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Timing and Measurement in Plato's *Sophist*

There is no doubt that the sophist, statesman, and philosopher are intimately related kinds. Both the *Sophist* and *Statesman* occur on the same day with the identical cast of characters, and it is within the middle parts of the *Statesman* (283b-287b) that we are introduced to the Two Arts of Measurement. It is the latter of the two arts that is relevant for not only various expertises but also the structure and design of dialogues as a whole. In the *Sophist*, there are echoes to this second art—the term *metrios* (μέτριος) appears three times at key parts of the dialogue: the beginning, middle, and end. These three instances are full of thought-provoking references and allusions to length and measurement, and after establishing why it is so significant and intentional on Plato's part to embed hints relating to timing in the *Sophist*, this paper will make several observations on the strategic progression of the *Sophist* and what that can teach us about the role of timing in the Method of Division found in Plato's later dialogues. This paper shall first briefly review the famous passage on measurement in the *Statesman* and then examine 1) the importance of timing and its prefiguration in other middle to later dialogues and 2) how the parts and design of the *Sophist*, especially in the introduction, can be analyzed in light of timing and measurement.

I. The Second Art of Measurement in the *Statesman*

The digression on measurement begins due to an observation by the Eleatic Stranger, the main speaker in these dialogues, that he had gone on far too long about the model of weaving (283b-c). Even earlier than this passage, the Stranger criticizes the length of the story he told on the Myth of Chronos (277a-c). Comparing the discussion of the Statesman to a badly formed sculpture, the Stranger remarks how just like a sculptor who rushes on a piece inappropriately, they were too ambitious with the “astonishing mass of material in the story” and used more material than necessary. Thus, they caused their account to become needlessly longer and unclear. These are two important places where the Stranger directly comments how they had gone on too long about their current subject matter. The appropriateness (καίρῶν) of the sculptor prefigures the later discussion on measurement.

The Stranger divides the art of measurement into two parts: the first part relating to “the association of greatness and smallness with each other” and the second relating to greatness and smallness existing “in relation to what is in due measure (τὸ μέτριον)” (283d-e). Take the example of the sculptor. It is not enough for the sculptor to differentiate the bigger piece of marble with the smaller piece of marble, he needs to know what piece to choose such that it is measured (*metrios*), necessary (*deon*), fitting (*prepon*), and rightly-timed (*kairos*) for the sculpture he is working on (284e). Thus, the third thing we are comparing the first two objects with is represented by the standard of due measure.¹

The various expertises also depend on the second art of measurement, for the Stranger remarks how without the second art and due measure, statesmanship, weaving, along with all the expertises would be destroyed (284a). This catastrophe would be due to the fact that “it is by

¹ For a more in depth analysis on the two arts of measurement and the role of *kairos*, see pg.125-147 of Melissa Lane’s *Method and Politics in Plato’s Statesman*.

preserving measure...that they produce all the good and fine things they produce” (284a-b). Furthermore, Melissa Lane rightly points out that not only are the expertises at stake, but the very ability to inquire and define the Statesman would be impossible (128). Seeking definitions on such difficult subjects indeed requires well-measured discussions, and the Stranger’s over-extending of the Myth of Chronos and model of weaving illustrate the danger of going on about a subject for longer than what is necessary.

Why must we now examine the *Sophist* in light of the Second Art of Measurement? Plato was a master architect of language, and as will be discussed later, his three usages of *metrios* are both deliberate and provocative. But, if that is not enough, let us examine what the Stranger says at the end of this digression:

Well, I say that you and I must be careful to remember what we have now said, and to distribute censure and praise of both shortness and length, whatever subjects we happen to be talking about on each occasion, by judging lengths not in relation to each other but, in accordance with the part of the art of measurement we previously said we must remember, in relation to what is fitting (*πρέπον*). (286c-d)

The reader is actively encouraged to ‘remember’ this passage and use the Second Art, relating to timing, in any subject of discussion.² Given that Plato’s *Sophist* and *Statesman* occur on the same day and that the sophist is equally, if not more, important than the statesman, something would be amiss if the reader did not go back to the *Sophist* and earlier dialogues to examine its content and structure in light of this crucial passage on measurement.

² For the purposes of this paper, *prepon*, *kairos*, and *metrios* will be referred to under the general term ‘timing’. See Lane pg.134 for why this choice was made and how Grube notes a comment by Dionysius of Halicarnassus on the fact that *kairos* is very similar to *prepon* (appropriateness to the occasion). Also, the Stranger uses all of these terms interchangeably to vividly illustrate the third thing, and in order to reduce confusion, the paper will use one term instead of many.

II. Timing and Intertextuality in the *Sophist*

SOC: Well, now I must go to the Porch of the King Archon, to meet Meletus' indictment, the one he has brought against me; but in the morning, Theodorus, let's meet here again. (*Theaetetus* 210d)

THEO: We've duly come, Socrates, in accordance with our agreement yesterday, also bringing with us this person here. He's a visitor from his native Elea, where he's a friend of the followers of Parmenides and Zeno; the man is very much a philosopher. (*Sophist* 216a)

The first sentence of the *Sophist* and last sentence of the *Theaetetus* provide several key details as to why they should be interpreted jointly. The dramatic date of the *Sophist* is quite late, around 399 BCE (Notomi 20). Socrates has already been indicted by Meletus for corrupting the youth and impiety against the gods. His life shall not last much longer, for he will be put on trial before the Assembly and ultimately consigned to death. Why does the *Sophist* occur the day after he is indicted? With regards to the Second Art, the timing of the dramatic setting most certainly seems to be a deliberate choice. One observation is that understanding the *Sophist* would be incomplete without the support of other dialogues, such as the *Theaetetus*. After all, at the end of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates and his interlocutors Theodorus and Theaetetus decide to reconvene the next day, when the *Sophist* and *Statesman* occur, and one can fairly assume that the topics discussed the previous day are still very much fresh in the minds of the interlocutors.

Another potential implication is that the first sentence indicates that the role of Socrates will be diminished in these upcoming two dialogues. It is eye-catching that the *Theaetetus* is cut short because Socrates has to go to the Porch of the King Archon due to the Meletus' charges against him. Plato's contemporary readers would have known that this indictment was the beginning of the end for Socrates, and the fact that yesterday's agreement is so emphasized brings to mind the indictment. Perhaps Socrates is a dying man, both in a physical and literary sense. It is the Eleatic Stranger who replaces his role. No longer will Socrates assume the mantle

of a constant driving force in these two upcoming dialogues, a sharp contrast from his active role in the *Theaetetus*.³ Outside of the introductions of both the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, he roams silently in the background like a ghost of sorts for most of the conversation.⁴

Additionally, this paper shall expand the circle of interrelated dialogues to include not only the *Theaetetus* but also the *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides*. This decision is not solely due to the fact that the *Theaetetus* is commonly grouped together with the *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides* stylistically as the dialogues of the transitional period which are closely connected to the later dialogues (Notomi 21). Upon a close examination of the *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides*, the role of timing as discussed in the *Statesman* emerges as one of the most interesting common themes. Since all the expertises depends on the Second Art of Measurement, one must discern whether this observation is retroactively applied to earlier dialogues or if earlier dialogues contain hints relating to timing (284a).

In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates goes to great lengths to describe the techniques of the true rhetorician and what makes a good speech: “Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head nor without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting (πρέποντα) both to one another and to the whole work” (264c).⁵ Much like the sculptor and his sculpture, the rhetorician must use the Second Art of Measurement to craft a well-proportioned, appropriate speech akin to a living being. It should also be noted that the same word, *prepon*, is used in both the *Statesman* and this section of the *Phaedrus*.

³ Socrates is not gone for good, however. He is not completely replaced, for the Eleatic Stranger is just a substitute for this conversation. Socrates is the main speaker in the *Philebus*, another later dialogue.

⁴ I have always wondered what Socrates is doing after the introduction of this dialogue. Is he in complete silence as the dialogue suggests and devoting himself to listening? Is it odd that he does not interject into the conversation even once?

⁵ See *Statesman* 284e9 where the imagery “from the extremes to the middle” is also invoked. Perhaps Plato had the *Phaedrus* in mind while writing the *Sophist* and *Statesman*.

Following that section is another key insight on the practical nature of speeches. The type and duration of speech must also vary depending on the characters of the audience, whether they have simple complex souls or complex complex souls, and a whole host of factors such as the issue at hand and size of the audience. But, Socrates also states:

The orator must learn all this well, then put his theory into practice and develop the ability to discern each kind clearly as it occurs in the actions of real life. Otherwise he won't be any better off than he was when he was still listening to those discussions in school...on meeting someone he will be able to discern what he is like and make clear to himself that the person actually standing in front of him is of just this particular sort of character he had learn about in school—to that he must now apply speeches...When he has learned all this—when, in addition, he has grasped the right occasions (καιρός) for speaking and for holding back... only then, will he have finally mastered the art well and completely. (271d-272b)

It is clear from this section that learning timing is a profoundly practical matter. In order for the rhetorician to truly master his art, it is imperative for him to put it into practice, and only through experience can he grasp the right timing for when to use different types of rhetorical techniques.⁶ Only by applying what he learned in school can he truly grasp when what types of speeches are appropriate for what audiences. For the statesman as well, he is an expert in timing, for he knows when it is the right or wrong time to begin important things relating to the city such as declaring war against enemies (305d). Therefore, one very crucial takeaway is that the statesman has all this theoretical knowledge that he learned in school, but until he puts it into practice, he will remain a novice. Only when he grasps the right timing and Second Art of Measurement through substantial practice, like the true rhetorician, will he have ultimately mastered his art.⁷

⁶ *Kairos* is used here in this passage. It is also present in the *Statesman* when discussing the second art of measurement, and thus, there can be no stronger indication that what Plato is referring to here is the same idea he was referring to in the *Statesman*.

⁷ This conclusion is problematic. The Stranger strongly insists that the Statesman himself must not perform practical tasks multiple times from the starting division to 305d. However, if he is to be an expert in statesmanship, he must also be an expert in timing, which can only be gained through practice and application. How do we reconcile the practical nature of timing with the Stranger's insistence?

The philosopher is more enigmatic than the sophist and statesman. The stranger vows to talk about the philosopher in the *Statesman* and *Sophist* several times but falls short of that promise (*Sophist* 217b, *Sophist* 254b, *Statesman* 257a). Fortunately, the *Parmenides* may provide some much needed insights. In both the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, Socrates mentions how he met Parmenides before, using Homeric words to describe his fear and reverence for the very noble, old philosopher (*Theaetetus* 183e-184a). In the prologue of the *Sophist*, Socrates once again mentions how Parmenides was “very old” and he was very young when he was questioned by the elder (217c). This is not to mention the even more nuanced parts where the Eleatic Stranger attacks and grapples with Parmenides’ philosophy (241d5, 242b, 244e).⁸ Thus, these two dialogues have strong references to the *Parmenides*.

There is indeed a fixation on the timing of the encounter. Perhaps *Parmenides* might provide important commentary on the relation between the figure of the philosopher and the Second Art. Parmenides is a venerable, experienced philosopher, and there is one particular moment which strongly evokes the idea of timing. After Parmenides has finished his powerful critique on Socrates’ Theory of Forms and youthful Socrates is unable to salvage his theory, he tells Socrates, “you are trying to mark off something beautiful, and just, and good, and each one of the forms, too soon (πρόην)...before you have been properly trained” (135c-d). Socrates has posited forms too soon, and since Parmenides is a masterful old philosopher, his ability to identify this serious flaw with timing suggests that he is also an expert in the Second Art. There is a right time to posit something, and there is also a wrong time, depending on a host of factors including proper training. Parmenides does not leave Socrates in *aporia* however, for he goes on

⁸ See Charles Kahn’s 2007 article “Why Is the *Sophist* a Sequel to the *Theaetetus*?”, especially pg.35 where he remarks how both the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* stand in the shadow of the *Parmenides*.

to illustrate the training he has in mind in the dialogue's second part.⁹ Supposedly, the old Socrates in the *Sophist* and *Theaetetus* has benefitted from this interaction, given that he gratefully mentions it twice, and is now well-versed in the Second Art of Measurement as a proper philosopher should be.

Thus, it is plausible that even before the writing of the *Statesman* and Arts of Measurement passage, there was already the idea that timing was a necessary characteristic of all three kinds Socrates and the Stranger are interested in—the rhetorical sophist, statesman, and philosopher. Plato is also playing with time and its progressions, given that Socrates is a young youth in the *Parmenides*, a middle-aged man in the *Phaedrus*, and an elder in the *Theaetetus*. Perhaps this progression not only demonstrates the progression of Socrates from a novice to expert philosopher, but also from a novice to expert in the Second Art. Given the establishment of the intentional usage of timing in many of the earlier dialogues connected to the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, this paper will now turn to focus exclusively on the *Sophist* and how the dialogue as a whole and as parts can be analyzed through the lens of timing.

III. Elea and the Introduction of the *Sophist*

First, there must be a digression on the significance of introductions in Plato's literary style. As persuasively advocated by Myles Burnyeat and the fifth century Platonist Proclus, the prologue is more than an embellishment and contains deeper philosophical significance.¹⁰ In fact, Proclus urges for a critical approach, stating how, “in studying any Platonic dialogue we must look especially at the matters that are its subject

⁹ For more on the second part of the *Parmenides*, see Gill (2012) Ch. 2 on philosophical exercise. In the interest of time and brevity, this paper will not go into it deeper.

¹⁰ See the start of the *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus* for some crucial and especially illuminating examples of this pattern.

and see how the details of the prologue prefigure them” (Buryneat 20). In the case of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, timing is one of the most important ideas in the latter, but is prefigured in the former, the first dialogue of the incomplete but continuous trilogy. If one recalls the *Phaedrus*, given that an account must be like a living being, one must consider all the parts and not solely the torso, or the philosophical ‘meat’ of the dialogue.¹¹ Notomi presents quite a fitting analogy of how the first and final parts are like the egg white and how the middle part is the yolk, which tends to get singled out (27). Not only would the picture be incomplete if we ignored the egg white, but the egg white balances out the harsher flavor of the yolk to achieve an appropriateness in flavor. In fact, the first part is what prepares us for the rigorously difficult middle part, which will be discussed later.

The introduction of the *Sophist* also gives important hints on how to read the dialogue. Plato is playing with the idea of wholeness at the start by alluding directly and indirectly to a whole host of dialogues: the *Theaetetus*, *Statesman*, and *Philosopher* (216d-217b). Perhaps our understanding of the *Sophist* would remain incomplete without the consultation of other Platonic dialogues. This thus brings up the question if it is more fitting to view the *Sophist* itself as an isolated unity or as one part of a greater project. Namely, the monumental task at the outset is how to distinguish clearly between the sophist, statesman, and philosopher and say what each of them is (217a10). Such a project is one left unanswered and the trilogy is incomplete as the *Philosopher* was never written. Consequently, the *Sophist* is both unitary and fragmentary on varying levels. But, we must always pay attention to the whole, for the *Republic* at 537c develops the idea of *sunoptikos*, how philosophers or dialecticians must be capable of an overview and

¹¹ See Notomi pg. 8 footnote 30 for a vivid, illustrative example of this scholarly tendency to ignore everything but the most popular and meaty bits of the dialogue.

“discerning the structure of the whole” (Brown 152). Yet, since the trilogy is not whole, readers must depend on themselves and struggle with salvaging from the parts a semblance of wholeness. To do so, the introduction of the *Sophist* is indispensable.

The prologue of the *Sophist* sheds light on how the Stranger is an expert of dialectic. The first thing Socrates says refers to Homer’s *Odyssey*:

Theodorus, are you sure it’s not as in Homer, and it’s some god you’re bringing along, not a foreigner, and you’ve not noticed? Homer says gods generally attend on all humans who show due respect, but most of all he says it’s the god of strangers and visitors that attends on all humans and observes us as we overstep the mark or keep in line. So maybe this person with you will turn out to be some superior being come to observe how bad we are at argument and find us out, a sort of god come to put us to the test. (216a5-b7)

One way to read this line is to understand it as Socrates accusing the Stranger to be a god of refutation. However, Theodorus defends him from this charge, as we shall later see. Comparing the Stranger to a foreign deity has a more hidden meaning that is revealed by paying attention to earlier related dialogues.

The *Phaedrus* has a section on collection and division using much of the same terminology the Stranger uses such as cutting up each “kind along its natural joints” (265e). The “systematic art” Socrates refers to is indeed the dialectic or method of division (265d). Following this section on method, Socrates says something striking:

Well, Phaedrus, I am myself a lover of these divisions and collections, so that I may be able to think and to speak; and if I believe that someone else is capable of discerning a single thing that is also by nature capable of encompassing many, I follow ‘straight behind, in his tracks, as if he were a god’. (266b)

Given that Socrates uses Homeric references to gods in both dialogues, it is plausible that the reason why gods are evoked in comparison to the Stranger is due to the Stranger’s ability to use the dialectic, the divine method, and discern a single thing from many, as he will do with the kinds of the sophist and statesman. Socrates goes on to call

those people dialecticians, and thus, it is fitting to call the Stranger a dialectician, and his association with Parmenides and Zeno further reinforce his claim to such a title (266c).¹²

It is therefore important to distinguish the goals of the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. In the dramatic and literary context, the interlocutors are attempting to narrow down and catch the sophist and statesman. In a philosophical sense, however, the Eleatic Stranger is a divine herald of sorts from foreign, mysterious lands. His unfamiliarity and strangeness challenges the complacency and understanding of his interlocutors. Much like how Prometheus gave humans fire, the Stranger, no matter if he realizes he is doing so, is embodying the divine by bestowing upon the talented students Theaetetus and Young Socrates, the future generation of Athenian philosophers, the method of division, the philosopher's method which leads down the dazzling, divine path of being (254a).

IV. Justification of Timing and *Metrios* in the *Sophist*

XENOS: We musn't refer everything to this [Second Art]...In particular, if an account is very long (παμμήκης) but renders the hearer better at discovering things, our business is to take this one seriously and not feel at all irritated at its length, and similarly if a shorter one, in its turn, has the same effect. (*Statesman* 286e)

Lengthy discussions are forgivable, if they are designed to have a more significant purpose. Upon re-examination of the *Sophist*, there are three usages of the term *metrios*, the standard of the second art of measurement, and many unusually long parts of the

¹² The fake narrative introduction of the *Theaetetus* is also very interesting. Socrates states how, "If it had been Cyrene I cared about more, Theodorus, I would be asking you how things were there—whether there were any young people in Cyrene interested in geometry or philosophy of some sort; as it is, I'm less fond of the people there than I am of people here, and I'm keener to know which of our young people are expected to turn out respectably" (143d). It seems that in the case of the Stranger however, Socrates is more interested and fond of the people from Elea because he is interested in how the people over there distinguish the three kinds (217a). This perhaps suggests that 1) the Stranger has something worthwhile to say and 2) Socrates is keener to learn about Elea and its philosophers such as Zeno and Parmenides.

dialogue conducted by the Stranger such as the initial six divisions of the sophist at 219a-231b. In light of the passages on timing in the *Statesman*, reanalyzing the *Sophist* under such a framework leads to several key observations on the nature of the method of division and the intricate construction of Platonic discussions.

First of all, the way that Theodorus defends the Stranger against eristic charges prefigures how timing will function as an overarching mechanism over much of the dialogue. Theodorus responds to Socrates' god of refutation line by stating, "That isn't our visitor's way, Socrates. There are people who make it their specialty to win arguments, but he's more measured (*μετρίωτερος*) than them" (216b8-10). Here, Theodorus employs the same word used to refer to 'due measure', *metrios*, the standard which the Second Art of Measurement operates on in the *Statesman*. This word is only used thrice in the *Sophist*, and is a deliberate indication that the Stranger is someone well-trained in timing. It is even more significant that this term is used in the introduction, given what we know from Proclus and Burnyeat on the philosophical importance of introductions in Platonic dialogues. The reader learns straight from the very start of the dialogue that the Stranger is not as inexperienced as an imitator of expertise, he is more measured than that. Consequently, he must have his reasons for elongating discussions given that he is very likely an expert in the Second Art. Not only is this a hint to what is to come in the *Statesman*, but it is also a reminder for the reader to pay attention to how *metrios* is used in the *Sophist*.

Right before the Stranger introduces the model of the angler and initial six divisions, he even explicitly says to his interlocutor Theaetetus, "From now on the discussion is addressed to you. If the length (*μήκει*) of the labors involved turns out a

little too much for you, don't blame me, blame your friends here" (218a). The Stranger warns us the answer to the question would require treatment at considerable length, and indeed, it is so long that it will take multiple dialogues to distinguish the three kinds. But, there is no doubt the discussion will "render the hearer better at discovering things", namely employing the method of division, the dialectical method, that the well-versed Stranger introduces (*Statesman* 286e).¹³ Although the length might be cumbersome and may not be fitting in terms of the dialogue's structure, one must take length seriously, as it is necessary and fitting in the context of training for the dialectic.

The initial six divisions of the sophist therefore illustrate the true difficulty of the task the interlocutors are pursuing and the importance of *metrios* in utilizing the method of division. The sophist is an elusive figure, and it is certainly fitting that the Stranger calls him a many headed sophist akin to a Hydra, reminiscent of the many-headed beast (πολυκεφάλου θρέμματος) in Republic Book IX (240c5). After dividing six times and finding the sophist at six different spots, with the sixth one looking awfully similar to Socrates, the Stranger pauses and says, "First let's stop to catch our breath, as it were, and while we're resting let's count up to ourselves—come on, just how many things has the sophist appeared to us to be?" (231d1-3). He goes on to reiterate the six and chastise himself and his interlocutors. The Stranger implores Theaetetus to not let the turning up in multiple spots happen again, attributing the issue to laziness (232b). The tricky sophist has appeared in too many places under too many names, and the essential feature that connects all these names has not yet been pinpointed.

¹³ Although the *Sophist* and *Statesman* are riddled with large and small errors both unmentioned and mentioned (i.e. whether sophistry can even be considered a *technai*) by the Stranger, he is still the speaker who introduces the method of dichotomous division to the reader. Although it can be quite puzzling, it seems that the Stranger is still well-versed in dialectic, regardless of whether one should consider him a philosopher or god of refutation/sophist.

The Stranger knows better than to do this. With the initial six divisions, his aim was certainly never to successfully narrow down the sophist, but rather, his goal was instructive in nature. The fact that the interlocutors have to stop and catch their breath suggests that the Stranger was intentionally too hasty in trying to find the sophist. He went down too many paths, causing *aporia*, forcing them to spend more time to reconsider and reflect on their previous discussion. Not only did the sophist turn up in too many places, but as Brown points out, there are competitors at that location much like the initial division leading to the *Statesman*. There is no reason why doctors or geometers could not also be classified as hunters of rich young men or sellers of intellectual wares (Brown 165). Reading the dialogue for the first time versus reading it the third or fourth time as a student undergoing training in the dialectic represents very different experiences, for many issues and errors, such as the one with competitors of the initial six divisions, goes unmentioned explicitly. There is almost a hidden layer to the dialogue which, in order to be manifested, requires foresight to the *Statesman* and hindsight to the *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, and *Phaedrus*.

Perhaps the first six divisions are examples of the method of division without proper timing. They lead us nowhere because the method of division is not executed in the appropriate context. However, the interlocutors are not left unrewarded. They do learn that there is much more to the method of division than simply dividing. One must divide at the natural, or most appropriate joints, and that itself requires more contextual contemplation on the nature of being and non-being in the case of the sophist. Much like for the Myth of Chronos and model of weaving in the *Statesman*, the Stranger has gone on too long about his application of the model of the angler in order to illustrate how difficult it will be to find the sophist and why the dichotomous method of division needs timing. Now, after the tedious yet instructive six

divisions, the interlocutors are now ready to tackle and find the sophist by embarking upon an intensive and long discussion on being and non-being which will then allow them to divide at the most natural, fitting joints.

Measurement continues to be important in the middle part of the dialogue. After discussing the paradigm of the image-maker, the Stranger remarks how the sophist is so puzzling that it is difficult to decide whether he should be placed in the expertise of apparition-making versus that of likeness-making (236c-d). Ultimately, the ontological status of non-being is extremely difficult to discern, and the way the Stranger starts the discussion is with a famous line said by Parmenides:

But, my boy, from the time I was a boy the great Parmenides never stopped testifying against it, whether expressing himself in prose or in verse: 'For never shall this prevail,' so his lines go, 'that the things that are not are; / keep you your thought, as you search, back from that path.' So we have his testimony, but most of all the statement itself will demonstrate it if we subject it to moderate cross-examination (*μέτρια βασανισθείς*). (237a5-b2)

The Stranger characterizes the discussion they will embark upon on non-being to be akin to rubbing gold upon a touch-stone to test its genuineness, with all of this done in a measured way. The usage of *metrios* in the middle certainly highlights the relevance of having measured discussions. The Stranger ultimately reaches the conclusion that catching the sophist would be impossible if they followed down the path of Parmenides, that is positing that the things that are not are not, for it is unthinkable and inexpressible to think about what is not by itself (238c10, 241c2).

But, the Stranger insists on not giving up, and suggests to "draw back a bit" from the intense discussion (241c7). He pleads with Theaetetus to not mistake his next action as parricide, for he will now "cross-examine" (*basanizein*) Parmenides and challenge him by arguing that the things that are not are (241d). The same word used at 237b2 is

re-employed here, and one must ask what makes this discussion measured? It seems that in this section, 237b6-241c3, there is overall conciseness and structural organization. Not only is the visitor able to discuss the difficulties concerning what is not, but he is also able to discuss images and falsehoods in a measured way.

The interlocutors are then ultimately able to reach the same conclusion regarding the need to commit parricide against Parmenides. They have examined the implications of his view, without letting the discussion become too long or cumbersome, and realize they must rebel against his ideological fatherhood. In a sense, both Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger are children of Parmenides, for his philosophy has made lasting impressions on them as they recount their experiences and mention him numerous times. Much like the master sculptor and his sculptures, it is fitting to imagine the need for discussions to start over, backtrack, pause, or go down new, rebellious paths. These are all necessary parts of the overall process of imaginative creation.

When the interlocutors realize that it is no longer fitting to go down the path of Parmenides, they must use their courage to reroute the direction of their discussion so that it will become more measured. This realization enhances the discussion, for they could have easily spent an excessive amount of time attempting to reconcile the metaphysics of Parmenides with their quest to catch the sophist if they were stubborn and reverent enough. Another important implication regarding measured discussion in the middle part of the dialogue has to deal with the choice of using rest and change, two very difficult and confusing topics, as the examples guiding the conversation. Right before the *aporia* of being, the Stranger states, “My dear friend, don’t you see that as things stand we’re in the greatest ignorance about it, even while we appear to ourselves to be making

sense” (249e).¹⁴ Precisely by using change and rest instead of easier aforementioned examples of hot and cold will the interlocutors be able to make valuable progress and realize the true difficulty of these metaphysical topics. It is only appropriate that the interlocutors must struggle with being and not-being. Otherwise, the discussion would cease to be either instructive or measured.

Thus, to obtain a worthier grasp of the truth, one needs good timing. Much like how the statesman decides when is the best time to go to war, the dialectician must find the most appropriate timing to reroute and expound discussion topics. In order to have a well-measured discussion, each part has to be the right length and have to fit into a well-proportioned whole akin to a living being with a head, torso, and feet. Parts also must not drag on for too long, and if they do, it is only forgivable if there is a good cause that merits such lengths. In the cases of parricide and rest and change, it seems their difficulty and length is indeed necessary and serious to progress the task and discussion at hand.

V. Measured Forms, Letters, and the Mystery of the *Philosopher*

After the *aporia* on being, the Stranger tackles an important question on the nature of forms. No matter if one ascribes to a Heraclitian or Parmenidian metaphysics where everything is either changing or at rest by making it one, they both add in being because they are either positing that things are changing or things are resting (252a). The Stranger must answer the question whether forms can mix, and by process of elimination, he arrives at the conclusion that some forms fit together and others do not. In order to

¹⁴ See *Statesman* 277d. Both the *Sophist* and *Statesman* have beautiful expressions on the limitations of knowledge, the main topic of the *Theaetetus*. Although one may appear to make sense of a topic, they still are in great ignorance. It is like how one knows in a dreamlike state but is ignorant when awake.

better illustrate this claim, the Stranger employs the analogy between forms and letters (253a). Some letters fit together and others do not, and much like the form of being, vowels differ from normal letters and run through them all, serving like a bond. It becomes clear that not everybody has this skill and that only an expert in letters knows which letters can combine and which ones cannot fit together. The Stranger then brings the analogy back to the topic of forms:

So then given that we've agreed that kinds too mix in such ways as these, must a person not have some sort of expertise to progress in his arguments if he is going to show correctly which sorts of kinds are in harmony with which and which are not receptive to each other, and further, whether there are some that hold them together, running through them in such a way as to make them capable of mixing; and again, in cases where they divide off, whether there are others similarly running through them all that cause the division? (253b-c)

Theaetetus responds that such an expertise is the most important one of all, and in one of the most wonderful and fun moments of the dialogue, the Stranger interjects, "Zeus!—have we stumbled, without noticing, on the very expertise that makes a person free? Can we possibly, in searching for the sophist, actually have found the philosopher first?" (253c). This knowing of which forms can or cannot fit together falls under the expertise of dialectic. It is no mistake that the second art of measurement is invoked with the language of fitting letters or forms together, and it seems that *metrios* is lurking here in the background. In order to find the most appropriate letters or forms that combine together, certainly one must also have a grasp of timing.

The reader gets confirmation of this suspicion when the second analogy using letters, this time between speech and letters, is mentioned (261d). The Stranger posits that the most elementary form of speech is one noun combined with one verb, for a sentence with all nouns or all verbs is clearly not a sentence at all (262b5, 262b10). Thus, the

Stranger concludes that, “just as we found things themselves in some cases fitting together, in others not, so too in relation to the signs we voice—some of them do not fit together, but those of them that do fit together (ἀρμόττοντα) bring about speech” (262d-e). Now relating to true versus false speech, the Stranger gives the famous example comparing Theaetetus sits versus Theaetetus flies. Right after the Stranger says “Theaetetus sits” and asks if it is too lengthy at 263a1, Theaetetus responds “No, not too long (οὐκ, ἀλλὰ μέτριος)” (263a4). A better translation would perhaps involve the word ‘measured’, for the term used here is the third and last instance of *metrios* in the dialogue. The usage of *metrios* here suggests that the fitting together of letters, forms, and names are subject to the judgment of the second art of measurement. After all, Theaetetus is judging the proposition created by the Stranger in such terms. What is measured is thus of metaphysical importance, for to know what forms fit together is the art of the dialectician.

The first and second analogy with letters gives the reader a sense of confidence in measurement. Unlike the first or second usages of *metrios*, the third is of metaphysical direct importance relating to the most meaty bits of the dialogue. It is quite ironic that the third occurrence is the shortest, yet it is also the most revealing to the powerful standard which we ought to judge speech (Theaetetus sits), letters, and forms. It should also be noted that the deliberate usages of *metrios* at the beginning, middle, and end are all instances given once by different speakers—Theodorus, the Stranger, and Theaetetus respectively. It is very noteworthy and fitting that for the last occurrence, Theaetetus, the student in this conversation, is the one who employs the word *metrios*. Perhaps he is starting to get a grasp of timing and its metaphysical and dialectical significance. Surely only a well-measured dialogue would be able to give such effective instruction.

Finally, as mentioned several times, timing is especially important for Plato's literary strategy and form. Perhaps the *kairos*, or right moment, will never come for the philosopher to be posited. The overpowering brightness and identification with the divine prevent such a figure from being written down.¹⁵ Although it has been promised most directly in the *Sophist* at 253e7 and 254b4, one must recall the *Theaetetus* and the digression on the philosopher in the middle of the dialogue. Right before the story of Thales falling into a well, Socrates compares rhetoricians in a law court to slaves and philosophers to free men (173a). Theodorus responds:

You got it absolutely right when you said that, as members of our sort of chorus, we are not slaves of our discussions; it's our discussions that are our slaves, as it were, each one of them waiting around to be completed when we decide. There are no jurymen to stand over us, no spectators to find fault with us and order us about as they do poets in the theatre. (173c)

The philosopher roams in freedom, and as the Stranger puts it, the dialectic is the very expertise that makes a person free (*Sophist* 253c). Plato is most clearly saying that as philosophers, he and his characters will complete discussions when they want to. Plato, the puppetmaster of his dialogues, chose not to write the *Philosopher*, leaving the most difficult question open for posterity. Theodorus is wrong in one aspect however—Plato does have spectators, students, and critics.¹⁶ To them, he freely owes nothing. To Plato, they owe a towering debt.¹⁷

¹⁵ See the discussion on writing and its significant flaws in the *Phaedrus* and especially Plato's *Seventh Letter* (341b-d).

¹⁶ Euclides and Terpsion are certainly spectators (who have their feet up), Theaetetus and Young Socrates are promising students, and perhaps the critics are those who have committed parricide against Plato as the Stranger did to Parmenides. Are readers encouraged to commit parricide? The Stranger does so by necessity, as the sophist is impossible to catch otherwise, but is not stopped and is ultimately rewarded.

¹⁷ The introduction of the *Statesman* has a fascinating section on debt (257a-c). Socrates is indebted to Theodorus for introducing Theaetetus and the Stranger to him, but his debt is hard to calculate since the comparison of the value of the three kinds goes beyond mathematical proportion. Likewise, readers are certainly incalculably indebted to the methods and spirit Plato has gifted through his dialogues.

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