Structure and Aim in Socratic and Sophistic Method

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Abstract

I begin this paper with a puzzle: why is Plato’s Parmenides replete with references to Gorgias? While the Eleatic heritage and themes in the dialogue are clear, it is less clear what the point would be of alluding to a well-known sophist. I suggest that the answer has to do with the similarities in the underlying methods employed by both Plato and Gorgias. These similarities, as well as Plato’s recognition of them, suggest that he owes a more significant philosophical and methodological debt to sophists like Gorgias than is often assumed. Further evidence from Plato and Xenophon suggest that Socrates used this very same method, which I call ‘exploring both sides’. I distinguish this Socratic method and its sophistic counterpart in terms of structure, internal aim, and external aim. Doing so allows for a more nuanced understanding of their similarities and differences. It also challenges the outsized role that popular caricatures of philosophical and sophistic method have had on our understanding of their relationship.

1 Introduction

Was Socrates a sophist? Does the standard division between the pre-Socratic and Socratic traditions hold up to scrutiny? Recent interpreters have suggested that these divisions are misleading at best. Rachel Barney includes Socrates in a list of fifth-century sophists along with the likes of Gorgias, Protagoras, and Antiphon (Barney 2006, 77). André Laks and Glenn Most abandon the label ‘Presocratic’ in their new comprehensive collection, Early Greek Philosophy, and also include Socrates in the section on the sophists (Laks & Most, 2016). There are of course some obvious differences such as Socrates’ disinterest in monetary gain, but there are also a number of surprising similarities in Socratic and sophistic methodology. In this piece I will argue that some of these similarities do indeed warrant seeing the Socratic and sophistic traditions as more continuous with one another than is often assumed.

My starting point will be a Platonic work that may not be the first that comes to mind when thinking of Socratic and sophistic methodology, not the Gorgias or Protagoras or Euthydemus, but rather the Parmenides. In it, Plato has the much older Parmenides recommend to a young Socrates a new method for philosophical inquiry. He also riddles the dialogue with allusions to the writings of Gorgias. It is especially puzzling that Plato would allude to the works of a sophist so heavily in a dialogue that appears to be more directly engaged with the Eleatics. While others have noticed some of these connections, most have had little to say about why Plato goes out of his way to include them.

I will argue that the method thematized throughout the Parmenides, a method that I will call ‘exploring both sides’, uses the very same structure that Gorgias perfects in his method of ‘playing both sides’ but employs that structure for his own philosophical aims. Seeing the surprising similarities between these two methods and understanding their important differences explains why Plato alludes to Gorgias specifically in the context of this method. Furthermore, I will highlight evidence from both Plato and Xenophon that they associated this method of exploring both sides with Socrates himself. This reveals at least one line of philosophical influence that can
be traced from sophists like Gorgias through Socrates and Plato. It also showcases a way of carving out similarities and differences among the underlying methods in terms of structure, internal aim, and external aim that helps give a more nuanced picture of the relationship between Socratic and sophistic methodology.

I will begin the next section (section 2) with the initial puzzle that should motivate us to think more carefully about the sophistic roots of this philosophical method employed by Plato and Socrates, that is Plato’s persistent allusions to Gorgias in the *Parmenides*. I will then lay out what I take to be the important similarities and differences between the philosophical method of exploring both sides and the sophistic method of playing both sides that explain why Plato would go out of his way to allude to Gorgias in this context. In the following section (section 3), I will turn to other evidence in Plato’s *Lysis* and Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* that suggests a connection to the historical Socrates as well. The picture that emerges is one where ancient sophists and philosophers were using similar methodological structures but adapting them for different aims. These different aims help explain, though do not always track, common caricatures of philosophical and sophistic method.

### 2 Connections to the Historical Gorgias

One good reason why the *Parmenides* is not the first dialogue that comes to mind when thinking of Plato’s connection to the sophists is that the dialogue bears another more obvious connection. Clearly the historical Parmenides and Zeno are important points of reference given their speaking roles in the dialogue. It might come as a surprise, then, to see just how heavily Plato borrows from and alludes to the works of the sophist Gorgias. I do not wish to downplay the Eleatic roots of what is discussed in the dialogue, but I do want to stress that these frequent allusions to Gorgias hint at a sophistic intermediary. In this section I will review some of these connections with Gorgias (section 2.1), then I will lay out a structure that highlights the striking similarities between the philosophical method of exploring both sides and the sophistic method of playing both sides (section 2.2). Finally, I will emphasize the important differences that distinguish what Plato is up to in the *Parmenides* and elsewhere from the method employed throughout Gorgias’ extant works (section 2.3).

#### 2.1 Allusions to Gorgias in the Parmenides and Lysis

The first type of allusion to Gorgias in the *Parmenides*, and the one most often noted by others, is what appear to be a series of direct borrowings from his *On Not-Being*.\(^1\) These borrowings, especially in the *Parmenides*’ first deduction (137c–142a),\(^2\) have received significant attention in the literature. John Palmer argues that the first deduction contains a series of parallels with *On Not-Being* and generally follows its structure (Palmer 1999, 111–117). He notes a parallel in the arguments about its not being in motion or resting\(^3\) and an even stronger parallel in the argument about its being neither in itself nor in another.\(^4\) But there are parallels outside of the first

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1. *On Not-Being* only survives in two paraphrases, one in the anonymous *De Melisso, Xenophane, Gorgia (= MXG*) and one in Sextus’ *Adversus Mathematicos (= M)*.
2. We need to be careful about the state of our evidence here, since Gorgias himself may be borrowing some of these arguments more or less directly from predecessors whose texts do not survive in full. That being said, Mathilde Brémont (2019, 85–93) argues persuasively that the first deduction in particular is a direct response to and imitation of Gorgias’ *On Not-Being*.
3. Palmer (1999, 115) has MXG 980a1–8 and *Parmenides* 138b7–139b3 in mind in particular.
4. This connection between *Parmenides* 138a2–b6, MXG 979b21–26 and *M* 7.68–70 is pointed out by Palmer (1999, 114) and picked up by Spatharas (2001, 366). Mansfeld (1990, 259) suggests that the parallel starts at *Parmenides* 137d and Spatharas (2001, 340) notes that similar reasoning appears again at *Parmenides* 139a3–b3.
deduction as well. Later on, Plato plays with the idea of something being a not-being insofar as it is not (Parmenides 162a), reminiscent of Gorgias’ gymnastics in On Not-Being.\(^5\) Mansfeld also points out a connection between Gorgias’ contention that one thing cannot be in several other distinct things (MXG 980b9–11) and the objection to Socrates’ theory of forms at Parmenides 131b (Mansfeld 1990, 255). The striking frequency with which arguments in the Parmenides appear to be borrowed from or inspired by On Not-Being makes it likely that at the very least Plato had Gorgias in the back of his mind when writing the dialogue. There are also a number of surface-level methodological connections. Palmer (1999, 113) notes that On Not-Being and the first deduction of the Parmenides contain multiple polylemmatic reductiones, that is an argument that takes one possibility, splits it into several others, and gives a reductio against each. Relatedly, both works exhibit self-consciousness about ensuring that such divisions are exhaustive,\(^6\) and at times employ arguments that nest one polylemma within another.\(^7\) Both works also frequently use multiple arguments for the same conclusion\(^8\) as well as frequent signposting to mark where one argument ends and the next one begins.\(^9\) Yet there are a number of more or less explicit ways in which Plato alludes to Gorgias as well. Nestle has suggested that Plato has Gorgias in mind when he has the character Zeno say that he wrote his work in response to Parmenides’ detractors (Parmenides 128c7–d2).\(^10\) Some modest support for this claim comes just afterwards where Zeno appears to borrow a Gorgianic phrase from the Helen.\(^11\) We also see Plato’s Parmenides echo Gorgias’ Palamedes when, just before the final deductions, he asks “Where should we begin, that is, what will we hypothesize first?” (πόθεν οὖν δὴ ἄρξῃμεν καὶ τί πρῶτον ὑποθέσῃμεν; Parmenides 137a7–b1),\(^12\) closely reminiscent of Palamedes §4: “Where should I begin? What should I say first?” (πόθεν ἄρξομαι; τί δὲ πρῶτον εἴπω;)\(^13\) Plato’s Parmenides also appeals to the

\(^5\) Mansfeld (1990, 264–265) cites MXG 979a25–27 and Spatharas (2001, 321) gives a more comprehensive list of others who have noticed the connection. Cf. also M 7.67 and Parmenides 155e.

\(^6\) Cf. Parmenides 131a, 146c, 147b, 147c, 151a, 159c, 160b–d; Helen, 20; Palamedes, 20, 32 and On Not-Being, 72.

\(^7\) E.g. Parmenides 138c, 150a, 164d. Such nested polylemmas are quite frequent in Gorgias, especially the Palamedes and the first part of On Not-Being. See the appendix to my article “Untying the Gorgianic Not: Argumentative Structure in On Not-Being” (Rodriguez 2019b) where I diagram many of the features of Gorgias’ method discussed in this paragraph.

\(^8\) Cf. Parmenides 127e, 129c, 135a.

\(^9\) Cf. Parmenides 137d, 138a, 139e. Plato likely associates this feature of the arguments with Gorgias in particular given his blunt use of such signposting in Agathon’s speech of the Symposium, a self-conscious parody of Gorgias (194e–197e). Spatharas (2001, 27, 35, 174, 280, 301) draws frequent attention to Gorgias’ characteristic signposting and makes this connection to Agathon’s speech as well.

\(^10\) Nestle (1922, 558, 560–561). Palmer (1999, 109) doubts this on chronological grounds, but note that the relative dating of Zeno and Gorgias’ works is not secure and, even if Gorgias wrote after Zeno, Plato might be altering the chronology as he does in other dialogues to fit his dramatic and philosophical purposes.

\(^11\) Spatharas (2001, 142) notes the connection between Parmenides 128c2–3: “τι οὐχ ὑπὸ νεόν φυλονίκιος ότε αὐτό γεγράθη, ἀλλʼ ὑπὸ πρεσβετέρου φιλοτημίας” and Helen 4: “καὶ ήκον ἀπαντες υπ’ ἑρωτός τε φυλονίκου φιλοτημίας τε ἀνύχητον”.

\(^12\) Translations are my own; for the text editions used, see the bibliography. Note that the text and numbering system for Gorgias and other early Greek figures are from the widely-used edition by Diels and Kranz. Much of the research for this paper was conducted before the publication of newer editions by Laks and Most, which contain a concordance linking their numbering system to that of Diels-Kranz. The editorial differences between the two are not relevant for present purposes, and my use of Diels-Kranz is thus not intended to indicate a preference for one text over the other.

\(^13\) Even if this is not a direct reference to Gorgias it is clearly a play on a rhetorical trope. A TLG search for ‘πόθεν’ + forms of ἄρξομαι reveals that before Plato this trope is relatively rare and appears primarily in the context of defense speeches (Aeschylus’ Libation Bearers In.853; Euripides’ Iphigenia In.440; Andocides’ De Mysteriis 7.14, In Alcibiadem [potentially spurious] 10.1; and Xenophon’s Memorabilia 3.1.5, Oeconomicus 16.7; during Plato’s time it appears in Demosthenes’ De Falsa Legatione 94). Manuscript B and the first hand of manuscript T both read ἄρξομαι as I have printed, but a second hand in T suggests ἄρξημαι along with W. Given the rhetorical trope, I prefer the former. Rachel Barney points out to me that this may also be an allusion to Parmenides’ poem B5: “For me, it is a common point from which I shall begin; for I will arrive back there again” (ξινὸν δὲ μοί ἐστιν, ὅπποθεν ἄρξωμαι· τούτῳ γὰρ πάλιν ἔμμαι αὕθες). The parallel is closer with Gorgias, however, given the form of two successive rhetorical questions.
principle that opposites go with opposites, a principle that plays a prominent role in Gorgias’ works and is closely related to his signature use of antithesis (Parmenides 148b, 159a). But the most important and clearly self-conscious allusion comes at Parmenides 135a. Plato’s Parmenides sums up his criticisms of Socrates’ theory of forms with a direct allusion to the concessive, tripartite structure of Gorgias’ On Not-Being. Gorgias’ argument maintains that nothing is, that even if it is it is unknowable, and that even if it is knowable it cannot be communicated to others. Likewise, Parmenides imagines an objector who maintains that the forms do not exist and that even if they do they are unknowable. He goes on to admit that perhaps a very talented person can come to know that there are forms, but that only a still more remarkable person could teach that to someone else. Hays (1990, 335) emphasizes that the trio of existence, knowability, and communicability as well as the concessive structure must be a direct allusion to Gorgias. Even more importantly for our purposes, this comes immediately before Parmenides explicitly introduces the method of exploring both sides at 135b. So why all of these allusions to Gorgias in the Parmenides, especially if the dialogue is meant to be about Eleaticism rather than sophistry? Mathilde Brémond (2019, 95–97) rightly criticizes other interpreters of the Parmenides for either ignoring these connections or failing to explain them adequately. She suggests that Plato is borrowing Gorgias’ method and reinforcing a Gorganic criticism of Eleaticism, that it inherently leads to contradictions (Brémond 2019, 97–99). But I believe this takes the connections one step too far. An independent analysis of the method employed in the Parmenides and that employed in Gorgias’ works shows a surprising similarity in each method’s structure but an important difference in aim that sets them apart. This suggests that Plato’s allusions to Gorgias reflect an awareness of his debt to his sophistic predecessors without replicating every aspect of that sophistic method.

One might push back on my contention that Plato is acknowledging a positive debt to the sophistic movement by tying Brémond’s suggestion with an alternate account of the methodological connections. Perhaps Plato and Gorgias are both borrowing this method from an Eleatic figure such as Zeno, and Plato associates it more with the Eleatics. But part of the reason for thinking that Plato’s allusions to Gorgias have a broader scope than Gorgias’ criticism of Eleaticism, and do in fact suggest a positive methodological debt to Gorgias in particular, is that the methods in question appear throughout both Plato and Gorgias’ works. This includes works that do not directly engage with Eleatic themes. In Plato’s case, one of those works is the Lysis, where we get another interesting allusion to Gorgias. This is best explained by Plato’s awareness of the structural similarity between the method he has his interlocutors employ and the one that

14 For example, at the beginning of the Helen he lists a number of qualities that represent good order (kosmos): beauty for the body, wisdom for the soul, and truth for words. He then suggests that the opposite qualities (enantia) represent disorder (akosmia). He then goes on in the next sentence to suggest that in such domains one should honor the praiseworthy with praise and inflict the unpraiseworthy with blame. Spatharas (2001, 18, 22, 23) points out that it is hard to find a passage of Gorgias that does not use antithesis and Gorgias seems to have been closely associated with this technique in antiquity as well (cf. Protagoras; Diels-Kranz A4, A32). The principle about opposites seems to be a special case of this favored device of his. Later in the Helen Gorgias suggests that certain “godlike incantations inject pleasure and reject pain” (Helen, 10). Also related are fragment B5: “victories against the barbarians demand hymns of praise, but those against Greeks demand lamentations”, fragment B6: “servants to those in unjust misfortunes, punishers to those in unjust prosperity”, and fragment B12: “it is necessary to destroy the seriousness of enemies with laughter, but the laughter of enemies with seriousness”.

15 Cf. MXG 979a12–13; M 7.65.

16 This point is picked up by Palmer (1999, 109) and Spatharas (2001, 290) as well. Brémond 2019, 77 points out two other instances in the deductions where Plato alludes to this same trio of existence, knowability, and communicability: 141e9–142a6 and 155d3–e3.

17 In a forthcoming piece, ‘A Long-Lost Relative in the Parmenides? Plato’s Family of Hypothetical Methods’, I argue that the method is explicitly introduced here, though it is thematized throughout, starting with the description of Zeno’s display and its relation to Parmenides’ arguments at the beginning of the dialogue.
And he went on even further to prosecute the point in a more magnificent manner, saying that it is altogether impossible for like to be friend with like, but rather it is the very opposite of this, for the most opposite is friend to the most opposite. For each thing desires something of this sort but not something similar; the dry desires the wet (δέχεται ὑγρό), the hot the cold (ψύχραν θερμαν), the bitter the sweet (πικρὰν γλυκᾶς), the sharp the blunt (ψηκός ἄμβλητος), the empty filling (κενόν πληρώσεως), and the full emptying (πλήρες κενώσεως), and so with others according to the same argument. For the opposite is food for its opposite; the like does not get any satisfaction from the like.

**Lysis** 215e1–216a1

Here Socrates summarizes this view using stylized antithesis and homeoteleuton with a Gorgianic ring. The words quoted in Greek are clearly chosen not only for their opposition but for the repetition of individual sounds (especially in word endings) that Gorgias is so fond of in his writing. Not only is the theory itself one of opposition, it is also presented as the extreme opposite of the preceding theory. But the invocation of a Gorgianic figure does not end here: Socrates later announces that the argument has made him dizzy, exactly as he does in response to Protagoras’ great speech in the *Protagoras* and to Agathon’s explicitly Gorgianic speech in the *Symposium*. Furthermore, he worries that those fond contradiction (hoi antilogikoi) will take issue with the position (Symposium 216a6–b1).

Once again we have Plato invoking the likes of Gorgias in the context of a Socratic application of exploring both sides. To complicate the picture, the worry that Socrates puts into the mouth of Protagoras in the *Protagoras* is likely influenced by the Eleatics, my focus here is explaining why Plato alludes to Gorgias in particular. The fact that Plato goes out of his way to bring in Gorgias, and does so in contexts that do not invoke Eleaticism, suggests that Gorgias has an important role to play in this story from Plato’s perspective, one that I will argue below makes good sense based on the methodology that Gorgias seems to have perfected. For more on the connection with the Eleatics, see n. 23 and the end of section 2.2 below.

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18 Even though Gorgias’ own method is likely influenced by the Eleatics, my focus here is explaining why Plato alludes to Gorgias in particular. The fact that Plato goes out of his way to bring in Gorgias, and does so in contexts that do not invoke Eleaticism, suggests that Gorgias has an important role to play in this story from Plato’s perspective, one that I will argue below makes good sense based on the methodology that Gorgias seems to have perfected. For more on the connection with the Eleatics, see n. 23 and the end of section 2.2 below.

19 See n. 14 above for more on antithesis. Spatharas (2001, 17–22) also discusses Gorgias’ signature use of repetition more generally, including the repetition of individual sounds.

20 Socrates uses the very same word (eiliggiai) to indicate his bafflement after Protagoras’ initial questioning about the Simonides poem in the *Protagoras* (Protagoras 339e2; Lysis 216c5). Cf. also Prodicus’ admonition that Socrates not insist on Protagoras giving excessively short replies so that they might appear “in a more magnificent manner” (megaloprepesteros) (Protagoras 338a3; Lysis 215e1). Symposium 198b1–c5 is where Socrates responds similarly to Agathon’s speech and explicitly calls out the similar style rife with antithesis and homeoteleuton as Gorgianic.
‘those fond of contradiction’ is the very same worry that he raised twice with earlier proposals: that friends will turn out to be friends with their enemies. Given this similarity in content as well as the similarities in structure it cannot be that Plato is simply dismissing one method and replacing it with another. The invocations of Gorgias are better explained by Plato’s own awareness of these similarities and of his debt to his sophist predecessors.

2.2 Exploring Both Sides vs. Playing Both Sides: Similarities

Elsewhere I have argued that Plato systematically employs the method of exploring both sides throughout the Parmenides and other dialogues such as the Lysis and Sophist. This method looks very much like what the sophists are commonly supposed to be up to, that is contradiction (antilogikē), sometimes translated with the phrase ‘arguing both sides’. In fact, this uncomfortable similarity may be part of why exploring both sides in Plato has been so routinely overlooked. Gorgias’ works are indeed replete with a method that has the very same structure as exploring both sides, but his method is importantly different in its internal aim. In a separate article I show that Gorgias systematically employs this method that I am here calling ‘playing both sides’ in his Helen, Palamedes, and On Not-Being (Rodriguez 2019b).

Rachel Barney has suggested a framework for thinking about method that is particularly helpful for seeing some of the similarities and differences between these two methods. The basic idea is this: methods, like other structured activities such as games or sports, have a certain structure as well as certain aims or goals for which that structure is employed. Thus, there are at least two different respects, structure and aim, in which methods can be compared. Some activities have the same goal but a different structure: take, for example, cooperative board games where all players win or lose together. Despite widely varying rules, themes, and game mechanics, these have something important in common that sets them apart from competitive board games where there is only one clear winner. Other activities have the same structure but different goals: my morning jog around the local high school track has the goal of health and relaxation, while a track athlete’s race that afternoon aims to score points for her team. Yet both involve running counter-clockwise around the track unaided. I will argue that the relationship between exploring both sides and playing both sides is like this latter case where they share a certain structure but differ in their aim.

21 Cf. Lysis 213b2–c2.
22 I make the case that exploring both sides is thematized throughout the Parmenides as a unique hypothetical method (distinct from the so-called ‘method of hypothesis’ in the Meno, Phaedo, and Republic) in ‘A Long Lost Relative in the Parmenides? Plato’s Family of Hypothetical Methods’ (Rodriguez, forthcoming). I argue that Plato both employs and describes the same method in the Sophist in my forthcoming article “Pushing Through” in Plato’s Sophist: A New Reading of the Parity Assumption’, and extend the same framework to the Lysis in ‘More than a Reductio: Plato’s Method in the Parmenides and Lysis’ (Rodriguez 2019a).
23 The translation ‘arguing both sides’ picks up on the type of contradiction employed systematically by both Plato and Gorgias, and less so by their Eleatic predecessors. This involves an independent examination of two or more opposed claims (see the structural conditions of exploring both sides and playing both sides as defined below). Plato also seems to have associated contradiction (antilogikē) with Zeno, though of a different variety. In the Phaedrus he stresses that the ‘Eleatic Palamedes’, most likely a reference to Zeno, is as much a practitioner of contradiction as the likes of Gorgias (Phaedrus, 261b6–e4). But while Gorgias’ skill is fleshed out in terms of the ability to argue either side of a case, that of the Eleatic Palamedes is cashed out in terms of the ability to bring out opposing properties in the same things. We get the same emphasis in the Parmenides, where Zeno is said to argue that if things are many, they are both similar and dissimilar (127d6–128a3, 128e5–b6). Again, a salient type of contradiction we see throughout Gorgias’ works involves an opposition between two or more claims considered independently. This, rather than deriving an opposition from a single claim, is an essential component of exploring both sides.
24 I am indebted to several helpful conversations with Rachel Barney and her manuscript ‘Sextus, Socrates, and Sceptical Inquiry’ for the distinction between structure, internal aim, and external aim.
It will also be useful to distinguish between two different types of aim involved in philosophical methods and other structured activities. Following Barney, I will call these 'internal' and 'external' aims. Take again our example of a track athlete. She may, like me, run at least in part for the sake of health. But what makes her a track athlete, and what makes her running that afternoon part of a track competition, is her aim of scoring points for her team. If she were to run backwards to work different muscle groups then we would say that she is not really competing. So her aim of scoring points is an aim that is *internal* to the activity of track and field, one without which we would not consider her as fully participating in the sport. Her aim of being healthy, however, is *external* to the activity in question: if she replaced her aim of health with the goal of honor and glory she would still be engaged in the same sport. Likewise, consider the game of Go. It has an internal aim of winning by maximizing one's territory and capturing the opponent's pieces. Try to minimize your territory instead and you will no longer be playing Go. But Go can be played with a variety of different external aims: again, you can play for fame, for fun, for mental acuity, or for testing the limits of artificial intelligence.

Socratic and sophistic method are often distinguished by what I will consider an external aim: robust understanding or well-being on the one hand and mere conviction or wealth on the other. It may even be suggested that these different aims have some essential connection to differences in methodological structure. Yet I will argue that this is a mistake. The Socratic method of exploring both sides is identical in structure with its sophistic counterpart of playing both sides. Furthermore, both methods could in principle be used for the external aim of developing a robust understanding (or for generating wealth). But they do in fact differ in their internal aim, which in turn makes each method better suited for different purposes.25

Thus, the two methods can be characterized as follows:

**Exploring Both Sides**

**Structure:**

(a) a set of what are at least taken to be exclusive and exhaustive alternatives and (β) an independent consideration of each

**Internal aim:**

(γ) assessing the truth of the alternatives in question

**External aim:**

suited for (δ) robust understanding of which alternative is correct, (ε) testing candidate first principles, or (ζ) helping others recognize their ignorance concerning which alternative is correct to encourage further inquiry (among other aims)

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25 It is important to keep in mind here that methods can be described at different levels of generality. For example, given the way I am individuating methods here, an instance of exploring both sides with an external aim of testing a candidate first principle and an instance of exploring both sides with an external aim of impressing potential fee-paying students both count as exploring both sides. But one might worry that there is an important difference: maybe one is more truly *philosophical* than the other. It is perfectly consistent with this framework to make a distinction here and insist that we define a narrower version of the method that builds more into its internal aims. Describing the method at the level of generality I have chosen here is useful insofar as it accurately portrays what is happening in the relevant texts without becoming so broad as to describe any argument or becoming so narrow as to cover only one or two examples. It is important that we find the method of exploring both sides in several Platonic texts, though equally important that it only appears in a limited number of them and is nowhere to be found in the writings of Gorgias. Similarly, it is important that the relevant structure does appear in Gorgias, but not in just any text that survives from the period. Thus, I see my central task as providing a framework and terminology that illuminates key relationships between the texts in question. Another worthwhile task would be to analyze to what extent this maps the framework or terminology that Socrates, Plato, or Gorgias might use to describe these relationships, though this is not my task here. I discuss this point in connection with analogous issues in the philosophy of science at the end of section 3 below.
Playing Both Sides

Structure:

\[ (\alpha) \text{ a set of what are at least taken to be exclusive and exhaustive alternatives and (}\beta) \text{ an independent consideration of each} \]

Internal aim:

\[ (\gamma') \text{ assessing the truth of some thesis } T \text{ other than the alternatives in question} \]

External aim:

\[ \text{suited for (}\delta') \text{ robust understanding of some thesis } T \text{ and (}\varepsilon') \text{ persuading others of the truth of that thesis, or (}\zeta') \text{ impressing potential fee-paying students (among other aims)} \]

For example, the character Socrates in Plato’s *Lysis* conducts the inquiry through the method of exploring both sides.\(^{26}\) In their initial discussion of friendship, Socrates and his interlocutors explore each of the following alternatives independently: when one loves another, either the loved becomes a friend, the lover becomes a friend, both the lover and the loved become friends, or neither the lover nor the loved become friends (*Lysis* 212a8–213c9). It is clear that they are doing so with the internal aim of assessing which one is true (internal aim γ) given Socrates’ initial motivation for raising the question and the fact that they find themselves in *aporia* when they encounter problems with each option.\(^{27}\) In response Socrates goes on to apply the method twice more with the same internal aim, also consistent with external aims δ–ζ above. Though this is not Socrates’ only method for inquiry, we find this same method attributed to Socrates in other works by Plato and Xenophon as well.

Gorgias, on the other hand, uses the same structure as part of playing both sides. In the *Palamedes*, for example, he argues that if Palamedes were willing to commit the crime, it would have been for money, honor, security, helping friends and harming enemies, escaping trouble, or becoming a tyrant. He then goes through each option independently showing that none would have been plausible for Palamedes (*Palamedes* §13–19). Rather than leading to an *aporia*, the appropriate result if the aim were assessing the truth of one of the alternatives (internal aim γ), the problems on each side are meant to show that there was no plausible motive for Palamedes to commit the crime (internal aim γ’).\(^{28}\)

It is worth stressing just how similar both methods can be. For example, Plato’s *Lysis* and *Parmenides* as well as Gorgias’ *Palamedes* and *On-Not-Being* make frequent use of polylemmatic *reductiones*: show that if A is the case then there are several options, but each option is unacceptable, so that A must not be the case. Both can be used as part of a genuine search for the truth (δ and δ’ respectively). Yet this structure is not unique to figures like Plato and Gorgias. On some interpretations of Parmenides’ poem there is a similar polylemmatic *reductio* in fragment B, and we have some evidence of Zeno using this structure as well.\(^{29}\) Why, then, think that Plato is acknowledging a debt to Gorgias in particular when both may have gotten it from one of the Eleatics?

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26 I discuss the *Lysis* in more detail in section 3 below.

27 This is also consistent in principle with external aim ζ, impressing potential fee-paying students. Maybe Socrates does not actually care himself about developing a robust understanding of the question at hand or instilling that in his interlocutors, though this would be hard to square with Plato’s other portrayals of Socrates.

28 In principle this is consistent with a genuine interest in a robust understanding of the underlying truth of the matter (external aim δ’). Given the fictional context, however, something along the lines of ζ is more likely.

29 Cf. Parmenides B8 6–15, 45–49; Zeno B1, B2, B4. As Laks & Most 2016, 44 point out, Simplicius appears to interpret the first case from Parmenides as a polylemmatic *reductio*, though it does require emending the text as it comes down to us.
Of course, Plato is not reacting to the sophists in a vacuum, but rather in a rich intellectual context where strategic reappropriations are as important as new inventions. My hypothesis here is not that Gorgias was the first to use the structure of playing both sides, but that he perfected and systematized that structure. If this is right, it explains why Plato would bring in allusions to Gorgias in the context of exploring both sides, not just the Eleatics. While Zeno was famous for deriving opposed theses from a single claim, this can take the structure of a simple \textit{reductio} rather than playing both sides. We do not have direct evidence of his exploring a set of opposed claims independently nearly as frequently or as systematically as Gorgias did.\footnote{A simple \textit{reductio} structure appears more frequently in the fragments of Zeno that survive than a polylemmatic \textit{reductio} (a version of playing both sides), though the fragmentary nature of that evidence makes it difficult to assess with any certainty the relative frequency or the overarching structure. Either way, it is salient that Plato emphasizes Zeno’s deriving opposed theses rather than exploring them independently as Gorgias does (cf n. 23 above).} Nor is there direct evidence that he used it at the same level of generality. Part of what is striking about playing both sides in Gorgias is that it describes the overarching structure of his argument in each of his surviving works as well as a structure that appears systematically on a smaller scale within each work.\footnote{Many of the other methodological connections discussed in section 2.1 above, including the frequent signposting, the nesting of one polylemma within another, and a self-consciousness about exhaustivity also appear to be more characteristic of Gorgias than of the Eleatics. The case of Parmenides is slightly more tricky in that one may interpret the opposition between the way of truth and the way of seeming as an instance of not only the structure but also the internal aim of exploring both sides. Even so, my hypothesis about Gorgias’ systematization of that structure explains why Plato would go out of his way to allude to Gorgias in particular. This is all consistent with the view that the Eleatic roots of the method are an important part of the story as well.}

Thus, these striking structural similarities between exploring both sides in Plato and playing both sides in Gorgias in particular offer the best explanation of Plato’s allusions to Gorgias in the \textit{Parmenides} and \textit{Lysis}. Gorgias may not have been the first to employ the structure of playing both sides, but he appears to have been the first to perfect that structure and employ it systematically, a strategy that Plato then picks up on. It is equally important, however, to keep in mind the key difference between these two methods to see that Plato is not simply copying Gorgias’ methodology in every detail.

### 2.3 Exploring Both Sides vs. Playing Both Sides: Differences

I have already suggested that exploring both sides has a serious use for Plato: not only can it encourage further inquiry, but it can be used to test and ultimately come to understand the truth of the very starting points or first principles of a philosophical system. This highlights how an internal focus on the truth of the alternatives themselves goes hand in hand with distinct uses for this Gorgianic structure; while Plato seems to acknowledge his positive debt to Gorgias, he applies that structure in a different way.

Consider the following example of how exploring both sides might work. Say you are investigating the nature of reality and inquiring into the most fundamental principles that explain the way things are. You want to decide which principles play that role without having to be derived from anything else. Furthermore, say that you have identified the following principle as a candidate:

\[(1) \quad \text{All things change}\]

One way to test whether or not one should in fact accept (1) as a first principle is simply to reflect on whether it has a privileged epistemic status, for instance whether it is self-evident or self-
justifying such that it need not be derived from any other theses. Another way to test whether or not to adopt (1) as a first principle would be to posit (1) provisionally as a hypothesis, follow out its consequences, then compare them to the consequences of positing not-(1) as a hypothesis. This would be to test (1) by exploring both sides. In fact, Plato has his interlocutors investigate this very hypothesis through exploring both sides in both the *Sophist* and the *Cratylus*.

The procedure need not be limited to (1) and its contradictory: it may be helpful to test more than two candidate principles as long as they form a mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive set. For instance, on the assumption that at least some things exist:

(1) All things change  
(2) All things are changeless  
(3) Some things change, while others are changeless

One could complicate the picture even further by distinguishing more fine-grained options such as (3a): most, but not all things change, and (3b): most, but not all things are changeless. This all goes to show that, while the simplest case involves a hypothesis and its contradictory, the same method can be applied to any set of exclusive and exhaustive alternatives.

There are a number of possible outcomes after one has initially explored the consequences of each alternative. The simplest outcome would be if you found, say, promising consequences for (1) and problematic consequences for not-(1), lending strong support for accepting (1). If instead you found contradictory results for (1) and promising ones for not-(1), then you would have strong reason to reject (1) and adopt not-(1) instead. These are not the only possible outcomes: it could be that you initially find equally promising (or unpromising) results for both, in which case you would have no more reason to go with one rather than the other based on this evidence alone. Given that either (1) or not-(1) must be true, however, you would have reason to believe that something has gone wrong with your reasoning. Perhaps one of the arguments is faulty, or one of the assumptions being held fixed is mistaken, or the two hypotheses as you have formulated them are not true contradictories. This final outcome is one that Plato takes advantage of for encouraging further inquiry.

Of course, even in the best-case scenario where (1) has promising consequences and not-(1) leads to a contradiction you have not definitively proven that (1) should be adopted as an axiom or first principle. You have given reasons for taking (1) to be true, though you have not through exploring both sides proven that it is true. You have also not proven that it should be taken as a first principle rather than a derivative thesis. But this lack of certainty need not condemn exploring both sides as of no use. Even though a single application of the method does not bring with it any guarantees, it still serves as a useful test for whether or not to adopt some candidate principle above and beyond mere intuition. And Plato emphasizes the need to apply this method repeatedly with many other candidates as well (*Parmenides* 136a4–e4). Multiple applications of exploring both sides will provide more useful evidence, as you can then compare the explanatory

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32 I discuss the *Sophist* case in “Pushing Through’ in Plato’s *Sophist*: A New Reading of the Parity Assumption” (Rodriguez, forthcoming). In the *Cratylus*, this application of exploring both sides comes to a head in the two competing etymologies of ‘knowledge’ (*epistēmē*), one on the hypothesis that reality is full of motion (*Cratylus* 412a1–4) and the other on the hypothesis that it is full of rest (*Cratylus* 437a2–8). Socrates similarly proposes investigating (1) through exploring both sides at *Theaetetus* 180c7–181b8. Yet, despite Theaetetus’ encouragement, Socrates and Theodorus give up on examining the opposing theory (183c8–184b1, though Plato does have Socrates reference the conversation depicted in Plato’s *Parmenides*).
advantages of adopting one principle over another. Plato has his characters readily admit that this is an enormous task but continue with it nevertheless, one step at a time.33

This is all to say that the method of exploring both sides as highlighted in Plato’s Parmenides can indeed be of genuine philosophical use. Built in to the method is an internal aim of assessing which alternative is true, and it can be used for the external aim of testing candidate principles or encouraging further inquiry. An application of exploring both sides is clearly not complete when problems are found on either side: at this stage, we do not yet have any positive evidence for which is true.34 This is precisely Socrates’ position in the Parmenides after Plato has Parmenides offer arguments against Socrates’ theory of forms and then, just before explicitly recommending the method of exploring both sides, offer an argument against denying Socrates’ theory (Parmenides 135b5–c3). This helps to keep Socrates from giving up on the theory prematurely. It also underscores an important contrast with playing both sides; as we see in Gorgias’ works, his method can reasonably end after finding problems with each hypothesis.

Like exploring both sides, playing both sides involves looking at the consequences of an exclusive and exhaustive set of alternatives (α and β above), but rather than aiming to assess the truth of the alternatives themselves, it aims to assess the truth of some other thesis (γ). This argument structure is sometimes called ‘argument by cases’. For instance, in Gorgias’ Helen he argues that there are only four potential causes for Helen’s going to Troy: fate, force, persuasion, or love. He treats each cause in turn, hypothesizing that if it were true, Helen would not be to blame for the Trojan war. Since Helen’s lack of culpability follows in each case, Gorgias can positively conclude that she is not to blame no matter which actually obtained. He highlights this aspect of his speech when he stresses how he will show that Helen is not to blame without taking a stand on what actually happened, “passing over that time then” as he puts it in Helen §5. Similarly, in the first part of his On Not-Being, he argues that, if anything is, either being is, not-being is, or both being and not-being are. He then goes through each option in turn, independently showing that it leads to contradictory results. Rather than leading to an aporia, the immediate aim appears to be to challenge the presupposition upon which the initial division was made: the assumption that anything exists in the first place.35

Thus, there is a pronounced difference in Plato’s and Gorgias’ use of the structure involved in both methods. As far as playing both sides is concerned, you are done when you have shown that some result (in this case, a negative one) follows from each of several cases. And this is precisely the attitude Gorgias takes: the point is proven once he has refuted each option, even if he is happy to go on and give another proof. This is not so with Socrates’ strategy in the Lysis or with exploring both sides more generally: after finding this reductio against A one is not yet finished; one still needs to explore the other side, not-A, to see whether it fares any better.36 And if you find problematic consequences in each case then you’re certainly not done: it suggests that there is a mistake somewhere in your reasoning and motivates further inquiry to find where exactly it was made. This difference in the method’s completion conditions, when one takes oneself to be done,

33 Plato has Socrates exclaim that it is an enormous task (Parmenides 136c6), later confirmed by both Zeno and Parmenides (Parmenides 136e1–3, 137a6). This is foreshadowed in the initial frame when he has Antiphon hesitate due to the difficulty of the task at hand (Parmenides 127a6), later repeated by Parmenides and Zeno using the same language (Parmenides 136d1, d6). Again, my hypothesis is that this level of systematicity is something we see perfected by Gorgias in particular, explaining why Plato would allude to Gorgias her in addition to the Eleatics. Though we may, of course, have made some progress in recognizing our ignorance.

34 These two examples show that the consequence derived in each case can be either a positive or a negative one. Either way, it will still count as a case of playing both sides.

35 Again, this is something that Zeno himself is not portrayed as doing in the Parmenides, though Plato foreshadows the theme of exploring both sides by highlighting how Zeno and Parmenides as a pair might be seen as secretly exploring both sides of the question.
goes hand in hand with the difference between an internal aim of assessing the truth of one of the alternatives in question (γ above) and assessing the truth of some other thesis (γ’ above).

All in all, the similarities in these two methods suggest an answer to our initial puzzle: Plato borrows from and alludes to Gorgias in his *Parmenides*, a dialogue purportedly about Eleaticism, because of the positive methodological debt he owes to the method of playing both sides as perfected by Gorgias. Yet he does not adopt this method in every detail, nor use it for the exact same purpose; Plato applies the related method of exploring both sides for encouraging further inquiry when an interlocutor might otherwise give up and for testing candidate first principles. Next, I will argue that we have good reason to associate exploring both sides not just with Plato, but with the historical Socrates as well.

3 Connections to the Historical Socrates

At this point one may rightly wonder: what does all of this have to do with Socrates? Sure, Plato has Parmenides recommend this method to a very young Socrates in the *Parmenides*, but why think that the historical Socrates employed the method of exploring both sides? As it turns out, both Plato and Xenophon appear to have associated this method with Socrates. Without evidence to the contrary, we should associate the method with Socrates as well. My claims about the similarities between exploring both sides and playing both sides along with their upshot for understanding the relationship between philosophy and sophistry do not depend on my suggestion that the method was practiced by the historical Socrates. Nevertheless, the association with the historical Socrates allows for a simple explanation for why we see the method arising in both Plato and Xenophon and provides an opportunity for seeing how the analytical framework of understanding method in terms of structure, internal aim, and external aim can be helpful from both a historical and philosophical perspective.

Once we are sensitive to this aspect of Platonic methodology we can see it playing a role in numerous other dialogues: *Sophist*, *Cratylus*, and *Phaedrus* just to name a few. But most relevant for present purposes is the fact that Plato has Socrates systematically employ the method of exploring both sides throughout the *Lysis*. Most scholars agree that, if anywhere, the most reliable traces of the historical Socrates are to be found in so-called ‘early dialogues’ where the *Lysis* is traditionally grouped. This often goes hand in hand with a theory about Socratic methodology: the theory that Socrates primarily employed the *elenchus*, and that Plato was responsible for later innovations with the method of hypothesis and with collection and division.

Yet a closer look at the *Lysis* shows that it contains the very same method of exploring both sides, as I have suggested above. It is no coincidence that Gregory Vlastos saw the *Lysis* as an exception to his general view and thus a ‘post-elenctic’ dialogue (Vlastos 1994, 71). Vlastos suggests that this must show Plato’s own disenchantment with the elenchus but, to the contrary, the connections with other dialogues suggest an independent method that Plato took seriously and that he associated with his famous teacher. To be clear, this does not mean that Socrates employed the method of exploring both sides to the exclusion of the *elenchus*; instead, it challenges a dominant paradigm that assumes that Socrates, and Plato too, only employed one core philosophical method at any given point in their career.

Plato has Socrates introduce the main discussion of friendship with the following question: “So tell me: whenever someone loves someone else, which one becomes a friend to which, the person loving of the person loved, or the person loved of the person loving, or is there no difference?” (*Lysis* 212a8–b2). In the ensuing discussion, Socrates and Menexenus explore each option in

37 More specifically, in Plato’s *Lysis* and in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* as I discuss in more detail below.
reverse order (a classic Platonic chiasmus): first that there is no difference in the sense that both are friends when one loves another, second that there is no difference in the sense that neither are friends (that is, reciprocal love is required), third that the loved becomes friend of the lover, and finally that the lover becomes friend to the loved (Lysis 212b2–213d2).

In what follows, Socrates continues to double down on the method of exploring both sides, considering whether the Homeric claim that ‘god always draws like to like’ is always true, sometimes true, or never true (Lysis 213d6–216b9). This eventually leads to a new six-fold division of the possibilities at hand, with each of the possible combinations of either the good, the bad, or the neither good nor bad being friends with one of the others (Lysis 216e7–222e7). Each hypothesis is explored in turn, though each has its problems, leading to one of Plato’s famous aporetic endings.38

It is striking that Plato has Socrates in the Lysis systematically employ the very method that he has Parmenides teach Socrates in the Parmenides. This suggests that Plato did indeed associate this method with Socrates, a suggestion that gains further traction from the fact that the same method crops up in Xenophon’s depiction of Socrates as well.

Multiple times throughout the Memorabilia Xenophon has Socrates strengthen his point through exploring both sides. In IV.2.26–29 Socrates first explores the consequences of knowing oneself: it allows one to understand their own capacities and what is fitting for them and, as a result, furnish good things for themselves and avoid bad ones.39 He then explores the consequences of being deceived about oneself, which results in a failure to hit upon good things and a propensity to fall into bad ones instead.40 Socrates then goes on to make a related point about knowing or not knowing what one is doing: the former results in honor, a good reputation, and control over others while the latter results in dishonor, a bad reputation, and punishment. We see a similar strategy in IV.5. Throughout this discussion, Socrates explores all of the good consequences that follow from being continent and all of the bad consequences that follow from being incontinent. Incontinence brings about slavery and inhibits wisdom, moderation, and even pleasure; continence, on the other hand, provides all of these in their highest form and results in complete freedom.

Yet the analysis of each side is not always so straightforward. An earlier discussion of friendship has a number of interesting parallels with Plato’s Lysis, including a familiar aporia about who is friend to whom. At II.6.17–20 Socrates and Critobulus encounter problems for the hypothesis that the good are friends with one another as well as the hypothesis that the bad are friends with one another and the hypothesis that the bad are friends with the good. Unlike the Lysis, however, Socrates quickly decides that the truly good are in fact friends with the good (Lysis II.6.22–27).

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38 I discuss these applications of exploring both sides in greater detail in Rodriguez 2019a.
39 Here Socrates can be understood as exploring the hypothesis that one should seek self-knowledge and the hypothesis that one should not seek self-knowledge respectively. It is an application of exploring both sides in the practical domain, so it is framed first and foremost in terms of a cost–benefit analysis, though this is equivalent to inquiring into the truth of the above-mentioned hypotheses. The same applies in the next two examples, and Xenophon himself explicitly acknowledges the practical sphere of the discussion in Memorabilia IV.5. He opens that chapter by saying that he will show how Socrates made his companions ‘more capable in action.’
40 It is not clear whether we should take the two options as contrary or contradictory: is the second case of being entirely deceived about oneself, or simply the case of having some deception? The latter reading is more plausible, but even on the former it is still possible to understand this as a case of exploring both sides since the same reasoning will rule out the intermediate and extreme cases. It follows from the argument that, insofar as one knows oneself, goods will come about and bads will be avoided and, insofar as one does not, the goods will elude them and they will fall into the bads. Thus, an intermediate state of knowing some of oneself but being deceived about some of oneself will result in an intermediate amount of goods and bads, leaving the state of complete knowing clearly preferable here for the same reason. The same applies for the next division mutatis mutandis.
These applications of exploring both sides do not end in aporia as they often do in Plato’s dialogues: Socrates and his interlocutors quickly arrive at a clear verdict in favor of virtue. In fact, at least on the surface-level of the text, one might worry that the verdict has been achieved too quickly. Have Socrates and his interlocutors really explored both sides with an open mind? Have they given due consideration to where the argument might have gone wrong? It appears that they have not, at least when each instance of exploring both sides is taken in isolation. This shows that a successful application of exploring both sides as a method of inquiry is one where the question is genuinely treated as an open one, where a genuinely hypothetical attitude is taken towards each alternative.

This of course is not to say that Xenophon intends to portray this as Socrates’ final word on the matter; he may very well have a deeper underlying message in mind, especially once we bring in the full context. He may, for example, be portraying a different use of the method aimed primarily at teaching or demonstration rather than inquiry. Regardless of how effective these applications are in isolation, Xenophon does in fact depict Socrates as employing the method. This provides independent support for my claim that exploring both sides was indeed a (though not the only) method associated with, and plausibly used by, the historical Socrates. It then suggests a plausible historical link between authors such as Gorgias and Protagoras on the one hand and Plato and Xenophon on the other.

At the same time, we can see why asking these historical questions can be useful from a purely analytical perspective as well. Just as the history of science provides useful tools and data sets for better understanding scientific methodology, the history of philosophy provides useful tools and data sets for better understanding philosophical methodology. In the case of scientific methodology, we can fruitfully use a contemporary framework to analyze how historical figures engaged in similar inquiries even if they did not share the same terminology. How they would conceive of the project on their own terms is another important but distinct question. In this case, too, the framework for understanding method in terms of structure, internal aim, and external aim is helpful for tracing important similarities and potential historical connections even if this is not the framework that the historical figures in question would use to describe their project. The connections I have alluded to, both implicit and explicit, support the idea that there is an important continuity between philosophy and sophistry in Classical Greece. How well this framework matches, say, Plato’s own methodological terminology or metaphilosophical views is an important, further question for another time.

4 Conclusion

What should we make of all of these methodological connections, and of the fact that Plato himself goes out of his way to highlight them? They suggest that Plato, Socrates, and Gorgias were much closer from a methodological perspective than they are often taken to be. In this light the suggestion that Socrates should be seen as part of the sophistic movement makes good sense. It does not suggest that we should understand Socrates as more ‘sophistic’ in a pejorative sense; instead, it suggests that the sophists are closer to Socrates and Plato than we standardly think of them (at least as concerns the methods that they employ).

At the same time, it is easy to see how several caricatures of each respective method arose. These caricatures, that philosophers care about truth and their interlocutors’ moral development or that they are lost in incessant logic-chopping, that sophists are more comfortable with a relativized notion of truth or that they have given up truth altogether in favor of money and persuasion, all focus on what I have identified as natural external aims of each respective method.
It is natural to use exploring both sides as part of an arduous process of testing candidate first principles or as a goad for further philosophic inquiry given its unique internal aim. It is also easy to use playing both sides for persuasion as well as for challenging commonly-held beliefs.

But these external aims are not essential to the methods themselves: one could also try to impress potential fee-paying students with exploring both sides or use playing both sides as part of a genuine inquiry into independent truths. The legacy of these methods is not entirely up to their initial practitioners; later followers can emphasize these aims as part of a larger strategy for legitimating one method or condemning another. Yet we need to be careful not to let this focus on external aim overshadow the structure and internal aim that individuate these methods, or read the aims attributed by later interpreters back into the initial practitioners.\textsuperscript{41}

If all of this is right, then the crafting of new methods of philosophical inquiry, standardly assumed to be an anti-sophistic development pursued by Socrates and championed by Plato, is less of a reaction to and more of a positive development of what we find in their sophistic predecessors. Plato, of course, had a variety of influences from literature to medicine to mathematics; at least in this respect, however, his debt to Socrates is also a debt to the sophists.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} For example, Barney (2016, 24–25) has pointed out how the arguments of Gorgias’ Helen along with its self-undermining elements can be interpreted as a type of “philosophy as challenge”, similar to how many are used to interpreting Platonic dialogues. Even though the external aims as defined here are not essential to an application of either exploring both sides or playing both sides, they may very well still be essential for employing those methods either philosophically or sophistically. It may very well be that, when criticizing sophistry, Plato is criticizing that tradition more as it was practiced by later followers than by founders such as Gorgias or Protagoras. Again, a full examination of these figures’ own metaphilosophical views will have to wait for another time.

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