

Plato

SOPHIST

TO 232A

Translated by Benjamin Jowett

Persons of the Dialogue

THEODORUS

THEAETETUS

SOCRATES

An ELEATIC STRANGER, whom Theodorus and Theaetetus bring with them

The younger SOCRATES, who is a silent auditor

Theodorus. Here we are, Socrates, true to our agreement of yesterday; and we bring with us a stranger from Elea, who is a disciple of Parmenides and Zeno, and a true philosopher.

Socrates. Is he not rather a god, Theodorus, who comes to us in the disguise of a stranger? For Homer says that all the gods, and especially the god of strangers, are companions of the meek and just, and visit the good and evil among men. And may not your companion be one of those higher powers, a cross-examining deity, who has come to spy out our weakness in argument, and to cross-examine us?

Theod. Nay, Socrates, he is not one of the disputatious sort—he is too good for that. And, in my opinion, he is not a god at all; but divine he certainly is, for this is a title which I should give to all philosophers.

Soc. Capital, my friend! and I may add that they are almost as hard to be discerned as the gods. For the true philosophers, and such as are not merely made up for the occasion, appear in various forms unrecognized by the ignorance of men, and they "hover about cities," as Homer declares, looking from above upon human life; and some think nothing of them, and others can never think enough; and sometimes they appear as statesmen, and

sometimes as sophists; and then, again, to many they seem to be no better than madmen. I should like to ask our Eleatic friend, if he would tell us, what is thought about them in Italy, and to whom the terms are applied.

Theod. What terms?

Soc. Sophist, statesman, philosopher.

Theod. What is your difficulty about them, and what made you ask?

Soc. I want to know whether by his countrymen they are regarded as one or two; or do they, as the names are three, distinguish also three kinds, and assign one to each name?

Theod. I dare say that the Stranger will not object to discuss the question. What do you say, Stranger?

Stranger. I am far from objecting, Theodorus, nor have I any difficulty in replying that by us they are regarded as three. But to define precisely the nature of each of them is by no means a slight or easy task.

Theod. You have happened to light, Socrates, almost on the very question which we were asking our friend before we came hither, and he excused himself to us, as he does now you; although he admitted that the matter had been fully discussed, and that he remembered the answer.

Soc. Then do not, Stranger, deny us the first favour which we ask of you: I am sure that you will not, and therefore I shall only beg of you to say whether you like and are accustomed to make a long oration on a subject which you want to explain to another, or to proceed by the method of question and answer. I remember hearing a very noble discussion in which Parmenides employed the latter of the two methods, when I was a young man, and he was far advanced in years.

Str. I prefer to talk with another when he responds pleasantly, and is light in hand; if not, I would rather have my own say.

Soc. Any one of the present company will respond kindly to you, and you can choose whom you like of them; I should recommend you to take a young person-Theaetetus, for example-unless you have a preference for

some one else.

Str. I feel ashamed, Socrates, being a new comer into your society, instead of talking a little and hearing others talk, to be spinning out a long soliloquy or address, as if I wanted to show off. For the true answer will certainly be a very long one, a great deal longer than might be expected from such a short and simple question. At the same time, I fear that I may seem rude and ungracious if I refuse your courteous request, especially after what you have said. For I certainly cannot object to your proposal, that Theaetetus should respond, having already conversed with him myself, and being recommended by you to take him.

Theaetetus. But are you sure, Stranger, that this will be quite so acceptable to the rest of the company as Socrates imagines?

Str. You hear them applauding, Theaetetus; after that, there is nothing more to be said. Well then, I am to argue with you, and if you tire of the argument, you may complain of your friends and not of me.

Theaet. I do not think that I shall tire, and if I do, I shall get my friend here, young Socrates, the namesake of the elder Socrates, to help; he is about my own age, and my partner at the gymnasium, and is constantly accustomed to work with me.

Str. Very good; you can decide about that for yourself as we proceed. Meanwhile you and I will begin together and enquire into the nature of the Sophist, first of the three: I should like you to make out what he is and bring him to light in a discussion; for at present we are only agreed about the name, but of the thing to which we both apply the name possibly you have one notion and I another; whereas we ought always to come to an understanding about the thing itself in terms of a definition, and not merely about the name minus the definition. Now the tribe of Sophists which we are investigating is not easily caught or defined; and the world has long ago agreed, that if great subjects are to be adequately treated, they must be studied in the lesser and easier instances of them before we proceed to the greatest of all. And as I know that the tribe of Sophists is troublesome and hard to be caught, I should recommend that we practise beforehand the method which is to be applied to him on some simple and smaller thing, unless you can suggest a better way.

Theaet. Indeed I cannot.

Str. Then suppose that we work out some lesser example which will be a pattern of the greater?

Theaet. Good.

Str. What is there which is well known and not great, and is yet as susceptible of definition as any larger thing? Shall I say an angler? He is familiar to all of us, and not a very interesting or important person.

Theaet. He is not.

Str. Yet I suspect that he will furnish us with the sort of definition and line of enquiry which we want.

Theaet. Very good.

Str. Let us begin by asking whether he is a man having art or not having art, but some other power.

Theaet. He is clearly a man of art.

Str. And of arts there are two kinds?

Theaet. What are they?

Str. There is agriculture, and the tending of mortal creatures, and the art of constructing or moulding vessels, and there is the art of imitation-all these may be appropriately called by a single name.

Theaet. What do you mean? And what is the name?

Str. He who brings into existence something that did not exist before is said to be a producer, and that which is brought into existence is said to be produced.

Theaet. True.

Str. And all the arts which were just now mentioned are characterized by

this power of producing?

Theaet. They are.

Str. Then let us sum them up under the name of productive or creative art.

Theaet. Very good.

Str. Next follows the whole class of learning and cognition; then comes trade, fighting, hunting. And since none of these produces anything, but is only engaged in conquering by word or deed, or in preventing others from conquering, things which exist and have been already produced-in each and all of these branches there appears to be an art which may be called acquisitive.

Theaet. Yes, that is the proper name.

Str. Seeing, then, that all arts are either acquisitive or creative, in which class shall we place the art of the angler?

Theaet. Clearly in the acquisitive class.

Str. And the acquisitive may be subdivided into two parts: there is exchange, which is voluntary and is effected by gifts, hire, purchase; and the other part of acquisitive, which takes by force of word or deed, may be termed conquest?

Theaet. That is implied in what has been said.

Str. And may not conquest be again subdivided?

Theaet. How?

Str. Open force may; be called fighting, and secret force may have the general name of hunting?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And there is no reason why the art of hunting should not be further divided.

Theaet. How would you make the division?

Str. Into the hunting of living and of lifeless prey.

Theaet. Yes, if both kinds exist.

Str. Of course they exist; but the hunting after lifeless things having no special name, except some sorts of diving, and other small matters, may be omitted; the hunting after living things may be called animal hunting.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And animal hunting may be truly said to have two divisions, land-animal hunting, which has many kinds and names, and water-animals hunting, or the hunting after animals who swim?

Theaet. True.

Str. And of swimming animals, one class lives on the wing and the other in the water?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. Fowling is the general term under which the hunting of all birds is included.

Theaet. True.

Str. The hunting of animals who live in the water has the general name of fishing.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And this sort of hunting may be further divided also into two principal kinds?

Theaet. What are they?

Str. There is one kind which takes them in nets, another which takes them

by a blow.

Theaet. What do you mean, and how do you distinguish them?

Str. As to the first kind-all that surrounds and encloses anything to prevent egress, may be rightly called an enclosure.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. For which reason twig baskets, casting nets, nooses, creels, and the like may all be termed "enclosures"?

Theaet. True.

Str. And therefore this first kind of capture may be called by us capture with enclosures, or something of that sort?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. The other kind, which is practised by a blow with hooks and three pronged spears, when summed up under one name, may be called striking, unless you, Theaetetus, can find some better name?

Theaet. Never mind the name-what you suggest will do very well.

Str. There is one mode of striking, which is done at night, and by the light of a fire, and is by the hunters themselves called firing, or spearing by firelight.

Theaet. True.

Str. And the fishing by day is called by the general name of barbing because the spears, too, are barbed at the point.

Theaet. Yes, that is the term.

Str. Of this barb-fishing, that which strikes the fish Who is below from above is called spearing, because this is the way in which the three-pronged spears are mostly used.

Theaet. Yes, it is often called so.

Str. Then now there is only one kind remaining.

Theaet. What is that?

Str. When a hook is used, and the fish is not struck in any chance part of his body-he as be is with the spear, but only about the head and mouth, and is then drawn out from below upwards with reeds and rods:-What is the right name of that mode of fish, Theaetetus?

Theaet. I suspect that we have now discovered the object of our search.

Str. Then now you and I have come to an understanding not only about the name of the angler's art, but about the definition of the thing itself. One half of all art was acquisitive-half of all the art acquisitive art was conquest or taking by force, half of this was hunting, and half of hunting was hunting animals, half of this was hunting water animals-of this again, the under half was fishing, half of fishing was striking; a part of striking was fishing with a barb, and one half of this again, being the kind which strikes with a hook and draws the fish from below upwards, is the art which we have been seeking, and which from the nature of the operation is denoted angling or drawing up (aspalienutike, anaspasthai).

Theaet. The result has been quite satisfactorily brought out.

Str. And now, following this pattern, let us endeavour to find out what a Sophist is.

Theaet. By all means.

Str. The first question about the angler was, whether he was a skilled artist or unskilled?

Theaet. True.

Str. And shall we call our new friend unskilled, or a thorough master of his craft?

Theaet. Certainly not unskilled, for his name, as, indeed, you imply, must surely express his nature.

Str. Then he must be supposed to have some art.

Theaet. What art?

Str. By heaven, they are cousins! it never occurred to us.

Theaet. Who are cousins?

Str. The angler and the Sophist.

Theaet. In what way are they related?

Str. They both appear to me to be hunters.

Theaet. How the Sophist? Of the other we have spoken.

Str. You remember our division of hunting, into hunting after swimming animals and land animals?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And you remember that we subdivided the swimming and left the land animals, saying that there were many kinds of them?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. Thus far, then, the Sophist and the angler, starting from the art of acquiring, take the same road?

Theaet. So it would appear.

Str. Their paths diverge when they reach the art of animal hunting; the one going to the seashore, and to the rivers and to the lakes, and angling for the animals which are in them.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. While the other goes to land and water of another sort-rivers of wealth and broad meadow-lands of generous youth; and he also is intending to take

the animals which are in them.

Theaet. What do you mean?

Str. Of hunting on land there are two principal divisions.

Theaet. What are they?

Str. One is the hunting of tame, and the other of wild animals.

Theaet. But are tame animals ever hunted?

Str. Yes, if you include man under tame animals. But if you like you may say that there are no tame animals, or that, if there are, man is not among them; or you may say that man is a tame animal but is not hunted-you shall decide which of these alternatives you prefer.

Theaet. I should say, Stranger, that man is a tame animal, and I admit that he is hunted.

Str. Then let us divide the hunting of tame animals into two parts.

Theaet. How shall we make the division?

Str. Let us define piracy, man-stealing, tyranny, the whole military art, by one name, as hunting with violence.

Theaet. Very good.

Str. But the art of the lawyer, of the popular orator, and the art of conversation may be called in one word the art of persuasion.

Theaet. True.

Str. And of persuasion, there may be said to be two kinds?

Theaet. What are they?

Str. One is private, and the other public.

Theaet. Yes; each of them forms a class.

Str. And of private hunting, one sort receives hire, and the other brings gifts.

Theaet. I do not understand you.

Str. You seem never to have observed the manner in which lovers hunt.

Theaet. To what do you refer?

Str. I mean that they lavish gifts on those whom they hunt in addition to other inducements.

Theaet. Most true.

Str. Let us admit this, then, to be the amatory art.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. But that sort of hireling whose conversation is pleasing and who baits his hook only with pleasure and exacts nothing but his maintenance in return, we should all, if I am not mistaken, describe as possessing flattery or an art of making things pleasant.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And that sort, which professes to form acquaintances only for the sake of virtue, and demands a reward in the shape of money, may be fairly called by another name?

Theaet. To be sure.

Str. And what is the name? Will you tell me?

Theaet. It is obvious enough; for I believe that we have discovered the Sophist: which is, as I conceive, the proper name for the class described.

Str. Then now, Theaetetus, his art may be traced as a branch of the appropriative, acquisitive family-which hunts animals,-living-land-tame animals; which hunts man,-privately-for hire,-taking money in exchange-

having the semblance of education; and this is termed Sophistry, and is a hunt after young men of wealth and rank-such is the conclusion.

Theaet. Just so.

Str. Let us take another branch of his genealogy; for he is a professor of a great and many sided art; and if we look back at what has preceded we see that he presents another aspect, besides that of which we are speaking.

Theaet. In what respect?

Str. There were two sorts of acquisitive art; the one concerned with hunting, the other with exchange.

Theaet. There were.

Str. And of the art of exchange there are two divisions, the one of giving, and the other of selling.

Theaet. Let us assume that.

Str. Next, will suppose the art of selling to be divided into two parts.

Theaet. How?

Str. There is one part which is distinguished as the sale of a man's own productions; another, which is the exchange of the works of others.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And is not that part of exchange which takes place in the city, being about half of the whole, termed retailing?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And that which exchanges the goods of one city for those of another by selling and buying is the exchange of the merchant?

Theaet. To be sure.

Str. And you are aware that this exchange of the merchant is of two kinds: it is partly concerned with food for the use of the body, and partly with the food of the soul which is bartered and received in exchange for money.

Theaet. What do you mean?

Str. You want to know what is the meaning of food for the soul; the other kind you surely understand.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. Take music in general and painting and marionette playing and many other things, which are purchased in one city, and carried away and sold in another-wares of the soul which are hawked about either for the sake of instruction or amusement;-may not he who takes them about and sells them be quite as truly called a merchant as he who sells meats and drinks?

Theaet. To be sure he may.

Str. And would you not call by the same name him who buys up knowledge and goes about from city to city exchanging his wares for money?

Theaet. Certainly I should.

Str. Of this merchandise of the soul, may not one part be fairly termed the art of display? And there is another part which is certainly not less ridiculous, but being a trade in learning must be called by some name germane to the matter?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. The latter should have two names,-one descriptive of the sale of the knowledge of virtue, and the other of the sale of other kinds of knowledge.

Theaet. Of course.

Str. The name of art-seller corresponds well enough to the latter; but you must try and tell me the name of the other.

Theaet. He must be the Sophist, whom we are seeking; no other name can

possibly be right.

Str. No other; and so this trader in virtue again turns out to be our friend the Sophist, whose art may now be traced from the art of acquisition through exchange, trade, merchandise, to a merchandise of the soul which is concerned with speech and the knowledge of virtue.

Theaet. Quite true.

Str. And there may be a third reappearance of him;-for he may have settled down in a city, and may fabricate as well as buy these same wares, intending to live by selling them, and he would still be called a Sophist?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. Then that part of acquisitive art which exchanges, and of exchange which either sells a man's own productions or retails those of others; as the case may be, and in either way sells the knowledge of virtue, you would again term Sophistry?

Theaet. I must, if I am to keep pace with the argument.

Str. Let us consider once more whether there may not be yet another aspect of sophistry.

Theaet. What is it?

Str. In the acquisitive there was a subdivision of the combative or fighting art.

Theaet. There was.

Str. Perhaps we had better divide it.

Theaet. What shall be the divisions?

Str. There shall be one division of the competitive, and another of the pugnacious.

Theaet. Very good.

Str. That part of the pugnacious which is contest of bodily strength may be properly called by some such name as violent.

Theaet. True.

Str. And when the war is one of words, it may be termed controversy?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And controversy may be of two kinds.

Theaet. What are they?

Str. When long speeches are answered by long speeches, and there is public discussion about the just and unjust, that is forensic controversy.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And there is a private sort of controversy, which is cut up into questions and answers, and this is commonly called disputation?

Theaet. Yes, that is the name.

Str. And of disputation, that sort which is only a discussion about contracts, and is carried on at random, and without rules-art, is recognized by the reasoning faculty to be a distinct class, but has hitherto had no distinctive name, and does not deserve to receive one from us.

Theaet. No; for the different sorts of it are too minute and heterogeneous.

Str. But that which proceeds by rules of art to dispute about justice and injustice in their own nature, and about things in general, we have been accustomed to call argumentation (Eristic)?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And of argumentation, one sort wastes money, and the other makes money.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. Suppose we try and give to each of these two classes a name.

Theaet. Let us do so.

Str. I should say that the habit which leads a man to neglect his own affairs for the pleasure of conversation, of which the style is far from being agreeable to the majority of his hearers, may be fairly termed loquacity: such is my opinion.

Theaet. That is the common name for it.

Str. But now who the other is, who makes money out of private disputation, it is your turn to say.

Theaet. There is only one true answer: he is the wonderful Sophist, of whom we are in pursuit, and who reappears again for the fourth time.

Str. Yes, and with a fresh pedigree, for he is the money-making species of the Eristic, disputatious, controversial, pugnacious, combative, acquisitive family, as the argument has already proven.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. How true was the observation that he was a many-sided animal, and not to be caught with one hand, as they say!

Theaet. Then you must catch him with two.

Str. Yes, we must, if we can. And therefore let us try, another track in our pursuit of him: You are aware that there are certain menial occupations which have names among servants?

Theaet. Yes, there are many such; which of them do you mean?

Str. I mean such as sifting, straining, winnowing, threshing.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And besides these there are a great many more, such as carding, spinning, adjusting the warp and the woof; and thousands of similar expressions are used in the arts.

Theaet. Of what are they to be patterns, and what are we going to do with them all?

Str. I think that in all of these there is implied a notion of division.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. Then if, as I was saying, there is one art which includes all of them, ought not that art to have one name?

Theaes. And what is the name of the art?

Str. The art of discerning or discriminating.

Theaet. Very good.

Str. Think whether you cannot divide this.

Theaet. I should have to think a long while.

Str. In all the previously named processes either like has been separated from like or the better from the worse.

Theaet. I see now what you mean.

Str. There is no name for the first kind of separation; of the second, which throws away the worse and preserves the better, I do know a name.

Theaet. What is it?

Str. Every discernment or discrimination of that kind, as I have observed, is called a purification.

Theaet. Yes, that is the usual expression.

Str. And any one may see that purification is of two kinds.

Theaet. Perhaps so, if he were allowed time to think; but I do not see at this moment.

Str. There are many purifications of bodies which may with propriety be comprehended under a single name.

Theaet. What are they, and what is their name?

Str. There is the purification of living bodies in their inward and in their outward parts, of which the former is duly effected by medicine and gymnastic, the latter by the not very dignified art of the bath-man; and there is the purification of inanimate substances-to this the arts of fulling and of furbishing in general attend in a number of minute particulars, having a variety of names which are thought ridiculous.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. There can be no doubt that they are thought ridiculous, Theaetetus; but then the dialectical art never considers whether the benefit to be derived from the purge is greater or less than that to be derived from the sponge, and has not more interest in the one than in the other; her endeavour is to know what is and is not kindred in all arts, with a view to the acquisition of intelligence; and having this in view, she honours them all alike, and when she makes comparisons, she counts one of them not a whit more ridiculous than another; nor does she esteem him who adduces as his example of hunting, the general's art, at all more decorous than another who cites that of the vermin-destroyer, but only as the greater pretender of the two. And as to your question concerning the name which was to comprehend all these arts of purification, whether of animate or inanimate bodies, the art of dialectic is in no wise particular about fine words, if she maybe only allowed to have a general name for all other purifications, binding them up together and separating them off from the purification of the soul or intellect. For this is the purification at which she wants to arrive, and this we should understand to be her aim.

Theaet. Yes, I understand; and I agree that there are two sorts of purification and that one of them is concerned with the soul, and that there is another which is concerned with the body.

Str. Excellent; and now listen to what I am going to say, and try to divide

further the first of the two.

Theaet. Whatever line of division you suggest, I will endeavour to assist you.

Str. Do we admit that virtue is distinct from vice in the soul?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And purification was to leave the good and to cast out whatever is bad?

Theaet. True.

Str. Then any taking away of evil from the soul may be properly called purification?

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And in the soul there are two kinds of evil.

Theaet. What are they?

Str. The one may be compared to disease in the body, the other to deformity.

Theaet. I do not understand.

Str. Perhaps you have never reflected that disease and discord are the same.

Theaet. To this, again, I know not what I should reply.

Str. Do you not conceive discord to be a dissolution of kindred elements, originating in some disagreement?

Theaet. Just that.

Str. And is deformity anything but the want of measure, which is always unsightly?

Theaet. Exactly.

Str. And do we not see that opinion is opposed to desire, pleasure to anger, reason to pain, and that all these elements are opposed to one another in the souls of bad men?

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. And yet they must all be akin?

Theaet. Of course.

Str. Then we shall be right in calling vice a discord and disease of the soul?

Theaet. Most true.

Str. And when things having motion, an aiming at an appointed mark, continually miss their aim and glance aside, shall we say that this is the effect of symmetry among them, or of the want of symmetry?

Theaet. Clearly of the want of symmetry.

Str. But surely we know that no soul is voluntarily ignorant of anything?

Theaet. Certainly not.

Str. And what is ignorance but the aberration of a mind which is bent on truth, and in which the process of understanding is perverted?

Theaet. True.

Str. Then we are to regard an unintelligent soul as deformed and devoid of symmetry?

Theaet. Very true.

Str. Then there are these two kinds of evil in the soul—the one which is generally called vice, and is obviously a disease of the soul...

Theaet. Yes.

Str. And there is the other, which they call ignorance, and which, because

existing only in the soul, they will not allow to be vice.

Theaet. I certainly admit what I at first disputed—that there are two kinds of vice in the soul, and that we ought to consider cowardice, intemperance, and injustice to be alike forms of disease in the soul, and ignorance, of which there are all sorts of varieties, to be deformity.

Str. And in the case of the body are there not two arts, which have to do with the two bodily states?

Theaet. What are they?

Str. There is gymnastic, which has to do with deformity, and medicine, which has to do with disease.

Theaet. True.

Str. And where there is insolence and injustice and cowardice, is not chastisement the art which is most required?

Theaet. That certainly appears to be the opinion of mankind.

Str. Again, of the various kinds of ignorance, may not instruction be rightly said to be the remedy?

Theaet. True.

Str. And of the art of instruction, shall we say that there is one or many kinds? At any rate there are two principal ones. Think.

Theaet. I will.

Str. I believe that I can see how we shall soonest arrive at the answer to this question.

Theaet. How?

Str. If we can discover a line which divides ignorance into two halves. For a division of ignorance into two parts will certainly imply that the art of instruction is also twofold, answering to the two divisions of ignorance.

Theaet. Well, and do you see what you are looking for?

Str. I do seem to myself to see one very large and bad sort of ignorance which is quite separate, and may be weighed in the scale against all other sorts of ignorance put together.

Theaet. What is it?

Str. When a person supposes that he knows, and does not know this appears to be the great source of all the errors of the intellect.

Theaet. True.

Str. And this, if I am not mistaken, is the kind of ignorance which specially earns the title of stupidity.

Theaet. True.

Str. What name, then, shall be given to the sort of instruction which gets rid of this?

Theaet. The instruction which you mean, Stranger, is, I should imagine, not the teaching of handicraft arts, but what, thanks to us, has been termed education in this part the world.

Str. Yes, Theaetetus, and by nearly all Hellenes. But we have still to consider whether education admits of any further division.

Theaet. We have.

Str. I think that there is a point at which such a division is possible.

Theaet. Where?

Str. Of education, one method appears to be rougher, and another smoother.

Theaet. How are we to distinguish the two?

Str. There is the time-honoured mode which our fathers commonly practised

towards their sons, and which is still adopted by many-either of roughly reproving their errors, or of gently advising them; which varieties may be correctly included under the general term of admonition.

Theaet. True.

Str. But whereas some appear to have arrived at the conclusion that all ignorance is involuntary, and that no one who thinks himself wise is willing to learn any of those things in which he is conscious of his own cleverness, and that the admonitory sort of instruction gives much trouble and does little good-

Theaet. There they are quite right.

Str. Accordingly, they set to work to eradicate the spirit of conceit in another way.

Theaet. In what way?

Str. They cross-examine a man's words, when he thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing, and easily convict him of inconsistencies in his opinions; these they then collect by the dialectical process, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same things, in relation to the same things, and in the same respect. He, seeing this, is angry with himself, and grows gentle towards others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation. For as the physician considers that the body will receive no benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so the purifier of the soul is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the application of knowledge until he is refuted, and from refutation learns modesty; he must be purged of his prejudices first and made to think that he knows only what he knows, and no more.

Theaet. That is certainly the best and wisest state of mind.

Str. For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we must admit that refutation is the greatest and chiefest of purifications, and he who has not been refuted, though he be the Great King himself, is in an awful state of impurity; he is

uninstructed and deformed in those things in which he who would be truly blessed ought to be fairest and purest.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. And who are the ministers of this art? I am afraid to say the Sophists.

Theaet. Why?

Str. Lest we should assign to them too high a prerogative.

Theaet. Yet the Sophist has a certain likeness to our minister of purification.

Str. 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. Nevertheless, let us assume that the Sophists are the men. I say this provisionally, for I think that the line which divides them will be marked enough if proper care is taken.

Theaet. Likely enough.

Str. Let us grant, then, that from the discerning art comes purification, and from purification let there be separated off a part which is concerned with the soul; of this mental purification instruction is a portion, and of instruction education, and of education, that refutation of vain conceit which has been discovered in the present argument; and let this be called by you and me the nobly-descended art of Sophistry.

Theaet. Very well; and yet, considering the number of forms in which he has presented himself, I begin to doubt how I can with any truth or confidence describe the real nature of the Sophist.

Str. You naturally feel perplexed; and yet I think that he must be still more perplexed in his attempt to escape us, for as the proverb says, when every way is blocked, there is no escape; now, then, is the time of all others to set upon him.

Theaet. True.

Str. First let us wait a moment and recover breath, and while we are resting, we may reckon up in how many forms he has appeared. In the first place, he was discovered to be a paid hunter after wealth and youth.

Theaet. Yes.

Str. In the second place, he was a merchant in the goods of the soul.

Theaet. Certainly.

Str. In the third place, he has turned out to be a retailer of the same sort of wares.

Theaet. Yes; and in the fourth place, he himself manufactured the learned wares which he sold.

Str. Quite right; I will try and remember the fifth myself. He belonged to the fighting class, and was further distinguished as a hero of debate, who professed the eristic art.

Theaet. True.

Str. The sixth point was doubtful, and yet we at last agreed that he was a purger of souls, who cleared away notions obstructive to knowledge.

Theaet. Very true.

Str. Do you not see that when the professor of any art has one name and many kinds of knowledge, there must be something wrong? The multiplicity of names which is applied to him shows that the common principle to which all these branches of knowledge are tending, is not understood.

Theaet. I should imagine this to be the case.