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PLATO, *SOPHIST* 259C7–D7: CONTRARY PREDICATION AND GENUINE REFUTATION*

ABSTRACT

This paper defends an interpretation of Plato, Soph. *259c7–d7, which describes a distinction between genuine and pretender forms of 'examination' or 'refutation' (ἔλεγχος). The passage speaks to a need, throughout the dialogue, to differentiate the truly philosophical method from the merely eristic method. But its contribution has been obscured by the appearance of a textual problem at 259c7–8. As a result, scholars have largely not recognized that the Eleatic Stranger recommends accepting contrary predication as a condition of genuine refutation. After reviewing various proposals to change the text, the paper defends this reading. Finally, the paper turns to the methodological significance of accepting contrary predication. The dialogue depicts contrary predication as an instance of a class of statements that compel the soul's disbelief.* Soph. *259c7–d7 suggests that these kinds of statements are a crossroad: one can either reject them and turn to eristic discourse or accept them and practise genuine refutation. The paper reflects on what this indicates about Plato's meditations on contradiction and philosophy.*

Keywords: Plato; *Sophist*; elenchus; eristic; predication; contraries; contradiction

1. INTRODUCTION

At *Soph.* 259b9–c4, the Eleatic Stranger draws a distinction between a simple and easy mode of discourse, in which the speaker 'drags statements back and forth' for the sake of pleasure, and a difficult, fine (καλόν) alternative. At 259c7–d7, he then elaborates on this difficult, fine alternative, suggesting that it is 'genuine' (ἀληθινός) 'refutation' or 'examination' (ἔλεγχος),[1] whereas the simple and easy discourse is not. Unfortunately, the second line of the text in which the Stranger explains this distinction (259c8) has appeared problematic to many editors and translators, and has subsequently warped their understanding of the passage. Many scholars take the Stranger to be recommending a *dismissal*, either of contrary predication/participation[2] or of the simple and easy mode of discourse. This article argues that this is a misunderstanding. The

* I am grateful to Marta Heckel for discussions about the dangers of education in Plato and to Lev Marshall about the epistemology of contradiction in the *Parmenides*; both contributed to my thinking in this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *CQ*.

[1] I use 'refutation' and 'refuter' as translations of ἔλεγχος and its variants, but it is an imperfect translation: 'examination' captures the sense that one will not necessarily *reject* the account under consideration, but 'refutation' captures the sense that one is indeed *criticizing* the account. See LSJ s.v. A.II: '*cross-examining, testing, scrutiny*, especially for purposes of *refutation*'.

[2] This paper will not address directly the issue of the relation between language and ontology in the *Sophist*, notably whether the Stranger distinguishes between types of being or types of predications. For a review, see M.L. Gill, Philosophos*: Plato's Missing Dialogue* (Oxford, 2012), 173–6. The paper uses 'participation' for the relation of mixing between kinds, and 'predication' for a statement of this relation. There is evidence that the latter depends on the former (e.g. *Soph.* 260a–b).

Stranger is recommending *accepting contrary predication/participation* as possible, and is then elaborating on how one should try to refute such statements.

Section 2 presents the passage and lays out some of the stakes for understanding it in its immediate context and the broader dialogue. Sections 3–4 show that editors and translators are wrong to construe the Greek of the manuscripts as 'suspicious',[3] 'wrong',[4] 'garbled',[5] or 'impossible'.[6] The Greek is not only translatable, with plausible parallels in Plato and elsewhere, but appreciating the Greek as it stands also makes more argumentative sense. Finally, section 5 unpacks the rest of the passage. I argue that my overall interpretation of 259c7–d7 illuminates important methodological themes of the *Sophist*, especially the epistemology of speech that appears contradictory.

2. METAPHYSICS AND METHOD

The main goal of this paper is to defend and explicate the following text and translation of *Soph.* 259c7–d7:

ὃ καὶ πρόσθεν εἴρηται, τὸ ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ τοῖς λεγομένοις οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἐλέγχοντα ἐπακολουθεῖν, ὅταν τέ τις ἕτερον ὂν πῃ ταὐτὸν εἶναι φῇ καὶ ὅταν ταὐτὸν ὂν ἕτερον, ἐκείνῃ καὶ κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνο ὅ φησι τούτων πεπονθέναι πότερον. τὸ δὲ ταὐτὸν ἕτερον ἀποφαίνειν ἁμῇ γέ πῃ καὶ τὸ θάτερον ταὐτὸν καὶ τὸ μέγα σμικρὸν καὶ τὸ ὅμοιον ἀνόμοιον, καὶ χαίρειν οὕτω τἀναντία ἀεὶ προφέροντα ἐν τοῖς λόγοις, οὔτε τις ἔλεγχος οὗτος ἀληθινὸς ἄρτι τε τῶν ὄντων τινὸς ἐφαπτομένου δῆλος νεογενὴς ὤν.

What was spoken of before: to able to follow what is said, granting these things as possible and refuting on the basis of each statement, whenever someone says that what is different is in some way the same, and when he says that what is the same is different, [refuting][7] in that respect and according to that very thing which he said, whether each of them has the property. But making the same appear different to us in just some way, or the different same, or the great small, or the like unlike, and to take pleasure in placing before us contraries in speech, that is not a genuine kind of refutation, but is clearly a newborn of someone coming into contact with the beings only recently.

This passage sets out two conditions for how one should 'follow' speech (τὸ … τοῖς λεγομένοις οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι … ἐπακολουθεῖν). First, 'granting these things as possible' (ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ); and second, 'refuting on the basis of each statement' (καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἐλέγχοντα).[8] The focus of this paper is explicating the first condition, 'granting these things as possible', and showing that it means 'accepting the possibility of statements that predicate contraries of contraries', although I explore the possibility

[3] L. Campbell, *Sophistes and Politicus of Plato*, *with a Revised Text and English Notes* (Oxford, 1867), ad loc.

[4] H.N. Fowler, *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist*, *with an English Translation* (Cambridge, MA, 1921), ad loc. n. 1.

[5] N. White, *Plato: Sophist*, *Translated, with Introduction and Notes* (Indianapolis, 1993), ad loc.; and N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1999), 245.

[6] S. Benardete, *Plato's Sophist. Part II of* The Being of the Beautiful (Chicago, 1986), n. 82.

[7] ἐλέγχοντα at 259c8 probably takes both καθ᾽ ἕκαστον at 259c8 and ἐκείνῃ … πότερον at 259d1 as its object, which makes for an awkward translation. Part of the issue is that ἐκείνῃ … πότερον has the sense of a genuinely open question, so 'examining' may seem more appropriate for the repetition at 259d1—still, I retain 'refuting' for the sake of consistency. See n. 1 above.

[8] I take ἕκαστον to pick out a member of τοῖς λεγομένοις, but it could also mean 'each subject', e.g. the same, or the different.

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that it applies to a broader class of apparently contradictory statements. The core of the paper focusses on the dispute around the text of the first condition (ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ) and defends the proposed translation. In the final part I turn to the rest of the passage.

First, however, I will review some relevant context. The Stranger's statement above, starting with the relative ὅ, is a continuation of a previous series of ideas. At 258c, he begins a review of the 'demonstration' (ἀποδείκνυμι, 258c11, d5, d7) he has conducted regarding being and non-being, or 'what is' (τὸ ὄν) and 'what is not' (τὸ μὴ ὄν). The demonstration has shown that what is *is not*, and what is not *is* (259b4–7), in so far as negation is a two-place relation of otherness, rather than opposition, and it is enabled by one of the greatest kinds—namely, *difference* (258e–259a, cf. 254e–256e, 257b–c). For example, one can say (without contradiction) that 'being is not', since being participates in difference: it stands in the relation of *being-other-than* (or *being-different-from*) each other being. The Stranger then outlines a methodological principle going forward. Someone could try to 'refute' what they have said and show that they have spoken poorly; otherwise, he should say what they say (259a2–4): kinds 'mix', being and difference 'pass through' all of them and each other, and, as a result, each being *is* and *is different from* each other being (259a4–b4).

In the passage prior to the focus of this paper (259b9–c5), the Stranger outlines two options for this hypothetical 'refuter' of his account, or 'someone not persuaded of these contrarieties' (ταύταις δὴ ταῖς ἐναντιώσεσιν εἴτε ἀπιστεῖ τις). Positively, he recommends that they 'consider' (σκεπτέον) it for themselves and try to 'say something better'. Negatively, he warns against someone, thinking that they have found some difficulty for the account, taking pleasure in 'dragging the statements back and forth' (χαίρει τοτὲ μὲν ἐπὶ θάτερα τοτὲ δ' ἐπὶ θάτερα τοὺς λόγους ἕλκων). This, the Stranger says, is to be enthusiastic about what is not 'worthy of much enthusiasm' (οὐκ ἄξια πολλῆς σπουδῆς ἐσπούδακεν). He then refers to these two options—the positive and the negative, respectively—with two demonstratives: to discover 'this' (τοῦτο μὲν)—dragging statements—is 'neither sophisticated at all nor difficult' (οὔτε τι κομψὸν οὔτε χαλεπὸν εὑρεῖν), but 'that' (ἐκεῖνο δ') is both 'difficult and fine at the same time' (ἤδη καὶ χαλεπὸν ἅμα καὶ καλόν). 'That' is the referent picked up by the relative ὃ at 259c7. For Theaetetus, naturally, asks 'what sort of thing' (τὸ ποῖον;) 'that' is, and the relative answers his question. Thus the Stranger's next words—our passage—elaborate the 'difficult and fine' path moving forward, which, apparently, 'was spoken of before' (πρόσθεν εἴρηται).

Indeed, the Stranger's backreference points to the broader themes in the dialogue. When the Stranger says that followers of the simple and easy path are 'enthusiastic about what is not worthy of much enthusiasm', the reader will be reminded of the opening scene of the dialogue.[9] Socrates calls the Stranger a philosopher and divine 'expert at refutation (ἐλεγκτικός)' present to oversee their speech (λόγοις) and censure

[9] Campbell (n. 3), in his note on 216b, sees the anticipation of 259c–d. More broadly, this early passage has been observed by L. Brown, '*Aporia* in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*', in G. Karamanolis and V. Politis, *The Aporetic Tradition in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2018), 91–111, at 101–2; S. Delcomminette, 'Odysseus and the home of the stranger from Elea', *CQ* 64 (2014), 533–41, at 533–5; M. Frede, 'The literary form of Plato's *Sophist*', in C. Gill and M.M. McCabe, *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), 135–51, at 146–51; Notomi (n. 5), 67 n. 79, 69, 295; and N. Zaks, 'Éristique et réfutation socratique dans le *Sophiste* de Platon', in S. Delcomminette and G. Lachance, *L'Éristique: Définitions, Caractérisations et Historicité* (Brussels, 2021), 267–88, at 287–8.

them for speaking poorly (216b), but Theodorus stresses that he is 'more moderate than those enthusiasts of disputation' (μετριώτερος τῶν περὶ τὰς ἔριδας ἐσπουδακότων) (216b9). The Stranger does not disappoint: he describes his own speech in the dialogue as 'refuting' the thesis that non-being is (238d6, 241e1, 242b1, cf. 241d5–7). Still, there is a need to distinguish between the Stranger's philosophical refutation and its eristic counterpart. This reappears, prominently, in the sixth definition of the sophist, which describes refutation as the 'greatest and most authoritative' kind of purification (230d7–e4, cf. 230b4–d4). While the Stranger appears to grant a similarity between this practitioner of 'noble sophistry' (231b8) and the sophist, he insists that it is the similarity between a wolf and a dog (231a4–b1). Indeed, the previous classifications of the sophist as a practitioner of the *eristic* craft (232e2, cf. 225c6–226a4) seem better suited to capture a sophistic style of refutation. By contrast, the practitioner of noble sophistry arguably deploys the positive methodology of our passage: having collected someone's statements together and placed them side-by-side, he proceeds to show that these 'are opposite themselves at the same time, concerning the same things, and in relation to those things according to the same respects' (ἐπιδεικνύουσιν αὐτὰς αὑταῖς ἅμα περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἐναντίας) (230b4–8). In fact, the Stranger describes this purification as refutation (ἐλέγχων, τὸν ἐλεγχόμενον, 230d1; ἐλέγχον, 230d8), so it is possible that this is the backreference implied by 'what was said before' at 259c7.[10]

Soph. 259c7–d7 appears to spell out, then, the methodological substance of the philosophical mode of refutation in contrast to its eristic neighbour. In the immediately preceding statement (259b9–c5), the Stranger's identification of the pleasure-seeking dragger and follower of the simple and easy path as an 'enthusiast' clearly refers to an eristic mode of discourse. Our passage then argues that this path is not 'a genuine kind of refutation', but only makes 'the same appear different to us in just some way, or the different same, or the great small, or the like unlike, and to take pleasure in placing before us contraries in speech'. The first part of our passage elaborates on the counterpart, the true skill in refutation, which proceeds in the 'difficult and fine' way, also in relation to contrary predication: 'whenever someone says that what is different is in some way the same', the listener should follow what is said according to the two conditions laid out. The second condition, refuting 'on the basis of each statement', involves responding to the speaker of contrary predication by refuting on the basis of the precise respects and subjects of predication. Therefore, our passage explains the distinction between eristic and philosophical refutation by elaborating how the two modes of critical discourse relate to contrary predication/participation in two contrasting ways.

3. TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Unfortunately, the Stranger's positive proposal for the 'difficult and fine' path contains text that many editors want to reject. At 259c7–8, the manuscripts read:

[10] I am grateful to *CQ*'s reader for emphasizing this connection. By contrast, A. Diès, *Platon: Œuvres complètes, tome VIII: Le Sophiste* (Paris, 1925), in his n. 3 on 259c, suggests that the reference is to 251b. I address this below. For further discussion of the contrast between eristic and philosophical refutation at 230b–d, see I. Campbell, 'Plato, the eristics, and the principle of non-contradiction', *Apeiron* 54 (2021), 571–614, at 580–1; Notomi (n. 5), 295–6; Zaks (n. 9), 269–77; N. Zaks, 'Socratic *elenchus* in the *Sophist*', *Apeiron* 51 (2018), 371–90.

τὸ ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ τοῖς λεγομένοις οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ἐλέγχοντα ἐπακολουθεῖν,

The central issue is δυνατὰ: although MSS families β, T and W in δ have δυνατὰ at 259c8, editors largely think that it is nonsense and propose emendations.

The proposal that dominates contemporary Greek editions is from Diès in the Budè:[11] τὸ ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς <παντὶ> δυνατὰ. This text is also adopted, for example, by the most recent Oxford Classical Text and by Tovar's Greek edition and Spanish translation.[12] In his note, Diès justifies the insertion with reference to 251b8, where the 'young and old late learners' grab a hold of what is 'available to everyone' (παντὶ πρόχειρον)—namely, the thought that it is 'impossible for the many to be one and the one to be many'.[13] As a result, along with many other scholars, Diès takes ἐάσαντα as *pejorative*, meaning *dismissing* 'these things' (ταῦτα), to which he attaches 'quibbles' (arguties), on the assumption that the Stranger is dismissing the contrary predications of the late learners as methodologically worthless.[14]

Other Greek text editors have similar inclinations, though their proposals differ. Apelt, in the Teubner, writes that 'ὡς δυνατὰ corruptum necdum certa emendatione correctum'; he proposes to change the text to 'ὡς δέον αὐτὰ sc. ἐᾶν', meaning 'leaving them as they should be' ('"es gebührendermassen liegen lassen"').[15] Something left 'as it should be' could be understood as being unworthy of further enquiry, and it could encourage us to render ἐάσαντα in a pejorative way. We move closer to this reading with Schanz's proposal δυνατώτατα, so that the ὡς + superlative would read 'leave behind these things as much as possible'.[16] Similarly, Campbell ([n. 3], note ad loc.) proposes δυνατὸν μάλιστα, so that ταῦτα ἐάσαντα means to *get away* from something unproductive as much as possible. Fowler ([n. 4], note ad loc.), in the Loeb edition, gives clear expression to the idea that ταῦτα ἐάσαντα is pejorative: he agrees that 'δυνατὰ is certainly wrong', and he proposes οὐκ ὄντα or οὐκ ἄξια. He then translates: 'to let those quibbles go as of no account'.

Translations, it is worth noting, do not universally reflect editors' inclination to change the text: the manuscripts' text is adopted, for example, by some English and French editions.[17] But these are largely the exceptions.[18] In the English translation popular for much of the twentieth century, Cornford, following a proposal from

[11] Diès (n. 10), ad loc.

[12] E.A. Duke, W.F. Hicken, W.S.M. Nicoll, D.B. Robinson and J.C.G. Strachan, *Platonis opera, tomus 1* (Oxford, 1995), ad loc.; A. Tovar, *Platon*: El Sofista*: edicion del texto con aparato critico, traduccion, prologo y notas* (Madrid, 1959), ad loc. The older OCT—J. Burnet, *Platonis opera, tomus 1* (Oxford, 1900), ad loc.—prints †δυνατὰ†.

[13] Diès (n. 10), ad loc. writes: 'Allusion aux arguties sur l'un et le multiple (251b), que *le premier venu* trouve toute prètes (παντὶ πρόχειρον), croyant avoir fait la "une trouvae de haute sagesse"'.

[14] For example, Tovar (n. 12), ad loc. adds the 'retorcidos' ('twisted').

[15] O. Apelt (ed.), *Platonis Sophista* (Leipzig, 1897), ad loc.

[16] Reported in Diès (n. 10), ad loc. and Fowler (n. 4), ad loc. Cf. *Grg.* 492d6–7.

[17] For English, see C. Rowe, *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist* (Cambridge, 2015), ad loc.; E. Brann, P. Kalkavage, E. Salem, *Plato: Sophist. The Professor of Wisdom, with Translation, Introduction and Glossary* (Newburyport, MA, 1996), ad loc. For French, see N.L. Cordero, *Platon: Le Sophiste* (Paris, 1993), ad loc.; L. Mouze, *Le Sophiste* (Paris, 2019), ad loc.; L. Robin, 'Le Sophiste', in L. Robin and M.J. Moreau, *Platon: Œuvres complètes, tome 2* (Paris, 1950), ad loc. However, Cordero ([this note], n. 342) thinks that the text is 'very uncertain'; while Robin ([this note], n. 324) thinks that the emendations are useless, his actual translation adds 'fantaisies' to the demonstrative.

[18] In addition to the translations discussed below, see W.S. Cobb, *Plato's* Sophist (Savage, MD, 1990), ad loc.; J. Duerlinger, *Plato's* Sophist*: A Translation with a Detailed Account of its Theses and Arguments* (New York, 2005), ad loc.; B. Jowett, 'Sophist', in B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of*

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Badham of ἀνήνυτα for δυνατὰ, translates 'leaving such quibbling alone as leading nowhere'.[19] Thus, like Diès, Cornford implies that what they are leaving behind—the object of ἐάσαντα—is not even contrary predication itself but an eristic mode of discourse in relation to these, or the simple and easy path. In White's (n. 5) now widely used English translation,[20] he asserts that the 'text here is slightly garbled', and he appears to follow Cornford in reading Badham's ἀνήνυτα: 'That is, we should leave pointless things like this alone'. Benardete's (n. 6) English translation removes any ambiguity about the object of ἐάσαντα. Although he thinks that no emendation 'is very persuasive', he also asserts that '"as possible" … seems impossible',[21] and he translates ταῦτα ἐάσαντα as 'to dismiss the former', so that the referent of ταῦτα is the τοῦτο that is neither 'sophisticated nor difficult'.

Although the readings canvassed here propose different emendations and translations, many share the idea that ταῦτα ἐάσαντα means to flee something methodologically unproductive, which they often identify with the simple and easy eristic mode of discourse. The thesis of this paper is that this is a mistake: ταῦτα ἐάσαντα does not mean to dismiss anything in a pejorative sense but to *accept* or *grant* something; and that something is certainly not the simple and easy mode of discourse but the 'contrarieties' (ἐναντιώσεσιν) previously mentioned as following from the theory of being and difference put forward by the Stranger (259b8), which the eristic treats in a certain, problematic way.[22] Thus, while those who identify the referent of the demonstrative with contrary predication/participation are on the right track, the object of this demonstrative is not 'quibbles', that is, ἐάσαντα is not pejorative, and ὡς δυνατὰ indicates how: the Stranger is directing the sceptic of his account to accept contrary predications/relations as serious linguistic and metaphysical possibilities and then attempt to refute his account with those possibilities secured.

4. GRANTING CONTRARIETIES AS POSSIBLE

There are several reasons to read the clause ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ as 'granting these things (contrarieties) as possible' (259c7–8). First, the demonstrative ταῦτα at 259c7 is plural, and the contrarieties were picked out with the dative form of the same plural demonstrative (ταύταις) at 259b8. By contrast, in the previous lines (259b9–c4), the simple and easy mode is singular (τοῦτο … τι κομψὸν οὔτε χαλεπὸν εὑρεῖν) and a singular individual enjoys dragging the statements back and forth (χαίρει … ἕλκων), so it is not grammatically plausible that the referent of the demonstrative is the simple and easy path or its practitioner. Additionally, if the Stranger were directing his audience to dismiss the simple and easy path, then he would not be saying anything methodologically substantive; it would merely be a rhetorical prohibition against a way of speaking. Understanding the demonstrative as

Plato: Translated into English with Analyses and Introductions, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1953), ad loc.; Notomi (n. 5), 245; and W. Witwickiego, *Platon: Sofista, Polityk* (Warsaw, 1956), ad loc.

[19] F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (Frome and London, 1935), ad loc. To Cornford, Badham's proposal 'seems to be the most probable correction of δυνατὰ yet proposed'.

[20] Included (without notes) in J. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, 1997). The quote is from n. 72 in the original White (n. 5), ad loc.

[21] Benardete (n. 6), n. 82. Cf. Cobb (n. 18), ad loc.

[22] Cf. Rowe (n. 17), ad loc.; Mouze (n. 17), n. b ad loc.; and Brann, Kalkavage, Salem (n. 17), ad loc.

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referring to contrary predications/relations is preferable because it then says something that an enquirer could take up in practice: in principle, do not be bothered by contrarieties (cf. 256a11, 257a8).

I will return to the translation of ἐάσαντα as 'granting', but let us turn now to the crux of the difficulty: the supposedly problematic δυνατὰ at 259c8. The near consensus that this word is a corruption is perplexing: δυνατὰ is naturally read as a neuter plural accusative, from δυνατός, agreeing with ταῦτα as a predicative adjective, and ὡς as an adverb modifying ἐάσαντα: 'granting these things as possible'.[23] Plato uses a nearly identical formula at *Prm.* 159b2: Parmenides says 'if we grant these things as shown by now' (εἰ ταῦτα μὲν ἤδη ἐῶμεν ὡς φανερά), in reference to his previous demonstration of the consequences for the others, if the one is (157b–159b).[24] Here ἐάω takes a plural demonstrative subject, ταῦτα, with ὡς + a neuter plural predicative adjective, 'shown' or 'evident' (φανερά). It is grammatically parallel to the disputed text at *Soph.* 259c8. Thus at 259c7–8 the Stranger says that they should ἐάσαντα the contrarieties witnessed in his own account 'as possible'.[25]

There are other parallels worth noting. Outside of Plato, a similar phrase is found in the Hippocratic *Regiment* III 79.10–11: as for the parts of a fish as food, 'passing over the head and belly [parts] as too moist' (τὰ δὲ κεφάλαια καὶ ὑπογάστρια ἐᾷν ὡς ὑγρότερα);[26] and in Iamblichus' *Protrepticus* 111.26–8: 'leaving behind the human characters as popular' (τὰ μὲν ἀνθρώπινα ἔθη ἐᾶν ὡς δημώδη). Herodotus uses the same phrase but with a finite verb rather than an adjective: unlike the Egyptians, who practise circumcision, other people 'leave the genitals as they have come about' (τὰ αἰδοῖα ὦλλοι μὲν ἐῶσι ὡς ἐγένοντο, 2.36.12). In Plato, there are similar but different constructions: at *Tht.* 190d3, 'I concede, and it seems to me, as you say' (ἐῶ τε καί μοι δοκεῖ ὡς λέγεις); at *Resp.* 450a9, '[I would have] let these things be accepted as they were then stated' (ἐάσοι ταῦτα ἀποδεξάμενος ὡς τότε ἐρρήθη); and at *Lach.* 201a6–7, 'I do not council that we let ourselves be as we now are' (ἐᾶν δὲ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ὡς νῦν ἔχομεν οὐ συμβουλεύω).[27] These examples reinforce the argument that there is no good philological reason to reject the manuscripts at *Soph.* 259c7–8: ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ is perfectly acceptable Greek.

Now, as these examples show, ἐάω has a variety of meanings available in any given semantic context. It can mean to 'dismiss' or 'pass over something not worthwhile', as in Iamblichus and the Hippocratic *Regiment* (cf. LSJ s.v. II). But the basic meaning is to 'leave alone' or 'leave be' (LSJ s.v. A), and this can just as easily mean to 'permit' or 'allow' in a given context (LSJ s.v. b); indeed, Smyth consistently renders it 'permit', and its negation to 'forbid'.[28] In Herodotus, it means to 'leave the genitals unaffected by circumcision'; in several of the examples from Plato, it means 'not to dispute or

[23] On ὡς as an adverb appropriate for this clause, see LSJ s.v. A (on ὡς as adverb of manner), especially A.II and A.III.2, and H.W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), §§2990, 2992 and 2996.

[24] F.M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides' Way of Truth and Plato's Parmenides Translated with an Introduction and a Running Commentary* (Frome and London, 1939), ad loc. renders this very clause 'Suppose, then, we pass over those further consequences as obvious'. Compare M.L. Gill and P. Ryan, *Plato: Parmenides, Translated, with Introduction* (Indianapolis, 1993), ad loc.: 'suppose we now concede those results as evident'.

[25] For δυνατά as a plural adjective meaning 'possible', cf. Pl. *Leg.* 736d1; Thuc. 5.89; Xen. *An.* 4.2.23.

[26] However, one manuscript is missing ἐᾷν ὡς.

[27] There is also the disputed *Alc. I* 119a8: 'allowing as you now hold' (ἐᾶν ὡς νῦν ἔχεις).

[28] See Smyth (n. 23), §§431, 438, 808; on the negation, §2692a.

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disturb a proposition in a discourse'. Indeed, in the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides*, it arguably means to 'concede', 'grant', or 'accept'. This is a reasonable way to translate the participle at *Soph.* 259c7: thus I render ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ as 'granting these things as possible'.

This translation is not without precedent. As we have seen, some translators have already adopted it. Moreover, despite favouring an emendation, Campbell (n. 3) also proposes that ὡς δυνατὰ could mean 'Letting these contradictions alone, as not inconsistent with the nature of things', noting that οὐκ ἀδύνατα is written in the margins of one manuscript. This is the core of the proposal defended in this paper: the Stranger says that 'these things', predication/participation of contraries, are possible, and the person who is not convinced of his own account of being and difference should take their starting point from accepting this possibility and proceed from there.

My reading of 259c7–8 is also not far from the popular emendation of ὡς <παντὶ> δυνατὰ. But there are two problems with this text. First, there is no need to insert παντὶ: the manuscripts read perfectly well as is, even if there is a plausible connection with 251b. Second, the insertion of παντὶ arguably obscures the Stranger's meaning. The common translation, based on this text, of ἐάσαντα ταῦτα as roughly meaning 'dismissing these argumentative quibbles' makes sense if we think that the Stranger is reinforcing his rejection of the late learners' grabbing hold of what is 'available to everyone' at 251b8. It is true that at 251b8 identifying the impossibility of contrary predication/participation is not an intellectual accomplishment, and neither is the 'dragging' of statements. But this does not require that at 259c7–8 the difficult and fine path of true refutation dismisses contrary predication as an eristic quibble. The eristic quibble is identifying contrary predication as if doing so constituted an objection. The Stranger is imagining someone, like the late learner, thinking that, because (for example) the Stranger's account entails that what is *is not*, the account is therefore flawed. But that is unproductive; it would not lead to a real refutation or to a new, better theory. By contrast, the first step of the path of true refutation is to grant the possibility of contrary predications such as the Stranger's. Indeed, just after this passage, the Stranger reiterates that they have fought to 'allow one thing to mix with another' (ἐᾶν ἕτερον ἑτέρῳ μείγνυσθαι) (260a2–3), against those who would do away with discourse and philosophy by denying mixing (260a–b). Clearly, ἐᾶν here does not imply dismissing the mixing of kinds as 'quibbles'. The Stranger describes allowing or permitting the metaphysical possibility of mixing, which enables real philosophical discourse. Contrary predication is at least one of the linguistic correlates of this possibility. ταῦτα ἐάσαντα ὡς δυνατὰ at 259c8 should be read in this light.[29]

5. CONTRADICTION, DISBELIEF AND PROGRESS

Why does the Stranger instruct his sceptic to allow the possibility of contrary predication? We may begin to address this question by looking at the rest of the passage.

[29] For roughly similar readings of the upshot of this passage and its contribution to the distinction between philosophical and eristic refutation, compare Brown (n. 9), 108; Campbell (n. 10), 581–91; G. Movia, *Apparenze essere e verità* (Milan, 1991), 421; L. Mouze, *Chasse à l'homme et faux-semblants dans Le Sophiste de Platon* (Paris, 2020), 89; Mouze (n. 17), n. b ad loc.; A.L. Peck, 'Plato and the ΜΕΓΙΣΤΑ ΓΕΝΗ of the *Sophist*: a reinterpretation', *CQ* 2 (1952), 32–56, at 55; and Zack (n. 9), 282–3.

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The primary text considered here is one of two participial phrases modifying an articular infinitive: 'to able to follow what is said, granting these things as possible and refuting on the basis of each statement'. The main verbal construction is 'to be able to follow' (οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι ἐπακολουθεῖν), whose object is the dative participle 'what is said' (τοῖς λεγομένοις) (cf. *Leg.* 688d8, 861c4; *Tht.* 168e5, 206b1). Hence, the instruction is to follow what is said according to two conditions: (1) first, as I have argued, accept contrary predication/participation as possible and, (2) second, refute καθ᾽ ἕκαστον, or 'according to each statement'. What does it mean to refute according to each statement? The Stranger explains: whenever someone produces a sentence that predicates a contrary of a contrary (for example 'what is different is in some way the same, and … what is the same is different'), one should refute 'in that respect and according to that very thing which he said, whether each of them has the property'. That is, one should refute (or 'examine'—see n. 7 above) the contrary predication produced by the speaker according to the precise respect of predication (ἐκείνῃ, corresponding to πῃ) and the subject of the predicate (κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνο) in the statement (ὅ φησι), to see whether the subject really has the contrary predicate in the respect the speaker asserts.[30]

This is highly abstract and somewhat obscure, but the reader should be able to understand what the Stranger means because, as he says, he has spoken of the method already. First, as we have seen, the Stranger describes a method of purification by refutation, in which the refuter shows that a speaker's statements (λόγοις) on the same subject are opposed to each other 'at the same time' (ἅμα), 'concerning the same things' (περὶ τῶν αὐτῶν) and 'in relation to those things according to the same respects' (πρὸς τὰ αὐτὰ κατὰ ταὐτὰ, 230b7–8). Second, and perhaps more informatively, the Stranger's own speech has followed the method. For example, difference 'passes through' being, so that being *is not* each other being (259b), yet this does not force a contradiction, as it had appeared initially (238d5–8). Rather, the statement is respect-specific: 'what is' is the subject of the predicate, 'is not', only in so far as it *is not* with respect to *other* beings (255d–e, 257a).[31] Conversely, in his theory of negation (257b3–c3), the Stranger explains how what is not *is*, in so far as when a speaker predicates a term of another term, but prefixes the second term with a negation, they pick out one being —the subject—and attribute to it, in respect of the referent of the second term, the relation of difference or otherness. These are subject- and respect-specific analyses of contrary predications. Moreover, this type of method involves not only contrary predication but also straightforward contradiction. For example, 'change is the same and not the same' is not a statement that should 'bother' us (οὐ δυσχεραντέον), because we do not 'speak in the same way' in both cases: when we say that change is the same, this is based on change's mixing with the same in relation to itself (hence, we 'speak thus', οὕτω λέγομεν), but when we say that it is not the same, we speak on the basis of (διά) its communion with the different, so that it becomes separated from the same (256a10–b4).[32] True refutation, then, has been *witnessed* (not just described) in the

[30] Cf. *Prm.* 158e–159a: the others are like each other in so far as each of them is unlimited and limited, distributively; the others are unlike each other in so far as each of them is unlimited and limited, collectively.

[31] On the Stranger's distinction between three modes of predication (or being—see n. 2 above) as applied to being, change and rest, see C. Buckels, 'Motion and rest as genuinely greatest kinds in the *Sophist*', *AncPhil* 35 (2015), 317–27; and, more generally, P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood: A Study of the* Sophist (Cambridge, 2012), 149–65.

[32] For a review of the apparently contradictory statements in close detail, see Crivelli (n. 31), 149–65. For my part, either reading (2) (ambiguity in 'is' of identity and predication) or reading (3)

Stranger's own practice, as one would expect of this 'god' and 'expert at refutation' (216b): he has gone from submission to the puzzles produced from contrary predications and contradictions (237a–241e) to discovering the underlying reality that makes sense of it all—the blending of kinds—through disambiguating the respects and subjects of predication in the relevant sentences.[33]

Indeed, we can see from this why the Stranger emphasizes accepting contrary predication as possible precisely when he addresses a potential sceptic of his account. At the beginning of the discussion of being, the Stranger used the same verb for 'following' (ἐπακολουθέω) from our passage to describe how the first type of theorists about being—those who say that being is one or two or three, and so forth—have neglected to make sure that their audience understands what they mean (243a8–9, cf. *Resp.* 534e). The Stranger has 'followed' these speakers in the manner of true refutation (cf. 242a–c, 237a7–9, 258d1–3), and his advice to a hypothetical sceptic of the theories of being and difference that came from this following instructs the sceptic to 'follow' in the same way. By contrast, the forbidden path, as the 'in just some way' (ἀμῇ γέ πῃ, 259d3) indicates, relies on not clarifying ambiguities in predication: it makes a contrary appear predicated of a contrary in one way, but does not specify or keep consistent the respect or subject of predication. The dialogue, again, has given us some hints as to how this might come about. For example, the late learners are gripped by the impossibility of 'many' being predicated of 'one', and conversely (cf. *Phlb.* 14c–16a, especially 14d4–e4, 15d8–16a3, and *Prm.* 137c4–5). The implication, according to 259c7–d7, is that they do not pay attention to the subjects and respects of predication and so cannot see the underlying relations of mixing that explain the possible truth of the sentence. For example, perhaps one is many in that one whole is many because it has parts, but the same whole is one because it is a unity of parts (cf. *Prm.* 157c–158c).[34] To 'drag' speech back and forth, then, is to produce statements with some kind of paradoxical surface logic only by exploiting the lack of clear and consistent qualifiers for respects and subjects. If these qualifiers were made explicit, then the hearer could dissolve the apparent impossibility of the truth of statement.

Thus the contrast between eristic and philosophical refutation illustrates an epistemology of contradiction and paradox. The issue hinges on what we might call the risk of *compelled disbelief*: statements whose comprehension also threatens the listener with being unable (in principle) to believe the content of the statement. The Stranger found some of these for himself: for example, the third puzzle concerning non-being compels (ἀναγκάζεσθαι) the one trying to refute (ἐλέγχοντα, ἐλέγχειν) non-being to 'say the opposite to himself' (238d5–8). This, in turn, empowers the sophist to grab hold of their use of speech (τῶν λόγων) and thereby 'easily turn around

(relationally completed predications) is acceptable, although (3) is clearly preferable. What I need is an emphasis on relational qualifiers as the core of disambiguation; either (2) or (3) could achieve this, but a theory of predication as intrinsically relational would deliver this result in a neater way than the ambiguity in essential and predicative 'is' would.

[33] There is also the famous passage in which the Stranger describes dialectical knowledge as the ability 'to divide according to kinds (τὸ κατὰ γένη διαιρεῖσθαι), and neither thinks that the same form (εἶδος) is different nor that a different one is the same' (253d1–3, cf. 253d5–e2). See C. Ionescu, 'Elenchus and the method of division in the *Sophist*', in J.K. Larsen, V.V. Haraldsen and J. Vlasits, *New Perspectives on Platonic Dialectic* (New York, 2022), 116–33.

[34] Socrates makes a similar point about sameness and difference in the *Philebus* (12e3–13a5): shape is the same and one in relation to itself, but its parts are different and opposite in relation to each other.

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(ἀποστρέψει) the statements (τοὺς λόγους) to the contrary (τοὐναντίον)' (239d1–3). What I would like to propose is that such statements are a fulcrum or crossroad: the threat of compelling disbelief will either invoke true philosophical refutation, or the pretender refutation of eristic quibbling (cf. *Tht.* 165b–e).[35] We have seen that the follower of the simple and easy path, the pretend refuter, responds to contrary predication in the way the Stranger says the sophist does: they assume that contrary predications are necessarily false and use them to give the appearance of refutation. Another relevant example is the late learners, who both reject the possibility of true contrary predications and 'take pleasure in not allowing us to call a man good but only the good good' (χαίρουσιν οὐκ ἐῶντες ἀγαθὸν λέγειν ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν ἀγαθόν) (251b7–c1).[36] Like the sophist, who 'grabs hold' of the Stranger and Theaetetus' speech and forces them to contradict themselves (239d2), the late learner seizes on the paradoxical surface logic of contrary predications and refuses not only their possibility in true speech but also the possibility of any cross-subject predication.[37] By contrast, the Stranger claims that accepting the possibility of apparently paradoxical statements is a condition of philosophical discourse (cf. 249c6–d4, 260a): at the outset he insists that, in some way, it must be true that what is *is not*, according to one respect (κατά τι), and, in turn, what is not *is*, in some way (πῃ) (241d5–7). The issue is not simply about the distinction between apparent contradiction and genuine contradiction,[38] since not all difficult sentences are contradictory or even involve contraries. The Stranger also describes needing to pay attention to the respect (πῃ) in which change is different from difference (256b5), which implies that certain kinds of statements of non-identity are of a kind, methodologically, with contrary predication and apparent contradiction. I would propose that, rather than focussing specifically on contrary predication or contradiction *per se*, the Stranger (and, by extension, Plato) is concerned with any statement for which the soul cannot comprehend how it could even possibly accept its truth. These are the crossroads for philosophy and eristic.

The dialogue also gives some illustrations of how these two paths proceed. On the one hand, by following the true method of refutation, the Stranger and Theaetetus discover of the blending of kinds, and with this the philosopher's dialectical knowledge (253b–254b).[39] Thus, practising true refutation leads to dialectic, in so far as disambiguating the problematic sentences requires an understanding of the blending of kinds. On the other

[35] The *Parmenides* is well known for systematically exploring contrary predications and contradictions as an exercise in 'wandering' to 'grasp the truth in thought' (136d4–e4). Campbell (n. 3), in his note on 259c–d, reports Grote's observation of this connection, but objects on the grounds of the contrast between 'stimulating the mind to further study' and raising challenges 'for their own sake'. This paper has shown that *Soph.* 259c–d makes the same distinction. On contradiction and education in the *Parmenides*, see F. Gonzalez, 'Dialectic in Plato's *Parmenides*: the schooling of young Socrates', in J.K. Larsen, V.V. Haraldsen, J. Vlasits, *New Perspectives on Platonic Dialectic* (New York, 2022), 70–91; and C.C. Meinwald, *Plato's* Parmenides (Oxford, 1996), 19, 76–94.

[36] Cf. Crivelli (n. 31), 103–8. It does not matter for the purposes of this paper specifically why the late learners find contrary predication impossible.

[37] The Stranger also describes the late learner's view as depending on a metaphysical/ontological thesis: he mocks those who 'do not allow (ἐῶντες) anything to be called by its association with a different property' (252b8–9). When the Stranger argues against this view, he asks if 'we should allow (ἐῶμεν) all things to be capable of mixing with each other' (252d2–3). For uses of ἐάω to describe forbidding or allowing the metaphysical thesis of forms, cf. *Prm.* 135b6, 135b8, 135e1.

[38] As argued, for example, by Crivelli (n. 31), 198–9, 220 and by Campbell (n. 10).

[39] There are also suggestions of a connection to the escape from the cave in *Resp.* 7 (514a–517b): for example, cf. the language of locations (253e7, 254a6, 254a9) and light vs darkness (254a1–2, 254a5–6, 254a9–b1).

hand, the late learner's belief that he has found some 'wisdom' (251c4–5) corresponds to other descriptions in Platonic dialogues of how a person can be exposed to argumentative discourse in a way that misleads them to an unproductive path: eristic, antilogic, or misology, which is often characterized by the pursuit of pleasure or reputation rather than truth (*Resp.* 539b–c; *Phlb.* 14c–e, 15d–16a; *Phd.* 89a–90d; *Tht.* 165b–e).[40] Moreover, the Stranger's description of eristic speech as the 'newborn of someone coming into contact with the beings only recently' (259d6–7) arguably recalls the earlier discussion of how young people, because they stand 'far away from the truth of things' (ἔτι πόρρω τῶν πραγμάτων τῆς ἀληθείας), can be tricked by the sophist's practice of contrary argument (ἀντιλογικός, 234c3–7).[41] When they age and are 'forced through experience to grasp the beings vividly', they experience an 'overturning' (ἀνατετράφθαι) of the images of which the sophist convinced them before, 'so that the great appears small and the easy hard' (234d2–e2; cf. *Resp.* 539b–d). We thus find the kinds of contrary predications that will soon haunt the Stranger and Theaetetus. But the Stranger suggests that his discussion with Theaetetus—who admits to being far from the truth himself (234e4–5)—is a pedagogical project of keeping him 'as near as possible' to reality *without* the experience of forced overturning (234e5–7). The Stranger does not say what comes of the person who experiences overturning or what will happen to Theaetetus, but one possibility is that, just as Theodorus contrasts the philosophical Stranger with his eristic counterpart, so here there is an implicit contrast between the pedagogy of the Stranger as a philosopher and that of the sophist.[42] Methodologically, we can explain this in terms of exposure to statements that may compel disbelief: such exposure can lead to philosophical progress toward dialectic, as I have argued, because disambiguating subjects and respects of predication is grounded in and leads to knowledge of the blending of kinds; but without this practice the statements are left to stand as they are, so the learner instead turns not to dialectic but to the pleasure- and victory-seeking discourse of eristic (cf. *Resp.* 539b; *Phlb.* 15e–16a). Thus the difference between such exposure through sophistic deception and experience or while under the tutelage of a philosophical refuter makes the difference, in turn, between the production of a cynical eristic or a dialectical philosopher.

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[40] On the epistemic contributions and dangers of contradiction in the *Republic,* see M. Heckel, 'Plato on the role of contradiction in education', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25 (2017), 3–21.
[41] See Notomi (n. 5), 245, 230–1; Cornford (n. 19), 298.
[42] See Delcomminette (n. 9), 540–1.

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