

INTRODUCTION

Tradition ascribes thirty-five dialogues to Plato, and more than half of them (21) touch on the theme of sophistry in one way or another.¹ In some dialogues, Plato casts the sophists as leading interlocutors of Socrates; in others they are mentioned for their intellectual tendencies and pedagogical practices. Frequently Plato exposes readers to hearsay about the sophists—sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. At times he has Socrates defend them, but not always. And, constantly, he hints at the many ways in which Socrates seems both like and unlike the sophists. The richness and frequency of Plato's handling of the sophists gives rise naturally to certain questions: What was Plato's purpose in presenting these controversial figures? What was his view of them? And how did he expect readers to understand their relationship to Socrates?

This book springs from the suspicion that such questions have not been adequately answered. The dominant and indeed almost universally held view is that Plato was the sophists' implacable foe, that he presented them in his dialogues in order to discredit them, and that his campaign against them was motivated by a deep desire to separate what he regarded as the sham wisdom of the sophists from the genuine wisdom of his teacher, Socrates.² This view no doubt has its attractions, not least of which is that it captures something of a dramatic, almost epochal struggle for the soul of Athens and the integrity of philosophy in Plato's handling of the sophists. But how well does it ultimately line up with evidence from the dialogues?

In his dialogue, *The Sophist*, Plato has a silent Socrates look on while a stranger from Elea investigates the nature of sophistry with a pupil, Theaetetus. The dialogue ends when, after prodigious effort, the interlocutors finally agree on a definition of sophistry. The definition is intensely negative,³ but it is also tendentious—or so readers of this dialogue should understand. For it fails to accommodate the full range of sophistic traits that Theaetetus and the stranger had outlined over the dialogue's labyrinthine course. Moreover, and just as importantly, around the midpoint of the dialogue, Theaetetus and the stranger hesitatingly agree that Socrates (or some group of figures indistinguishable from Socrates) should be classed among the sophists for attempting to educate the young by means of a purgative art of refutation (231a–c). One thus wonders: Why would Plato's chief dialogue on the sophists (if the *Sophist* can be described that way) dismiss these figures on obviously tendentious grounds and, at the same time, allow Socrates to appear vexingly intermingled with them, if his purpose were indeed to distinguish Socrates and the sophists once and for all?

Plato's handling of sophistry in the *Meno* raises similar questions. When Socrates there suggests to Anytus that people who want to learn virtue or excellence (*aretē*) might do well to consult the sophists, Anytus reacts with horror: the sophists are “plainly the ruin and corruption of those who associate with them!”⁴ But Plato does not leave it there. He rather has Socrates interrogate Anytus: Is it really credible to suppose that a great sophist like Protagoras has been corrupting all of Greece for forty years while receiving pay and gratitude in the process? The question goes unanswered, so Socrates continues: “Has one of the sophists done you some injustice, Anytus? Or why are you so harsh toward them?”⁵ Anytus responds notoriously that he has in fact never had any experience of the sophists at all. To which Socrates reasonably retorts that Anytus must be some kind of prophet; for how else could he know whether there is something good or bad in a matter of which he has no experience? Thus is Anytus revealed to be a thoughtless proponent of a mere prejudice against the sophists. But, again, why would Plato have Socrates stand up for the sophists in this way if his goal were to discredit them?

Or consider Plato's fascinating presentation of the sophist, Prodicus. Though there is no dialogue called the *Prodicus*, this sophist is treated in more than a dozen different places in the Platonic corpus, once as a character in the *Protagoras* and often as the originator of

certain useful ideas or skills that Socrates wants to consider.⁶ In multiple dialogues, Socrates claims to have studied with Prodicus, and he frequently goes on to employ one of this sophist's best known skills (an art of making careful distinctions, called *diairesis*) in order to dispel intellectual confusion and expose fallacies. But why would Plato portray this sophist so sympathetically and indeed go so far as to stress his role as Socrates' teacher if his purpose were to dissociate Socrates from the sophists and tarnish their reputation?

Further examples could easily be cited to suggest that Plato's handling of the sophists is more varied and complex than frequently assumed. But rather than pile example on example, I set out a summary of the argument that emerges gradually over the chapters that follow. The argument of this book is that Plato did not cast the sophists merely to criticize them, much less to villainize them or attack them as the enemies of philosophy.⁷ Rather he treated them with remarkable care as teachers engaged in an enterprise similar in many ways to that of Socrates. He used them, moreover, to illuminate what was most distinctive about Socratic philosophy while at the same time supplying readers with necessary propaedeutic experiences to begin to engage in it.

On a more particular level, my thesis involves three basic claims. First, I argue that Plato made crucial and sometimes fundamental distinctions among the various figures we today call sophists. Plato's sophists were neither a school nor a movement. Specific figures differed from each other in manifest ways—in what they studied, how and what they taught, how they stood in relation to conventional civic norms and, most importantly, how they related to Socrates. Moreover the sophists, on Plato's account, were categorically different from another important group of intellectuals, the "rhetoricians," even though both groups taught rhetoric.⁸ In Plato the sophists are defined with remarkable consistency as professional teachers of *aretē* (human excellence or virtue) while the rhetoricians made no claim to teach *aretē* and in fact tended to denounce its conventional forms. Based on this important distinction, I claim that Plato treats only five major sophists in the dialogues. These are Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias, and the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Contrary to the modern tradition of classifying the sophists, Plato does not typically present such figures as Gorgias, Thrasymachus, Callicles, Polus, Antiphon or Critias as sophists in the precise sense of the word.⁹

Second, I argue that Plato intentionally discloses deep affinities between Socrates and the sophists, affinities that approach the very heart of what it means to philosophize in the Socratic manner. One affinity is their shared interest in *aretē*. At a time when most intellectuals focused primarily on questions of cosmology, religion, and natural science, Socrates and the sophists focused squarely on human excellence. It was Socrates who would become famous for pulling philosophy “down from the heavens,” implanting it in the cities of men, and compelling it to attend to questions of virtue and vice.¹⁰ But the truth is that the sophists also pulled philosophy down from the heavens. The so-called Socratic turn was anticipated by Protagoras, the oldest of the sophists, who maintained that the gods were too obscure to admit of knowledge and that man was, at any rate, the “measure of all things.”

Another affinity between Socrates and the sophists relates to certain shared techniques. Scholars have long noted that Socrates' practice of *elenchus* (refutation) bears a strong resemblance to the method of eristic (verbal combat) developed by Protagoras, Euthydemus, and Dionysodorus. Both Socrates and the sophists crafted speeches that made “weaker arguments appear stronger.” But this is not all. Plato's Socrates also candidly acknowledged a methodological debt to Prodicus in the dialogues. And he likewise shared with other sophists a broad range of rhetorical tactics, some aimed at pedagogical effectiveness, others at minimizing the potential friction that could sometimes arise between intellectuals and the city.

A final affinity between Socrates and the sophists lies in their mutual recognition of a basic epistemological insight. With the exception of Hippias, who appears to have been an outlier in this regard, all the sophists as well as Socrates recognized that appearances (*phainomena*) both physical and intellectual were vexingly unstable. Such things as justice, beauty, piety, and nobility seemed susceptible of radical change depending on the angle from which they were viewed; and Socrates as well as the sophists were interested in the implications of this for human life. Socrates tried to respond to this problem by seeking some plane on which ideas might ultimately stand still, the plane of the “forms” as he calls it in some of Plato's accounts. This differed markedly from the various ways in which the sophists responded to the experience of instability. But that Socrates and the sophists both recognized and reacted to this problem put them in a class of their own

and often brought them into fascinating conflict with traditionalists of various stripes.

The third and final part of my argument addresses the reasons why Plato might have wanted to emphasize these manifold similarities between Socrates and the sophists. This is something that cannot be explained (or not easily) on the assumption that Plato was the sophists' inveterate enemy. Again, why would someone who ostensibly wished to dissociate Socrates from the sophists once and for all allow readers to see so many deep affinities? I argue that Plato casts the relationship between Socrates and the sophists in such complex terms for two reasons. One is propaedeutic. If Socratic philosophy is understood as an effort to respond to the instability of appearances, then it can *only* be engaged in by individuals who sense that instability. Yet human beings typically attempt to suppress such uncomfortable experiences, failing to acknowledge that, for instance, their understanding of justice does not account for what they themselves deem just in every instance. People have multiple, competing understandings of important moral concepts vying for primacy in their minds, but they do not realize their inconsistency. And here the sophists have a valuable role to play. In Plato's account, Socrates *uses* the sophists and sometimes plays the role of sophist himself in order to awaken interlocutors and readers from their dogmatic slumber. He uses them to reveal the inconstant nature of appearances. This generates wonder (*thaumas*), which, according to Socrates, is nothing else than the beginning (*archē*) of philosophy (*Theaetetus*, 155d).

The second reason Plato casts the relationship between Socrates and the sophists in such complex terms can be described as *protreptic*—not simply preparing students for philosophy, but positively leading them to practice it. What is philosophy? This question is hardly exhausted by saying it is Socrates' unique way of searching out something above and beyond the realm of vacillating appearances. Certainly it is that. But it is, beyond that, a whole way of life, a commitment to honesty and integrity in the face of the unknown, a disposition to seek lovingly and patiently for the source of our being, a dissatisfaction with partial answers and false prophets, and above all an understanding of what, given the conditions in which we find ourselves, it means to live a life of excellence or virtue (*aretē*). The love of wisdom (*philosophia*) as such is essentially related to *aretē*, and yet wisdom and *aretē* are

themselves among those problematic appearances that admit of instability. What wisdom and *aretē* finally mean looks different depending on the angle from which they are viewed.

Plato did not try to suppress this fact. He did not compose dialogues that uniformly celebrate Socrates as a philosopher with sound answers about wisdom and virtue; nor did he orchestrate a blanket dismissal of the sophists as impostors. Rather, he wrote dialogues in which Socrates and particular sophists (among other interlocutors) appear vexingly interrelated. Indeed, as a rule, the closer one looks at Plato's treatments of Socrates and the sophists, the more do apparent differences give way to similarities. This pattern can be appreciated in every dialogue relating to the sophists. Plato has made them difficult to distinguish. But why would he do that? My argument is that he does so because he sees in the relationship between Socrates and the sophists a possible entry point to the practice of philosophy itself. He sees that readers who honestly admit that their first impressions on the matter of Socrates and the sophists are inadequate may well be fit to seek the truth about philosophy and in so seeking actually to engage in it. This is what I mean when I say that Plato uses the problem of Socrates and the sophists as a protreptic.

CONNECTION TO RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

How does this book's argument relate to recent work on the sophists and their presentation in Plato? Studies of Greek sophistry have been bountiful in recent decades, and to a certain extent all such studies necessarily touch on Plato, for he is one of the most valuable sources of information we have on the sophists.¹¹ But the primary aim of almost all recent scholarship has been not so much to deepen our understanding of Plato's rich portraits or his goals in presenting the sophists, but rather to uncover facts about the "historical" sophists, washed clean of any distortions that may have been wrought by the biases of Plato or other conveyers of information. Scholars have thus been engaged in a subtle and challenging sifting operation—poring over sources such as Plato's dialogues for "fragments" of information, which, once sifted, might be reassembled into an unbiased account.¹²

Moreover, and more significantly given the aims of the present study, scholars engaged in the effort to uncover the historical sophists

have tended to rely heavily on the common view that Plato was the sophists' enemy as a starting point for analysis. Thus Eric Havelock expressed his method of reconstructing the sophists as follows: "the historian, even as he discounts Plato's judgmental evaluation of sophistic, can find in Plato's hostility a valuable guide, a signpost, to what precisely sophist doctrine was. *It was everything that Platonism was not.*"¹³ Similarly, G.B. Kerferd began his study by lamenting that "for much of our information we are dependent upon Plato's profoundly hostile treatment of [the sophists], presented with all the power of his literary genius and driven home with a philosophical impact that is little short of overwhelming."¹⁴ And John Dillon and Tania Gergel begin their more recent study by announcing that "Plato is, of course, a declared foe of the sophists and all that they stand for, so that we cannot expect from him a sympathetic portrayal," even if Plato does (according to them) occasionally allow one or two sophists to speak briefly in their own voices.¹⁵

Against this backdrop I want to stress that this book is not primarily an effort to understand the historical sophists, but rather a work of Plato scholarship. I am interested first and foremost in what Plato thought about the sophists and what his purposes were in casting them in the dialogues. I write on the assumption that Plato's views were complex and his purposes not always transparent; and I write, moreover, under the conviction that to strive to understand what Plato thought about the sophists is an activity worthwhile per se. After all, save for Socrates, who wrote nothing, Plato is perhaps the most informed commentator on the sophists we have. And he is not merely a commentator but also a penetrating philosophical interpreter of the first rank. To learn, therefore, what Plato thought—not just on the surface but in depth—about figures as alluring and controversial as the sophists should be fascinating in its own right.

That having been said, it may indeed be an incidental benefit of this study to challenge and perhaps change the way historians of the sophists assess some of the fragments within the sophistic corpus, especially those from Plato's dialogues. For if it turns out that Plato's relationship to the sophists cannot be simply characterized in terms of opposition, then scholars may be led to reconsider any fragments that have been interpreted on that basis.

This study owes a great deal to the work of diverse specialists who have written on Plato's handling of particular sophists,¹⁶ and it

contributes to an interdisciplinary current in Plato scholarship that has become more and more visible over the past fifty years. I now say a few words about this approach to reading Plato as a way of foreshadowing the method that is employed here.

THE LITERARY-PHILOSOPHIC APPROACH TO PLATO

The past century has witnessed some astonishing advances in the way we read Plato. The change has been frequently remarked and turns chiefly on recognizing the philosophical importance of the “literary and dramatic aspects” of the dialogues.¹⁷ With some wit and lightheartedness, Malcolm Schofield has described the seismic shift as follows:

In the bad old days questions about the literary properties of the Platonic dialogues were not much canvassed by philosophical readers—unless they happened to be Straussians or (in even older days) Neo-Platonists. [But now] . . . the relation of form to content has become a prime subject of philosophical interest, sometimes handled gushingly or flat-footedly, but at best with tact and sophistication. . . .¹⁸

The bad old days to which Schofield alludes are in truth not so far behind us; and many scholars still continue to trudge along as if nothing has changed. But something has changed. The old way of interpreting the dialogues was chiefly doctrinal and didactic. That is to say, scholars treated the dialogues as tantamount to philosophical treatises designed to teach Plato's doctrines straightforwardly to readers. That the dialogues were not in fact treatises, but rich literary creations with carefully constructed characters, settings, conflicts, resolutions, reversals, and so on, was regarded as unimportant. Perhaps such literary aspects would make the philosophical doctrines more pleasant to consider, but they were not thought to have serious bearing on Plato's doctrinal articulation. Form and content were thus viewed as largely unrelated.

Along with this way of interpreting Plato came the “mouthpiece” assumption and a deep interest in compositional chronology. The mouthpiece assumption was the pervasive but problematic belief that Plato's own views were more or less identical to those of the lead

character in any given dialogue (usually but not always Socrates). The lead character thus spoke as Plato's mouthpiece. This view has come under devastating criticism in recent years not only because it is difficult to see how such radically diverse characters as Socrates, Parmenides, the Eleatic Stranger, and the Athenian Stranger could serve as so many mouthpieces for one and the same man, but also because it approximates a "fallacy" to assume that the views and arguments of literary characters are the same as those of their author. We do not make this assumption when reading Shakespeare; why should we make it when reading Plato?¹⁹

The chief problem with the mouthpiece assumption is that the views of Plato's imagined spokesmen often change from dialogue to dialogue and sometimes entail outright contradictions. Even the views of Socrates alone, as Plato presents him, appear inconsistent across the dialogues. It was primarily as a way of responding to this problem that the interest in compositional chronology arose. If the dialogues seemed to contain changes of position, then perhaps this could be explained in terms of the "development of Plato's thought" over the course of his career.²⁰ If so, then knowledge of the dates of the dialogues would be crucial for explaining inconsistencies in the corpus. The project of Platonic chronology thus took off, and various accounts of Plato's intellectual trajectory were offered in light of rival schemes of dating and grouping of the dialogues.²¹

But the interest in compositional chronology has likewise come under criticism in recent decades and is today regarded by many interpreters of Plato as relatively unimportant compared to other interpretive approaches and problems.²² Following in the footsteps of Joseph Cropsey, Catherine Zuckert has at length demonstrated the fruitfulness of arranging the dialogues according to Socrates' biography (i.e., the dramatic dates of the dialogues) rather than the date of composition.²³ Similarly scholars of the Tübingen School, believing the purpose of the dialogues to lie elsewhere than in Plato's communication of serious doctrine, have loosened the grip of the chronological orientation in parts of Germany and Italy.²⁴ And a widely eclectic group of scholars in the United States with backgrounds in philosophy, literature, and political philosophy have made huge strides in showing the ways in which certain literary and dramatic features of the dialogues intermingle with philosophical arguments to shape the meaning of a dialogue as a whole.²⁵

Taking stock of the massive shift away from reading the dialogues as Platonic treatises toward reading them as literary and dramatic works of philosophy, Gerald Press has remarked that the “most broadly shared conviction” among the new generation of Plato scholars is that “thought and art, philosophy and literature, ideas and their expression, form and content are not to be distinguished from each other, but rather are marked in their interpenetration.” Indeed the question now according to Press “is no longer *whether* literary and dramatic matters are important for understanding the dialogues, but *how*.”²⁶

This is precisely what numerous studies over the past fifty years have begun to address. Though this is not the place for a lengthy “how to” treatment of various hermeneutic techniques, it will be useful nevertheless to list a few of the most important insights made by scholars attentive to the literary dimension of the dialogues. Here are just a few guiding principles.

1. Most characters in the Platonic dialogues are carefully drawn psychological “types,” and the arguments made by Socrates (in the dialogues in which he takes the lead) are more often than not designed specifically with that type in mind. This does not necessarily mean the dialogues contain no generalizable doctrine; but it does mean that to decipher whatever teachings may be available, one must look beyond the context-dependent remarks of Socrates to a particular character; one must transpose from the particular to the general.
2. Plato often undercuts or otherwise qualifies the surface “doctrine” of a dialogue by confronting readers with various obstacles. These include contradictions (blatant or subtle) as the argument unfolds, fallacies in the proofs, and friction between words and deeds—which is to say between the teachings on offer and the actual behavior of the one offering them. Careful study of such obstacles often reveals deeper insights into a dialogue’s meaning.
3. Plato leads the way toward deeper interpretations of his dialogues also through his use of various literary cues. These include cues deriving from the formal structure of the dialogue; from allusions to (and alteration of) myths, dramas, epics and historical events; from emphases placed at nodal

points such as openings, endings, and centers; and from word play such as metaphor, ambiguity, double entendre, and the like.

One could go on to discuss the importance of irony on multiple levels of the dialogues, the importance of rhetoric in general, as well as Plato's tendency to bury crucial information in the middle of apparent digressions from the main argument. But the best place to treat such techniques of writing and interpretation is in the chapters ahead, where they can be presented and evaluated in practice. The present list of hermeneutic considerations is only meant to be indicative.

Such has been the shift in Platonic interpretation over the past century. My own attitude toward this shift is largely enthusiastic. Certainly the "mouthpiece" approach to interpreting Plato needed to be revised, and the belief that the meaning of any given dialogue is exhausted by its arguments on the surface has been shown to be grossly inadequate. Moreover the new insights and hermeneutic techniques that have resulted from taking the literary dimensions of the dialogues seriously have been nothing short of revolutionary. Still, I would stress that the greatest scholarship from the "bad old days" of Platonic interpretation has remained extremely valuable as I have set about the task of understanding Plato's treatment of the sophists. I therefore repair often to Plato scholars from generations past in the chapters ahead and have found engaging them quite fruitful.

But returning now to the matter of the sophists, the larger point must be stressed. With few exceptions, the revolution in Platonic interpretation that has occurred gradually over the past century and enriched our understanding of Plato's thinking and his purposes has not made its way to the banks of sophistic scholarship.²⁷ Even the latest studies touching on Plato's attitude toward the sophists continue to treat the dialogues as communicating Plato's "doctrine" more or less transparently on the surface, and most continue to employ the "mouthpiece" assumption.²⁸ The work that lies ahead is thus to reexamine the question of Plato's attitude toward the sophists through the lens of the more refined hermeneutics now at our disposal.

To do this, I begin in Chapter 2 by reconsidering the various definitions and characterizations of the sophists in Plato's dialogues, paying careful attention to the characters who are speaking, the dramatic situations in which the speeches occur, and the overarching purposes of

the dialogues in which they occur. This method yields a relatively clear and startling result, which is that Plato used the word “sophist” in its most precise sense to refer to figures with two traits in common: the claim to teach virtue (*aretē*), and the practice of charging a fee. I thus define the Platonic sophists as “paid teachers of *aretē*,” and draw a line between the sophists (Protagoras, Prodicus, Hippias, Euthydemus, and Dionysodorus) and the rhetoricians (Thrasymachus, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles). Again, even though all or most sophists taught rhetoric, they did so as part of a broader curriculum in *aretē*. The rhetoricians by contrast did not claim to teach *aretē*. Failure to mark this distinction has been the chief cause of false generalizations about the nature and role of the sophists in Plato's dialogues. Moreover, as teachers of *aretē* the sophists were engaged in an activity that overlapped significantly with that of Socrates. Even though Socrates did not accept fees and claimed not to know what *aretē* was (much less whether it could be taught), his fundamental interest in *aretē* as an intellectual problem for himself and for his students brought him inevitably into contact with the sophists. But what was the precise relationship between the sophistic and Socratic approach to *aretē*? And what was Plato doing in general with the sophists in the dialogues—that is, what should readers take away from Plato's handling of them? These questions arise naturally once the definitional spadework has been done, and the aim of my subsequent chapters is to consider each sophist with such questions in mind.

To this end, Chapter 3 offers fresh examination of the so-called Great Speech in Plato's *Protagoras* and reveals something of the depth of Plato's respect for this sophist. Often the Great Speech is treated as Protagoras' attempt to demonstrate that virtue can be taught. But it entails much more. The challenge Socrates puts to Protagoras has a rhetorical and political dimension that scholars have not yet fully explored. And in meeting Socrates' challenge, Protagoras reveals himself not only to be a thinker and teacher of the first order, but also to have much in common with Socrates. Both, for instance, use myth in similar ways as a pedagogical tool; and both engage in forms of veiled speech in order to communicate different messages concomitantly to different audiences. Moreover, recognition of these similarities facilitates a richer and deeper account of what separates Protagoras and Socrates. In this chapter, the differences between them center on Socrates' abiding search for a “saving knowledge” that goes beyond

Protagoras's conventional moral orientation and which leads him (Socrates) to take a more circumspect view of such key Protagorean concepts as "virtue" and "prudence."

Chapter 4 studies the figure of Prodicus as he is treated across numerous dialogues, most importantly in the *Protagoras* and *Theaetetus*. Prodicus is described on multiple occasions as Socrates' teacher, and I argue that these reports are true. I then show what Socrates likely learned from Prodicus, as well as the ways in which Socrates' own philosophical and pedagogical enterprise went beyond what his teacher could offer.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of Plato's treatment of Hippias in the *Hippias Minor*. Hippias is in many ways the most roughly handled of Plato's sophists, at least on the surface. However, by focusing on the chief literary theme that courses through the dialogue—the theme of *polytropia*, or "versatility," as it is sometimes translated—I show how Hippias supplies a valuable touchstone for evaluating Socrates' own polytropic tendencies. Nowhere does Socrates appear more sophistic than in this short dialogue, and yet through this very portrait readers can see some precise ways in which Socrates differs from the sophists, particularly in his self-awareness of his polytropic tendencies and his ability to marshal them in the service of philosophy.

Whereas Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus chiefly on the fascinating similarities and differences between Socrates and specific sophists, Chapters 6 and 7 turn also to the question of Plato's intention in incorporating the sophists into the dialogues. In these chapters my argument about Plato's propaedeutic and protreptic purposes comes to the fore. Chapter 6 analyzes Plato's *Euthydemus* and shows how Socrates' practice of protreptic on a pupil named Clinias is also designed as a protreptic for Socrates' auditor, Crito, and even more for us, Plato's readers. Throughout the chapter Socrates and the sophists are compared and contrasted, and this is revealed in the end to be a necessary part of philosophic education. In Chapter 7, I return to the figure of Protagoras, this time as he is portrayed posthumously in Plato's *Theaetetus*, and show again how Plato's Socrates carefully orchestrates an encounter with Protagorean sophistry as a means of advancing his pedagogical and philosophical goals.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 8, turns to the passages most frequently cited in support of Plato's supposed critique of the sophists, passages from the *Meno*, *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Sophist*. Using

the same dramatic, literary, and philosophical methods of interpretation employed throughout this study, I show how unconvincing these passages are as evidence for Plato's ill will toward the sophists and how they instead support the basic arguments developed here: that the sophists and rhetoricians are distinct groups that Plato handled quite differently, that Socrates and the sophists have more in common than first meets the eye, and that Plato uses the sophists in the dialogues for chiefly propaedeutic and protreptic purposes.