

# *Hic Sunt Leones: Mythologies and Partisan Constructions of the Good Philosopher in Plato*

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## Abstract

Plato constructs the philosopher in contrast to the sophist. Both sophistical and rhetorical *logos*, in their epistemic closeness to philosophical *logos*, require a constant act of demarcation throughout Plato's works. The challenge posed by the sophists creates a structural, instable tension in several Platonic dialogues. Why is the Athenian philosopher obsessed by a different yet comparable approach to virtue, knowledge and social order? Why does the Athenian philosopher need and, at the same time, reject the sophist when it comes to shaping his own self-image? To try to answer these questions, I will go back to a foundational moment where the Platonic philosopher is theoretically constructed and conceptually produced against the sophist, namely, Plato's *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. The aim of the article is to show how the Platonic philosopher is conveniently defined through a series of partisan demarcations grounded on ontological privilege, epistemic exclusion, ethical circularity and, ultimately, political delegitimation.

**Keywords:** Plato; dialectic; demarcation; partisanship; sophistic; agonistics; delegitimation

*Decolonization* was the preoccupation of two groups that propelled the nationalist movement: the intelligentsia and the political class. They set out to create the nation, the former to give the independent state a history and the latter to create a common citizenship as the basis of national sovereignty. Both projects unravelled in the thick of civil war. It is time to ask: what have we learned? How far have we gone beyond settler claims to being custodians of cosmopolitan pluralism and nativist preoccupation with origin and authenticity? (Mamdani 2013, 85)

[T]he unconscious has first and foremost to do with grammar ... This also has a bit to do, or much to do, or everything to do, with *repetition*, that is, with the aspect that is entirely the opposite of what a dictionary is used for ... Grammar and repetition constitute a completely different aspect from what I've just pinpointed as invention, which is doubtless no smaller matter, and nor is persuasion. (Lacan 2017, 12–13)



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## German Shepherds and Wolves—Plato’s Good Philosopher and his Mythological Foundations against the Sophists

The former butcher is transformed into a dog. Henceforth all his virtues will be reduced to the virtue of a dog, pure “*dévouement*” [devotion] to its master. (Marx 1975, 164)

In principle, a porter differs less from a philosopher than a mastiff from a greyhound. It is the division of labour which has set a gulf between them. (Marx 1976, 180)

My path in this article<sup>1</sup> is to follow the conceptual production of the philosopher in some dialogues written by Plato; backwards and forwards in mythical narratives and strange incorporations that will follow the rhythms and modulations of their libidinal investments as well as theoretical practices. This article will be primarily dealing with disciplinary boundaries, theoretical conditions of self-affiliation, inner vaults and implicit exclusions required to produce the good philosopher against the bad sophist.

I start from one of Plato’s most elusive yet dense works, the dialogue traditionally named *Sophist* and with an analogy contained in it. It is a double metaphor; better, a philosophical chiasmus that I shall accept as it is for now and problematise in the rest of this article: “[y]et the Sophist has a certain likeness to our minister of purification. Yes, the same sort of likeness which a wolf, who is the fiercest of animals, has to a dog, who is the gentlest. But he who would not be found tripping, ought to be very careful in this matter of comparisons, for they are most slippery things” (*Sophist* 231a).<sup>2</sup> Plato tells us in different places in his works that he always wanted to write a dialogue called *Philosopher*, a book that, together with two other dialogues he actually wrote, namely *Sophist* and *Statesman*, would have given us a trilogy on the three major figures of his body of work.<sup>3</sup> But Plato never wrote the *Philosopher*, he never finished and released a dialogue on the philosopher.<sup>4</sup> This means that we get his living portray of the philosopher only *ex contrario*, that is via his constructions and prescriptions of what a philosopher should be and do against his worst enemies,

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1 An earlier version of this article formed the first part of a paper presented at the international workshop “What-Is Questions and Philosophy,” 11–13 May 2018, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. I would like to thank Bryan Mukandi for his comments, substantial feedback and careful reading of the article. The Latin phrase *hic sunt leones* (here there are lions) refers to the medieval practice among European cartographers of labelling unknown and unexplored lands in Africa and Asia with phrases evoking exotic animals, horrible monsters and sub-humans (*plurima ferra prava hic sunt; in istis partibus sunt dragones et serpentes; homines sine inteletto*, etc). For a critical review on the actual historical occurrences of these Latin phrases in ancient maps, see Van Duzer (2014).

2 Unless stated otherwise, all translations of Plato’s dialogues are from Plato (1871). I cite the Stephanus numbers to easily locate passages and lines in the dialogues.

3 *Sph.* 217a4, *Timaeus* 19e and *Statesman* 257a4.

4 On these questions, see Notomi (1999, 23–25). Notomi’s entire book is an indication of how it is impossible to theoretically disentangle the sophist from the philosopher in a clear, univocal way.

namely, evil politicians, bad rhetors and deceiving sophists.<sup>5</sup> As explained in the quote above, the philosopher, or “minister of purification” is similar to a dog, a friendly, loyal and gregarious animal,<sup>6</sup> while the sophist is like a wolf, a scary and untameable wild animal; they are alike but, at the same time, they are not. And this relation of likeness—“a certain likeness”—is that which Plato, in those dialogues that primarily deal with *bellicose* sophists and *ignorant* politicians, is mostly concerned about. In his *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*—the dialogues I will be mainly focusing on in this article—Plato constructs and erects a tireless discursive and textual machinery to theoretically separate and conceptually demarcate the German shepherd from the black wolf; that is the good philosopher from the bad sophist, or, in other words, the rightful model-maker from the crooked shadow-maker.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I shall put aside the *Republic*: I am only going to reflect on those dialogues I mentioned, even though they all present arguments and argumentations very similar to what we read throughout Plato’s *Politeia*.

The Socratic *elenchus* and the Platonic division (*diakritike*) and collection (*synagoge*) are implemented to catch the wolf in the net of dialectic.<sup>8</sup> German shepherds seem to be in endless controversy with wolves about the nature of justice, virtue, and happiness; and this controversy, we are told, is “a war of words ... we have been accustomed to call argumentation” (*Sph.* 225a–b). It is within this “war of words” that Plato needs and makes use of what he calls the “art of discerning or discriminating”; an apparently neutral art of “purification” called dialectic, which purges, makes comparisons, demarcates uniformity from deformity, and separates order from

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5 On the vexed problems of why Plato only wrote and released dialogues and not treatises, dialogues that never present a character named Plato nor directly discuss his theories, in short, the mouthpiece problematics, a good introductory tool on these multi-layered issues is Press (2000), esp. Introduction, Part I and III. I hold what Holger Thesleff (2000, 55) describes as the general sense position: “Plato’s ‘mouthpiece’, in a general sense, is each dialogue as a whole—irreducibly, insofar as it is authentic or at least semiauthentic.”

6 These descriptions are of course contingent on the social history of interactions between dogs and humans. For instance, during apartheid dogs were not automatically perceived as friendly animals by the vast majority of South Africans.

7 Irigaray (1985) deconstructs with psychoanalytical expertise Plato’s obsessive characterisation, in the allegory of the cave, of philosophical light against non-philosophical shadows.

8 On this difficult hunt in *Sophist* in relation to Socrates’ opening words echoing *Odyssey* and Odysseus’ multiform abilities, see Bordoy (2013). He also highlights Plato’s “obsessive insistence” on portraying the divinity as well as the philosopher as immutable, a feature shared with ideal Forms that qualify philosophers as the only rulers since they are the only ones who can determine, via *diairesis*, genus and class of everything.

disorder in order to “leave the good and to cast out whatever is bad” (*Sph.* 227d).<sup>9</sup> More specifically, evil in Plato can always be traced back to disagreement as he argues that “disease and discord are the same” and “deformity” is in constant need and “want of measure” (*Sph.* 228a). Disagreement calls for refutation, and once the wolves have been refuted and silenced, dialectic can finally produce good people out of them as “reason is the lord of the hunt.”<sup>10</sup>

Once reason is on the side of the minister of purification, unreason is conversely on the side of the minister of contradiction, who is constantly portrayed as the master of *simulacra* and not-being, a “many-headed” enemy who, in this *war of words*, forces Plato to acknowledge in language and on earth the co-existence of being with not-being. As such, it is in his war waged against the sophists that Plato understands the necessity of consuming his double patricide on Parmenides and Heraclitus: a move that, in fact, is a necessary step to create his own version of dialectic. Thus, the sophists make Plato understand that being and not-being are always bound together in some form of linguistic and epistemological contradiction when we speak about and

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9 Gill (2010) states that “[t]he Stranger’s lecture on parts (e.g. barbarian) and kinds (forms characterized by some positive feature) is misleading, because it suggests that division starts at the top of a tree with some wide kind, which breaks at natural joints into sub-kinds. But that is not the way dichotomous division works. The target at the *bottom* of the tree—however vague or even misguided the initial conception of it—determines the selection of the wide kind at the start, the proper first division, and relevant next steps. Different target kinds (the angler, the sophist, the statesman) prompt the investigators to carve up the world in different ways ... what counts as a ‘natural joint’, a proper break between kinds, depends on the goal of the investigation. The present target is statecraft, and its definition, when ultimately discovered, will mention humans, since the city is the object of the statesman’s knowledge, and humans make up a city, but the essence of statecraft depends on its *perspective* on humans, as members of a city” (Gill 2010, 191–2). Brown (2010) explains further: “division of a whole into forms (or kinds) is never a *de novo* division, rather, it is a division of a whole into its forms (or its kinds), just as the butcher divides a carcass into its parts, according to the joints, i.e. the place at which the limbs join. Correct dividing into forms is presented as a matter of *discerning* pre-existing distinctions in the subject, and, to that extent, dividing according to those distinctions. But it is this very presumption that raises the most acute difficulties for understanding the method of division, especially as demonstrated in *Sophist*. For the metaphor of cutting up a carcass into parts according to its joints strongly suggests both that the divisions are objective, and (though less definitely) that there is only one correct way to divide a given subject-matter. But when the Stranger claims to discern divisions in *Sophist* and *Politicus*, these often seem arbitrary, whimsical, or designed to make a particular point” (Brown 2010, 156–7). Brown adds: “it is hard to separate sophistry from philosophy ... In fact it becomes clear that at none of the cuts in this division is the practice of philosophy firmly distinguished from that of sophistry on our intuitive understanding of Plato’s distinction between them. That is, there is no explicit reference to what from earlier works we have been led to hold is a key difference between true philosophy and sophistry, that the former undertakes its investigations seriously and aiming to discover the truth, while the latter is careless of truth but aims instead at prestige, victory, or money. Instead, the so-called distinguishing features at each of the cuts fit some philosophers as well as sophists” (Brown 2010, 162).

10 *Sph.* 235b–c: «if the sophist stands his ground against us at first, we will seize him by the orders of reason, our king, (*kata ta epestalmena hupo tou basilikou logou*) then deliver him up to the king and display his capture»—I find Harold N. Fowler’s translation (Loeb edition) more effective.

symbolise the body or any other form or matter on earth. But this understanding about the co-existence of being with not-being must only be a preliminary stage within the Platonic science of division. The “friends of ideas”—the true philosophers—get the legitimacy of their linguistic divisions and analytic demarcations from what Plato calls “heaven and the unseen world” since the “true essence consists of certain intelligible and incorporeal ideas” (*Sph.* 246b). In what follows, I am going to discuss four main aspects of Plato’s conceptual economy of the good philosopher.

First aspect: the “friends of ideas” or idealists are always depicted as better human beings than materialists, sophists, and rhetors or, as Plato calls them, the “friends of earth”: “[w]ith those who make being to consist in ideas, there will be less difficulty, for they are civil people enough; but there will be very great difficulty, or rather an absolute impossibility, in getting an opinion out of those who drag everything down to matter” (*Sph.* 246c–d). The line that divides up civilised thinkers from uncivilised ones, the “absolute impossibility” runs across the acceptance of true concepts, notions, ideas and forms as they are correctly articulated by Plato in his works. It is only with these civilised thinkers that it is possible to have symbolic exchanges, pleasant conversations and reassuring discussions, as they know the true art that measures everything. The uncivilised scholars, on the other hand, helplessly debating and disputing with no care for any truth nor real kind, constantly contest the established order of priorities when it comes to symbolising the philosophical scene, its fetishes, projections and identifications:

But these persons, because they are not accustomed to distinguish classes according to real forms, jumble together two widely different things, relation to one another, and to a standard, under the idea that they are the same, and also fall into the converse error of dividing other things not according to their real parts. Whereas the right way is, if a man has first seen the unity of things, to go on with the enquiry and not desist until he has found all the differences contained in it which form distinct classes; nor again should he be able to rest contented with the manifold diversities which are seen in a multitude of things until he has comprehended all of them that have any affinity within the bounds of one similarity and embraced them within the reality of a single kind. (*Stat.* 285a–b)

Obviously, the friends of earth are perceived as philosophical troublemakers who do not recognise the intrinsic value of rational accounts when it comes to analyse and agree on transcendent realities and transcendental axioms.<sup>11</sup> As such, they are depicted as showing no interest, nor desire for what *really* counts in philosophy:

But people seem to forget that some things have sensible images, which are readily known, and can be easily pointed out when anyone desires to answer an enquirer without any trouble or argument; whereas the greatest and highest truths have no

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11 See Lyotard (1988, 19–26) on the narrative, argumentative and philosophical operations implemented by the Platonic friends of forms to produce and impose *homologia* on the friends of earth.

outward image of themselves visible to man, which he who wishes to satisfy the soul of the enquirer can adapt to the eye of sense, and therefore we ought to train ourselves to give and accept a rational account of them; for immaterial things, which are the noblest and greatest, are shown only in thought and idea, and in no other way, and all that we are now saying is said for the sake of them. (*Stat.* 285d–286b)

And, most importantly, from the argumentative mistake of not acknowledging Plato's truths, the theoretical ostracisation of wolves requested by German shepherds must immediately be followed by social and political exclusion:

But who are these other kings and priests elected by lot who now come into view followed by their retainers and a vast throng, as the former class disappears and the scene changes? They are a strange crew. A minute ago I thought that they were animals of every tribe; for many of them are like lions and centaurs, and many more like satyrs and such weak and shifty creatures—Protean shapes quickly changing into one another's forms and natures; and now, I begin to see who they are ... The chief of Sophists and most accomplished of wizards, who must at any cost be separated from the true king or Statesman, if we are ever to see daylight in the present enquiry (*Stat.* 291a–c). The members of all these States, with the exception of the one which has knowledge, may be set aside as being not Statesmen but partisans—upholders of the most monstrous idols, and themselves idols; and, being the greatest imitators and magicians, they are also the greatest of Sophists. (*Stat.* 303c)

It is through a double act of philosophical delegitimation and socio-political segregation that what we call Platonic *dialogues*, construct and produce their own theoretical order, libidinal attitudes, and need for regular exchanges among dialecticians whose speculations and linguistic analyses permanently reinforce each other. In textual constructions erected to challenge and hide both philosophical partisanship and speculative circularity, Plato shapes his arguments and argumentations while constantly trying to avoid theoretical practices that do not mirror his own:<sup>12</sup>

But where the company are real gentlemen and men of education, you will see no flute-girls, nor harp-girls; and they have no nonsense or games, but are contented with one another's conversation, of which their own voices are the medium, and which they carry on by turns and in an orderly manner ... and a company like this of ours, and men such as we profess to be ... prefer to talk with one another, and put one another to the proof in conversation. And these are the models which I desire that you and I should imitate. (*Prot.* 343c–348a)

Second aspect: both Plato's ethics of conversation and philosophical analysis reflect, produce, and are grounded on an ontological privilege granted to the soul as the only inner place which mutually connects every level of existence to each other. It is only

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12 Derrida (1981) inscribes Plato's attempts to separate philosophy from both rhetoric and sophistry as originally and irremediably contaminated by the logic of the supplement (here manifested as *pharmakon*), esp. pp. 103–119, 125–133, 149–155, 165–169.

within the soul that dialectic gets connected to ontology, ontology to epistemology, epistemology to ethics, ethics to politics, politics to ontology, dialectic to epistemology, and so on. And this infinite, systematic circularity finds in the nature and essence of the soul its constant principle and stable axiomatics. When it comes to separate philosophy from both rhetoric and sophistry, we see how in Plato *elenchi*, divisions, *dialectike*, *synagoge* and philosophical analysis are shaped by and must reflect the clear-cut difference between two heterogeneous realms of experience: opinion and true knowledge, that is *doxa* and *episteme*. And this epistemological divide finds its source in the Platonic privilege for an ideal form of ontology. Ideal Forms, to be found in a transcendent ontological realm, provide the true legitimate framework to every possible experience, the privileged form of life that informs every decision on how to separate and demarcate the philosopher from the sophist, true philosophy from mimetic sophistry.<sup>13</sup> The only pure human part that shares elements with Forms and Ideas is the soul, and everything that does not represent them is not only epistemically wrong, it is also an injustice made to the soul and its constant search and quest to go back to the divine realm of Forms, that sublime place where it originally comes from.<sup>14</sup>

The body, as we can easily imagine, gets in the way with its urges and opposing, ambivalent desires, interfering with the ontological relationship between the soul and the ideal sphere of Forms. In this sense, ethical wrongdoings originate from ignorance of true knowledge: what one thinks to be the best possible course of conduct always turns out to be irrational when it is rational only to do and want what philosophers know to be true. In fact, the premise of Platonic intellectualism lies in the undisputable equivalence of knowing what the good *really* is with doing what one *really* desires. Another corollary to Plato's intellectualism is the theory of the unity of virtues: having a virtue such as temperance or courage implies that one, somehow, has and displays by default all other virtues because they all come from the true knowledge of good and evil. For ethics becomes a branch of dialectic, the art of measurement cannot be satisfied by what is better and worse, greater and smaller or, in other words, with partial degrees whenever one is facing ethical dilemmas. Ethics needs to display a univocal and unambiguous analytic, which eventually grounds itself in transcendent principles and standards of absolute goodness, truth and, of course, knowledge:

Now suppose happiness to consist in doing or choosing the greater, and in not doing or in avoiding the less, what would be the saving principle of human life? Would not the art of measuring be the saving principle; or would the power of appearance ... Would

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13 See Nehamas (1990) for a general introduction to this partisan self-demarcation within Anglo-Saxon historiography. However, Nehamas does not investigate how Plato's injunction to theoretically discredit rhetoric and sophistry plays an important role in Aristotle as well, since he accepts the Aristotelian foundation of syllogistic reasoning unambiguously. For a more nuanced understanding of the Platonic-Aristotelian relation to rhetoric and sophistry, see Ryle (1966), esp. chs. 4–5; Cassin (2014), esp. Introduction and chs. 1–2.

14 For religious connotations (initiations and mystery-rites) underlying dialectic as the art of purification of the soul in Plato, see Bernabé (2013).

not mankind generally acknowledge that the art which accomplishes this result is the art of measurement ... What would be the saving principle of our lives? A knowledge of measuring, when the question is one of excess and defect, and a knowledge of number, when the question is of odd and even ... Men err in their choice of pleasures and pains; that is, in their choice of good and evil, from defect of knowledge; and you admitted further, that they err, not only from defect of knowledge in general, but of that particular knowledge which is called measuring. And you are also aware that the erring act which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance. This, therefore, is the meaning of being overcome by pleasure—ignorance. (*Prot.* 356d–357e)

Ethical knowledge in Plato is usually shown to present clear-cut divisions between means and ends and this is usually how interlocutors are defeated in their ignorance of what ends or means *really* are. But it is the language we use to describe, the vocabulary and genres of discourse we choose to employ in defining means and ends that create fixed divisions in the very definitions we use. In fact, different definitions imply that some means can be part of some ends and vice versa—what counts as means or ends in the cognitive or logical can be quite different from what counts as means or ends in the aesthetic or the political. It is how we consciously or unconsciously choose to *describe* experience and value-terms, for instance from a decolonial point of view or from a liberal perspective, that generates the shifting relation between existential means and philosophical ends. But in ethical matters, Socratic *elenchus* and Platonic *diairesis* employ a narrow understanding of polarised divisions based on either/or classifications to prove that true knowledge must be consistent with itself. On the other hand, it is the very assumption that consistency of beliefs in ethical problems equals to ethical truth that could be questioned. For instance, in *Gorgias* we see Plato using a series of arguments based on linguistic ambiguities to exclude the epistemic legitimacy of any shared and communal understanding as acceptable source of ethical truths—while this collective epistemic legitimacy is countered by a consistency of belief professed by one single person who ultimately grounds his philosophical claims on invisible entities (*Gorg.* 471d3–475e). And the same epistemic exclusion also takes place when, in the same dialogue, Plato theorises on how and by whom political power should be exercised (*Gorg.* 489a–492e). The only universal ethical values, when it comes to guiding oneself in moral life, are the philosopher's true knowledge and his art of measurement. We can then argue that justice becomes here political subjugation to the philosophical guardians when it is only based on the strict correlation between physicians prescribing health and philosophers who, by virtue of their expertise, dialectic and superior *episteme*, are the only ones with magisterial power and epistemic authority to prescribe what is good for the souls and bodies of any citizen.

In Plato, philosophy as superior knowledge always aims at the ideal ontological order, which by itself produces, must enable and implement justice and moderation. But this whole syllogism follows only if we, first, accept the premise that politics is like medicine and, secondly, do not question how political authority over justice and injustice must be based and solved by a sort of ontological understanding of ethico-



political matters exercised by experts who happen to be in power not by elections. Moreover, this syllogism is usually supplemented by Plato with myths about fair retribution in the after-life as we read at the end of *Gorgias* and *Republic*. It is as if he saw that his chains of arguments were not producing universal agreements among his fellow Athenians, politicians or men of knowledge.

Thirdly, philosophy can be read in Plato as a partisan self-partition of sophistics.<sup>15</sup> Since Platonic philosophy and sophistics share so many discursive tools and conceptual apparatuses, Plato, especially in *Statesman* and *Phaedrus*, carefully demarcates good rhetoric, that is philosophy, from bad rhetoric, that is sophistics. Such ambivalence is so strong as both philosophy and sophistics aim at the same thing, which is persuading the soul through speech and writing. Philosophical speeches and sophistic speeches are set about the soul to persuade it, but sophists in Plato's dialogues achieve their ends, we are told, without caring about the nature of the soul. And as we saw earlier, the soul is the most strategic element in Plato's philosophy, and it is by no chance that the actual mechanisms and workings of Plato's rhetorical and speculative machinery of philosophical delegitimation against the sophists centre around the transcendent origin of the soul. This whole theoretical edifice relies on invisible and untraceable foundations whose dynamics Plato constantly makes visible and ventriloquises through myths, tales and philosophical analyses.<sup>16</sup> But, how should we call the act of ventriloquising an invisible entity? Isn't this act an act of *mimesis* that forces a divine simulacrum to utter and represent what he, Plato, wants? Where does Plato get the speculative authority and epistemic legitimacy to express and manifest what the soul truly is and irresistibly yearns for? Does he really believe that what he is doing is not just ventriloquising his own philosophical desires, narcissistic projections and imaginary identifications?<sup>17</sup> To what extent is this awareness the source of his bitter irony about almost everything he writes and thinks in relation to those who are not concerned with the same system of speculations?

Plato eventually grounds his views about the origin, nature and aims of the soul on a theory of recollection and reminiscence, which are always *described* through mythological tales and stories that serve as an organised set of signifiers. These signifiers are usually from religious, civic and feminine practices, that is from modes of existence (asceticism facing death, war heroism, childbirth pains, weaving) previously excluded or rejected by Plato; whence they return in his texts only to be

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15 On the terminological shift from sophistry to sophistics and what this means in terms of philosophical practice and historiography, see Derrida (1981) and Cassin (2014), esp. chs. 1, 2 and 4.

16 Scholarly literature on how Plato conveniently uses mythical sources and stories in his works is huge; an old but still valid introduction in its shortness is Edelstein (1949). See Strijdom (2004) on how story, history and myth (*plasma, historia, muthos*) are connected to the Platonic notion of noble lie (*pseudos gennaion*).

17 Nancy (1975) discusses in detail Plato's argumentative ventriloquism in *Sophist* as a mimetic *dispositif* implemented through divisions and *patrikos logos* to produce the purity of his philosophical paradigms.

reappropriated by philosophers for their paradigmatic arguments—it is a form of incorporation that immediately produces its own symbolic orthodoxy against different and competing paradigms of virtue, excellence and justice. It is a discursive strategy whose goal is the production of the paradigmatic tradition for all possible souls, in other words the philosopher’s immortal soul.<sup>18</sup> More specifically, this strategy’s final aim is to legitimate the philosopher in its central position in the *polis*. The virile *andreia* of Plato’s philosophers, who accept death and dominate irrational passions in both their bodies and souls throughout their lifetime, the masculine economy of a patriarchal ascension that reflects and at the same time transcends the civic virtues of both hoplites and traditional sages, the manly assimilation of exclusive and complex female experiences, all these social practices reinforce and rely on a whole metaphoric of war that is projected, re-inscribed and intellectualised to portray (convenient) *dialogical conflicts* between a self-sufficient sage-hero and the vicious tribe of shadow-makers—a (fictional) *logomachia* that always calls for a (final) *homologia*. But the partitions, divisions and demarcations between Platonic dialectic and sophistic do not ontologically pre-exist his dialogues, his theoretical *Kampfplatz*, they are made of the very social divisions and materials of the texts he gave us:<sup>19</sup>

Even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the true way of writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, and that such principles are a man’s own and his legitimate offspring—being, in the first place, the word which he finds in his own bosom; secondly, the brethren and descendants and relations of his idea which have been duly implanted by him in the souls of others—and who cares for them and no others—this is the right sort of man; and you and I would pray that we may become like him ... To all of them we are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth ... then they are to be called, not only poets, rhetors, legislators, but are worthy of a higher name, befitting the serious pursuit of their life.

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18 For a detailed analysis of Plato’s tactics and strategies to elevate the philosopher to a new social position through his recontextualisation of religious asceticism, hoplitic endurance and childbirth suffering, see Loraux (1995, chs. 8–9). On the female practice of weaving and textile productions as a rich signifier of awareness and communication among women in ancient Greece, see Wace (1948); Jenkins (1985); Nosch (2014).

19 See Robinson (2013) on how Plato’s arbitrary distinctions (denotation and connotation) play an important role when it comes to demarcate the sophist of noble lineage (the philosopher) from the sophist of bad lineage: “But what about the further, final definition of the sophist, at the very end of the dialogue, in terms of *mimesis* ... The weakness lies in what are chosen as the distinguishing features of the definition ... Plato’s apparent conclusion that sophists fall into two groups, the morally unacceptable and the morally acceptable (those of ‘noble descent’). A division of this type *within* a class seems unexceptional; the problem lies in Plato’s apparent belief that the latter can remain within the class yet be excluded from the overall definition *of* the class. But this is not good enough. Who, for example, would ever believe that there are morally praiseworthy and morally repugnant members of the class ‘*homo sapiens*’ but that only the morally praiseworthy ones fall within the *definition* ‘*homo sapiens*’?” (Robinson 2013, 10–13). On the chiasmus between sophist/philosopher and wolf/dog in relation to (self)demarcation, refutation, ambiguity, *mimesis* and falsehood in *Sophist*, see Canto (1986), esp. pp. 27–38 and pp. 49–51; Cassin (2017).

What name would you assign to them? Wise, I may not call them; for that is a great name which belongs to God alone—lovers of wisdom or philosophers is their modest and befitting title. (*Phaedrus* 278a–d)

The fourth and last of my brief points on Plato involves how his *logos basileus* implements itself in society and what this means for those who are perceived as curable threat or incurable danger to the philosopher's political order, for those who are perceived as tameable lions or untameable wolves. It is here that Plato's psychology grounds the political order as well as division of labour of his philosophical republic. Platonic human nature, immutable in its phenomenological manifestation, has three major biological characterisations in each subject: intemperate inclinations, passionate courage and rational self-control. Each *natural* psychological trait calls for a specific role, occupation and class in society: those many who are dominated by intemperance in their character (slaves and workers) must only be traders and artisans; those whose inner structure displays good passions and courage must be warriors; those few whose *nous* and rational nature make them superior are naturally destined to be legislators and guardians.<sup>20</sup> As such, *natural* distributions in the soul, *metaphysical* divisions and partitions in human psychology function as an *ontological* machinery of hierarchical legitimation of the *just* social order, of an organic socio-political totality that is predicated upon and perpetually reproduces (psychological) nature as (social) destiny—Plato's apartheid?<sup>21</sup>

It is a socio-political space and time that knows no conceptual exceptions: rhetors and sophists should be punished according to their different degrees of subjugation or non-

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20 Plato describes the strict relation between psychology, socio-political functions and division of labour in *Republic* Book IV.

21 Althusser (2016) gives us a brief analysis of how this Platonic foundation of politics is supposed to work through psychology: "this human subject, conceived as constituted by a tripartite structure, is in fact the by-product of the political problems that Plato is trying to resolve. It is simultaneously the reflection of these political problems in the individual and the expression of this political problem presented as its solution and its foundation. It is a foundational pathology ... [T]he tripartite structure in the human subject is expected to resolve the problem of the division of classes in society ... There is a contradiction between the structure of the human being and the function this structure is supposed to perform in society; Plato's solution is to simply substitute for the tripartite structure a hierarchy among the functions in the human subject, that is, to immediately invest a possible psychology with a moral. It is the ordering of the three agencies in the human subject that appears as the condition of possibility of the ordering of the classes in society. We see here what role is played by the establishment of this structure of a possible psychology in Plato's work: to justify the pathology of politics, to justify the fact that the social order is not what it should be, and, at the same time, to found a social order that would be what it should be. But this social order cannot be founded as such in an individual except on the condition of denying the objective meaning of the structures established that could found a psychology and of transforming it immediately into morals. Politics becomes morals in the individual; morals being, in the guise of the constitution of a subject that can be the object of an objective study, nothing but the establishment of an order that, in the subject, realizes the condition of possibility and the foundation of the order that are supposed to be worked out in society." (Althusser 2016, 66–67). For a more detailed account of how the division of labour is in Plato institutionalised and implemented through (ontological) psychology, see Rancière (2004).

subjugation to the true philosophical social order. As we read in *Laws*, those who can be rehabilitated will be tolerated even though they are to be sent to prison to redeem themselves; but those who cannot be re-socialised, philosophy “gets rid of by death and exile” as these are “monstrous natures who not only believe that there are no Gods, or that they are negligent ... but in contempt of mankind conjure the souls of the living” (*Laws* 909a–b). The worst crime for Plato, as we know, is to successfully persuade the soul of citizens with anything that is not (his) philosophy. This is the worst possible felony committed by the worst criminals and, as such, it deserves the worst possible punishment—that is, capital punishment. However, even capital punishment is not enough as the dead wolf remains a permanent threat to the German shepherds in power:

... and when he is dead let him be cast beyond the borders unburied, and if any freeman assist in burying him, let him pay the transgression to anyone who is willing to bring a suit against him. But if he leaves behind children who are fit to be citizens, let the guardians of orphans take care of them. (*Laws* 909c–d)

The extramural dispersion of the non-subjugated sophists’ carcass leaves their dead bodies at the mercy of stray animals, the worst symbolic punishment in ancient Greece. Furthermore, this ruthless form of punishment is inflicted to ensure their ultimate erasure for the peaceful development of the philosophical society: there must be no visible sign of an alternative *logos* that has threatened the identity, domination and reproduction of the philosophical class, its power and capital. Forcing philosophical re-acculturation for the sophists’ progeny—the last possible remnants of a foreclosed past, present and future resistance to Plato’s *logos basileus*—secures the safe replication of a philosophical breeding forever identical to itself: concealing the power relations at the basis of its violent imposition makes ruling ideas legitimate in their pedagogic and institutional manifestation. The just reproduction of the philosophical class cannot tolerate the remembrance of those who directly challenged the sheer arbitrariness of its legitimacy, and what must follow is the maintenance and transmission of philosophical institutions that cancel the very possibility of that remembrance.<sup>22</sup>

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22 Moving to contemporary issues, we could apply the interpretative protocol of this article to the South African philosophical field and ask: What is that which has been playing or still plays the role of the (Platonic) soul in contemporary academic philosophy in South Africa? What legitimises white philosophy scholars to call and prise themselves as philosophers in South African public universities? Is there such a thing? And if such a thing exists, was this philosophical *simulacrum* and machine of self-legitimation broken down by the emergence of the Azanian Philosophical Society in 2017?

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