



## A HOMERIC LESSON IN PLATO'S *SOPHIST*\*

### ABSTRACT

*Plato's closing reference to the Iliad in the Sophist has been largely overlooked in contemporary scholarship. The reference, a quotation from the confrontation between Glaucus and Diomedes in Book 6, forms part of a broader frame to the dialogue. The frame, with its recurring themes of identification and misidentification, helps us make better sense of the dialogue's final description of the sophist and its central concerns about the relationship between philosophy and sophistry. It also provides a revealing case study of Plato's use of Homer as part of a broader strategy for undermining simple appeals to authority.*

**Keywords:** Plato; Plato's *Sophist*; Homer; Glaucus; Diomedes; philosophy; sophistry

Plato's *Sophist* is often described as having an outer frame about defining the sophist and an inner core about understanding being and not-being. But this neglects the outermost frame of the dialogue with several references to Homer that centre around themes of identification and misidentification. The dialogue ends with a reference to the Glaucus and Diomedes episode of the *Iliad*, where the two fighters oppose one another only to learn that they are in fact family friends (ξένοι). This connects to the opening, where Theodorus announces having brought a visitor (ξένοσ) of Eleatic lineage. Properly understanding different lineages or kinds (γένε) is a recurring theme throughout the dialogue.

This outermost frame, and especially the closing reference to the Glaucus episode, has been largely overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Taking it seriously can help us see how Plato uses this framing to highlight central issues about the relationship between philosophy and sophistry. Both parts of the frame make this connection explicit: the closing reference is couched in a claim about the lineage or kind represented by the dialogue's final division of the sophist, and the opening makes explicit that the kind 'philosopher' is hardly easier to distinguish than that of the gods. It is worth taking a closer look, then, at what the frame might help us understand about philosophy and sophistry as conceived in this dialogue. The frame also provides a revealing example of Plato's

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<sup>1</sup> The most significant exception is L. Mouze, *Chasse à l'homme et faux-semblants dans le Sophiste de Platon* (Paris, 2020), 171–8. Mouze argues that the frame, including the Glaucus episode, underscores the divinity of the philosopher as opposed to the mere humanity of the sophist in order to communicate a straightforward ethical lesson to the reader about the relative value of each. Similarly, S. Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful: Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman* (Chicago, 1984), 2.167 suggests that the Glaucus reference simply emphasizes that the sophist is not divine. I will argue that the reference to family ties serves instead to complicate the relationship between philosopher and sophist, and to bring the reader's attention to the similarities that allow for misidentification in the first place. C. Iber, *Platon: Sophistes* (Frankfurt, 2007), 460 and N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist: Between the Sophist and the Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1999), 296 n. 44 suggest that the Glaucus reference is an example of ring composition but do not discuss the reference otherwise.

engagement with the authority of the Greek poetic tradition in a dialogue not usually discussed for its use of literary techniques or its perspective on their value.<sup>2</sup>

## I

Let me begin with a brief survey of this outermost frame and the repeated themes to be found both at the beginning and at the end of the dialogue. It ends with the Visitor summarizing the final division of the sophist as follows:

Visitor: [...] Whoever claims that the genuine sophist is 'of this blood and lineage', speaks, as it seems, most truly.

Theaetetus: Absolutely. (*Soph.* 268d3–5)<sup>3</sup>

Again, the reference is to the confrontation between Glaucus and Diomedes in *Iliad* 6.<sup>4</sup> Glaucus faces Diomedes for battle and Diomedes taunts him in return, adding the important caveat that he will not fight if Glaucus ends up being a deathless god rather than a human. Glaucus interprets Diomedes' question as to his divine or mortal status as one about his lineage (γενεά, a cognate of the more common term in Plato, γένος).<sup>5</sup> Glaucus reflects on the fleetingness of human generations, but then goes on to report his own lineage, ending his curiously long reply with the line quoted by Plato above (211). Just afterwards comes a striking turn of events: Diomedes puts down his spear and happily reports that they have old family ties, calling Glaucus a guest-friend or ξένοσ. They then agree to change into one another's armour instead of fighting, the only example of such an exchange in the poem.<sup>6</sup>

Plato's closing reference invites us to compare the encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes with the encounter that has just taken place in his dialogue. What should we make of the sophist's lineage? Is the sophist as just defined mortal or divine? In what sense might those in the present conversation be akin to sophists? And should sophists and philosophers treat each other as guest-friends or ξένοσ? If so, what might it look like for them to (metaphorically) change into one another's armour?

These same themes, it turns out, are present from the opening frame of the dialogue as well. Theodorus opens the dialogue by introducing his guest as a ξένοσ and a philosopher, but does not otherwise name him. While Theodorus does not name the Visitor, he does mention his Eleatic lineage, using the term γένος. Plato uses this

<sup>2</sup> M. Frede, 'The literary form of the *Sophist*', in C. Gill and M.M. McCabe (edd.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford, 1996), 135–51 does not discuss the frame or the references to Homer but does arrive at a similar conclusion about how the dialogue is designed to avoid mere arguments by authority.

<sup>3</sup> Translations are my own, based on the most recent Oxford Classical Texts volume.

<sup>4</sup> The quoted formula appears again at *Il.* 20.241. This time it comes in the mouth of Aeneas when he is challenging Achilles. I will focus on the first instance given its stronger parallels with the themes of misidentification and of guest-friendship or ξενία. That said, Tyler Jordan suggests to me that Plato may be playing with the polysemy of the line being deployed in contexts both of friendship and of animosity, perhaps highlighting the different reactions we see between Achilles and Diomedes. In Section V I suggest that these Homeric references are designed to shift under their own weight and complicate a more straightforward reading of the text.

<sup>5</sup> γένος is also used in the *Iliad*, including at 6.209, just two lines before the line that Plato quotes.

<sup>6</sup> T. Jordan, 'The gift in the *Iliad*' (MA Thesis, Western University, 2020) points out how the Glaucus episode is importantly different from other scenes of gift exchange. Chapter 3 offers an in-depth discussion of the episode as well as a helpful summary of recent interpretations.

term in the *Sophist* both to describe personal origins, as in this case, and as a term for a general kind; the latter use has a prominent role in the various divisions that seek to properly identify the kind 'sophist'. Socrates immediately responds by suggesting that Theodorus is unknowingly bringing a god to the conversation; after all, it often happens in Homer that gods accompany humans taking all different kinds of forms (this time quoting from *Od.* 17.486–7). Theodorus brings the focus back to philosophy, adding that he sees all philosophers not as gods but as godlike. Socrates goes on to liken the difficulty of identifying gods in disguise with that of distinguishing the kind 'philosopher' and mentions how philosophers are often mistaken for sophists (*Soph.* 216a1–217a4).

This opening invites similar questions to those raised by the closing reference to the *Iliad*. How might we understand the relationship between philosophy and sophistry such that the former might be mistaken for the latter? Should we accept Theodorus' impression of the Visitor as a philosopher or his suggestion that philosophers are divine? How about Socrates and Theaetetus? In what sense are the present figures all to be considered as guest-friends or ξένοι?

While both ends of the frame might on their own encourage the reader to reflect on these questions, their combined force makes them even more prominent. Why, then, does Plato go out of his way to frame the *Sophist* with these anxieties about identification and misidentification, the guest-friend relationship, and one's lineage or kind as either sophist or philosopher, human or divine? What should we make of these resonances in the outermost frame?

We might hope that a close reading of this outer frame on its own can explain why Plato chose to include it, but I will suggest that no such reading is clearly set forward in the text. Instead, as with Plato's frequent use of *aporia*, the frame serves to temporarily disorient the reader. Rather than pointing us towards a simple lesson or interpretation, it invites us to re-engage with other details of the text and see them more clearly.

## II

Without the outermost frame, I will suggest, we would be liable to come away from the dialogue with a more superficial, and ultimately misleading, understanding of the relationship between philosophy and sophistry. The frame enriches our understanding by bringing out aspects of this relationship that might otherwise go unnoticed and, more generally, by bringing in references that undermine any simple argument by authority or any easy way of understanding their significance. In what follows I will highlight two underdeveloped aspects of the final division of the sophist, that is two aspects of the sophist's 'lineage', that the themes of the outermost frame encourage us to consider more closely. The first is the identification of the sophist as engaged in a sort of human, as opposed to divine, production of images. The second is the role that antilogic (ἀντιλογική) plays in the background of this final division.

Part of what is striking about the final division of the sophist (and, as Esses has argued, each of the other divisions as well) is how similar the sophist's activity sounds to the activity that Socrates is most famous for.<sup>7</sup> The sophist is identified as an imitator and image maker, one who (a) does not actually know the underlying subject that they are imitating, (b) is aware of their ignorance, and (c) uses short question and answer to

<sup>7</sup> D. Esses, 'Philosophic appearance and sophistic essence in Plato's *Sophist*: a new reading of the definitions', *AncPhil* 39 (2019), 295–317.

get their interlocutor to contradict themselves. Dialogues such as the *Apology*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras* emphatically portray Socrates as disavowing any specialist knowledge of the subject at hand and emphasizing the importance of being aware when one does not know. Furthermore, (c) in particular appears in those dialogues as a distinctive feature of Socratic inquiry, especially his insistence on short question and answer as opposed to long speeches. It is surprising to see this as the final criterion for identifying the sophist.

One option would be to simply conclude that Socrates is a sophist in the Platonic sense.<sup>8</sup> But there is no good reason to abandon the idea of Socratic question and answer as a philosophical activity. Plato often contrasts Socrates with other identified sophists—and other depictions of sophistry in the *Sophist*—by his poverty, his patience in following an argument wherever it leads, and his eagerness to be refuted in the service of better understanding. Plato also has Socrates refer to himself as a philosopher in the *Theaetetus* (164d1), a dialogue that announces its connection to the *Sophist* in the final line and that begins with Socrates and Theodorus discussing the current state of philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Socrates' point that philosophers are often mistaken for sophists also warns against making this identification too quickly. But it does not yet explain the mistake in the opposite direction: why sophistry might look eerily similar to philosophy. This invites us to look back to earlier aspects of the final division, in particular its identification of the sophist as an imitator and image maker. The framing anxieties around misidentifying the human for the divine help make sense of the ways in which Socrates, for example, is and is not such an imitator.

### III

References to the divine are common throughout the Platonic corpus, but relatively rare in the *Sophist*. The human/divine contrast does, however, appear in the final division of the sophist. After the discussion of being and not-being, they return to the idea of the sophist as a type of imitator and image maker. This locates the sophist under the art of production. Production then receives a four-fold division—the only division of its type in the dialogue—to produce the following four categories:

Divine production of originals	Human production of originals
Divine production of images	Human production of images

<sup>8</sup> It may be that sophists in the Platonic sense can be seen as philosophers in a contemporary sense; thus G. Striker, 'Methods of sophistry', in G. Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996), 3–21. Similarly, it may be that the contemporary 'sophist' label should be applied equally to Socrates, as in A. Laks and G.W. Most (edd.), *Early Greek Philosophy*, vol. VIII (Cambridge, MA, 2016). Still, there is a distinct Platonic sense of 'sophist' and 'philosopher' at issue in the dialogue in which the two should not be so easily identified, otherwise it would be difficult to make sense of misidentifying one for the other.

<sup>9</sup> Socrates' disavowal of knowledge also fits with Diotima's famous point from the *Symposium* that one can only be a true lover of wisdom if they do not yet have it and are aware of its absence (204a1–b7). The final division of the *Sophist* suggests that this is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for being a philosopher since a sophist can recognize their ignorance but desire to *appear* wise above actually being wise. For more on Socrates, Plato, and contemporaneous conceptions of philosophy see C. Moore, *Calling Philosophers Names: On the Origin of a Discipline* (Princeton, 2020), especially ch. 6 and 8, and S. Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge, 2011).

The sophist, they decide, is a human producer of images. More specifically, the sophist is in the class of those who produce images of things such as justice and the other virtues, not knowing and recognizing their ignorance, but nonetheless making it look like they themselves possess those virtues (267c2–6). Theaetetus later suggests that the sophist gets their name in part by imitating the wise person in particular, presumably by making themselves appear to possess wisdom (268c1–4).

Could Socrates, too, be considered a producer of an image of wisdom? If so, in what sense? Though Socrates is not characterized by Plato as merely trying to look wise, many interlocutors—including many contemporary readers—suspect that he does really possess some secret knowledge that he is withholding from others. Socrates may not intend it, but he is perceived as wise. In this sense, Socrates too is an image of wisdom, only with a crucial difference in aim or intent.

Socrates does not produce an image of wisdom in the same way that the sophist does. The imitators described in this final division of the sophist make an enthusiastic effort to create these images and even make a show of knowing what they privately suspect they do not in fact know (267c3–5, 268a1). Socrates, on the other hand, is forthcoming about his own ignorance; even if his disavowal of knowledge does not prevent his appearing wise to others, it suggests that he does not intend to appear wise. The likes of Socrates, then, do not produce images of wisdom in any straightforward way. How might we describe this production of an appearance of wisdom through Socratic philosophy? The divine/human contrast and the theme of misidentification suggest one possible answer: we can understand it is a kind of divine production of images rather than a human one.

In the opening frame, Theodorus announces that he takes all philosophers to be not gods, but rather god-like or divine (216b9). This is literally true in a trivial sense according to the final division: all people, including philosophers, are products fashioned by a god (266b2–5). The gods produce both people themselves and images of those people (for example, dreams, shadows, and reflections: 266b7–c4). The appearance of the philosopher as the wise person, then, may be a product of divine rather than human production.<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that this is precisely what Theodorus meant when making this remark in the opening frame. He seems to have just mistaken Socrates' description of a sort of philosophical activity (Socrates' suggestion that the Visitor is an elenctic god, 216b4–6) as a type of sophistic activity ('he's more modest than those who spend all of their time in eristic disputes', says Theodorus at 216b8), the very mistake that Socrates goes on to emphasize. But in characteristically Platonic fashion, the suggestion that philosophers are divine gains greater significance once we see the role that the divine/human contrast plays elsewhere in the dialogue.<sup>11</sup> Like Socrates and Diomedes, we should be careful not to mistake as human what is actually divine.

<sup>10</sup> Since these divisions are meant to be exhaustive, the category 'divine production of images' will be broad, encompassing any production that is not of an original nor the product of a human being. Some of these images, e.g. reflections on smooth surfaces, will depend on the way that different objects interact with each other (266c1–4). It may not be a coincidence that the divine realm of the philosopher and surfaces that cause reflections are both described as 'bright' or 'clear' (λαμπρός, 254a9, 266c2). Socrates' appearance of wisdom is not an original, because Socrates is not in fact wise. Because Socrates, unlike the sophist, does not intend to appear wise, it is not the product of human production in any straightforward sense either.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to the outer framing and the final division of the sophist, the contrast is also found at 254a4–b1, where the location of the philosopher, as opposed to that of the sophist, is called 'divine'.

## IV

I have suggested one aspect of the frame that highlights a difference between sophistry and philosophy. The final *Iliad* reference, however, also asks us to consider their similarities. Just after the quoted line is when Diomedes recognizes that he and Glaucus are guest-friends or ξένοι. In what sense might philosophers and sophists be ξένοι as well? This brings us to one more underdeveloped aspect of the final division of the sophist, namely the sophist as practitioner of antilogic (ἀντιλογική). While ἀντιλογική and its cognates are often translated as ‘contradiction’ or ‘speaking on both sides’, the *Sophist* curiously describes the skill as a sort of private question-and-answer discussion, a description that makes it sound eerily similar to Socratic practice (let alone the practice of the Visitor in this dialogue).

The final division implicitly locates the sophist under the heading of antilogic. Antilogic first appears in the fifth division as a kind of combat in speeches, again the kind that does so in private question and answer as opposed to long public speeches.<sup>12</sup> It is picked back up after the sixth division and after the interlocutors marvel at the number of different ways the sophist has appeared: the Visitor singles out antilogic as a kind that reveals the sophist especially clearly, because it purports to make someone able to dispute about anything (232b3–e5). This observation leads them to see the sophist’s skill in imitation, a skill that allows the sophist to claim expertise by impressing others in question and answer. The final distinction in the seventh division makes this explicit: the sophist is an imitator who does not make long public speeches, but rather uses private question and answer to make an interlocutor contradict themselves. The Visitor then sums up the division with a new label for this category, calling it ἐναντιοποιολογική ‘producing contrary speech’ (268c8) rather than ‘antilogic’.

In fact, the Visitor also ropes in the sixth division when he brings up antilogic at the beginning of the seventh division. After mentioning antilogic, he adds that they also made the sophist a teacher, which in fact happened not in the fifth, but in the sixth division. The sixth division identifies the sophist as someone who cleanses the soul by removing false beliefs that prevent learning.<sup>13</sup> Antilogic is not mentioned explicitly, but the Visitor does specify that this sophist operates by asking people questions (230b4). In this case, the questions reveal that the interlocutor is contradicting themselves on subjects where they thought they had something to say (230b4–8). Since this point about skill in question and answer in fact arises in each of the final three divisions, it raises the question of what role this point in particular has to play in the dialogue as a whole.

With the outermost frame in mind, that role gains even more significance. Expertise in question and answer is the kind of similarity that might make sophists and philosophers methodological guest-friends or ξένοι, and once again can help explain

<sup>12</sup> The final distinction in the fifth division leaves us with those who engage in this kind of conversation for pleasure on the one hand and for profit on the other. The latter are sophists, the former are engaged in a sort of ‘prattle’, ἀδολεσχία, which is associated with Socrates both in Plato and in Greek comedy (cf. *Tht.* 195b10, *Phdr.* 269e4–270d8, *Plt.* 299b6–8, *Prm.* 135d5, *Phd.* 70b10–c3; Eupolis fr. 386 K.–A.; Procl. *In Prm.* 1.656–8).

<sup>13</sup> This division has received much attention for its similarities to Socratic practice. N. Zaks, ‘Éristique et refutation socratique dans le *Sophiste* de Platon’, in S. Delcomminette and G. Lachance (edd.), *L’Éristique : Définitions, caractérisations, historicité* (Brussels, 2021), 267–88 argues that the sixth division describes true Socratic refutation as opposed to the merely apparent refutations of the sophist highlighted elsewhere in the dialogue.

why the two are so easily confused. Beyond Socrates' portrayal as an expert questioner, Plato has Socrates describe dialectic as the ability to ask and answer questions knowledgeably (*Resp.* 534d8–535a2).<sup>14</sup> Yet skill in question and answer is something that Plato portrays sophists such as Protagoras, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Gorgias, and Hippias laying claim to as well.<sup>15</sup> Philosophers and sophists might have significant family ties when it comes to their methodology, even if they are ultimately on different sides, as are Glaucus and Diomedes.

As in the case of divine as opposed to human production of images, here too it is crucial to track differences in intent. The sophist uses their skill in question and answer in order to look wise, often in service of honour or of making money. A philosopher, on the other hand, would use skill in question and answer for improving their own or their interlocutor's epistemic position. Aristotle highlights this point with language reminiscent of the *Sophist* in *Soph. el.* 11, distinguishing philosophy from sophistry along with fair uses of antilogic from unfair ones (171b3–35).

## V

If these are at least some of the ways in which the outermost frame resonates with and ultimately amplifies key themes in the division of the sophist, it illuminates how Plato's references to Homer work in the *Sophist*. They operate not by giving us a straightforward account of their own or of the dialogue's significance, but rather by complicating what might otherwise seem to be the main point. For example, the seventh division of the sophist might initially make salient to us how a sophist can easily be mistaken for a philosopher. Plato could have underlined this point and given us an easy moral by emphasizing how we can mistake something of lesser value for something of greater value. Instead, Plato reverses the point: he emphasizes how the greater (the divine) is often mistaken for the lesser (the mortal). By reversing the more obvious point and emphasizing the more unintuitive consequence of his account, that a genuine philosopher might be mistaken for a sophist, he invites us to re-engage rather than simply nodding along.

Even the references to Homer themselves are self-undermining. The Glaucus passage features several reversals, as in Glaucus' remark about the fleetingness of human generations and the sudden switch from a scene of competition to one of recognition and friendship mentioned above. Yet the friendship, too, is further complicated by

<sup>14</sup> Plato has Socrates make the same point at *Cra.* 390c10–11. In the *Republic* Socrates actually uses the superlative 'most knowledgeably'. This claim is consistent with there being other skills that enable one to ask and answer questions knowledgeably, just not as knowledgeably as the dialectician. See also *Meno* 75c4–d7.

<sup>15</sup> Plato portrays Protagoras as competent at question and answer in addition to long speeches (*Prt.* 329b1–5, 334e4–336d5, 338e6–339e1; cf. Diogenes Laertius' claim that Protagoras introduced 'the Socratic form of arguments' at 9.53 = D15 Laks-Most). Plato suggests that Gorgias boasted of being able to answer any question put to him at *Meno* 70b5–c3 and *Grg.* 447b9–449c8. He has Hippias make a similar boast in the *Hippias Minor* (363c7–d4, 373a9–c5; cf. *Prt.* 315c5–7, *Hp. mai.* 287a8–b3). Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, on the other hand, are portrayed as claiming to be able to refute an answerer no matter what (*Euthyd.* 275b7–e6, 276d1–e7). They are also portrayed as able to give answers so as to avoid being refuted (cf. 294d1–7) though not with complete success in their discussion with Socrates (e.g. 287b6–d6, 295b4–e3). The dialogue does also give hints that locate Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' skill as a kind of private battle in words (272a8, 305d5–7) employing the same language used to describe ἀντιλογική in the *Sophist* (225a9–b12).



the fact that when they agree not to fight each other they also agree to go on killing the others' companions (*Il.* 6.226–9). And when the guest-friends do exchange their armour, the narrator interjects that Glaucus got the worse end of the deal by exchanging his gold armour for Diomedes' bronze. As the narrator puts it, Zeus took away Glaucus' wits (234–6). These self-undermining elements raise further questions. How much weight should we put on one's lineage? Why exchange armour in just this case? And did either Glaucus or Diomedes come out with the better end of the deal? Was one in fact tricking the other?

Plato references the same passage in the *Symposium* in a way that raises, but does not straightforwardly answer, similar questions. Famously, Alcibiades bursts into the dinner party and recounts at length his relationship with Socrates. He recounts becoming convinced of the value of Socrates' teaching and even offering physical gratification in return. Alcibiades' attention was widely coveted, but his story implies that what Socrates has to offer is of much greater value. Socrates agrees: he maintains that Alcibiades is proposing to exchange what is merely judged to be valuable for what really is valuable, then quotes the line 'gold for bronze' from *Iliad* 6.236 (*Symp.* 218e3–219a1).

Like Glaucus, Alcibiades is a young man with riches trying to make a name for himself. And, in both cases, the young men have what could be described as something of merely apparent value. Are we to liken the philosopher, then, to Diomedes with armour and skills of greater practical value? Both references stop short of making this identification explicit; the effect is to temporarily disorient the reader and raise these questions about relative value in both the Homeric and the Platonic context without allowing us to rely unthinkingly on a simple answer.

To return to the question of lineage, Plato also has Socrates question the importance of looking to one's lineage as does Glaucus at the beginning of his speech. In the *Theaetetus*, a conversation having taken place the day before the conversation of the *Sophist*, Socrates describes how the philosopher will dismiss those who brag about their lineage in the lawcourts, pointing out how everyone is likely to have had many great ancestors (174e5–175b6). In this context, the emphasis on the lineage of the sophist in the *Sophist*'s reference to the Glaucus passage invites us to attend to this lineage while remaining wary of its significance.

We see a similar Platonic self-undermining when we look at the *Odyssey* passage quoted in the opening frame. This reference asks us to attend to the possibility of misidentification, but the same passage has a less than ringing endorsement when quoted in *Republic* Book 2. In the latter context it is an example of a Homeric passage to be banned for its false implication that the gods might change their form (381d3).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, in its context in the *Odyssey*, this advice is given to the suitor Antinous and then promptly ignored. Antinous does not relent in his mistreatment of a stranger, nor does the stranger end up literally being a god in disguise (rather, it is Odysseus disguised with the help of Athena). None of these complications rise to the level of a direct contradiction; if they did, then the lesson might be to simply ignore such advice. Instead, the cumulative effect is to draw the reader's attention to and sharpen their

<sup>16</sup> Like the *Sophist*, this passage at the end of *Republic* Book 2 goes on to address the nature of false statements and false thoughts more broadly, though in this case they relate to the activity of the gods rather than the activity of sophists.



understanding of the respects in which the concern about misidentification is or is not relevant for the underlying points being made in the dialogue.

## VI

I have suggested that, despite its reputation for being one of Plato's more austere dialogues, the *Sophist* features a level of ring composition and an outermost frame that invites us to re-engage with the details of the text in a characteristically Platonic way. The outermost frame raises the themes of identification and misidentification especially as relating to kind or lineage, the guest-friend relationship, and the distinction between mortal and divine. The frame ties these concerns directly to that of distinguishing philosophy and sophistry, and I have suggested two ways in which this invites us to re-evaluate the final division of the *sophist*. First, the frame draws our attention to the divine/human contrast at the beginning of the final division that otherwise receives little comment. Second, it highlights a key similarity between the philosopher and the *sophist*, namely their engagement in 'antilogic', understood as short question-and-answer discussion, that makes the two much more akin than one might otherwise assume. While the frame does not provide a secret key for understanding the final division, it does draw our attention and help us think through aspects of that division that might otherwise escape our notice.

As Frede (n. 2) has argued for in the case of the dialogue form itself, the framing goes out of its way to avoid any straightforward claim to authority. The references not only provide an original context that complicates the initial questions they raise, but they are employed in a way that disorients the reader as much as it orients them, helping to jettison any unquestioned assumptions that might lead to too quick a resolution. There is no easy one-to-one identification between the themes the frame raises and the results of the argumentation within. The two connections I have proposed to the seventh division of the *sophist*, however, do both raise the importance of intent: while the form of Socratic and sophistic argumentation may appear quite similar, the philosopher intends to get clear on the matter at hand whether or not it makes them appear wise. Like a suit of armour, the superficial appearance of wisdom might be easily exchanged between philosopher and *sophist*, yet the underlying intent is what really determines which side you are on. Plato invites us to think about the texts of Homer, widely used in ancient Greek education, not as a simple authority to appeal to but rather as a guide for inquiry. Such a guide raises important questions and does not shy away from complicated answers, precisely as a true, if not divine, expert in question and answer would do.

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