Sophists, Names and Democracy

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> A real art of speaking, says the Spartan, which does not grasp truth, does not exist and will never exist.
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> (Plato, *Phaedrus* 260e5–7)

Plato's *Euthydemus* was described as strange, the oddest, the most bantering, frivolous and farcical or even uninteresting dialogue.[1] The sophistic brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus from Chios claim the ability to teach virtue, and Socrates asks them to convince Clinias that he should love wisdom and virtue. The brothers fail and Socrates finishes the task himself. The most radical exchanges take place between the brothers on the one hand and Socrates with his friends on the other, when the brothers fully expose their eristic skills in order to astound and bewitch the audience. On the contrary, Socrates' conversations with Clinias are clear cases of *protreptic* speeches. Therefore, several interpreters think that the dialogue is simply a *protreptic* work designed to provoke philosophical interest.[2]

In the following text I will argue that the dialogue shows the essential connection between (i) sophistry, (ii) right usage of language, particularly in the case of names and naming, and finally (iii) politics, and more precisely the critique of radical democracy.[3] By doing this, I

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[1] See Roochnik (1990–1), Landy (1998), Straus (1970), Michelini (2000) for the adjectives used in the first lines of their articles. Cf. Sprague (2000) for a summary of different interpretations of the dialogue.

[2] Michelini (2000), Gill (2000) or Roochnik (1990–1).

[3] Concerning democracy, Isocrates and the political discussion in the dialogue see Dusanic (1999) or Heitsch (2000). It is usually assumed that *Euthydemus* 305b ff. is meant as an allusion to Isocrates and thus one aspect of the dialogue is a critique

want to show that Plato's *protreptic* work is not without any other purpose or merely *protreptic*. I will show how the sophistic use of language correlates with the manners of politics which Plato associates with the sophists.

First, I will proceed by showing the explicit criticism of both brothers, for they seem unable to fulfill the task given to them. Namely, they seriously fail to convince Clinias that "he ought to practice philosophy and care about virtue" (*Euth.* 275a5–6). Second, several times in the dialogue Socrates criticizes sophists' use of language, since it is totally inappropriate to fulfill the above-mentioned pedagogical task. I will show that this critique mirrors a deeper conflict between two different conceptions of language. And finally, I will suggest that the sophistic erroneous usage of language has direct implications on their political theory, which is criticized by Plato in the *Euthydemus* as well as in the *Republic*.

I. *Plato's explicit critique of the sophists*

The *Euthydemus* is famous for perhaps the most ridiculous conversations in Plato's dialogues. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus trap their interlocutors with several sophistries and fallacies that are sometimes funny sometimes outrageous but in many cases thought provoking.[4] The sophistic word-dance can be shown right at the opening of their discussion with Clinias concerning the question whether the foolish ones learn or the wise ones learn:

> … he [Clinias] answered that the wise were the learners.
> Then Euthydemus said: "Are there some whom you call teachers, or not?"
> He agreed that there were.

of Isocrates' stay at Chios (at c. 393 BC) and of his conception of politics. However, this straightforward interpretation has one problem. The same person that is described as being "at the margins between the philosopher and the statesman" at 305c7 harshly criticises not only philosophy in general but the debate with sophistic brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as well (304e3–5, 305a3–4). Therefore, before suggesting the link with Isocrates one should explain the role of this critique of his alleged political allies from Chios. Michelini (2001, 529), suggests that the critique shows the middle position of Isocrates: he is able to see that the brothers are fakes, on the other hand he does not recognize Socrates' irony in praising the brothers and cannot tell the difference between Socrates' protreptic speeches and sophistic games. Hawtrey (1981, 26) reminds us that Isocrates' critique in *Helen* aimed both at Academy and sophistic eristic.

[4] For a detailed analyse of two passages (impossibility of falsehood at 283e7–284c6 and impossibility of contradiction at 285e9–286b6) cf. Denyer (1991, 8–23). Summary of arguments and fallacies is offered by Hawtrey (1981, 2–3) or McCabe (1998, 167–168).

> "And the teachers are teachers of those who learn, I suppose, in the same way that the music master and the writing master were teachers of you and the other boys when you were pupils?"
> He agreed.
> "And when you were learning, you did not yet know the things you were learning, did you?"
> "No," he said.
> "And were you wise when you did not know these things?"
> "By no means," he said.
> "Then if not wise, ignorant?"
> "Very much so."
> "Then in the process of learning what you did not know, you learned while you were ignorant?"
> The boy nodded.
> "Then it is the ignorant who learn, Clinias, and not the wise, as you suppose."

<div align="right">(Euth. 275e7–276b5, tr. K. R. Sprague)</div>

Clinias' original opinion is refuted just to be confuted once again to the opposite result that the wise actually learn (*Euth.* 276c6–7). The sophism entails two possible equivocations: μανθάνειν might mean both "to learn" and "to understand", and the pair of opposites σοφοί and ἀμαθεῖς means "wise" and "ignorant" as well as "clever" and "stupid".[5] Euthydemus then exploits these equivocations so that it is not clear whether he means that the ignorant learn since the wise ones do not need to learn anymore or, on the other hand, that the clever ones learn since they understand more during the classes than the stupid ones.

The result of the wordplay is Clinias' embarrassment and unwillingness to continue in what seems to be rather a case of ridicule than introduction to virtue and wisdom (277d). The sophistic performance does not arouse interest in virtue, but rather laugh and amusement of the listeners (276b7, d1, 278c1, 298e9, 303b2). While Euthydemus and Dionysodorus cause laughter among the audience (276b6–c1), "drowning" of the victimized interlocutor (277d2) and anger among his friends (283e1), Socrates' protreptic entrance fulfills in its brevity the task that was originally given to the sophists.

Socrates' questioning proceeds without laughter (ἀγελαστί, 278e1) and its direct result is not a temporal entertainment but Clinias' determination to search for wisdom (282c–d) and his bold theses concerning the right nature of politics (290b–d). As a result of the first Socrates' protreptic interlude, Clinias accepts the thesis that he should look for wisdom, since it is the only thing that can make him happy and successful (282c–d). Socrates himself says that his speech was a model example of protreptic speeches (παράδειγμα τῶν προτρεπτικῶν λόγων, 282d4–6) and invites the brothers to show how their art could achieve similar protreptic goals. The two sophists respond, however, not with a protreptic speech, but rather with a new wordplay directed not to Clinias but to the audience. Socrates then picks up the discussion with Clinias

[5] Hawtrey (1981, 58).

again at the beginning of his second protreptic interlude at 288d. It is clear from this development of the dialogue that the sophistic brothers are unable to attract Clinias to wisdom and virtue. Not only that the sophists failed in the task that was given to them, it is more than likely that their conversations could easily result into violence because of the bad temper it causes among the listeners.[6]

II. *Language, meaning and speaker*

In this section I want to point out certain aspects of the language that the sophists use and that allows them to do their tricks introduced above. I will discuss the relation of "names" to reality,[7] and the second aspect will be the role of a speaker who uses the language to say something. It will be clear that Plato's own position, as I take it to be represented in Socrates' protreptic appearances in the *Euthydemus*, differs in both respects from the way Euthydemus and Dionysodorus use the language.

(a) *The meaning of names*

In his first reaction to the sophistries in the dialogue, Socrates openly says that to understand the sophistic "mysteries" one merely has to study with Prodicus the meaning of names (*Euth.* 277e4).[8] The first sophistic trick mentioned above is based on the fact that people conventionally use the verb "to learn" (μανθάνειν) for two opposite states (278a5–6).[9] Homonymy or equivocation is used in several sophisms in the dialogue (cf. 287d7 with νοεῖν, 300a for τὰ δυνατὰ ὁρᾶν). But even if one knew the meaning of names, the only ability gained would be to play with other people (προσπαίζειν, 278b5–6), for this does not lead to any knowledge of the true nature of things (278b5). This is why Socrates tries to calm down the heated discussion saying that one should not "quarrel over the word" (285a5–6). But words are the only weaponry of the sophists from which they build a wall around Socrates (295d). It is questionable whether these words and names tell us anything about reality.

I will demonstrate this claim on a part of one further exchange between Socrates and the brothers:

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[6] Several moments in the dialogue seem to grow into a brawl and Socrates must calm down his partners, see esp. 285a and 288b, 294d, 298c–299b.

[7] The term "name" stands here for both nouns and verbs that are taken to be names of a given activity. This reflects Plato's usage of the term ὄνομα (name) in the *Cratylus* to which I will refer. For Plato's distinction between name (ὄνομα) and verb (ῥῆμα), see Fine (1997, 291).

[8] Cf. Sedley (2003, 154).

[9] Socrates stresses that this is how people *use* the verb (οἱ ἄνθρωποι καλοῦσι, *Euth.* 277e6); see Hawtrey (1981, 58–60) for an extensive commentary.

[Socrates speaks:] "Then is there no ignorance, nor are there any ignorant men? Or isn't this just what ignorance would be, if there should be any—to speak falsely about things?"

"It certainly would," Dionysodorus said.

"And yet there is no such thing," I said.

He said there was not.

"Are you making this statement just for the sake of argument, Dionysodorus—to say something startling—or do you honestly believe that there is no such thing as an ignorant man?"[10]

"Your business is to refute me," he said.

"Well, but is there such a thing as refutation if one accepts your thesis that nobody speaks falsely?"

"No, there is not," said Euthydemus.

...

"This is just where my stupid question comes in," I said. "If no one of us makes mistakes either in action or in speech or in thought—if this really is the case—what in heaven's name do you two come here to teach? Or didn't you say just now that if anyone wanted to learn virtue, you would impart it best?"

"Really, Socrates," said Dionysodorus interrupting, "are you such an old Cronus as to bring up now what we said in the beginning? I suppose if I said something last year, you will bring that up now and still be helpless in dealing with the present argument."

<div align="right">(Euth. 286d6–287b5, tr. R. K. Sprague)</div>

When Socrates confronts Dionysodorus with the question whether he really believes in what he says (ἀληθῶς δοκεῖ σοι, 286d12), he chooses not to answer, but asks for refutation of his *logos* instead. It is only the speech and the relation between the propositions in the wordplay that matters in the eristic play. Further on, when Socrates refutes the sophistic brothers by showing a serious inconsistency in their speeches, he is brushed off again, since the present (παρόντι) debate should not be determined by the past one (287b2–5). What counts as a present debate seems to be completely arbitrary. The only landmarks are single questions which demarcate the part of speech which is relevant now and the answerer is not allowed to cross over to the previous parts.

It seems that the sophist's language is a semantically closed environment and refuses any "outer" interference of reality that could correct or enrich the meaning of the used terms. This happens at least on two levels. On the first level, the questions themselves establish the only possible meaning of certain terms and the answerer is not allowed to enrich or correct it. On the second level, the questions delimit the possible answer itself and the answerer must answer in the way demarcated by the questions without any qualifications. Now I will explain those two ways the sophists use the language in their wordplays.

The sophistic brothers use the common language, but the semantic field of the terms is always radically tied down to the meaning given

[10] Hawtrey (1981, 111–112) notes that Socrates uses the difference in degrees of moral or intellectual competence to refute the convention theory of naming in the *Cratylus* 386a–d.

by the present debate, which radically limits the meaning of the terms. Socrates is thus stopped when he wants to qualify his answers according to his conviction regarding how things really are (295b, 296a–c). The meaning of the names used by the brothers is limited only to the meaning used in the mutual relations with other names within their word-plays and this meaning cannot be corrected or enriched.[11] In order to proceed with the wordplay without an interruption or correction based on a certain state of affairs, the sophists not only restrict the discussion so that the one who is asked is not allowed to ask clarifying questions (295b), but also one should not add to the answer anything that was not already said in the question itself (296a),[12] so that one is not allowed to qualify his answer in any way (300c5–7). Then the paradox is reached when this intentionally limited meaning is presented as the only meaning the given term has and it is then applied in different context.

The possible space for an answer is fully given by the sophistic question itself. The interlocutor has no possibility to ground the meaning of the names in his answer anywhere else than upon the question that has been given to him. The meaning of the term that is usually tied either to the entities in the world or concepts in minds must be constituted within the limits given by the previous question. Therefore, whatever limitations the question entails, these limits—regardless of being mistaken, one-sided or intentionally exaggerated—must be kept in the answer as well and cannot be corrected. Any belief about the reality or true nature of things that could inform the answer is—so to say—not only out of the question but out of the answer as well.[13] That is why their questions "leave no escape" (ἄφυκτα, 276e5) and, according to Euthydemus, Socrates makes a mistake when he "answers more than was the question" (προσαποκρίνεται τοῖς ἐρωτωμένοις, 296a1). The only reference points for the answer are the questions which basically delimit the entire possible space for the answers themselves.

On the other hand, the two protreptic passages exhibit a completely different way of using names and language. Socrates seems to be genu-

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[11] For the cases where the meaning of names is established without relation to reality see sophisms at *Euth.* 275d–276d6, 283b, 284c, 287d, 293b, 295b, 297e, 298d, 300a, 301c and 301e. In order to illustrate how the meaning of the term is emptied and cut from reality I will use the following example. The sophistic brothers would happily accept that if (i) Socrates is a father and (ii) my dog is a father then according to the transitive rule of logic it follows that (iii) Socrates is my dog. The sophism then depends on the impossibility to correct or specify the meaning of the generic term "father".

[12] The condition is quite strict and it seems to limit the possible terms in the answers on the terms used in the question. Further, if the question is about an X that is not directly mentioned (e.g. What is the thing you use for cutting hair?) one is supposed to answer only with the name of X without any qualification (e.g. the correct answer is, let's say "scissors", while the wrong one is that "sometimes one uses scissors, sometimes hair clipper").

[13] Hitchcock (2000, 60) talks about "rigid restrictions on what their answerer can say".

inely interested in the true meaning of the terms and does not use double meanings in order to trap Clinias. Right at the beginning of the first protreptic dialogue Socrates and Clinias try to enumerate goods important for human life (279b ff.). After wisdom (σοφία, 279c1) they name good fortune (εὐτυχία, 279c7) as well:

> [Socrates speaks:] "Good fortune, Clinias, which everybody, even quite worthless people, says is the greatest of the goods."
> "You are right," he said.
> "And I reconsidered a second time and said, son of Axiochus, you and I have nearly made ourselves ridiculous in front of our visitors."
> "How so?" he said.
> "Because in putting good fortune in our previous list we are now saying the same thing all over again."
> "What do you mean?"
> "Surely it is ridiculous, when a thing has already been brought up, to bring it up again and say the same things twice."
> "What do you mean by that?"
> "Wisdom is surely good fortune," I said "—this is something even a child would know."
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> <div align="right">(Euth. 279c7–279d7, tr. R. K. Sprague)</div>

Socrates does not play a word game with the terms "wisdom" and "good fortune". He is not content with the fact that everyone names (πάντες φασί) good fortune among the greatest goods. Socrates sees the mistake in saying that wisdom and good fortune are two different goods and proceeds with a supportive argumentation which gives an account about σοφία and εὐτυχία. Similarly as in the *Cratylus*, a name or a word is here a tool for teaching; it is a tool of certain didactic value (ὄργανον διδασκαλικόν) with which we differentiate in being in the same way as a comb separates wool on the loom (*Crat.* 388b13–c1). Only in this way one could use names to say something about the nature of how things are (*Crat.* 388b10–11, cf. *Euth.* 281d). It is the examination of what wisdom and good fortune mean and do that leads young Clinias to agree that he wants to look for wisdom and virtue.

(b) *Sophistic language and speaker*

Further, I want to argue that the sophistic conception of language as semantically closed environment cuts off the speaker from the language he or she uses.[14] On Socrates' conception, the personalities of speakers play an important role for proper understanding of the dialogue and the role of the language itself. For Socrates it is important not only *what* is said but *who* says it as well.[15] Therefore, right after Socrates connects the method of the sophistic brothers with Prodicus, he immediately several times mentions that *they*, people, use the same name "to learn" for states of affairs with opposed characteristics (*Euth.*

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[14] See Scolnicov (2000, 115–117) for a similar interpretation of sophistic language.

[15] The dialogue starts with Crito asking twice "who was it" (τίς ἦν, 271a1, a5).

277e5, 278a1, a6). Within the entire passage Socrates carefully avoids saying "this and this is called so and so" he is rather insistent in saying "*they* call this and this so and so".[16]

The sophistic brothers claim that they can "teach virtue" (273d8), however they do not care at all about the person whom they accept as an aspirant (274d–e)—apart from one condition: she or he must reply to their questions (275c1). But even this sole condition does not have anything to do with the speaker. The sophists care solely about being answered not about the answerer. They do not care what kind of answer they receive. The content of the answer is not interesting for them, since it depends on the knowledge and character of a given speaker, i.e. on her or his soul. But whatever the answer might be, the speaker will be always refuted (275e6) and there is no proper answer to these questions (276e5).[17]

The sophistic model of language in the *Euthydemus* does not take into account the personality of the speakers. Socrates wants to bring the topic of the soul into the discussion as well, since the soul is the subject of knowledge and naming (295a–b). Euthydemus does not allow any distortion in the sophistic way of the talk; he admits at the very most that we know something *by something* but he refuses to go into any further inquiry. For that might reveal that we know *by soul* and the subject, i.e. the speaker, would enter the scene complicating the sophistic tricks.

For Socrates, however, the identity and authenticity of the answerer play a crucial role. Identity and authenticity are essential for the method of *elenchus* as well as for the main aim of Socrates' talks: for liberating the soul from false opinions and thus making it "better".[18] That is why Socrates insists that his partner in the dialogue always says what he really thinks, because only then the wanted change in the interlocutor's soul can happen. On the other hand, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus reject any identity or authenticity of the speaker (both the questioner and the answerer) and their conception of language does not need it. Therefore, they insist that Socrates should not commemorate his past answers and their past questions but to focus solely on the present question-answer exchange (287b).

It is clear that the way Euthydemus and Dionysodorus use the language is an obstacle to their original task, namely teaching virtue and attracting people to it. The sophistic word play cannot be taken seriously, since it is clear that it does not have any real content. The answers

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[16] Cf. Scolnicov (2000, 116).

[17] On this point cf. McCabe (2008, 117–118).

[18] The role of the speaker and authenticity is stressed for example at *Charmides* 158e–159a; *Alcibiades* 106b–c, 113a; *Gorgias* 462a. The two most obvious violations of the authenticity principle, Callicles in the *Gorgias* (497b) and Thrasymachus in the *Republic* (350e) deserve a separate study on its own; cf. Hawtrey (1981, 76–77). On Socrates' insistence on consistency, sincerity, reflection and rational integrity; cf. McCabe (1998, 164) and Reeve (2008).

are delimited by the questions and cannot be qualified by or related to anything outside the word play as it is explicitly said in the dialogue (296a1). Further, since the language does not care about the speaker, it is hard to imagine how anyone could be convinced by it to care about virtue and wisdom.

III. *Language and democracy*

In the previous passages I interpreted two features of sophistic language: the semantically closed environment using a radically conventionalist theory of names and suppression of speaker's authenticity and identity. Now I will argue that both of these aspects play important role in the way of doing politics that Plato associates with sophists. In the first part of this section, I will present Plato's view on the sophists from the *Republic* VI. Then I argue that sophistic language contributes to the generation of the democratic character both in an individual and in a *polis*. The connection between politics, democracy and the *Euthydemus* needs perhaps some short justification. There is, of course, the second protreptic conversation Socrates has with young Clinias about the ruling art (*Euth.* 288d–290d). Further, the fact that the brothers arrived from the island Chios, together with the probable allusion to Isocrates at the end of the dialogue, support the claim that democracy and its critique were implicitly present for the first readers or listeners to the dialogue. Athens concluded a defensive alliance with Chios in 384 B.C. and the island was a democracy at that time. Isocrates presumably helped to establish this democratic constitution and he stayed at Chios for two years (390–388 B.C.). Therefore, it is possible that Plato took Isocrates responsible not only for the democratic constitution at Chios, but for the 384 B.C. treaty as well. This treaty further boosted Athenian democrats and popular clique which Plato opposed. Thus one could read the *Euthydemus* as a debate between βασιλικὴ τέχνη on one side and democracy on the other.[19]

There are two analogies in *Republic* VI that Plato uses to support his claims about the role of a philosopher in his *polis* against democracy. The first one is the famous ship of state story that should explain why knowledge and philosophy matter in politics (*Resp.* VI, 487e7–489a2). Second, there is the analogy between *polis* and a huge strong animal; it is used to describe the role sophists play in societies that listen to them (*Resp.* VI, 493a6–c8).

According to Socrates in the *Republic*, the sophists do not teach anything else than what they learned at public gatherings as a preferred opinion among the public (*Resp.* VI, 493a7–9). The whole story goes:

> It's rather like someone keeping a large, powerful animal, getting to know its moods and wants, how to approach it, how to handle it, when and why it is most awkward and most amenable, the various sounds it is in the habit of

[19] Cf. Parry (2003) and for historical details see Dusanic (1999) and Heitsch (2000).

> making in different situations, and the sounds which soothe it or infuriate it when someone else makes them. Imagine he'd learnt all this as a result of being with the animal over a long period of time. He might than call what he had learnt wisdom, might organize his findings into an art or science, and take up teaching, though in truth he would have no idea at all which of these opinions and desires was beautiful or ugly, good or bad, just or unjust, and would assign all these names (ὀνομάζοι δὲ πάντα ταῦτα) in accordance with the opinions of the huge animal. Things which gave the animal pleasure he would call good. Things which annoyed it he would call bad. He would have no other standards by which to judge them ... If that were how he behaved, don't you think he would be a pretty odd teacher?

<div align="right">(Resp. VI, 493a9–c8, tr. T. Griffith)</div>

This image depicts not only the sophists but also reveals Plato's views on democratic constitution. The sources of value in democratic society are feelings and impressions of people, which a sophist tries to satisfy or tries to "meet" in his speeches. At the same time, the feelings of people are highly unstable and thus what they produce is rather a chaotic system of values, where some of these values might be rather perverted.

In their pretending that they rule over the people, the sophist apply a radically conventionalist usage of names. The sophists do not in truth know (μηδὲν εἰδὼς τῇ ἀληθείᾳ) how to apply correctly the normative terms like good or bad, fine or shameful. The names are applied only according to the convictions or beliefs (δόξαι) of the "big animal" and they have no other account or explanation (λόγος) for these terms.[20] Therefore, as in the *Euthydemus* the names are used in a conventional manner without investigating their proper meaning. As we saw in the *Euthydemus*, the sophists do not care about the fact that the moods of the huge animal often change. The names can be applied to yet a different mood or feeling, since we should not determine our current discussion with the past or with other discussions.[21]

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[20] Within the *Republic* there are not many passages dealing with the correct approach to naming, but at 435a–b Plato clearly points out that the name must depend on the character of the named entity: "Well, then, are things called by the same name, whether they are bigger or smaller than one another, like or unlike with respect to that to which that name applies?—Alike.—Then a just man won't differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice; rather he'll be like the city.—He will." (tr. Grube-Reeve).

[21] The sophist is not a master or trainer of the huge strong animal—it is rather the other way round. It is the crowd, people that control the sophist. The crowd determines what it wants or does not want to hear from him. Plato actually does not favour democracy, not only for its anarchic features, but also for a similar reason he opposes to tyranny: not the ideas or feelings of those at power should decide about the *polis*, but knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of the wise according to which the *polis* ought to be governed. The sophists cannot do anything other than boost the feelings of the many, since the knowledge of true reality is hidden to them; cf. Schofield (2006, 64–69).

In the preceding section I talked about two aspects of sophistic language: the division between reality and meaning of the names resulting in radical conventionalism, and the separation of the speaker from what he says. Both these features reflect the praxis of sophists in a democratic *polis*:

A)   Because of their radical conventionalism, the sophists can describe pleasant as good and unpleasant as bad, without actually knowing what is really good or bad.[22]

B) The separation of speaker then allows the sophists to change their statements from one day to another, without being attacked for inconsistency. For what was said yesterday does not have any relevance for the discussion today.

The language used by sophists thus enables them not only to pull discussion tricks as in the *Euthydemus*, but also to support the irrationality of crowd decisions in a democratic society.

Another case of a similarly mistaken usage of names and language can be found in the passage describing the origin of democratic character from its oligarchic predecessor (*Resp.* VIII, 560b6–561a4).[23] There is no order (τάξις) in a democrat's soul and he knows no compulsion (ἀνάγκη) in his life (*Resp.* VIII, 561d5–6); the first distinguishes him from a just person, the latter from an oligarch.

The democrat's soul lacks learning and true arguments; it is filled with false flattering and seducing arguments. These false *logoi* support the presupposed equality of all desires: each and every one of the desires has an equal right to being satisfied (*Resp.* VIII, 561c–d). The democrat thus sometimes feasts, sometimes observes the fast days, one day he works out, just to be idle the next day, and he deals with business, politics and even with philosophy. However, he follows any of these desires only because he enjoys it, only because it gives him temporal pleasure. He does not consider any of them to be worthy on its own.[24]

Yet again, among the causes that lead to this unfortunate situation is a radical form of conventionalist theory of names that enables quite arbitrary changes of the names. The young lad must be completely confused about what is wrong and what is right. When knowledge and truth are chased away from the young democrat's head, false and boastful words and beliefs (λόγοι τε καὶ δόξαι) take their place. These new masters than proceed in a sophistic manner of arbitrary renaming virtues and failures: self-discipline is called (ὀνομάζοντες) cowardice, sense of shame is labelled (καλοῦντες) simple-mindedness, and so on (*Resp.* VIII, 560d3–8).

The democratic soul is filled with insolence, anarchy, extravagance and shamelessness instead of virtues. The return of these is accompa-

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[22] Hermogenes' conventionalism in the *Cratylus* is presented in political or social vocabulary of "contract" (συνθήκη) or "custom" (νόμος), cf. *Crat.* 384d1, d7.

[23] Cf. Scott (2000, 21).

[24] Scott (2000, 27).

nied by their renaming: each bad habit gains a fancy name that, however, says nothing about its true nature: "insolence is called (καλοῦντες) sophistication, anarchy liberty, extravagance generosity, and shamelessness courage" (*Resp.* VIII, 560e4–561a1).[25]

Thus the false speeches at the bottom of the democrat's soul have one thing in common: they are based on a radical twist in naming things. Virtues are named according to vices, and vices have nice names as if being virtues. Any name can be used to name anything the democrat wants: good and beautiful names for bad things and vice versa. It is the conventionalism of sophistic language that enables these semantic changes. Moreover, no democrat must hold a consistent way of life in the same way as a sophistic speaker does not have to be consistent in his claims. The desire or appetite favored today will be tomorrow easily replaced by a new one in the same way as Dionysodorus or Euthydemus replace the old *logos* by a new one.

VI. *Conclusion: back to the Euthydemus*

The interpretations I have set out should illuminate in what sense Plato uses the connection between language and politics in the *Euthydemus* as well. Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not care about Clinias himself, he is not the centre of their attention. They rather focus on the people, crowd or audience around and play a game for their amusement. Reading the *Euthydemus* together with the *Republic* shows that the arbitrariness and relativity of sophistic language correspond to their need to successfully communicate with a crowd. People demand that the pleasant things are translated and given to them as good or right, and whatever is irritating as bad or false. The instability of the sophist's position—that is not secured either in the identity of speaker or in the nature of things themselves—then conforms to the instability of the democrat's soul. As McCabe says, sophists do not allow for sincerity, since they refuse any sort of consistency in speech. It is Socrates who demands certain reflection and thus rational integrity of what one says.[26]

All in all, the *Euthydemus* could be read as a reminder about far reaching effects a dangerous sophistic game could have. This game does not bring its "victim" to study philosophy nor to devotion to virtue. If sophistry succeeds and convinces anyone about its power and glory, most probably his or her soul will end up in a mess that will result in a chaotic and unstable democratic character. And if sophistry succeeds in public life, according to Plato, most probably the given *polis* will end up only one step from the worst constitution ever, that is only one step from tyranny.

[25] Cf. Monoson (2000, 171–172). Further notice Plato's imagery of exile, returning of victorious groups from exile and sending former masters to exile in return. The return of Athenian democrats to power at 403 BC could be Plato's target here.

[26] McCabe (1998, 164).

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