).
 - 27 Cf. the *Rep.*, where the depiction of certain extreme behaviours (such as excessive grief) in dramatic theatre also aims at the effect of gratification and pleasure in the audience (603c-606b). This image or mimetic representation does not, however, aim to gratify by means of the production of a beautiful appearance (of something that is not in fact beautiful), but rather by means of an appearance that appeals to the audience in another way, namely, by indulging the baser appetitive part of the soul that takes excessive pleasure in displays of excessive emotion.
 - 28 Is this reading directly contradicted by Plato's banishment of the mimetic arts from the *kallipolis* in *Rep. X*? Although there is no scope to adequately address the issue here, it is sufficient for my purposes to point out that in the *Sophist* the Stranger is discussing the visual effect produced by a very limited range of mimetic artists. So although the artist aims at and is able to produce in

- the audience true and accurate beliefs about the sensible (or physical) characteristics of the object represented, nothing necessarily follows from this about Plato's (more complex) target in *Rep.* X, namely, the ability of the artist who crafts mimetic poetry to inculcate in the audience a set of false beliefs about moral or intellectual truths. See also section V below.
- 29 Plato's chosen form of presentation has recently generated considerable interest in the question of the relation between the dialogue form and the philosophical content of his work, some of which has focused on his later work and even the *Sophist* in particular (e. g., Klagge and Smith 1992; Gill & McCabe 1996; Frede 1996, 1992; Benitez 1996; McCabe 1998, 2000; Blondell 2002).
- 30 Heraclitus DK B1; B108, but see B50; Parmenides DK B1.14; 22–32.
- 31 Frede, 1996: 140-1.
- 32 Does the Stranger's insistence on a compliant interlocutor contradict my claim that Plato wishes the student to challenge the authority of the one offering the account or view? I think the Stranger's behaviour throughout the dialogue shows that it does not, that what the Stranger clearly means when he requests a tractable respondent is someone who will cooperate with the learning enterprise. That is, he wants someone who will *inter alia* answer honestly, not simply agree because he is in the habit of it, remember what has been said before, try hard to think of reasoned answers to the question put to him, and not someone who will, like a sophist or (perhaps one of his eager students) focus his energies instead on making clever objections wherever possible and generally trying to wrong-foot the Stranger and create controversies (232b-e). (For more on the pedagogical purpose of the role of the interlocutor in the *Sophist*, see below.)
- 33 222d9: *ou manthanō*; cf. 231b-c, 233a, 233e-234a, 242c, 249e, 251a, 257b.
- 34 227c, 229b, 232b-c, 232e, 233d, 236d, 239b, 249e-250a.
- 35 For instance, at 241a, the Stranger describes falsehood as saying that those which are are not, and that those which are not are. (As pointed out above, this is a summary of his more detailed claim in the preceding lines that falsehood says that what completely is in no way is, and that what is not is in a way (240e).) The previous conversation makes it plain that suitable examples of this are saying that something is small when it is in fact not small but large, or that something is hard when it is not hard but easy (234d), and is presented as analogous to an artisan who makes a large representation of something appear beautiful when it is in fact not beautiful but out of proportion (235e-236b). But then the Stranger asks Theaetetus whether the sophist will deny the charge, and adds that any reasonable person would want to reject it on the basis of what was said earlier (241a). Theaetetus understands that he is referring to Parmenides injunction against speaking of what is not. For the possibility of falsehood requires that they attach what is not to what is, the young man says,
- 36 and so they cannot consistently claim the possibility of falsehood as long as they accept this injunction. (For example, attaching the predicate 'not large' to what is in fact large in their description of the kind of falsehood the sophist inculcates in the young (234d), or their description of the appearance that the sophist creates as analogous to something that is 'not beautiful', even though it is presented as though it were (236b). See also 232a-c, 238d-239a, 249e-250a, 255b-c, 256c-d.)
- 37 Many of the most striking of which were listed in section 3 above.
- 38 As the Stranger warned at the outset, taking part in the investigation led by him in the manner he has witnessed before and learned well requires no small effort (217e3-4, 218c5-7, 218d3-4, cf. 217b2-4).
- 39 For further discussion of the *Sophist* as a *maieutic* dialogue, see my (2007: 317-19), on the *Theaetetus* as a *maieutic* dialogue, see Sedley (1996: 103; cf. 80, 95-6, 101-2; 2004: 5-35).
- 40 E.g. the Stranger's comparison of his experience with the friends of the Forms and their doctrine with Theaetetus' inexperience of them at 248b.
- 41 Benardete asks exactly the same question, but argues for quite the opposite view (1984: II.111).



Plato on Art, Perspective, and Beauty in the Sophist

His view is that the *Sophist* is a product of Plato's practice of the *phantastic*, not *eikastic*, art. This reading is in part a result of his understanding of all *phantasmata* as images distorted or corrected for perspective so as to truly represent (so every *phantasma* functions in the way in which the appearance produced by the imitative artist does), and all *eikastic* images as undistorted but also not adjusted for the audience's perspective (so that these images misrepresent in the sense that they do not put the audience in mind of the object with the correct characteristics or properties) (1984: II. 109-112). This reading seems to me to be untenable for the simple reason that the Stranger's point is that the sophist does not put his audience in mind of a true representation (i.e. a representation whose propositional content is true): the analogy between the appearance-making of sophistry and artistry comes apart at this point.

- 42 I am grateful to Richard Sorabji for making me think more carefully about this point.
- 43 607b-c. See also Janaway (2005: 7-13).
- 44 Nehamas (1988, 1999: 284-91).

