

Sophist

ΣΟΦΙΣΤΗΣ

Plato

tr. David Horan

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Well, Socrates, as agreed yesterday,¹ we have come in person, and appropriately we are bringing this stranger, one of the people from Elea, an associate of those who follow Parmenides and Zeno.² He is a man with a great love of wisdom.

In that case, Theodorus, are you unwittingly bringing in some god rather than a stranger, as Homer's phrase would have it, when he says that the gods in general, and the god of strangers in particular, become the companions of people who partake of true righteousness, to behold the excesses and the good order of humanity?³ So, perhaps this companion of yours may indeed be one of those higher powers, who is going to watch over and refute our sorry predicament in these arguments, as he is a god of refutation.

That is not the manner of this stranger, Socrates. No, he is more moderate than those who take controversies seriously. Indeed, the man does not seem to me to be a god at all, though he is certainly divine, for I refer to all philosophers as divine.

And rightly so, my friend. In fact, you could say that this kind is just as difficult to discern as that of the god. Because most people do not recognise them, they go in and out of the cities in all sorts of guises.⁴ And the actual philosophers, not the artificial ones, looking down from on high at the life of those below seem to some quite worthless, and to others most precious. Sometimes they appear as statesmen, at other times as sophists, and then again to some people they give the appearance of being utterly insane. Now, if it is acceptable to our stranger, I would like to find out from him what the people in his country think about these, and what names they use.

What are you referring to?

Sophist, statesman and philosopher.

What do you want to ask? What exactly is puzzling you about them?

This: whether they regard all of these as one or two, or, as the names imply, three, also distinguishing three kinds and applying a name individually to each.

Well, I don't think that he is at all reluctant to give an account of these. But what does our stranger say?

Just that, Theodorus. There is no reluctance at all, nor is there a problem stating that my people believe there are three. But to define what exactly each of them is would not be a simple or easy task.

Well now, Socrates, by chance you have introduced questions much like those we happened to be asking him before we came here, and he gave the same excuse to us at the time as he gave to you just now. However, he does say that he has heard enough, in detail, and has not forgotten it.

Then, stranger, do not deny us the first favour we ask, and tell us this much. Do you usually prefer to deliver a lengthy oration expressing what you wish to present to someone, in your own way? Or do you work through questioning, as Parmenides once did in my presence, as he expounded glorious arguments when I was young, while he was, by then, quite an elderly man indeed?⁵

Well, Socrates, this interactive approach is easier with someone who converses mildly and co-operatively, but otherwise it is better to do the talking oneself.

Then you may select any member of the company you wish, for they will all respond gently to you, though if you take my advice you will choose one of the young men – Theaetetus here – or any of the others whom you prefer.

Socrates, I feel a certain shame now at our first encounter for not making conversation based on short word-for-word exchanges instead of expounding a lengthy and prolonged oration all by myself, or with a respondent, as though I were putting on an exhibition. In fact, there is more to this than one might imagine from your question, and any account of it must be an extremely lengthy one. Then again, it seems to me discourteous and uncivil not to oblige you and these people, especially when you express it in this way. As for Theaetetus, well I unreservedly accept him as a partner in discourse, based on my own previous conversation, and your present recommendation.

Go ahead, dear stranger, and, as Socrates says, you will be doing us all a favour.

There is probably no more to be said on these issues, and from now on the discussion should be with you, Theaetetus. So, if the length of it causes problems, do not blame me for that. Blame these friends of yours instead.

Well, at the moment I don't think I shall give up on that account. However, if something like that does happen, we could involve Socrates here, the namesake of 'the' Socrates, as he is the same age as I am, we train together, and he is well used to working with me.

Well said, and you can make that decision for yourself as the discussion proceeds. But you and I should now investigate this together, beginning firstly, I believe, with the sophist, searching and clarifying through argument what precisely he is. Indeed, at the moment our only common possession is his name, though perhaps we have the function upon which we both confer that name, privately within ourselves. But we should always come to agreement on the issue itself through arguments rather than a mere name in the absence of argument. We intend to investigate this kind, the sophist, but

it is not the easiest thing in the world to comprehend what precisely he is. Now, whenever major issues need to be worked out properly, everyone has traditionally agreed that in such circumstances we should practise first with small and simple things before moving on to the greater. So now, Theaetetus, I am advising us, in view of the difficulty and elusiveness of the sophistic kind, to practise the method first on something simpler, unless you can suggest an easier way.

No, I cannot.

In that case, do you want us to resort to some ordinary example, and attempt to position it as a model for what's more important?

Yes.

Well then, what should we choose first as something minor and well known, and yet having an account no shorter than the important items? What about an angler, since he is readily recognisable to everyone without being of any great significance?

Just so.

Well, I hope he provides us with a method and an account that is suitable to our purposes.

That would be good.

Come on, let's begin as follows. Tell me whether we should propose that he is a skilled person or someone who is unskilled, but has some other power.

He is certainly not unskilled.

Well then, all skills belong basically to two forms.

How so?

Farming and the general care of any mortal creature, also the assembling or moulding of what we call household goods, and

the imitative skill, may all be most properly referred to by a single name.

How? What is it?

When a person brings something into being which previously was not, we usually say that he who brings it into being produces it, and whatever is brought into being is produced.

Correct.

And the power of everything we just mentioned is directed towards production.

That is indeed their direction.

Then we may refer to these by the general term 'productive'.

We may.

Now, besides this, there is the whole form that includes learning, knowledge acquisition, finance, sport and hunting. Although none of these actually manufacture anything, some manipulate by speech and action what has come into being or already exists, while others prevent anyone else from manipulating them. On this basis, all these subdivisions may very properly be said to constitute an acquisitive skill.

Yes, that would be appropriate.

Then, since all skills are either productive or acquisitive, in which of the two should we place angling, Theaetetus?

In the acquisitive. I suppose that is obvious.

But are there not two forms of the acquisitive, one being an exchange between willing participants through gifts, hire or purchase, while the rest includes all manipulation based upon word or deed, and this would be the manipulative skill?

It appears so anyway, from what has been said.

But what about this? Shouldn't the manipulative skill be divided into two?

In what way?

By designating all overt manipulation as competitive, and all manipulation by stealth as hunting.

Yes.

However, it would be unreasonable not to divide hunting in two.

Tell me how.

By categorising it as the hunting of living or lifeless prey.

Why yes, if there are indeed both.

How could there not be both? Though it is best to disregard the hunting of the inanimate, as it does not even have a name, except for certain parts of diving and other trifling activities of that sort. However, we should refer to the hunting of living creatures as animal hunting.

So be it.

Can't we also say, properly speaking, that animal hunting is twofold in form? One kind involving land animals is divided into many forms and names, while the other includes the swimming creatures and is generally called water animal hunting.

Yes, certainly.

Now, we observe that one class of swimming creatures has wings, while the other lives in the water.

Obviously.

And the hunting of the winged kind is generally referred to as fowling, I suppose.

Yes, that's what it's called.

While the hunting of the water dwellers is, in general, termed fishing.

Yes.

What about this? Can't we also divide this hunting again into two broad significant parts?

Based upon what?

Based on whether they conduct the hunt with traps or by striking.

What do you mean? And how do you distinguish between these?

Well, whatever encloses something, and completely surrounds it to imprison it, may properly be called a trap.

Yes, certainly.

So, baskets, nets, snares, nooses and the like must obviously be referred to as traps.

Indeed.

Then we shall say that this part of hunting is trapping, or something of that sort.

Yes.

But, Theaetetus, hunting effected by impact with hooks or tridents is different from this, and should now be referred to by the single word 'striking', unless someone has a better suggestion.

Let's not bother about the name, this one will suffice.

Well, I believe that striking that occurs at night by firelight is referred to by the hunters themselves as fire-hunting.

It is, indeed.

While striking conducted in daylight is generally termed barbing, as both the tridents and the hooks are barbed at the

tip.

Yes, that's what it is called.

Now, this striking by barbing, when performed from above upon prey which is below, is called tridentry, I believe, as it is usually done using tridents.

Well, that's what some people call it.

However, there is, so to speak, only one form still left.

What is it?

The kind which delivers the blow which is opposite to the trident and is effected with a hook, but not to any random part of the body of the fish, but always to the head and mouth of the victim, pulling him upwards from below with rods or sticks. By what name shall we say this process should be called, Theaetetus?

Well, we proposed earlier that we needed to discover something, and I think our search has just been concluded.

So, now you and I have come to agreement not just about the name of angling, but we have also acquired a satisfactory account of the function itself. Indeed, from the totality of skills, one half was acquisitive, half of the acquisitive was manipulative, and half of manipulative was hunting. Half of hunting was animal-hunting, and half of animal-hunting was water animal-hunting. The lower division of water animal-hunting was fishing, and half of fishing was striking, and half of striking was barbing. Now, the barbing by a blow which pulls upwards from below has a name which reflects this activity, and this is the angling for which we have been seeking.

Yes, that has certainly been made abundantly clear.

Come now, let's try to find out what exactly a sophist is, based upon this model.

Yes, certainly.

Now, the first question we asked was whether we should regard the angler as an ordinary man, or as someone with a skill.

Yes.

And shall we now propose, Theaetetus, that this other man is an ordinary man, or in truth utterly wise?

He is certainly not an ordinary man. However, I understand what you mean, as he falls far short of the wisdom which his name implies.⁶

But it seems we must propose that he has some skill.

Well, in that case, what precisely would it be?

By the gods, have we ignored the fact that this man is related to the other man?

Who is related to whom?

The angler to the sophist.

In what way?

To me they are both quite obviously hunters of some sort.

What is the hunt of the sophist? We have said what the other man hunts.

We somehow divided all hunting into two parts just now, one of swimming creatures and the other of land creatures.

Yes.

And we went on to discuss those swimming creatures who live in water, while we left the land animals undivided, though we said there were many forms.

Certainly.

So, beginning with the acquisitive skill, the sophist and the angler proceed together up to this point.

So it seems, anyway.

However, they diverge when it comes to animal hunting, and one will hunt animals in seas, rivers and lakes.

Of course.

While the other will hunt by land, and in quite different rivers of wealth and youth, which are like abundant meadows, in order to manipulate the creatures in them.

What do you mean?

There are two significant parts of land animal hunting.

What are they?

One is of the tame and the other of the wild.

Is there any hunting of tame animals?

Yes, if man is indeed a tame animal. But propose whatever you like, either that no animal is tame, or that some other animal is tame while man is wild, or that man is actually tame but in your opinion there is no hunting of men whatsoever. Make whatever one of these statements pleases you, and let that be our definition.

Well, I believe that we are tame creatures, and I say that there is hunting of men.

Let's declare that tame animal hunting also has a twofold division.

On what basis is that said?

By defining piracy, enslavement, tyranny, and everything military under the single heading of violent hunting.

Good.

And by then referring to skill in winning court cases, speaking to crowds, and general conversation, all together, as the single skill of persuasion.

Correct.

Now, we should say that there are two kinds of persuasion.

What are they?

One operates in private, the other in public.

Yes, each of these does constitute a form.

Now, isn't the hunting of private persons, for its part, either reward-accepting or gift-bearing?

I do not understand.

It seems you have not yet paid attention to the hunting carried out by lovers.

To what aspect?

That besides everything else, they bestow gifts on those whom they hunt.

Very true.

Well, let this form then be called the skill of love.

Certainly.

But the form which accepts reward converses for the sake of gratification, and lays its bait entirely through pleasure, demanding only its own sustenance as a reward. And I think we would all refer to this as flattery, a skill in making things pleasant.

Yes, what else could it be?

However, when it professes to carry on its discourse as though for the sake of excellence, and exacts a financial reward, doesn't that kind deserve a different name from the previous one?

Yes, it must.

What name? Try to say.

Well, it's obvious. Indeed, we seem to me to have discovered the sophist. So, having said that, I think I would be calling it by the appropriate name.

Then it seems, Theaetetus, based on the present account, that what must be referred to as sophistry is an acquisitive skill of hunting live, land-dwelling prey, hunting humans privately for money payment, which seems to be educational, and is a hunt for rich and famous young men. That is what our current argument concludes.

Entirely so.

Let's take a further look at this. For what we are pursuing belongs to no ordinary skill but to an extremely variegated one. And, indeed, in our previous deliberations, the appearance is given that it is not what we are now saying it is, but is a different kind.

In what way?

The acquisitive skill somehow was a twofold form, one part was hunting and the other exchange.

It was, indeed.

Should we now declare that there are two forms of exchange, one based on gifts, the other on purchase?

Let's say so.

And we shall actually go on to say that purchasing is divided in two.

How?

By distinguishing between the sale of one's own productions, which is 'self-selling', and dealing in the productions of others, which is barter.

Yes, certainly.

What about this? Don't we refer to barter within the city, which is roughly half of it, as retailing?

Yes.

And the barter between one city and another, by sale and purchase, as trading?

Of course.

Have we not observed that there is trading which, in one case, exchanges for money whatever sustains and provides for the body, and, in another case, whatever sustains and provides for the soul?

What do you mean by that?

Perhaps we don't recognise this in relation to the soul, though we do presumably understand the other instance.

Yes.

Well, let's speak about music and skills in general, which are constantly going from city to city, being bought in one place, brought somewhere else and sold. Paintings, entertainments and much else besides are brought in and sold, some for the delight, others for the more serious intent, of the soul. Now, a buyer or seller of these has as much right to be called a trader as those who sell food and drink.

What you say is very true.

And shouldn't a man who buys up items of knowledge, and goes from city to city exchanging them for money, also be called by the same name?

Quite emphatically.

Now, one part of this trading for the benefit of the soul may properly be called exhibiting, and the other part is just as ridiculous, but nevertheless, since it is the actual sale of

knowledge, it must be assigned a name relevant to this activity. Is this not so?

Yes, certainly.

Therefore, the part of this knowledge-selling which relates to the subjects of the other skills should be called that, while the part which deals with the subject of excellence should be called something else.

Of course.

Well, in the case of the other subjects, skill-selling would be an appropriate name. Now, you must try to give the name of the part which deals with excellence.

Indeed, it is the very object of our search! What other name could you safely utter? It is the sophistic kind.

None other. Come on, we shall summarise this now by saying that sophistry has made its second appearance as part of the acquisitive skill, which exchanges by purchasing through trading, which is for the benefit of the soul, and traffics in words and knowledge concerning excellence.

Exactly.

Actually, I think you have a third instance. For if one of them settled down in the city and proposed to make a living by buying some knowledge, and also fabricating his own knowledge on the same subjects, and making sales, presumably you would call him by the exact same name as you used just now.

I would have to.

And so, the part of the acquisitive skill which involves exchange by purchasing, whether by retailing or self-selling, in either case whatever involves selling knowledge in this way, you would presumably refer to, always, as sophistic.

I must, for I need to keep following the argument.

Then let's proceed to consider if the kind which we are pursuing actually bears a resemblance to something like this.

Like what?

We said that the acquisitive skill had a competitive part.

Yes, we did.

So, quite predictably, we divide it in two.

Tell me how it is done.

By designating one part as contentious and the other as combative.

That's it.

Is it quite reasonable and appropriate then, to assign a name such as 'violent' to the part of the combative which pitches bodies against one another?

Yes.

And when it is one argument against another, what else can we call it, Theaetetus, except disputatious?

Nothing.

And we should propose that the part concerned with disputes is twofold.

How so?

Well, when it is conducted in public, with one long speech opposing another, and the concern is justice and injustice, then it is a judicial dispute.

Yes.

However, when it is done in private, and has been broken up into questions and answers, is there anything else we usually call it except contradiction?

Nothing.

And the sort of contradiction which argues about contracts and proceeds at random and without skill, this should be designated as a particular form, since the discussion recognises it as separate. However, our predecessors never gave it a name, nor would it be worth our while to do so now.

True, for it has such minute and multifarious sub-divisions.

But when it does involve a skill, and disputes comprehensively about justice itself and injustice and about other matters, don't we usually refer to it as argumentative?

What else could we call it?

Now, there is a form of the argumentative which wastes money, and a form which makes money.

There certainly is.

Well, let's try to say what names should be given to each of them.

Yes, we should do that.

Now, I think that when the pleasure of engaging in these leads to neglect of one's own affairs, and the speech affords no pleasure to the many people who hear it, then in my opinion it is nothing other than talkativeness.

Yes, that's the sort of thing that is said about it.

Then, the opposite of this makes money from private arguments, and it is now your turn to try to name it.

Indeed, what else can one say without falling into error, except that a wondrous creature has turned up again for the fourth time, the object of our pursuit, the sophist.

So, our argument has now revealed further that the sophist is none other than the money-making kind, as it seems, belonging to the argumentative, contradictory, disputatious,

combative, competitive skill in acquisition.

Yes, certainly.

Now do you see how true it is that this is a creature of many aspects who will not be "captured with one hand", as the saying goes?

Then we must use both!

Yes, we must. And we should do this to the best of our ability by pursuing a particular mark of his. Tell me, then, do we have certain names for common household tasks?

Indeed there are many, but what sort of tasks are you asking about?

We refer to tasks such as filtering, sifting, sieving and winnowing.

Of course.

And in addition to these, there is dressing wool, spinning, adjusting the web, and we know countless other such terms which are involved in the skills. Is this so?

What quality of them do you wish to demonstrate when you give these examples and ask about them all?

All of these terms somehow refer to discrimination.

Yes.

Then, according to my argument, we should assign one name to the single skill which is involved in them all.

What shall we call it?

Discrimination.

So be it.

Well, let's see if there is any way that we can proceed to discern two forms of this.

You are asking me to think very quickly.

And yet in the distinctions we described, one separated worse from better, another like from like.

When you put it like that it appears so anyway.

Now, I do not have a name for the second one, but I do have a name for discrimination, which leaves the better and discards the worse.

Say it.

All such discrimination is, as I understand it, referred to by everyone as purification.

Yes, that's what it is called.

And couldn't everyone see that purification has two forms?

Given time, perhaps. However it is not obvious to me at the moment.

Well, it is surely appropriate to comprehend the many forms of bodily purification under a single name.

What are they? And what is this name?

There are those which apply to living creatures and effect purification within the body, making proper divisions by means of gymnastics or medicine, and outside the body through the process of bathing. These we regard as commonplace. There are also those affecting inanimate things which are cared for by wool-dressing and adorning in general, and are given numerous trivial and apparently ridiculous names.

Very much so.

They certainly are, Theaetetus. However, it is of no particular concern to the method based on arguments, whether purification by washing or medication benefits us much or little. For it endeavours to discern the inter-relation and

non-relation of all the skills, with the aim of acquiring intelligence, and to that end it respects them all equally. Indeed, because of their similarity, this method does not believe that one is more ridiculous than another. And it does not regard a person as more important if he exemplifies his skill in hunting through generalship, rather than louse-catching, though it will probably regard him as more pretentious. Now, let's go back to the question you asked. What name shall we assign to the collective capacities whose function is to purify living and lifeless bodies? And it will make no difference to this method whether the title sounds impressive or not, as long as it separates out whatever purifies the soul, and combines whatever purifies anything else. Indeed, if we do in fact understand its intention, this method has attempted to separate mental purification from the others.

But I do understand, and I agree that there are indeed two forms of purification, though one form is concerned with the soul, which is separate from the one concerned with the body.

Really excellent! Now, listen to the next aspect, and try in turn to cut that form in two.

I shall try to make this division on whatever basis you suggest.

Do we say that vice in the soul is something different from excellence?

What else could we say?

And purification was the casting aside of whatever was in any way base, leaving the other part.

Yes, it was.

So then, to whatever extent we discern any removal of badness from the soul, we may properly refer to that process

as purification.

Very much so.

Now we should state that there are two forms of badness of the soul.

What are they?

One is like a disease in the body, while the other is like a deformity that arises.

I do not understand.

Perhaps you think that disease and discord are not the same?

Again, I do not know how to respond to this.

Do you believe that discord is anything other than disagreement, born of some corruption, among naturally kindred elements?

Nothing other.

And is deformity anything other than the absence of measure, a characteristic which is ugly in every case?

Nothing else.

What about this? In the souls of base people, don't we observe that opinions are opposed by desires, spirit by pleasures, and reason by aversions, and that all these are opposed to one another?

Very much so.

However, all of these are necessarily kindred.

Of course.

So, we shall be right in referring to vice as discord and disease of the soul.

Absolutely right.

What about this? If things that partake of motion and have been assigned some target wander off that target with every attempt, and miss the mark, would we say that this happens to them through proper measure in relation to one another, or alternatively through lack of measure?

Obviously through lack of measure.

Now, we do know that any soul which is ignorant of anything is ignorant unwillingly.

Very much so.

And, indeed, ignorance is nothing but the disordered thinking of a soul, intent upon truth, whose understanding goes astray.

Yes, certainly.

So we must propose that an ignorant soul is deformed and lacking in measure.

So it seems.

Now, there are, it appears, two kinds of badness in the soul. One, which most people call vice, is clearly a disease of the soul.

Yes.

The other they call ignorance, but they are unwilling to agree that it is a badness arising only in the soul.

It certainly should be conceded, though I doubted it now when you said that there are two kinds of badness in the soul, and that cowardice, lack of restraint, and injustice should all be regarded as a disease within us, while the many varieties of ignorance should be designated as deformity.

Now, in the case of the body, aren't there two skills relating to the two conditions?

What are the two?

Gymnastic for deformity and medicine for disease.

Clearly.

And when it comes to violence, injustice and cowardice, surely punishment is the skill which is naturally closer to justice than any other?

Quite likely. At least that's what people think.

What about the other case? Could anyone prescribe anything more appropriate than teaching to remedy ignorance in its entirety?

Not at all.

Come now. Should we say that there is only one kind of teaching, or are there more, two of which are the most significant? Consider this.

I am considering it.

Well, I think the quickest way for us to find out would be as follows.

How?

By seeing whether ignorance has somehow got a division in the middle of it. For if it is twofold, it is obvious that teaching must also have two parts, one corresponding to each kind of ignorance.

Yes, but is the division we are now looking for becoming evident to you?

Well, I think I can discern a distinct form of ignorance which is extensive and problematic, and as weighty as all the other parts put together.

What is it?

Being of the opinion that you know something when you do not know. It is likely that this is how all mistaken thinking

arises in everyone.

True.

And, indeed, it is only this form of ignorance which is given the name of foolishness.

Yes, certainly.

Now then, what should we call the part of teaching which does away with this foolishness?

Well, stranger, I believe that the other part of it is called technical instruction, while this part, among ourselves in the city at any rate, is called education.

Almost all the Greeks do the same, Theaetetus. However, we shall still need to consider whether education is completely indivisible, or has some subdivision worth naming.

Yes, we should consider that.

It seems to me that there is a way of dividing this further.

On what basis?

There seems to be a part of teaching in discourse, which is a rougher method, and another one, which is smoother.

Can we say what sort of methods they are?

Well, there is the traditional method which fathers use towards their sons, a method still used by many today whereby they either get angry with them whenever they fall into error, or else resort to more gentle exhortation. This may in general most correctly be called didactic.

So it is.

However some people, having considered this for themselves, seem to conclude that all ignorance is involuntary, that no one who thinks that he is wise will ever wish to learn about matters of which he thinks himself knowledgeable, and that

after a lot of trouble, the didactic form of education accomplishes little.

A correct conclusion.

Accordingly, they set about the eradication of this opinion in another way.

What way?

They question him on matters about which he believes he is talking sense, when he is talking nonsense. They readily discover that his opinions are quite confused. So, by arguments, they gather the opinions together and place them side by side, and then they show him that these contradict themselves, about the same issues, in the same ways, and on the same basis. And those who recognise this become angry with themselves and gentle towards others, and they are liberated by this method from their exalted and fixed views about themselves. Their liberation brings the greatest delight to those who hear it, and constancy to those who experience it. Indeed, dear child, the physicians of the body recognise that the body derives no benefit from any food it is offered until the internal impediments are first removed. So too these purifiers of the soul understand that the soul will obtain no advantage from any learning which it is offered until someone resorts to refutation, and brings the man who is refuted to a condition of humility where the impediments to learning have been removed, he is rendered pure, and he thinks that he knows only what he does actually know, and nothing more.

And this is surely the best and most sound-minded condition to be in.

Now, on account of all this, Theaetetus, we must also state that refutation is the greatest and most powerful of purifications, and we must realise that the unrefuted man, even if he happens to be the Great King,⁷ is utterly unpurified,

and is both uneducated and deformed, where a man who intends to be truly happy should be most pure and good.

Entirely so.

Well then, what shall we call those who employ this skill? Indeed, I am afraid to say sophists.

Why is that?

In case I assign them too much honour.

But surely the people we are discussing bear some resemblance to sophists.

Yes, and so does a wolf to a dog, the fiercest animal to the tamest. And a cautious man must always be on his guard, especially when dealing with resemblances, for they are a most slippery class. Anyway, let them be called sophists, for I don't think that disputes over minor distinctions will arise once people are sufficiently vigilant.

No, it is quite unlikely.

So let there be a purificatory part of the skill of discrimination, and from purification let us separate out the part which deals with the soul. Let teaching be part of this, and let education be part of teaching, and let us say that the part of education which brings about refutation of a vain presumption to wisdom turns out in our present argument to be nothing other than the noble kind of sophistry.

Well, let's say so. But on account of the multiplicity of manifestations, I am now perplexed about what exactly I should say that the sophist really is with any confidence that I am speaking the truth.

Your perplexity is to be expected. But you must also appreciate that the man himself is intensely perplexed by now as to how he will continue to evade this argument. Indeed, the proverb is right in saying that "it is not easy to escape all the

grips of the wrestler". So now is the very best moment, and we must set upon him.

Well said.

Well, now that we have stopped, let's catch our breath first, and while we are resting let's count up for ourselves how many times the sophist has appeared to us. Now, I think he was first discovered as the paid hunter of the young and wealthy.

Yes.

And secondly as a trader in things which are learned by the soul.

Yes, certainly.

And didn't he appear for the third time as a retailer of the same things?

Yes, and for the fourth time selling his own knowledge himself.

Your recollection is correct. Now I shall try to remember the fifth. Indeed, he was a contestant in verbal competitiveness, specialising in the argumentative skill.

He was, indeed.

Well, although the sixth was actually disputed, we agreed nevertheless to propose that he is a purifier of souls from opinions that are an impediment to learning.

Yes, entirely so.

Well, do you appreciate that when someone appears knowledgeable about many subjects but is called by the name of a single skill, this appearance is not sound? Rather, it is obvious that whoever experiences this in relation to any skill is unable to discern clearly that aspect of the skill that all these understandings look to. Consequently he assigns

multiple names, rather than one, to whoever possesses them.

It's likely that this happens in exactly the way you describe.

Let's ensure that it does not happen to us in our search, due to laziness. Rather, let us first take one of the statements about the sophist again, as there was one which did seem particularly revealing to me.

Which one?

We said that he was a contradictor.

Yes.

What else? Isn't he also a teacher of others, in this particular skill?

Yes, indeed.

Let's consider this. In what realm do these men claim that they can turn people into contradictors? Our enquiry should begin as follows. Do they render people competent in contradicting about the divine realm which is unmanifest to the multitude?

Well that is what people say, anyway.

And what about the manifest realm of earth and sky, and the subjects associated with them?

These too.

In fact, whenever something is said in private gatherings concerning the entire field of becoming or being, we are aware, aren't we, that these men are brilliant at arguing against it, and they enable others to do the same.

Entirely so.

And again, don't they also promise to enable people to dispute about laws, and affairs of state in general?

Indeed, no one, or hardly anyone, would converse with them unless they made that promise.

Indeed, for each and every skill, what is needed in each case to argue against the practitioner himself has presumably been composed, written down, and published for anyone who wishes to learn.

You seem to me to be referring to the writings of Protagoras,⁸ on wrestling and the other subjects.

And of many others besides, blessed man. However, doesn't this skill in contradiction seem, in short, to be a power which is up to the task of disputation on all subjects.

Well, there is nothing it seems to leave out.

Well, by the gods, child, do you think this is possible? For perhaps you young people may view this matter with more insight, while we older men are more dim.

What matter? What exactly are you referring to? I do not quite understand what you are asking me now.

Whether it is possible for a human being to know all things.

In that case, stranger, the human race would indeed be blessed.

Then how could someone who is not knowledgeable himself ever say anything worthwhile when he contradicts a person who knows?

He simply cannot do so.

Well, what on earth can this wondrous sophistic power be?

Wondrous in what way?

In the way that they are somehow able to arm young people with the belief that they are wiser than everyone about everything. For it is obvious that if the sophists neither contradicted properly nor gave that appearance to the young,

or again if they did give that appearance but were not regarded as more learned due to this disputatiousness, then according to you hardly anyone would want to pay money to become their pupils in these subjects.

Hardly anyone indeed.

But nowadays they want to do this.

Very much so.

Presumably because the sophists are believed to be knowledgeable themselves with regard to whatever they contradict.

That must be so.

And are we saying that they may contradict every proposition?

Yes.

So they will appear to their pupils to be wise about everything.

They must.

But they are not, for this turned out to be impossible.

Yes, it must be impossible.

So our sophist has turned out to have an opinion-based knowledge about everything, but not truth.

Yes, certainly. And what we are now saying is probably the most accurate thing we have said about these fellows.

Well, let's take a clearer example of this.

What sort of example?

As follows. Apply your mind to this and try to answer really well.

Answer what?

If someone were to maintain that on account of a single skill he knew not how to speak and argue, but how to do and make everything there is...

What do you mean by everything?

You immediately fail to understand the point of what was said. In fact, it seems you do not understand the phrase 'everything there is'.

No, I do not.

Well, I am saying that you and I are included in 'everything', as well as all the other animals and plants.

What do you mean?

If someone said he was going to make you and me, and all the other creatures...

What could he mean by 'making'? Indeed, you are not actually referring to some sort of farmer, since you are also talking about a maker of animals.

And also of sea and earth, sky and gods, and everything else there is. What's more, he makes them quickly and sells each of them for very little money.

You are describing some sort of game.

Indeed. Mustn't you regard it as a game when someone says that he knows everything and would teach this to someone else for a small sum in a short time?

Entirely so.

And do you know of any form of game more skilled and elegant than that of imitation?

Not at all. Indeed, you have proposed a very extensive form, all captured in a single word, more diverse than almost anything else.

And so we appreciate that a man who professes to be able to make everything by means of a single skill, will be able to make imitations with the same names as the real objects by means of the skill in painting, and to deceive the less intelligent of the young children, who view the paintings from afar, into believing that he is entirely competent to complete any task he wishes.

How could he fail?

Now, shouldn't we presume that there is some other skill involving words by which one could beguile the young through their ears with words, while they are still at a far remove from matters of truth, showing them verbal images of everything so as to make the statements seem true, and the speaker seem the wisest of all men on every issue?

Yes, there would be another skill like this, wouldn't there?

Now, Theaetetus, most of those when they hear this, must, given enough time and advance in years, encounter things that are, and be compelled through their experiences to get a clear apprehension of things that are. This changes the opinions they once held, so that what was significant will appear trivial and what was easy will appear difficult, and all the illusions created by words will be turned completely upside down by the practical situations which they encounter. Is this so?

Yes, as far as I can judge at my age anyway. But I believe that I am one of those who are "still at a far remove from matters of truth".

In that case, all of us here will try, and indeed are trying, to draw you as close as possible to the truth in the absence of these experiences. So now, tell me something about the sophist. Is it clear by now that he is a sort of beguiler who imitates things that are, or are we still hesitating, in case he

truly possesses as many items of knowledge as the number of subjects on which he seems to be able to practise contradiction?

How could he, stranger? No. It is fairly clear by now from what has been said, that he is one of the huge number of people involved in entertainment.

Well, in that case, we should propose that he is a beguiler and a sort of imitator.

What else could we propose?

Come now, our task at this stage is to make sure that the creature does not get away. Indeed, we have almost captured him in a sort of web of devices involving our statements about these matters. Consequently, he will never escape the next proposal.

What is it?

That he is someone who belongs to the wonder-working kind.

And I agree with that statement about him at least.

It is accepted then that we should divide the image-making skill immediately, and descend into it, and if the sophist opposes us there, arrest him on the orders of lordly reason, hand him over to that king, and publicise his capture. But if he should somehow dive down into the subdivisions of the skill of imitation, we shall follow along, and continually divide the part which contains him until he has been caught. There is no way that this, or any other kind, will ever boast of escaping the method of those who are thus able to proceed in this way, based upon both the particular and the general.

Well said! We should do as you say.

Now, based upon the process of division we have been using, it seems to me that I can now discern two forms of imitative skill, but I don't think that I can yet figure out which of them

contains the object of our search.

You should first say what the two forms are, and then make the division for us.

I can see one skill within it, the skill in making imitations. This is most in evidence when someone produces the imitation according to the proportions of length, breadth and depth of the original, with the appropriate colours being assigned to each part.

Yes, but isn't that what all imitators try to do?

Not in the case of those who somehow fashion or draw huge works of art. Indeed, if they were to give true proportions to the limbs, you know that the upper parts would appear smaller than they should and the lower parts larger, because one is viewed from a distance and the other from close up.

Yes, certainly.

So these craftsmen nowadays set the truth aside, and fashion into their images not the actual proportions, but those which will seem to be beautiful, do they not?

Entirely so.

So, in the first case, where it is different but like, is it fair to call it a likeness?

Yes.

And the part of the skill of imitation that deals with this should be called what we called it before, likeness-making.

Yes, it should be called that.

But what about something that appears to resemble the beautiful, because the viewpoint is unfavourable, but is not like what it is said to be like, once someone is able to get a proper view of such an object? What should we call this? Well, since it appears to be like, though it is unlike, should we call it

an appearance?

Yes, indeed.

And isn't this very common in painting, and in imitation generally?

Of course.

And wouldn't it be best if we referred to the skill which produces appearances rather than likenesses as appearance-making?

Very much so.

Now, these are the two forms of image-making I was talking about - likeness-making and appearance-making.

Correct.

And yet, even now I am not able to see an obvious solution to the issue that bothered me earlier, in which of these two should the sophist be placed. Yes, the man is really wondrous, and extremely hard to catch clear sight of, since even now he has taken refuge very nicely and cleverly in a form which is hard to examine thoroughly.

So it seems.

Now, are you agreeing because you recognise this, or have you been drawn along by the force of the argument to agree quickly out of habit?

How? What are you referring to?

We really are involved in an extremely difficult investigation, my friend. Indeed this appearing, and seeming without being, and saying things which are not actually true, all these are now full of difficulties, and they always have been. For it is extremely difficult, Theaetetus, to maintain that there really is false speech and false thinking, without being involved in contradictions as soon as this is said.

What contradictions?

This statement has dared to propose that what is not, is. For otherwise falsehood would not have come into being. But, my boy, beginning when we were children up until his death, the great Parmenides emphasised this to us, stating in prose what he also says in verse. "Never shall this be proved that things that are not, are, but do thou, in thine enquiry, hold back thy thought from this way."⁹ So that is the testimony of the great man. But in fact, the statement itself would reveal most if it were probed moderately. So first let's spend a while looking at this, if it makes no difference to you.

I accept anything you propose. So just proceed by considering how the argument may best unfold, and lead me also along that path.

Well, that's what must be done. So tell me, would we dare to use the expression 'that which in no way is'?

Well, why not?

If one of his pupils who had considered this were asked, not for the sake of argument or sport, but seriously, to tell us to what the expression 'what is not' should be applied, what do we think he would say? To what sort of thing would he apply the phrase himself? To what would he apply it, and how would he explain this to the questioner?

You have asked a difficult question, and it is almost completely impossible for someone like me to answer it.

Well, isn't it obvious in any case that the term 'what is not' may not be applied to any of the things that are?

No, how could it?

Then, since it is not actually applicable to what is, neither may it be applied to something.

Indeed not.

And presumably it is clear to us that we always use the word 'something' in relation to what is, for it is impossible to use this word on its own, naked and isolated from all of the things that are. Is this so?

Yes, it's impossible.

Do you agree because you recognise that when speaking of 'something' we must be speaking of some one thing?

That's right.

Yes, indeed. And you will agree that 'some thing' indicates one, and 'some things' indicates two or many.

How could I disagree?

Well then, when not speaking of something, it is most necessary, it seems, that we are speaking of absolutely nothing.

Yes, it is most necessary.

Could we ever agree that such a person is speaking at all, when he is speaking of nothing? No, we should not even say that a man is speaking when he tries to utter what is not.

This argument should end our perplexity anyway.

Don't make extravagant claims yet, my friend, for there are other perplexities. Indeed, the greatest and first of them actually relates to the very principle involved here.

What do you mean? Speak, and do not hesitate at all.

If we take something that is, I presume we may add to it something else that is.

Of course.

But shall we say that it is ever possible to add anything which is, to what is not?

No, how could we?

Now, we include number in general among things that are.

Well, if we propose that anything is, we must surely propose that number is.

Therefore we should not even attempt to apply number, be it multiple or be it one, to 'what is not'.

Well, the argument does seem to indicate that it would not be appropriate to attempt this.

How, then, could anyone either utter through the mouth, or in any way comprehend in thought, things that are not, or what is not, in the absence of number?

Tell me why not.

Well, whenever we say 'things that are not', aren't we trying to attribute multiplicity of number to them?

Yes, indeed.

But whenever we say 'what is not', we attribute one in that case, do we not?

Well, that is very clear, anyway.

And yet we have been saying that it is neither proper nor correct to try to attach being to non-being.

What you are saying is perfectly true.

Do you appreciate then that it is not possible to utter correctly, or speak of or think of non-being just by itself? It is rather unthinkable, unspeakable and unutterable, and there is no account thereof.

Entirely so.

In that case, wasn't I mistaken earlier when I said that I was going to state the greatest perplexity involved here, when another even greater perplexity may be stated?

What perplexity?

You surprise me! Do you not realise from what has already been said, that 'what is not' reduces even the person who tries to refute it to such perplexity that it forces him to contradict himself on the issue?

What are you saying? Make this a bit clearer.

Don't look to me for clarity. For although I am proposing that what is not must partake neither of one nor of many, I said, both then and now, that it is one, for I said 'what is not'. Do you understand?

Yes.

And what's more, I actually said a little earlier that it is unutterable, unspeakable, and there is no account thereof. Do you follow?

Yes, of course.

So in trying to associate 'being' with this, am I not contradicting what I said before?

It appears that you are.

Then again, when I applied the word 'that' to it, wasn't I referring to it as one?

Yes.

And, indeed, in saying that there is 'no word' for it, and it is 'unspeakable' and 'unutterable', I used a statement that implies one.

Of course.

And yet we say that properly speaking it should not be defined as one, or many, or be called 'it' at all, for the use of this phrase would attribute the form of one.

Entirely so.

Well, what is to be said about me? It turns out that the refutation of non-being is again defeating me. So, as I said, we should not look to my pronouncements for the correct manner of speaking about 'what is not'. Instead, let it be your turn, and let's consider what you say.

What are you referring to?

Since you are young, you should come before us, fair and noble, exert yourself, and try your very best to make some correct utterance about this without attributing being, or one, or numerical multiplicity to what is not.

It would be strange if I had any great desire to attempt this myself in the light of what has happened to you.

Well, if that's what you think, then let's forget about you and me. Until we encounter someone who can do what I asked you to do, we should say that the sophist has very cunningly dived down into a place we cannot enter.

That is certainly how it seems.

Well, in that case, if we say that he has some skill which involves appearances, he will readily attack us for this usage of words, and turn those words against us by asking what precisely we mean at all by 'image' when we refer to him as an image-maker. So consider, Theaetetus, how we should respond to this impetuous questioning.

Obviously we are talking about images both in water and in mirrors, and also paintings, sculptures, and all the other varied productions of this sort.

Apparently, Theaetetus, you have never seen a sophist.

Why do you say that?

He will have you thinking that his eyes are shut or that he has no eyes.

How?

If you were to answer him in that way and refer to mirror images or fashioned images, he would laugh at your words for speaking as though he was a man who could see. He would pretend that he recognised neither mirror nor water, nor had any sight at all, and would just ask you something about your words.

What would he ask about?

In all these instances, and you say that there are many, you decided to employ a single word, and you used the word 'image' as one term applicable to all the instances. So defend this. Speak, and do not yield any ground to this fellow.

Well, stranger, what else can we say an image is except another sort of object made like the true object?

Are you speaking of another sort of true object? Or what do you mean by 'sort of object'?

It is not true at all, but like the true.

Are you saying that the true object actually is?

Just so.

And what about this? Is the not true opposite to the true?

Of course.

So, are you saying that the likeness actually is not, if you say that it is not true?

Yet somehow or other it is.

Though you are not saying that it truly is.

Indeed not. However, it is actually an image.

So, while it actually is not, it is actually what we call an image.

It really seems that something like this combines what is with what is not, and is very strange.

Indeed, how could it be otherwise? And now you may see that our many-headed sophist, by means of this interchanging, has compelled us against our will to agree that what is not somehow is.

I see it, indeed.

And now, shall we be able to define this skill of his without contradicting ourselves?

In what way? What sort of contradictions are you afraid of?

Whenever we say that he is deceiving us about the appearance, and his skill is one of falsification, shall we say that our souls form false opinion at that time, on account of the skill of this man? Or what precisely shall we say?

That's it! What else could we say?

What's more, false opinion will be thinking the opposite of things that are. Is this so?

Just so. It will be thinking their opposite.

So are you saying that false opinion thinks things that are not?

It must.

Does it think that things that are not, are not? Or does it think that things that are not at all, somehow are?

Things that are not must somehow be, if anyone is ever to speak falsely, even a little.

What about this? Doesn't false opinion also think that things that entirely are, are not at all?

Yes.

And this too is false?

This too.

And so I presume, on this basis, a statement will be considered false if it says that things that are, are not, or that things that are not, are.

Yes, how else could a statement of this sort arise?

Hardly at all, but the sophist will deny this. Or is there any way that a right-minded person would accept these formulations in the light of what we agreed before? Do we understand what agreements are meant, Theaetetus?

Indeed, how could we fail to understand? He will claim that we are saying the opposite of what we said a moment ago, once we dare to state that there is falsity both in opinions and based upon words. For we are constantly compelled to associate what is with what is not, despite having agreed just now that this is utterly impossible.

Your recollection is correct. But now we really must consider what to do about the sophist. For you see that we are well supplied with many objections and perplexities, once we propose to track him down in the skill of falsification and beguilement.

I do, indeed.

And we have elaborated only a small portion of the problems which are almost limitless.

Well, if that is the case, it would seem to be impossible to capture the sophist.

What next? Shall we become cowards, and give up now?

I say that we should not do that if we are somehow able to get even the slightest grip on this fellow.

Then you will have to be quite forgiving, and, as you have just said, be satisfied if we can somehow make even minor inroads

against such a powerful argument.

How could I refuse?

In that case, I have a further request of you.

What is it?

Do not presume that I am becoming some sort of parricide.

What do you mean?

It will be necessary in defending ourselves to probe the statement of Parmenides, our father, and force the assertion that in some respect what is not, is, and again what is, in some way, is not.

It is evident that some such contention must feature in these discussions.

Yes, mustn't this be evident even to a blind man, as they say? For if these statements are neither refuted nor accepted, it will hardly be possible for someone to speak about false statements or false opinions being either images, likenesses, imitations or appearances - or to speak of any skills associated with them - without looking ridiculous by being forced to contradict himself.

Very true.

Well, for these reasons we must dare to attack the paternal maxim. Or if some scruple hinders us from doing this, we should abandon the matter entirely.

Well, this should not hinder us at all.

Then I shall still make a third small request of you.

Just name it.

When I spoke just now, I indicated that I have always been daunted by the refutation of these, and this is especially so right now.

You did say that.

Now, I am afraid that because of what I have said, you will think that I am mad for changing my stance back and forth. After all, we are taking on the refutation of the proposition¹⁰ for your sake, if we do actually refute it.

Well, in my opinion, there is no problem at all if you embark upon this refutation and proof. Have no concern on my account.

Come now, where should one begin this audacious discourse? Indeed, my boy, I think that there is a certain inevitable path for us to follow.

What is it?

We should first investigate the matters that seem clear to us now, in case we have somehow been confused about them, and yet agree with one another as readily as though we had a good understanding.

Explain your meaning more clearly.

It seems to me that Parmenides has conversed with us quite casually, and so has anyone who has ever set about specifying how many, and of what sort, are things that are.

In what way?

Each of them appears to me to be telling us a story, as though we were children. One says that things that are, are threefold, and some of them on occasion conduct some sort of battle with one another, and at other times become friends, marry, have children and look after their offspring. Another says there are two factors, wet and dry or hot and cold, and he sets up a household for them and marries them off, while we Eleatic folk, beginning with Xenophanes or even earlier, recount our stories as though what we refer to as 'all things' are actually one. But some Ionian and, later, some Sicilian

Muses consider it safest to combine both stories, and say that what is, is both many and one, and is held together by enmity and friendship.¹¹ "Though it is separating, it is continually combining", say the more severe of these Muses.¹² But the milder ones relaxed the requirement that it always be this way, and they say that it alternates, and that the all is sometimes one and is friendly on account of Aphrodite, at other times it is many and at war with itself due to some strife. Now, some of these men may have spoken the truth in all this, or they may not, though it is difficult and problematic to attribute such a serious failing to famous men of old. But we can say one thing without reproach.

What is it?

That they have shown no regard for common folk, and they despise us. For each of them pursues his own line of argument without considering at all whether we are following what they say or are being left behind.

What do you mean?

Whenever one of them speaks and says that many or one or two is, or has become, or is becoming; or again, that heat is mixed with cold; or elsewhere proposes divisions and combinations; by the gods, Theaetetus, can you ever understand what they are saying? Indeed, when I was younger and someone mentioned what is not – the phrase that is puzzling us now – I thought I understood perfectly. But you see now just how perplexed we are about this issue.

I see.

But when it comes to 'what is', the soul may well be in the grip of a similar predicament. We profess to be unconcerned about this and to understand this and not the other whenever someone mentions it, yet we may be equally perplexed about both.

Quite likely.

And, indeed, the same may be said of anything else we discussed previously.

Yes, indeed.

Well, we shall consider all those other matters later on, if you wish. But we must now investigate the important, fundamental and primary issue.

Which one do you mean? Or is it obvious that you are saying that we must first examine 'what is', and what exactly those who use the phrase think that it indicates?

You have understood precisely, Theaetetus. For I am saying that this is indeed the approach we should adopt. We should resort to close questioning, as though the men were actually present, and say, "Come on, all you who say that hot and cold, or any pairs like that, are all things. What precisely are you attributing to both when you say that both are and each is? What should we understand by this 'is' of yours? Is it a third factor in addition to the other two, and should we propose on your behalf that the all is no longer two but three? For presumably you do not take one of the pair and call it being, and say that both of them equally 'are', for in either case they would effectively be one and not two."

What you say is true.

"Well then, do you want to call the pair of them being?"

Perhaps.

Then we shall say, "But, friends, even with this formulation you would be stating unambiguously that the two are one."

What you have said is absolutely correct.

"Now, since we have become perplexed, you must clarify adequately, to our satisfaction, what precisely you wish to

indicate whenever you use the word 'being'. For you have obviously known this all along, while we thought that we knew at one stage but have now become perplexed. So, explain this point to us first so that we may not presume to understand your doctrines when the very opposite is the case." Surely there would be nothing wrong, child, in saying these things, and putting them to these men, and to anyone else who maintains that all is more than one?

Not in the least.

And what about those who say that the all is one? Shouldn't we find out, as best we can, what precisely they mean by 'being'?

How could we do otherwise?

Then let them answer this question. "Do you say that one alone is?" To which they will reply, "We do say so", won't they?

Yes.

"And is there something which you call being?"

Yes.

"And is it what you call one? Are you using two names for the same thing, or how does this work?"

What answer will they give next, stranger?

Obviously, Theaetetus, it is not at all easy for someone who has proposed this hypothesis to respond to what we have just asked, or any other question for that matter.

Why so?

Well, to agree that there are two names when you have proposed that there is nothing except one, is presumably ridiculous.

Yes, it must be.

And it would be altogether ridiculous to accept the assertion that there is a name, when it does not possess an account.

What is ridiculous about it?

Well, in proposing that the name is different from the object, he is presumably referring to two things.

Yes.

And, indeed, should he propose that the name is the same as the object, he will either be compelled to say that it is the name of nothing, or he will say it is the name of something, and the name will turn out to be the name of a name and of nothing else.

Just so.

And the one will be the name of one, as there is only one, and also the one of the name.

It must be.

What about this? Is the whole different from what is one, or will they say it is the same as this?

They will have to say it is the same, and they do say so.

If it is a whole, and is, as Parmenides says, equally balanced in all directions from the centre, like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, for it must not be more in one place and less in another. Then, since what is like this, what is will have a centre and extremities. And since it has these, it certainly must have parts, must it not?

So it must.

Moreover, there is nothing to prevent whatever is divided into parts from having the characteristic of the one associated with all its parts, and in this way, being all, it could also be one whole.

Why not, indeed?

But isn't it impossible for something with these characteristics to be just the one itself?

How?

Presumably what is truly one must be described as entirely without parts, according to the correct account.

Yes, it must be.

But the sort of one which consists of many parts will not accord with this account.

I understand.

Now will 'what is' be both one and whole, as it possesses the character of the one, or should we utterly deny that 'what is' is a whole?

That's a difficult choice you are offering.

Well, that is certainly true. For 'what is', having been somehow characterised as one, will appear not to be the same as the one, and so all things will be more than one.

Yes.

However, if 'what is' is not a whole on account of being characterised as one, and yet the whole itself is, then 'what is' turns out to be missing part of itself.

Certainly.

And based upon this argument, 'what is' will be non-being, as it is deprived of itself.

Just so.

Furthermore, all things become more than one, as both 'what is' and the whole have each acquired a separate, distinct nature.

Yes.

But if the whole is not at all, then the very same applies to 'what is', and so in addition to its not being, it could never come into being either.

Why so?

Whatever has come to be has always come to be as a whole. Consequently, we cannot talk about being or becoming as if they are without including the one or the whole among things that are.

That certainly seems to be the case.

And, indeed, whatever is not a whole cannot be something with any number at all. For if it had number, whatever that number might be, it would have to correspond to that number as a whole.

Precisely.

And, indeed, a myriad of other issues, each involving endless perplexities, will present themselves to anyone who maintains that 'what is' is either some two or only one.

Yes, the issues that are now arising make this quite evident. One leads on to another, bringing a larger and more problematic lack of direction to whatever has already been said.

Now, we have not talked about everyone who gives a precise account of being and non-being, but let this be enough. Next, we should consider those who give a more general account, so that we may see, by reviewing them all, that it is no easier to say precisely what 'what is' is than to say what 'what is not' is.

Yes, we should proceed to consider these too.

And, indeed, there seems to be a sort of battle between gods and giants among them in their dispute with one another about being.¹³

How?

Well, some are dragging everything from heaven and the unseen down to earth, literally grabbing trees and rocks in their hands. Indeed, they lay hold of all such objects and strenuously maintain that that alone is, which gives rise to some contact and touch. They define body and being as the same, and if any of the others say that there is anything without a body, they are utterly contemptuous and they want to hear no more.

Yes, you are describing fearsome men, and indeed I myself have met many of them before.

Yes. That's why those who oppose them conduct their defence very cautiously, from above, from the unseen, maintaining forcibly that true being consists of certain bodiless forms which can be known by reason. And they gradually break the bodies of those other men into little pieces in their discussions, and what the others maintain to be true they refer to as a sort of becoming in motion, rather than being. And there is always a huge battle going on between both parties about these issues, Theaetetus.

True.

Then let's obtain, from both sides in turn, the account of being that they favour.

How shall we obtain them?

It will be easier in the case of those who propose that being consists of forms, for they are gentler people. However, it is more difficult, perhaps almost impossible, from those who drag everything by force to the physical. But I think they should be dealt with as follows.

How?

The best thing would be to make better people of them, if that were somehow possible. But if this is not to be, let's make up a story, assuming that they would be willing to answer questions more fully than now. For agreement with reformed individuals will be preferable to agreement with worse. However, we are not interested in the people themselves. We are seeking the truth.

Quite so.

Then call upon these reformed folk to answer you, and you should interpret what is said.

I shall.

Well, let them say whether they maintain there is such a thing as a mortal, living being.

How could they deny this?

And won't they agree that this is a body with a soul in it?

Yes, certainly.

And do they include soul among things that are?

Yes.

What about this? Don't they agree that a soul can be just or unjust, and can be wise or ignorant?

Of course.

But isn't it from the possession and presence of justice and wisdom that each of these souls becomes like this, while their opposites do the opposite?

Yes, they agree with all this too.

And they will surely agree that whatever is capable of being present or absent is something.

They do say so.

So, if they accept that there is justice, wisdom and excellence in general, and their opposites, and also soul in which they arise, do they say that any of these is visible and tangible, or are they all unseen?

Hardly any of these is visible.

What about this? Do they say that anything of this sort has a body?

They do not answer the entire question in the same way. Although they think that the soul has acquired a body of some sort, when it comes to wisdom and the other qualities you asked about, they are ashamed either to admit that these are not included among things that are, or to maintain emphatically that they are all physical.

Well, Theaetetus, we can see that these men have been reformed. For the original stock, their earth-born ancestors, would not have been ashamed of anything. Instead, they would insist that whatever they are unable to squeeze with their hands is nothing at all.

Yes, you have expressed their attitude fairly well.

Then let's question them once more. Indeed, if they are prepared to concede that there is even a small non-physical portion of things that are, that is sufficient. For they must explain the shared nature that has arisen simultaneously in the non-physical, and also in anything physical, with reference to which they say that they both are. Perhaps this may leave them perplexed. And if that is what happens to them, then consider this. Would they be willing to accept a suggestion from us and agree that 'what is' is as follows?

What is the suggestion? Tell us and we shall know immediately.

Well, I am saying that anything actually is, once it has acquired some sort of power, either to affect anything else at all, or to be affected, even slightly, by something totally trivial, even if only once. Indeed, I propose to give a definition, defining things that are as nothing else except power.

Then, since they do not have anything better to suggest right now, they accept this.

Very well, though perhaps a different suggestion may occur both to us or them later. For the present, let this stand as it has been agreed by both parties.

Let it stand.

Now, let us move on to the others, the friends of the forms, and you should interpret their doctrines for us too.

I shall.

"Presumably you make a distinction between becoming and being, and you refer to them as separate. Is this so?"

"Yes."

"And you say our communion with becoming is through the body, by means of sense perception, while it is by means of reasoning through the soul that we commune with actual being, which you say is always just the same as it is, while becoming is always changing."

"Yes. That is what we say."

"Now, best of all men, the communing which you ascribe to both, isn't it what we mentioned a moment ago?"

What was that?

"An action or an effect arising from some power, from their coming together with one another." You probably do not hear their response to this so clearly, Theaetetus, but perhaps I

can hear it, as I am quite familiar with them.

What then? What account do they give?

They do not agree with what we said just now to the earth-born men about being.

What was that?

We somehow proposed an adequate enough definition of things that are: whenever the power to be affected or to affect, even to the slightest extent, is present in something, that something is something that is.

Yes.

Now to this they reply that the power to be affected and to affect is a feature of becoming, but they say that neither power attaches to being.

Don't they have a point?

A point which makes us say that we still need to find out more clearly from them whether they also concede that the soul knows, and that being is known.

They will surely assent to that.

"What about this? Do you say that the knowing, or being known, is an action, an effect, or both? Or is one an action, and the other an effect? Or do neither of them have anything to do with action and effect?"

Obviously they would say neither, otherwise they would be contradicting what they said before.

I understand. Instead, they would say that if knowing is indeed some action, it follows that whatever is known must, for its part, be affected. Indeed, based on this account, since being is known by the act of knowing, insofar as it is known, it is changed to that extent because it is affected, which we insist does not happen to the quiescent.

Correct.

But, by Zeus, what are we saying? Are we actually going to be persuaded so easily that change, life, soul and thought are absent from what altogether is, that it neither lives nor thinks, but abides unchanging, solemn and pure, devoid of intelligence?

No, stranger. That would be an awful proposition were we to accept it.

But would we say that it has intelligence, but does not have life?

How could we?

But if we say that both of these are within it, shall we then deny that it has them in a soul?

How else could it have them?

But if it actually has intelligence, life and soul, does it remain totally unchanging, although it has a soul?

This all sounds unreasonable to me.

And, of course, we must concede that change, and what is changed, both are.

How could we deny it?

It follows, therefore, Theaetetus, that if there is no change, there is no intelligence in anything, or about anything at all.

Certainly.

And yet, if we concede instead that everything is moving and changing, by this argument too we shall be removing intelligence from things that are.

How?

Do you think there could ever be sameness of characteristics or manner or relation, without rest?

Not at all.

But in the absence of these, can you see how there could be intelligence, or how it could ever come into being anywhere?

Not in the least.

Well then, we must do battle, using every possible argument, against the man who would make strong assertions about anything at all, having done away with knowledge, thought and intelligence.

Definitely.

Now, all these issues are necessarily, it seems, of the utmost importance to the philosopher, and because of these he must not accept that the universe is at rest, whether it is said to be one or to consist of many forms. Nor should he listen at all to those who say that 'what is' is changing everywhere. Instead, he should invoke the childish prayer, 'I want everything', and should say that 'the all' and 'what is' are a combination of both the unchanging and the changing.

Very true.

Well then, is it likely that we have at last come to grips with 'what is' by this argument?

Yes, certainly.

Oh dear, Theaetetus, perhaps not! I think that we are just about to appreciate the perplexity involved in this enquiry.

How? Why have you said this?

Bless you! Do you not realise that we are now in utter ignorance about this, though we seem to ourselves to be talking sense?

Well, so it seems to me, but I do not quite understand how we got into this condition without noticing it.

Well, in agreeing with what has been said, consider carefully whether we may justifiably be open to the very questions which we ourselves put previously to those who say that the universe is heat and cold.

What questions? Remind me.

Yes, certainly. And I shall try to do this at any rate by questioning you, just as we questioned the others, so that we may also make some progress at the same time.

Right.

Very well then. Don't you say that motion and rest are completely opposite to one another?

They must be.

And do you also say that in like manner they both are, and that each of them is?

Yes, I do say that.

And when you accept that they are, do you mean that both of them and each of them is moving?

Not at all.

Then, in saying that both of them are, are you indicating that they are both at rest?

No, how could they be?

So, are you proposing that being is some third thing in the soul besides these two, and having understood that both rest and motion are encompassed by this, do you look to their commonality of being, and thus make the statement that they both are?

Yes. It is quite likely that we do, in truth, have an intuition that 'what is' is some third entity, whenever we say that motion and rest are.

So 'what is' is not the two together, motion and rest, but something different from them.

So it seems.

Then, based upon its own nature, 'what is' is neither at rest nor in motion.

Hardly.

Well then, where is there still left for someone's mind to turn who wishes to establish anything clear and certain about this for himself?

Where indeed?

I do not think there is any easy option left, for if something is not moving, how can it not be at rest? Or if it is not at rest at all, then how can it not be moving? Yet 'what is' has just appeared before us, outside of both motion and rest. But is this possible?

No, it is totally impossible.

However, it would be right to recall something about these.

What is it?

That we ended up in utter perplexity when we were asked what precisely the phrase 'what is not' should be applied to. Do you remember?

How could I forget?

And are we now in any less perplexity in relation to what is?

Well, stranger, it seems to me that we are in even greater perplexity, if that is possible.

Let's take it, then, that this is where our difficulty lies. However, since what is and what is not are equally involved in perplexity, there is now some hope. For as one of them becomes more dimly or clearly evident, the other will do the

same. And if we prove unable to discern either, we shall scrutinise the description of both at once, as appropriately as we can.

Very good.

Then let's explain how it happens that we refer to the same thing by many names, depending on the occasion.

What sort of thing do you mean? Give an example.

You know that we speak of a man, calling him lots of different things, attributing colours to him, and also shapes, dimensions, excellences and vices. In all these cases, and numerous others, we are saying not only that he is a man, but also that he is good, and countless other things. And in other cases, by the same argument, we propose that each is one, and then refer to it as many, and so we describe it by many names.

What you say is true.

Well, at any rate, I believe we have provided a feast for the young and for the old men whose learning came late in their lives. For it is easy for anyone to appreciate quite readily that it is impossible for the many to be one and also for one to be many, and indeed they delight in forbidding man from being called good, and they only allow good to be called good and man to be called man. Indeed, Theaetetus, I imagine you have often met those who take this sort of thing seriously. Sometimes older men who are amazed at such marvels, due to the poverty-stricken state of their intellect, actually believe that they have discovered the very repository of all wisdom.

They certainly do.

Then, so that our discussion may be all inclusive, we should direct our questioning now to all those who have ever discoursed on being in any way at all, and to those with whom

we discussed this earlier.

And the questions are?

"Whether we may neither attach being to motion and rest, nor attach anything at all to anything else, and should we therefore propose, in our own discussions, that these are unmixed, and it is impossible for them to participate in one another? Or should we have grouped them all together as the same, in their capacity for communion with one another? Or can some have this capacity while others do not?" Well, Theaetetus, can we say which of these options they would choose?

I cannot answer these questions on their behalf at all.

Then why don't you answer them one by one, and see what the consequences are in each case?

A good suggestion.

First, if you wish, let's propose that they say that nothing has any power of communion with anything else at all. In that case, movement and rest will have no share of being, will they?

Not in that case.

But will either of them be, if they have no communion with being?

They will not.

Well, all parties have been instantly overthrown by this concession it seems, including the 'universe is motion' people, those who say it is one and at rest, and anyone who maintains that things that are consist of forms which are always just the same as they are. Indeed, all of these people associate being with something, some by saying that the universe is actually movement, others by saying that it is actually rest.

Quite so.

And, indeed, those who propose to combine all things at one time and to separate them at some other time, either by having unlimited things coming from one and returning to one, or else by dividing all things into finite elements and making combinations of these, regardless of whether they propose that this happens successively or continuously, these people would be talking nonsense in all cases, if, in fact, there is no comingling.

Correct.

And what's more, the people who pursue this question, in the most ridiculous manner, are those who allow nothing to be referred to as different because it shares a different characteristic.

How?

Well, presumably they are compelled to use 'to be' in relation to everything. They cannot help employing 'apart' and 'the others' and 'itself', and very many more expressions, and connecting them when they speak, and so they are refuting themselves. The enemy and future opponent is within themselves, as the saying goes, and they walk about carrying his voice inside them like the strange ventriloquist, Eurycles.¹⁴

The comparison you make is both accurate and true.

Well then, should we concede to all things the capacity for intercommunion with one another?

Even I would be able to do away with that suggestion.

How?

Well, movement itself would be totally at rest, while rest itself would, in turn, be moving if they were to come together with one another.

And, presumably, it must be utterly impossible that movement be at rest, and rest in motion?

It must be.

Only the third option is left then.

Yes.

Well, it must be some one of the following: either everything will mix together or nothing will, or some will and others will not.

There are no other options.

And yet the first two were found to be impossible.

Yes.

So anyone who wishes to give the right answer will select the last of the three.

Exactly.

Now, since some things will do this and others will not, they would be behaving much like the letters of the alphabet, for some of them will not fit together with one another, while others will fit together.

Of course.

And the vowels are better at this than the other letters. They are like a bond running through them all so that it is impossible for one of the others to attach to anything else without at least one of the vowels.

Certainly.

Does everyone know what letters can combine with what, or is a skill required by someone who is to do this properly?

There is a skill.

What is it?

Grammar.

And isn't it the same where high and low notes are concerned? Does the musical person have the skill to recognise which notes go together and which do not, while the unmusical person does not understand this?

Yes, it is the same.

And we shall find that similar distinctions between skill and lack of skill apply to other subjects.

Of course.

Yes. And since we have agreed that the kinds can also mix with one another in this same way, mustn't a man who is going to show correctly which of the kinds accord with one another or reject one another proceed through the arguments with some knowledge? And will he also need some knowledge to show whether there are certain kinds which pervade all the kinds and keep them together, so that they can be mixed together, and again, in the case of division, whether the causes of division are entirely different?

How could he do it without knowledge, perhaps even the supreme knowledge?

Well now, Theaetetus, what are we going to call this knowledge? Or, by Zeus, have we stumbled unwittingly upon the knowledge belonging to free men? And is it possible that we have found first the philosopher, whilst looking for the sophist?

What do you mean?

This division on the basis of kinds, without thinking that the same form is a different form or that a different one is the same, should we not say that this belongs to dialectical knowledge?

Yes, we should.

Therefore, someone who can do this readily discerns one characteristic extending entirely through many things, each of which is separate and one; and many characteristics which are different from one another, encompassed externally by one characteristic; furthermore, one characteristic connected in one kind through multiplicities that are wholes; and many characteristics which are distinct and completely separate. This is knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, which way they commune and which way they do not.

Entirely so.

And I am sure that you will never grant this dialectical skill to anyone except a man who loves wisdom, purely and righteously.

Indeed, how could one grant it to anyone else?

It is in some such place as this that we shall find the philosopher, both now and hereafter, if we search for him. It is, indeed, difficult to see this person plainly, but the difficulty of seeing the sophist is of a different sort from this.

How?

Well, the sophist runs away into the darkness of non-being, attaching himself to this by practice, and he is hard to discern because of the darkness of the place. Is this so?

So it seems.

However the philosopher is always devoted, through reasoning, to the characteristic of what is. And he is also not at all easy to see because of the brightness of that region, as it is impossible for the eyes of the common soul to sustain the gaze that looks towards the divine.

Yes, all this is no less likely to be so than what was said about the sophist.

Well, we shall consider the philosopher in more detail presently, if we so desire. But it is obvious, I presume, that we must not give up on the sophist until we can see him properly.

Very good.

Indeed, we have actually agreed now that some of the kinds will combine with one another, while others will not, and some will combine with few, others with many, and also that some are all-pervasive and are allowed to combine with everything. So we should proceed to the next issue by considering the following question, not about all the forms, lest we get confused by the multiplicity, but selecting some of those which are said to be the most important. We should first ask what sort each is, and then what their power to commune with one another is. In this way, we shall at least understand something about being and non-being, as far as our current method of enquiry allows, even if we cannot apprehend them with total clarity, and we may somehow be allowed to say that 'what is not', is actually non-being, and avoid reproach.

Yes, we must do this.

Now, the most important kinds are those we have just mentioned – being itself, rest and motion.

Very much so.

And we also say that two of them do not mix with one another.

They do not.

And yet being mixes with both, for presumably both are.

Of course.

So there are these three.

Of course.

And of these, each of the two is different from the other, and the same as itself.

Quite so.

Well now, what precisely are the 'same' and the 'different' which we have just mentioned? Are they two additional kinds, apart from the first three, two kinds which must necessarily combine with the three, and should we investigate them as though there were five and not three? Or is this 'same' and 'different' something belonging to the other three, which we are referring to without noticing it?

Perhaps.

But of course, motion and rest are neither different nor the same.

How so?

Whatever we attribute to motion and rest jointly cannot itself be either of the two.

Why is that?

Because motion would then be at rest, and rest would be moving. For the involvement of either of the two with both of them will compel the other one to change to the opposite of its own nature, since it is partaking of its opposite.

Exactly.

However, both partake of the same and the different.

Yes.

Therefore, we may not say that either motion or rest is the same or the different.

No.

Well then, should we think of 'what is' and 'the same' as one thing?

Perhaps.

But if 'what is' and 'the same' do not signify anything different, then saying once more that motion and rest both are will amount to referring to them both as the same.

Yes, but that is impossible.

So it is impossible for 'the same' and 'what is' to be one.

Quite.

Well, should we propose that the same is a fourth form in addition to the other three?

Yes, certainly.

Yes, but should we say that the different is a fifth? Or must we think of the different, and what is, as two names for one kind?

Perhaps.

But I think you concede that some things that are, are always spoken of just by themselves, while some are always spoken of in relation to others.

So they are.

And different is always in relation to another. Is this so?

Just so.

But this would not be the case if what is and different were not utterly distinct. But if different, like what is, were to partake of both relations, some of the different things would sometimes be different, but not in relation to another. But now we find, simply, that whatever is different necessarily turns out to be the very thing it is, namely, different from something else.

It is exactly as you say.

Then we must say that the nature of the different is a fifth form among these forms we are selecting.

Yes.

And we shall say that this pervades all the others, for each one is different from the others, not because of its own nature, but because of participation in the characteristic of different.

Yes, precisely.

Now, let us say the following about these five, taking them up one by one.

What?

First, that motion is completely different from rest. Is this so?

It is so.

So it is not rest.

Not at all.

And yet, because of participation in being, it is.

It is.

Then again, motion is different from the same.

I dare say.

So it is not the same.

No, it is not.

And yet it is the same as itself, because everything partakes of the same.

Yes, indeed.

So we should accept that motion is the same and not the same, without making difficulties. For when we say it is the same and then not the same, we are not speaking in a similar manner. Rather, when we say it is the same, it is because of its participation in the same in relation to itself. And when we say it is not the same, it is because of its communion with different, a communion by which it is separated from the same and becomes not the same but different. So that it is

correct, in turn, to say that it is not the same after all.

Yes, certainly.

Yes, and if motion itself were somehow to partake of rest, it would not be strange to say that motion was resting.

And that is perfectly valid, provided we are going to accept that some of the kinds will mix with one another, and some will not.

And, indeed, we arrived at a proof of this before now, establishing that this process is in accordance with nature.

Of course.

Then let's say this once more. Motion is different from the different, just as it was other than the same and rest.

Yes, it must be.

So, in a sense then, it is not different and it is different, according to the current argument.

True.

Then, what about the next point? Shall we say that motion is different from three of the kinds but not from the fourth, though we have agreed that there are five items concerning which, and among which, we propose to conduct our enquiry?

How could we? For we cannot accept that their number is less than what was shown a moment ago.

So, should we persist fearlessly in maintaining that motion is different from being?

Yes, with no fear at all.

Well then, it is clear that motion is actually 'non-being'. And yet it is, since in fact it partakes of being.

Yes, that is perfectly clear.

So, of necessity, what is not is, both in the case of motion and all of the kinds, for in all cases the nature of the different, by rendering each different from what is, makes it what is not. And, indeed, in this way, we are right to say, on the same basis, that all of them are not, and again, because they partake of being, that they are and have being.

Very likely.

So, in the case of each of the forms, 'what is' is many, and 'what is not' is unlimited in multiplicity.

So it seems.

Well then, we must also say that what is, itself, is different from the others.

We must.

And we also found that as many as the others are, to that extent what is, is not. For on the one hand, not being those others it is itself one, and furthermore, it is not, in respect of number, those unlimited others.

Quite so.

Now, we should not make difficulties over these either since the nature of the kinds involves communion with one another. But if anyone does not accept this, he must prevail over our previous arguments and then take on their consequences.

What you propose is very fair.

Well, let us note the following.

What?

When we speak of 'what is not', it seems we are not speaking of something opposite to 'what is', but only of something different.

In what way?

For example, when we say that something is 'not large', are we indicating by this phrase that it is small rather than equal? Is that how it seems to you?

How could it?

So, whenever it is said that a negative signifies an opposite, we shall not accept that. We shall only go so far as to say that prefixing 'not' or 'non' indicates something else apart from the words which follow, or rather, apart from the things to which the words uttered after the negatives may refer.

Entirely so.

Let's think this through as follows, if you agree.

In what way?

It seems to me that the nature of different is broken up in the same way that knowledge is.

How?

Well, presumably knowledge is one, and so is the nature of different, but each portion of knowledge applicable to something in particular has been separated off and given its own particular title. That's why so many skills and branches of knowledge are referred to.

Yes, certainly.

And although the nature of different is one, the same thing happens to the parts.

Very likely, but how should we describe it?

Is there some part of different which contrasts with beauty?

There is.

Now should we say that this is nameless, or does it have a title of its own?

It has. For each time we mention 'non-beauty', this is different from the nature of beauty, and from nothing else.

Come now, tell me this.

What?

On this basis, has non-beauty turned out to be some distinct part of a single kind among things that are, and does it, in turn, stand in contrast to another kind among things that are?

It does.

Then it seems non-beauty turns out to be a contrast of 'what is' with 'what is'.

Quite right.

Well then, based on this account, is beauty more included among things that are, and non-beauty less so?

It is not.

So, should we say, on the same basis, that there is non-largeness and largeness itself?

On the same basis.

And should we therefore place non-justice in the same relation towards justice, in that one is no more than the other is?

Of course.

Well, we shall also describe the others in the same way. Since, in fact, the nature of different has been shown to be included among things that are, and since it is, we must necessarily propose that the parts of it are also things that are, no less.

Yes, we must.

Therefore, it seems, when part of the nature of different, and part of the nature of 'what is' are set against one another, the contrast is no less being than what is, itself, if such a

statement is legitimate, and this contrast is not indicating the opposite of 'what is', but only something different from that.

Yes, that is very clear.

So, what should we call this?

Obviously it is 'what is not', the very thing we were seeking because of the sophist.

And does it, as you say, have no less being than anything else? And should we now declare boldly that 'what is not' certainly is, and has its own nature? And just as largeness was large and beauty was beautiful, and the same applied to non-largeness and non-beauty, should we say on the same basis that 'what is not' was and is 'what is not', a single form counted among the many things that are? Do we still have any doubt about this, Theaetetus?

Not at all.

Now, do you realise that we have shown little regard for Parmenides' prohibition?

In what way?

In our previous enquiry, we have forged ahead in our search, and presented the man with something he forbade us to consider.

How?

Well, he says, "For never shall this be proved that things that are not, are, but do thou, in thine enquiry, hold back thy thought from this way."

Yes, that is what he says.

Yet we have shown not only that things that are not, are. We have also revealed the form upon which 'what is not' happens to be based. In fact, having shown that the nature of different is, and is divided up among all things that are in relation to

one another, we have dared to maintain that each part of different that contrasts with what is, is really 'what is not'.

Yes, stranger, and the statements we have made seem to me to be entirely true.

Then let no one say that we have dared to maintain that 'what is not' is the opposite of 'what is'. For we long since said farewell to talk of opposite of 'what is', whether there is or is not such a thing, and whether it has an account or is utterly devoid of one. Now, in relation to 'what is not' which we have proposed to be, let someone refute us, and either persuade us that we have not formulated it correctly, or, until he is able to refute it, he must say what we say, that the kinds combine with one another, and 'what is' and the different go through them all, and through one another, and the different, by partaking of 'what is', is, because of that participation, although it is not what it partakes of, but is different. And being different from 'what is', clearly it must be possible for it to be 'what is not'. And, in turn, 'what is', by partaking of the different, will be other from the other kinds, and since it is different from all of them, it is not each of them, nor all of them together except for itself. Consequently, 'what is' undoubtedly is not, in countless instances, and the others, individually and collectively, are in many cases, but are not in many cases.

True.

And one who is at a loss to believe these contradictions must consider these matters for himself and offer a better account than we have just given. But if he has taken hold of something difficult, and finds pleasure now in dragging the arguments to one extreme and now to another, his exertions are not worth taking very seriously, as our current arguments would suggest. For this is neither inventive nor difficult to discover. But what is difficult, and beautiful, is something else.

What is it?

What we said before, allowing such considerations as ineffective; to be able to follow what is said, refuting it stage by stage; if anyone proposes that the different is somehow the same, or the same different, in the very respect in which, and the very way that he says one experiences the other. But by saying that the same is somehow different, and the different is the same, and the great is small, and the like is unlike, and to derive pleasure from constantly bringing forward such oppositions in arguments, this is no real refutation. Indeed, it is obvious that someone who has just appeared on the scene is grasping at a beginning understanding of things that are.

Yes, that is so.

Well now, my friend, the attempt to separate everything from everything else is, in general, an inappropriate response and is, in fact, the activity of someone who is uneducated and unphilosophical.

Why is that?

Yes, this very approach of dissociating each thing from everything else is the total disappearance of all argument. Indeed, the interweaving of forms with one another is the basis from which our discourse arises.

True.

So, consider the timely battle which we waged just now against people like that, and how we have compelled them to allow one to mix with another.

To what end?

So that argument may continue to exist for us. For we would have been deprived of this if we had also deprived ourselves of the interweaving of forms with one another. Indeed, our argument has somehow arisen for us from the interweaving of

forms with one another.

True.

Now since we have got rid of this difficulty, but at the same time agreed that being is to be associated with non-being, perhaps we should now try to consider speech.

How so?

If 'what is not' has nothing to do with speech, all argument is necessarily false, while in fact it has been associated with it, and so there is false speech, and false thinking.

Just so.

But if there is falsity, deception arises.

Yes.

And if there is deception, everything is necessarily full of images, likenesses and appearances.

Of course.

And we said that the sophist took refuge in some such place, but he completely denied that there is falsity at all. For he said that 'what is not' could not be thought or stated, since 'what is not' does not partake of being in any way.

Just so.

And now it has appeared that 'what is not' partakes of being, so he probably will not contest the matter further on that basis. Yet he might say that some of the forms partake of 'what is not', while others do not, and speech and opinion are among those which do not. So in opting again for the contention that the skills of image-making and appearance-making, in which we said he was contained, do not exist at all, he might also argue that there is no false opinion or speech. For opinion and speech have no communion with 'what is not'. And in the absence of this

association, there is no possibility of any falsity. That's why we must first investigate speech, opinion and appearance, to see precisely what they are, so that, having seen them, we shall recognise their communion with 'what is not', and having recognised this, we shall prove that there is falsity, and having proved this, we shall imprison the sophist there, if we can keep our hold of him, and if we cannot, we shall release him and search in another kind.

Stranger, this expression about the sophist at the outset did indeed appear to be true, that this kind is hard to hunt. For he turns out to be replete with stratagems, and whenever he employs them, he must be vanquished before he can be caught. But now, although he has barely been overcome, he is already objecting that 'what is not', is not. For he is a wonder.

Well, my friend, it is the man with greater experience who will be best able to give the more accurate account, since whoever has been confounded for the longest time, often, is more vexed.

A good point.

Well, let's continue with the present argument and not get vexed.

Why should we?

Indeed, what comes first, in my view, is the question of speech, just as it was earlier in the case of the forms. For this is what we need to consider now: is 'what is not' associated with this too, or is speech entirely true, with no falsity ever arising in this?

Yes, this is what we should consider.

Come now, since we said as much in relation to the forms and letters of the alphabet, let's consider names again in the same way.

Yes, but what should we look for in them?

Whether they all combine with one another, none of them combine, or some can do so, while others cannot.

Well, this is clear in any case: that some can and some cannot.

Perhaps you mean the following: that any words which are uttered in succession and indicate something are combined, while those which are not significant when uttered in succession are not combined.

What you say? Why?

I imagined that you were making the same response that I have actually had in mind. Indeed, we recognise two kinds of vocal expressions about being.

How?

One is referred to as a name, and the other as a verb.

Tell me what each of these is.

The expression that applies to actions, we presumably refer to as a verb.

Yes.

While the vocal label applicable to those who perform such actions is a name.

Quite so.

Well, no statement can ever arise from a string of names that are uttered in succession, or even of verbs separated from names.

I do not understand.

Yes, it was clear when you responded just now that what I am saying is different. For my point was that the sequence does not constitute a statement.

How?

Take for instance "walks, runs, sleeps", and the other verbs which signify actions: even if someone were to recite them all in turn, that would not constitute any statement at all.

Why not?

So again, when "lion, stag, horse" are uttered, and any other names of those who perform actions, this sequence does not constitute a statement either. Indeed, neither in the first case nor in this one are the spoken words associated with any action, or in actuality, of one who acts or does not act. Nor will it ever do so, until someone mixes verbs with names. And as soon as he does so, the joining together produces a statement, the first and the smallest of statements, I dare say.

What do you mean by this?

Whenever someone says, "a man understands", do you say that this is the shortest and the first statement?

I do.

Indeed, it now provides some information about what is, becomes, has become or is to become, and not just naming, but enacting something by combining verbs with names. That is why we have said that it has spoken, and not merely named. And what is more, this combination is the very thing to which we attached the title 'speech'.

Correct.

Now, just as some things fit together with one another, while others do not, the same applies to vocal expressions, some of which do not fit together, while those that do fit together produce statements.

Just so.

But there is still one further consideration.

What?

Whenever there is a statement, it must be a statement about something. Indeed, a statement about nothing is impossible.

Just so.

And it must, of course, also have a particular quality.

Of course.

So now, let's take note of ourselves.

Yes, we should.

Then I shall make a statement to you, putting things and actions together by means of a name and a verb. You should indicate to me what the statement is about.

Yes, just as far as I can.

"Theaetetus is sitting." Surely that is not a long statement?

No, it has just the right measure.

Now it is your turn to say what it is about, and to whom it refers.

Quite clear that it is about me, and refers to me.

Then what about this one?

What?

"Theaetetus, with whom I am conversing right now, is flying."

No one could deny that this too is mine, and refers to me.

And we maintain that each of these is necessarily of some quality.

Yes.

Now, what quality should we say each of these has?

One is false, the other true.

And the true one indicates the things that are, as they are, in your case.

Just so.

While the false one indicates things that are different from things that are.

Yes.

Then it speaks of things that are not, as if they are.

Just so.

But it speaks of things that are, though they are different from things that are about you. For we have said, you remember, that in the case of each, there are many things that are, and also many that are not.

Entirely so.

Now, the second statement I made about you, in the first place, based on the way we have defined statement, must necessarily be one of the shortest.

Well, that's how it was agreed just now anyway.

And, then, in turn, the statement must be about someone.

Yes.

And if it is not about you, surely it is not about anyone else.

Indeed not.

And it would not even be a statement at all if it were about no one. For we showed that it was impossible for there to be a statement which is a statement about nothing.

Quite right.

Then, in this statement about you, when different things are stated as the same and 'what is not' as 'what is', it appears that the combination of verbs with names absolutely turns out to be a real and true false statement.

Very true.

Now, what about thought, opinion and appearance? Isn't it already clear that all of these become both true and false in our souls?

How?

You will recognise this more easily if you first realise what each of these is, and how each differs from one another.

Just tell me.

Now, are not thought and speech the same, except that the silent dialogue of the soul with itself has been given the name 'thought'?

Quite so.

And the flow from the soul to the mouth which is vocally expressed has been given the name 'speech'.

True.

And what's more, we know that the following arises in speech.

What is that?

Affirmation and denial.

Yes, we know that.

So when this happens in the soul through thought, in silence, can you call it anything other than opinion?

What else?

What about this? Whenever such an experience arises in someone, not through himself but on account of perception, is there another appropriate name for this experience, except 'appearance'?

There is not.

Then, since speech turned out to be both true and false, and we showed that thought is the discourse of the soul with itself; and that opinion is the conclusion of thought; and what

we mean by 'it appears' is a combination of perception and opinion; isn't it the case that any of these must be false sometimes since they are kindred to speech?

Of course.

Then do you appreciate that there has been an earlier discovery of false opinion and speech than was expected, when we feared that we were taking on an entirely impossible task by setting out in search of it?

I do.

Then we should not become disheartened by what remains. For since these have become apparent, we should recall the previous divisions on the basis of forms.

Which ones?

Well, we divided image-making into two forms: likeness-making and appearance-making.

Yes.

And we said that we were perplexed about which of these we would place the sophist in.

So we did.

And while we were unsure about this, even greater confusion arose for us, with the appearance of the argument which would dispute these, and maintain that there is no such thing as a likeness, image or appearance, since in no case at all is there any falsity, either in any way or at any time.

What you say is true.

But now, since false speech and false opinion have appeared, it is possible for there to be imitations of things that are, and from this disposition, a skill in deception arises.

Yes, it is possible.

And, indeed, we agreed earlier that the sophist was located in one of the divisions mentioned.

Yes.

Then let's try again, take the proposed kind and divide it in two, all the while proceeding to the right-hand part of what is being divided, holding on to the communion of the sophist, until we strip away whatever is common to the others, leaving only his own particular nature, which we shall display, first to ourselves, and then to those who are by nature most kindred to such a method.

Right.

Now, didn't we begin by dividing skill at that time into productive and acquisitive?

Yes.

And the sophist appeared to us in the acquisitive parts of hunting, contest, retailing, and certain kinds of that sort.

Yes, certainly.

But now, since he has been included under the skill of imitation, it is clear that we should first divide the productive skill in two. For presumably the skill of imitation is some kind of making, except that we shall say that it makes images, but not actual things. Is this so?

Yes, entirely so.

Now, in the first place, let there be two parts of the productive skill.

What are they?

The divine and the human.

I do not yet understand.

If you remember what was said at the start, we said that all production is the power which gives rise to whatever was not, previously.

We remember.

Now, with regard to all mortal animals, and as for all things that grow on earth from seeds and roots, and the lifeless bodies, with or without souls, that are formed within the earth: shall we say that some other than god is the producer who gives rise to them from non-being? Or are we to say what most people say and accept?

What?

That nature gives rise to them through some spontaneous cause that produces them without intelligence. Or are they produced with reasoning and divine knowledge that comes from god?

I myself, perhaps due to my age, often shift my views from one of these positions to the other. However, looking at you now, and noticing that you think that these things have arisen through divine agency, I myself also believe this is the case.

Good, Theaetetus, and if we thought that you were one of those people who would think differently in the future, we would now try, by means of an argument involving compelling persuasiveness, to make you agree. But since I am aware of your nature and recognise that even without our arguments, it is moving on by itself in the direction you say it is now inclined, I shall let the matter rest, for it would be a waste of time. Instead, let me propose that what are said to be the products of nature are produced by divine skill, while products that come from these products and are produced by humans, are produced by human skill. And, based on this account, there are two kinds of productive skill, the human and the divine.

Right.

Now, since there are two of these, divide each of them again in two.

How?

As though you were dividing the whole production skill widthwise just now, divide it lengthwise this time.

Take it as done.

In this way, there are now four parts in total: the two human parts on our side, and the two divine parts on the side of the gods.

Yes.

And, in turn, when divided in the other way, one part of each section is itself a making, while what remains in both cases is most accurately referred to as an image-making, and so production becomes two-fold again.

Tell me again how this division goes.

Well, presumably we ourselves, and the other animals, and the things from which natural objects come – fire, water and their kindred – we know that all of these are produced by the god, who has made each of them. Is this so?

Yes.

Following each of these, there are images, not the things themselves, and they have also come about through divine ingenuity.

What are they?

The phantoms that appear in dreams, and those that arise of their own accord during the day, such as a shadow when darkness occurs in firelight, and the doubles produced when one's own light, falling on bright and smooth surfaces, encounters the light from objects facing it, gives rise to an

appearance opposite to the usual sight.

These two are, indeed, products of divine making: the actual object and the image which follows in each case.

What about our skill? Won't we say that on the one hand it produces the house itself by the skill of building, while on the other, by the skill of painting, it produces another, which is some sort of human-made dream for those who are awake.

Just so.

Then, on the same basis, all the other products of our productive activity also come in twos according to our account: there is the thing itself produced by the making skill, and the image produced by the image-making skill.

I understand better now. And I now propose that there are two twofold productive skills: the divine and the human, based on one division, and the other yields the things themselves and a sort of likeness of these.

Now let's recall that we said there are two forms of image-making: one is likeness-making, while the other is appearance-making, provided false had been shown to be truly false, and to belong by nature, among things that are.

Yes, it was so.

And this has appeared, and so on this basis shall we now propose, without dispute, that there are two forms?

Yes.

Then let's divide the appearance-making, in turn, in two.

How?

One is the appearance produced by instruments, while the other is when the maker of the appearance presents himself as the instrument.

What do you mean?

Whenever someone uses his own body or voice to make something appear like your body or your voice, I think this part of appearance-making is, in general, called imitation.

Yes.

Let us call this part imitation, and set it aside, and we shall be lazy and entrust the entire remainder to someone else, to make this one into one form and assign it an appropriate name.

Yes, that's how we should distinguish them and pass on the other.

And yet, Theaetetus, it is appropriate to think of this also as two-fold. Now consider the reason why.

Tell me.

Of those who imitate, some do so with knowledge of what they imitate, others without knowledge of it. And what distinction shall we make that is greater than that between knowledge and ignorance?

None.

Now, the imitation we just mentioned belonged to those who know. For someone who knows you and your character would imitate you.

Of course.

But what about the appearance of justice and excellence in general? Don't many, who are ignorant of these but somehow have some opinion about them, give the appearance of inhabiting them by being eager to imitate what they themselves think, in word and deed, as much as possible?

Yes, there are very many indeed.

So, do they all fail in seeming to be just, although they are not at all? Or is the opposite the case?

Quite the opposite.

I think then, we should say that this person is an imitator who is different from the other, the ignorant one from the one who knows.

Yes.

Now, where should we look for an appropriate name for each of them? Or is it obvious that this is somehow difficult, because there was some long-standing ignorance among the men of old when it came to dividing the kinds into forms, so that no one ever even bothered to make any division, and so it must be the case that names are not very abundant. However, even if it is somewhat rash to do so, let us, for the sake of the distinction, call the imitation based upon opinion, opinionative imitation, while the imitation based on knowledge is a kind of knowledgeable imitation.

Let it be so.

Well, we should use the former, for the sophist did not belong with those who know, but with those who imitate.

Yes, certainly.

Then let's examine this opinionative imitator, just like a piece of iron, to see whether he is sound or whether there is still some flaw in him.

We should examine him.

Indeed, there is a really very significant flaw. For one of them is naive, thinking that he knows the matters about which he holds opinions, while the disposition of the other has had a great deal of involvement in arguments, and his very disposition gives rise to misgivings and fears that he does not know what he pretends to know in the presence of others.

Yes, certainly. There are indeed both kinds you describe.

So, should we propose that one is a simple imitator while the other is an ironical imitator?

That's likely.

And should we, in turn, say that the form of this fellow is one, or two?

Consider it yourself.

I am considering it, and there appear, to a great extent, to be two. One I see, who is able to dissemble openly in lengthy speeches before large numbers, while the other does this in private, in short discourses, and forces the person who is conversing with him to contradict himself.

What you say is perfectly correct.

Now, who should we propose is the more long-winded type? Is he a statesman or a popular orator?

A popular orator.

And what shall we call the other? A wise person, or a sophist?

A wise person is impossible, since we proposed that he was ignorant, but since he is an imitator of a wise person, it is clear that he will have a name derived from his, and now I am almost in a position to recognise that we must really and truly refer to this person as the man who is sophist in every sense.

Then shall we put together his name, as we did before, weaving it together from end to beginning?

Quite so.

Now, the contradiction-making, ironical part of opinionative imitation belongs to the appearance-making kind, which is part of image-making and is marked off as the human, not the divine, part of production in the realm of word-making and wonder-working. So, anyone who says that the true sophist is "of that lineage and blood"¹⁵ will, it seems, speak the absolute

truth.

Entirely so.

Notes

1. A reference to the conversation in the Theaetetus, which concluded the previous day. At the end of that dialogue (Theaetetus 210d), Socrates arranged to meet Theaetetus and Theodorus again on the following morning.
2. Elea was a Greek colony in southern Italy, home to the philosophers Parmenides and Zeno, whose teachings emphasised the unity and unchangeability of being. The Eleatic Stranger is presented as a follower of this philosophical tradition.
3. A loose reference to Homer, Odyssey ix.270–271, where the god Zeus is described as the protector of strangers and suppliants who watches over human affairs.
4. A reference to Homer, Odyssey xvii.485–487, where gods in the likeness of strangers from afar are said to wander the cities of men, observing their behaviour.
5. A reference to Plato's dialogue Parmenides, in which the young Socrates engages in conversation with the elderly Parmenides and his associate Zeno.
6. The Greek word 'sophistes' is derived from 'sophos' (wise or clever). The stranger here plays on the etymology, observing that the sophist's name implies a wisdom which he does not in fact possess.
7. 'The Great King' was the standard Greek term for the King of Persia, ruler of the vast Persian Empire and traditionally regarded as the most powerful and wealthy man in the known world.
8. Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490–420 BCE) was one of the most famous of the early sophists. He is the principal figure in Plato's dialogue Protagoras, and his views on knowledge and perception are discussed extensively in the Theaetetus.
9. Parmenides, Fragment 7, lines 1–2. This same passage is quoted again by the Stranger at 258d as the 'paternal maxim' which they must refute.
10. A reference back to the paternal maxim of Parmenides quoted at 237a, which forbids the proposition that 'things that are not, are'.
11. The 'Ionian Muses' is taken to refer to Heraclitus of Ephesus, and the 'Sicilian Muses' to Empedocles of Acragas. Empedocles maintained that the cosmos was governed by the alternating forces of Love (combining) and Strife (separating).

12. A reference to Heraclitus, Fragment 51, expressing the doctrine that opposites are simultaneously in tension and harmony – combining even as they separate.

13. A reference to the mythical battle between the Olympian gods and the Giants, in which the Giants attempted to overthrow the gods by piling mountains upon one another to scale heaven. The story is recounted in Hesiod's *Theogony* 675–715 and elsewhere.

14. Eurycles was a famous Athenian ventriloquist and soothsayer who appeared to have a voice speaking from within his belly. Reference is made to him in Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1017–1020.

15. A formulaic Homeric phrase used when concluding a genealogy or lineage. The Stranger is using it ironically to mark the completion of the sophist's pedigree of definitions. Compare *Iliad* 6.211.