Plato's *Sophist*

Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium
Platonicum Pragense

Edited by
Aleš Havlíček and Filip Karfík

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MAKING SENSE OF THE *SOPHIST*: TEN ANSWERS TO TEN QUESTIONS

T. D. J. Chappell

I. Why the method of division?

The long divisions with which the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* open can seem both tedious and self-parodic to us. They do not seem so to Plato; he believes that, in a familiar phrase, it is the task of the philosopher "to divide nature at the joints" (*Phdr.* 265d–266a). Philosophy, for Plato, consists both of analysis and of synthesis: it has both a phase where we pick apart the constituents of some thing, and also a phase where we weave them back together. In so doing – if we do it correctly – we are recovering the structure of reality. Reality has a rational structure, and our *logos* is rational just when it reflects that structure. (*Logos* here in at least three senses: our names, our language, and our philosophical accounts of things.) But doing the analyses correctly is not easy. As that passage of the *Phaedrus* tells us, it takes an expert dialectician to make the right divisions, and as *Cratylus* (389d) tells us, it takes a skilled *nomothetês* "to put in place the name for each thing that is fitting by nature in its syllables and its sounds".

The method of division presupposes a world of recurring themes, criss-crossing patterns, distinctions and parallels, samenesses and differences. The very world of sameness and difference that we give accounts of by "interweaving the Forms" is itself an interweaving of the Forms, and in it, otherness in particular is everywhere.

One notable feature of the method of division is this: every determination in a well-performed division is a positive determination. See *Statesman,* 262c9–d7, on an attempted definition by division of *barbaros*:

> "[Our division went wrong because we did] the same sort of thing as those who are trying to make a twofold division of the human race, and do what most of those do who live here: they distinguish on one side the race of Greeks as separate from all others, and then give the single name 'barbarians' to all the other races, though these are countless in number and share no kinship of blood or language. Then because they have a single term, they suppose they also have a single kind."

A good division will not divide Greeks from non-Greeks, but Greeks from Romans, Britons, Gauls, Teutons, Slavonic tribes, Hyperboreans, islanders of the utmost west, etc. etc. etc. To put it another way, every step of a well-performed division will use "other than" and not "is not". More about this in due course.

II. Why does it take Socrates and the Stranger seven attempts to define the sophist?

Partly because of the point just noted, that a well-performed division will use "other than" and not "is not". That is, it will proceed by finding positive determinations of things as different from each other, but each possessed of identifiable and real properties of their own: hence characterisable by reference to what they are, and not only by reference to what they are not. But the sophist is very difficult to get hold of in this way, because (just like his art of universal imitation, *Republic,* 596c–e) he shows up everywhere, as an impersonator of everything – and so, precisely not as something that he is, but as something (indeed a whole succession of somethings) that he is not.

When what someone has seems to be, as Ambuel nicely puts it ("The coy sophist"),[1] not so much an art of imitation as an imitation of an art, then it is bound to be difficult to capture his art by way of its positive determinations. We might almost say that "sophist", like some other terms that Plato notes, is intrinsically relative. Just as knowledge is always knowledge *of* something and otherness is

[1] D. Ambuel, *The coy eristic: defining the image that defines the sophist,* p. 279 (in this volume).

always otherness *than* something, so too the sophist goes the rounds: an imitation too is always an imitation *of* something.

The reduplication of misfiring attempts to define the sophist is caused, then, by all these difficulties attaching to those attempts; and also, of course, by one more difficulty besides. If as Parmenides contends we cannot say or think "is not", then we cannot classify the sophist as an imitation of anything, e.g. the philosopher. For that will be to say that the sophist *is not* the philosopher (though he resembles him); and on Eleatic principles, this form of words is forbidden (260d).

III. Why is Socrates called a sophist?

There is no doubt that he *is* called a sophist: see *Sophist,* 226b1–231b8. The Eleatic Stranger tells us in the sixth division of terms leading to a would-be definition of "sophist" that "noble and legitimate sophistry" (*hê genei gennaia sophistikê*) is demonstrated by the one who engages in *ho peri ten mataian doxosophian elegkhos* (231b6). This is a precise description in brief of Socrates' own philosophical activity; and it seems obvious that the longer speech of 230b4–d4 describes Socrates' activities in more detail. Those who undergo the *katharsis* that the Stranger describes become "vexed with themselves, but gentler with others" (230b9–c1; *hêmerountai* seems a particularly clear allusion to *hêmerôteros* at *Tht.* 210c2, and compare *Tht.* 195b9–10 for Socrates becoming vexed with himself). From that longer speech's first claim that these "noble and legitimate sophists" "question the one who thinks he has something to say about a subject, but in fact is talking nonsense" (*legôn mêden*, 230b5) to its final claim that sophists of this sort "purify their subject by removing the opinions that obstruct him from learning" (230d2–3), Socrates fits exactly the sixth division's description of the sophist.

This is very odd: no one is more insistent than Plato, everywhere else, that Socrates is not just something other than a sophist, but the very opposite of a sophist. What can he have meant by this evident contradiction?

The six divisions that open the *Sophist* offer a variety of accounts of the nature of sophistry, accounts which very probably correspond to opinions common among Plato's contemporaries about what sophistry is. Notoriously, one of these views was that Socrates himself

was a sophist. So the divisions are, in effect, a survey of common contemporary uses of the word "sophist". Plato is certainly not committed to a definitive endorsement of any of these definitions. He rejects them all in the final analysis – "the final analysis" being the seventh analysis, which by the end of the dialogue has told us, this time definitively, how Plato himself thinks we should define "sophist". But the question is what gives us the right to reject those six other ways of defining "sophist". Plato's answer would be that, until we have a clear grasp on how it is possible to say "is not" or to form false opinions, we have *no* right to reject them, even if our instinct is that the definition of Socratic philosophy as sophistry is as outrageous a mistake as confusing a dog with a wolf (231a6). If we cannot say "is not", then we cannot say that, essentially, a sophist *is not* a hunter, *is not* a salesman of some type, *is not* a disputer – and *is not* a Socratic inquisitor; if we cannot justifiably call any opinion false, then we cannot call these opinions about sophistry false. That is why Theaetetus' initial verdict on the first six divisions is one of *aporia* (231b9–c2); it is only by the very end of the *Sophist* that it becomes possible to understand how Socrates is not, in the deepest sense, any sort of sophist at all.

In any case, from the very opening words of the *Sophist*, confusions of this sort are rife. There Socrates fears that the Eleatic Stranger himself might be a disguised deity of the sort we meet in Homer, "a kind of god of refutation", *theos tis elegktikos* (216b6). And he goes on to express his misgivings about the whole idea of clearly discriminating philosophers, given their propensity to pop up in so many disguises – including those of sophist, statesman, and indeed madman (216c2–d2):

> "This *genos* is perhaps not much easier to distinguish than the *genos* of God. For through the ignorance of others, these men – the ones who are truly philosophers, not by imitation – go round the cities in every sort of fantastic disguise… sometimes they are disguised as statesmen, sometimes as sophists, and sometimes there are those to whom they give the idea that they are completely mad…"[2]

[2] I use my own translations throughout.

The sophist, we have suggested, disguises himself as a philosopher; and sometimes, it now appears, the philosopher disguises himself as a sophist. No wonder there is confusion between them, and in looking for one we end up finding the other (253c7–9), just as in looking for non-being, we end up finding being as well (243c2–5).

At least in Socrates' case, these confusions are not too hard to understand, for there are clearly some striking resemblances between Socrates and the sophists. At least on the outside Socrates can look like a sophist, just as in the *Symposium* we see that – at least on the outside – Socrates can look like an ugly god of debauchery. Socrates' mission was essentially negative; Socrates did engage in elenchus – short question–and–answer exchanges designed to reduce others to contradiction; Socrates did profess to know nothing himself; Socrates could be an infuriating interlocutor. In all these ways Socrates was strikingly similar to at least some sophists contemporary with him.

There was a fifth similarity too: like those sophists, *Socrates was not a true philosopher.* This will take a little more time to bring out.

Consider here the seventh and final division in the dialogue, at *Sophist,* 265a–268d. Picking up the threads from 235d–236c, the Eleatic Stranger distinguishes as follows:

Productive skill *vs*. acquisitive skill (*poiêtikê tekhnê/ ktêtikê tekhnê*, 265a7–9; cp. 219b–c)

Divine production *vs*. human production (266a5)

Divine production of things *vs*. divine production of images of things, e.g. perceptual images (266a9–c6)

Human production of things *vs*. human production of images of things, e.g. artistic (266c7–d8)

Human production of images of the faithful–copying sort (*eikastikon*) *vs*. human production of images of the deceptive-semblance sort (*phantastikon*) (266d9–e6)

Human production of images of the deceptive-semblance sort by way of instruments *vs*. the same by way of one's own body (*mimêsis*) (267a1–b2)

Knowledgeable *vs*. ignorant (merely opinion-based) *mimêsis* (267b3–e4)

Opinion-based *mimêsis* where the imitator does not realise his own ignorance, *vs*. opinion-based *mimêsis* where he does realise his own ignorance but speaks ironically (*eirônikon mimêtên*) (267e5–268a10)

Public, long-winded ironic speech of this sort – oratory – *vs*. private irony in short speeches – which is what sophistry is (268a10–c4)

Where on this tree of divisions would Plato locate Socrates? It almost seems that he wants to tempt us into saying that Socrates is the private, short-speechifying ironist. After all, irony (in some sense of the word[3]), private discussion, and shortness of speech were all clearly well-known features of Socrates' *modus operandi*. We seem to be pointed in the same direction by Theaetetus' answer to the Stranger's question at 268b10: *ti de ton heteron eroumen, sophon ê sophistikon?* Theaetetus responds that the person we are describing cannot be a *sophos*, because, like Socrates, *he does not know.*

But if this *is* how to place Socrates in the seventh division, then Socrates *is* a sophist, on Plato's own seriously intended account of what the sophist is. Can that be right? I don't think it can, most obviously because whatever else *eirôn* may mean in other contexts, in this context it fairly plainly involves pretending to know things that you don't know (*hôs agnoei tauta ha pros tous allous hôs eidôs eskhêmatistai*, 268a3–4): and this of course is precisely what Socrates did *not* do. The last division of the *Sophist* does remind us one more time how easy it would be to confuse Socrates with a sophist. But in the same breath it also reminds us of the key difference between him and the sophists – namely that Socrates, utterly unlike them, refuses to pretend to know anything at all.

So if the sophists' place in the seventh division is not Socrates' place, what *is* his place? A second temptation here would be to reply that Socrates has no place in the division at all, because it is a division of ways of producing, and Socrates produces nothing: he is a barren midwife (*Tht.*148e–151d). To give in to this temptation would be a mistake. For one thing, *Sophist* 265a's division of *tekhnê* into *ktêtikê* and *poiêtikê* is intended to be exhaustive, and Socrates' skill is clearly not "acquisitive"; so (unless the *ktêtikê/ poiêtikê* division is itself misguided) his skill must be classified on the other, productive side. As this first argument shows, it is easy for us to be overspecific about what is meant by "production" in the seventh division:

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3 On the vagaries of *eirôn* and its cognates see M. Lane, *The evolution of* eirôneia *in classical Greek texts*, in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* 31, 2006, pp. 49–83.

apparently even an orator counts as a producer of something (268a10 ff.). After all, Socrates also counts as someone who uses his body in an imitative way, which might seem equally surprising. (There is more to say about production: I say some of it below, in considering Plato's definition of being as *dunamis*.) Socrates then finds his place at the fourth step of the division, which distinguishes human production of images of the faithful-copying sort (*eikastikon*) *vs*. human production of images of the deceptive-semblance sort (*phantastikon*) (266d9–e6): Socrates is one of those who tell the truth, and therefore an *eikastikos*.

Is that all we can say about how to classify Socrates? No, because – although Plato does not spell this out – it is reasonable to think that the steps of the seventh division that are subsequently applied to the *phantastikon* can also be applied, even if they are not in the text of the *Sophist,* to the *eikastikon* sort of image-making. We can divide the *eikastikon* too by asking (the fifth step) whether instruments are used to produce the images in question. The answer, in Socrates' case, will be "No". Then we can ask (the sixth step) whether the production of images of the faithful-copying sort is done ignorantly or knowledgeably, and whether (the seventh step) the ignorant producer is ignorant of his own ignorance, or knows he is ignorant and speaks ironically. And *now* we have captured Socrates: he is the image-producer who is ignorant and speaks ironically, not (this time) in the sense that like an orator or an eristic he tries to hide his ignorance, but in the sense that he does not let it stop him from pursuing his questioning of others.

This gives us an account of what Socrates does. It also implies at least a programmatic account of what Plato thinks the true philosopher can do. (A more than programmatic account was presumably to be offered in the *Philosopher*: *Sophist* 254b3–4.) The true philosopher will be found at the sixth step of this same division: he is the producer of images of the faithful-copying sort, who produces them *knowledgeably.* That explains why Socrates is not a true philosopher – because he is to be found at a different point in the division. In his recent *The Midwife of Platonism*, David Sedley has made a convincing case that Plato took a "John the Baptist" view of Socrates – as the necessary, but not completely enlightened, precursor of Plato's own discoveries. The present argument gives further support to Sedley's case. It also explains why Socrates, as well as not

being a true philosopher, is not a sophist either. But he does occupy a position relative to the true philosopher in some ways closely analogous to the sophist's. And that is the second reason why, in the sixth division, Plato is at least provisionally content to describe Socrates as a sophist.

In the exposition that I have just given of Plato's argument at the end of the *Sophist*, there is much to give pause to a modern reader. In particular, there is the claim that philosophy involves "the production of images of the faithful-copying sort". This claim will sound far from obvious to modern ears (if, indeed, modern ears can make any sense of it at all). But it should be evident from the structure of the seventh division how seriously Plato intends this claim, and how strikingly friendly to image-making the whole tenor of his argument here is: contrast the strictures of (above all) *Republic* X with the present claim that the gods themselves produce both things and images of things (*Soph.* 266a9–c6). A closer examination of this claim will bring out a third reason why Plato is prepared to call Socrates a sophist in the sixth division.

What kind of "images of the faithful-copying sort" do philosophers produce? A simple but pregnant answer is that they produce *logoi*. In the most basic sense of *logos* philosophers, like nearly all other humans, produce *words*. In successively less basic senses of *logos*, they also produce sentences, thoughts, ideas, and even theories – reasoned and systematic accounts of the nature of reality. In any of these senses, to produce a *logos* is indeed to produce an image – and if it is an accurate *logos*, a faithful-copying image – of reality. (If it is not an accurate *logos*, the image produced will be not a faithful-copying but a deceptive-semblance image of reality of the kind characteristic of sophistry. But as before, the right to say that an image *is not* a faithful-copying one is a right that we cannot just take for granted, but need to win. The argument of the *Sophist* has the aim of winning this right.)

The philosopher – the dialectician – has a special expertise in the area of *logoi*, given that he is the one with the master-art to assign names correctly (*Crat.* 390d, 423e). Still, in two senses the ability to produce *logoi* is a perfectly general ability. It is general in one way, because all humans have this ability, inasmuch as they are language-users. And it is general in another way, because the whole point of language is its ability to be about anything. In fact

language, just as much as the more specific kind of art that Plato calls *mimêsis*, is like a mirror that reflects anything you care to put in front of it:

> "What name would you give to a craftsman of this sort: one who makes every sort of thing that is made by each of the particular kinds of handicraft… and not just all instruments, but every kind of plant and animal that grows from the earth, and himself as well, and besides these earth and heaven and the gods, and everything in heaven and in Hades below the earth?"
>
> "This is a completely amazing sophist (*panu thaumaston sophistên*) you're talking about."
>
> "Are you sceptical? … But don't you see that you yourself would be able to do this, in a way… if you chose to carry a mirror around with you everywhere?" (*Resp.* 596c–e)

The suspicion of sophistry attaches to any production of *logoi* at all, because any production of *logoi* is a production of images. *To onoma mimêma tou pragmatos* (*Crat.* 430a): language itself is an image-producing skill, and indeed a mimetic skill. If we worry, as Plato does in the *Republic*, that the making of images is an inherently sophistical enterprise, then we should be worried that language is an inherently sophistical enterprise too. For the two features of sophistry that tend to get emphasised in the *Republic* are its falsehood – its not being the thing it appears to be – and its *polupragmosunê* – its specious versatility. Language has these features just as much as *mimêsis* has them; for language *is mimêsis*. If the worry that Glaucon expresses by his sardonic words *panu thaumaston sophistên* is well-placed about imitative art, then it is equally well-placed about language in general. Hence our third reason why Plato is prepared to allow Socrates to be described as a sophist in the dialogue's sixth division: because, like any and every language-user, he seeks to produce *logoi*.

More about *logoi*, and their place in Plato's ontology, comes out as we turn to consider my fourth question about the *Sophist*:

IV. Why is being defined as *dunamis*?

I agree with Francisco Gonzalez[4] that, by and large, commentators on the *Sophist* have not had as much to say as they should have had about Plato's definition of being as *dunamis* (*Soph.* 247d–e).
To say that "being is power" is to say that it is essential to what is to *create*, to produce, to bring things into being. And what might that mean? Part of what it means is brought out in the *Timaeus* (37c6–d8):

> "When the father who had brought it into being saw that [the universe] was in motion and alive, and had become the delight [or 'the statue': *agalma* is ambiguous] of the eternal gods, he was pleased, and in his happiness conceived a plan to make it even more similar to its paradigm [the world–soul]. So just as the paradigm of the universe is alive and eternal, so likewise he did as much as he could (*eis dunamin epekheirêse*) to make this universe (*tode to pan*) of the same nature. However, the nature of the world soul turns out to be eternal; and this property could not be fitted in full measure (*pantelôs*) to what has come to be. So his plan was to make it a kind of moving image of the eternal (*eikô kinêton tina aiônos*)…"

Being, for Plato, is necessarily and intrinsically creative; as we might say, it can't help itself but create. The familiar principle of the "plenitude of being" is a Platonic principle: once there is as much reality as it is possible for there to be at the level of Pure Being, Pure Being itself will move to ensure that there is as much reality as possible at the next level down – and so on as far as possible. "As far as possible" is to the very boundaries of being itself, the boundary beyond which nothing but Not-Being remains – that is to say, the boundary which is not a boundary, because there is nothing on the far side of it.

The movement of the narrative in the *Timaeus* is from Being itself, to Being, Sameness, and Difference, and from there to Being, Sameness, Difference, Motion, and Rest: a dialectical unfolding of the contents of being which Hegel's deduction of the categories will one day imitate. The passage of the *Timaeus* just quoted is the point in the narrative where Motion and Rest come into the picture. These

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4 F. J. Gonzales, *Being as Power in Plato's Sophist and Beyond* (in this volume).

categories are hardly unfamiliar to readers of the *Sophist*, though there we proceed in a different order: the Stranger first distinguishes Motion and Rest as attributes of Being (249a–b), and only later brings in Sameness and Difference (254e ff.) These five kinds are deployed in the *Timaeus* to make the point that Plato's highest and most true being, his God – though he does *exist*, and does not merely dissolve into a Heracleitean flux in which nothing is true being – is not, on the other hand, a Parmenideanly jealous God, who will not permit there to be anything that is not Pure Being of his own highest kind. Very much to the contrary, the God of the *Timaeus* is a God of overflowing ontological abundance, a cascade of being that trickles down right to the very lowliest and humblest kinds of existent imaginable. And the *Sophist*, sharing the *Timaeus'* repugnance about the idea of a God who is "holy and reverend, having no mind, stationary and immovable" (249a1–2), goes on to illustrate something like the same plenitude of being, albeit with a modulation to the philosophy of meaning rather than to the philosophy of cosmogony. As we have already seen, one of the *Sophist*'s central concerns is with images and their production. And one fruitful way to understand the *Sophist'*s doctrine about images and their production, I suggest, is to see it as saying that images too have a lowly, but a deserved, place in the hierarchy of creation. After all, as we have already seen, the gods themselves are producers of images (266a5), which are created "not spontaneously or without understanding, but with reason and knowledge" (265c8–10); indeed in the words of the *Timaeus* quoted above, the universe itself is "a moving image of eternity".

More about this as we turn to my next two questions, which it will make sense to take together:

V. Why is the *Sophist* so concerned with images?
VI. How is the *Sophist* a successor to the *Theaetetus*?[5]

Recall first my point, in answer to question 3 above, that one way in which Socrates seems close to being a sophist is because he is,

[5] On this question see Charles Kahn, *Why is the* Sophist *a sequel to the* Theaetetus*?*, in: *Phronesis,* 52, 2007, 1, pp. 32–57, with which I find myself very much in agreement.

like the rest of us, a producer of *logoi,* words about the world – or accounts of the world – which really are capable of faithfully representing the way the world actually is. Plato sees two equal and opposite threats to the idea that humans can produce genuine *logoi*. Both threats come from subtle and complex bodies of philosophical thought with which Plato was intimately acquainted. And both threats can be expressed, as they turn up, in numerous guises.

One way of contrasting the two threats is to say that one of them is the thesis that every representation is correct, the other the thesis that no representation is correct. Seen this way, the first threat is that since there is no stable way the world is, the world can exert no discipline on what we say about it. We can say what we like without ever facing any danger of error: hence, there is no distinction between correct and incorrect representation. But it is essential to the idea of a representation-relation that there *should* be such a distinction: the first threat destroys the representation-relation by destroying this distinction between correct and incorrect representation.

As for the second threat, this consists in the denial that anything could be an adequate representation of something else without being actually identical with it. Only X can be X: nothing which is not X can take X's place in representation. Anything that you try to use to represent X that is not itself X will inevitably and obviously be an incorrect and falsifying image of X. The first threat attacked the *world* end of the representation-relation; this second threat attacks the *representation* end of it. Both threats are potentially fatal to the relation itself.

Another way of contrasting the threats will cast one of them as the thesis that every perception is always true, the other as the thesis that no perception is ever true. Every perception is always true, according to the first threat, because there isn't any more to truth than being perceived: there is no gap between what we think the world is and what the world is, because there *isn't* anything that the world is beyond what we think it is. And no perception is ever true, according to the second threat, because truth is in the things, not in shadows of the things; and perceptions are shadows.

A third way of contrasting the threats is to say that, according to the first threat, everything moves (*Crat.* 402a), *including all our statements about what moves*. So our statements about what moves can no more be false or unreal than what moves itself – which is

never false or unreal. Whereas according to the second threat, nothing can be true or real except something that never moves. But all our statements move. So our statements are never true or real: only that unmoving reality which they try, but fail, to be about is really and truly true and real.

A fourth way of bringing out the contrasting natures of the two threats to representation that Plato is trying to deal with is to consider a statue of Pericles. What makes it *of Pericles*? Maybe it is *of Pericles* because we want it to be, and/ or because it resembles Pericles. But then (the first threat) anything you like resembles anything else you like, so that we are free to call *anything* a representation of Pericles – and would be no more wrong if we said that a statue of Themistocles was also a representation of Pericles. Alternatively (the second threat) we might wonder how the statue manages to be Pericles, or of Pericles, when Pericles is precisely what it is not. How, we might ask, can anything *represent* Pericles, unless it actually *is* Pericles? An image works – we might say, if we like to speak in riddles – by being what it is not, and by not being what it is. (Recall here the famous Magritte picture entitled *Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*) And that raises a question how images are even possible. In modern terms, it raises the problem how one bit of the world can refer to or represent another.

By now, no doubt, it is obvious that one of these threats to the notion of representation is Heracleitean, the other Parmenidean. Plato's objective in the *Theaetetus* (as I have argued elsewhere[6]) is to show that Heracleiteans are unavoidably committed to this kind of attack on the notion of representation.

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6 T. D. J. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, Indianapolis 2005. The body of doctrine that is examined and rejected in the *Theaetetus* can more accurately, but more cumbersomely, be called "Heracleitean/ Protagorean". There is of course a question about the relations between the Heracleitean and Protagorean elements in that body of doctrine, and about how far these elements are really representative of the historical Heracleitus and Protagoras. A parallel question – about how far the Parmenides opposed in the *Sophist* is the actual one of history, or an amalgam of Parmenides' own views and his followers', or a Platonic reworking of what he took to be Parmenides or Parmenidean – arises in this paper. Both questions, as is usual, must be close to unanswerable.

Here is one piece of evidence for that thesis. Confronted at *Theaetetus* (188) with the proposal that knowledge be defined as true belief, Socrates' reaction is to ask at once whether Theaetetus can offer a plausible account of *false* belief. As the discussion of *Theaetetus* (188–200) goes on to show, the real question that Socrates is raising here is not just "What is false belief?". It is "How can we explain how belief is capable of being true *or* false (in modern terminology, truth-apt)?" The link between this question and questions about representation should be clear: truth is *correct* representation, falsehood is *incorrect.* So a full account of truth-aptness, Plato reasons, will presuppose an account of representation. But can there be an account of representation whose building materials are nothing but sensations? Plato believes not: sensations on their own can never give rise to representations, perceptions on their own can never give rise to thoughts. If we remain at the level of *aisthêsis*, we can never get to the level of truth *or* falsity. The most we can hope to offer is expressions of how things are subjectively for us. These may look like truth-apt statements, insofar perhaps as it is easy to confuse my expression of how things are for me with my report of how things are for me. But they are not; no such statement is either false or true, any more than any other expressions of feeling are either false or true.

Right up to the end of the *Theaetetus*, puzzles about what representation is – whether, for example, representation can be explained just as a matter of physical copying like marks on a wax block, *Theaetetus* (194–195 ff.), or whether it can be explained simply by invoking maximally accurate descriptions, *Theaetetus* (209b)[7] – remain central to its agenda. But the main problems about representation that Plato sees confronting the Heracleiteans are already clear before the dialogue reaches its half-way point. Rejecting as they do any more stable account of the world than the theory of the universal flux of perception, the Heracleiteans are in no position to *discriminate* between perceptions. For them anything whatever can equally be a representation of anything. Hence the notion of representation ceases to be a notion of *correct or incorrect* representation – which, as before, means that it ceases to be a notion of representation altogether. The

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7 *All' ean dê mê monon ton ekhonta rhina kai ophthalmous dianoêthô, alla kai ton simon te kai exophthalmon, mê ti se au mallon doxasô ê emauton ê hosoi toioutoi?* (*Tht.* 209b10–c3)

Heracleiteans' inability to give an account of false belief matters, not just because it blocks the proposal to define knowledge as true belief, but also because, if they cannot say how belief can be both true and false, they cannot explain how belief is a referring or representative state of mind. And if they cannot explain that, then they have no account of *belief* at all; the state of mind they are thinking of might just as well be identified with sensation or feeling, as indeed the more explicit Heracleiteans apparently did identify it. But, Plato argues, for the Heracleiteans to be reduced to denying that thought is an essentially representative state, and hence to denying that there is any essential difference between a true thought and a false one, is for them to be reduced to an absurdity from which only an account of representation such as that offered by Plato's own theory of Forms could rescue them.

If I am right to interpret the *Theaetetus* as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Heracleiteanism and the Heracleitean threat to the notion of representation, then what should we expect the *Sophist* to be? Here we come to my seventh question:

VII. How is the *Sophist* an answer to Parmenides?

On the interpretation of the *Theaetetus* that I have offered, as a response to the Heracleitean threat to representation, we will naturally expect the *Sophist* to be Plato's response to the other threat that he sees to representation – the Parmenidean threat. We might also expect to hear more about *how* exactly Plato's theory of Forms is supposed to do better in explaining representation than Heracleiteanism can. This, I suggest, is just how Plato presents the *Sophist*, and just what he achieves in it. The *Sophist* is indeed the immediate continuation of the *Theaetetus'* argument that Plato's stage-directions make it, by setting the conversation of the *Sophist* as beginning the morning after the conversation of the *Theaetetus* has ended.[8]

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8 Compare Plato, *Tht.* 210d3, *Soph.* 216a1 – and *Polit.* 257a1 ff. It is natural to wonder what has happened, in *Sophistes* and *Statesman*, to *Theaetetus* initial framing dialogue (142a–143d), which seems already to have dropped out of sight by the end of *Theaetetus*. I doubt there is an interesting answer. It seems implausible, for instance, to suggest that stage-directions would have returned us to Eucleides and Terpsion at the end of the *Philosopher*,

This purely formal join between the closing lines of the *Theaetetus* and the opening lines of the *Sophist* is not the only, nor of course the most important, connection between the two dialogues. A second is found at *Theaetetus* (180d7–181b7):

> "*Socr*. …But I nearly forgot, Theodorus, that other people again declare the opposite to them: "How it is immovable, the name of which is All" [*DK* Parmenides B 8,38], and all the other things that the Melissuses and Parmenideses insist on in opposition to all these [Heracleiteans]… What, my friend, are we to make of all these people? … I think we must examine the one side first – the side we began with, the men of flux… but if the partisans of The Whole seem to speak more truly, we will take refuge with them…
>
> *Theod*. Yes, Socrates, it would be completely intolerable not to examine thoroughly what both sides say."

"Completely intolerable", *ouden anekton,* is strong language. Yet if we look only at the *Theaetetus*, Socrates and Theodorus seem to bear it somehow. At 183c8 Theaetetus has to remind them of their undertaking to look at the Eleatics as well as the Heracleiteans. And despite the reminder, Socrates declines the invitation, *mê phortikôs skopômen* (183e4): "What we are proposing [*viz.* to discuss the Eleatics] is an extraordinarily large task. If this subject is considered only in an auxiliary discussion, it will not be treated as it deserves; whereas if we take it on properly, it will stretch out so far that it does away with the subject of knowledge" (184a6–9). These words point clearly towards the possibility of a discussion of the Eleatics on the same scale as the *Theaetetus'* discussion of the Heracleiteans. That discussion is, pretty obviously, the *Sophist.*

The Parmenidean threat to representation, remember, is the polar opposite of the Heracleitean threat. Heracleiteans threaten anarchic permissiveness about representation: if they are right, anything we like will count as representation, to the extent that the distinction between right and wrong representation will disappear – and with it the whole point of the notion of representation itself. Parmenideans,

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had Plato ever finished it: the slave who starts reading aloud at *Tht.* 143d1 is, we are explicitly told, only reading "the arguments that Socrates conducted with Theaetetus" (*Tht.* 142c8). This slave would have had a very dry throat had he read out the subsequent three dialogues as well.

by contrast, threaten absolute repression about representation: if they are right, nothing whatever will count as representation, because any would–be representation at all will involve the incoherent attempt both to be and not to be the thing represented.[9]

It is no wonder that at *Parmenides* 135c2 Socrates describes Parmenides' critique of the theory of Forms as one which *tên tou dialegesthai dunamin pantapasi diaphtherei*. If Parmenides is right, then what will be impossible is not only *to dialegesthai* in the tight sense of philosophical dialectic, but also in the wider and more general sense of discussion or language as well. The same problem of implying the impossibility of language is raised for Heracleiteanism at *Theaetetus* (183a–b), and the answer in both cases is, Plato thinks, the same. The aim of the *Sophist* – as we are explicitly told at 260a5 – is to show that human *logos* is "in one of the kinds of being": that discourse is possible, and not necessarily a traffic in unrealities. And the only way we can secure the possibility of discourse is by recognising that it depends on the Forms:

> "The divorce of each thing from everything else is the complete and final destruction of *logos*. For *logos* comes about for us from the interweaving with each other of the Forms (*dia gar tên allêlôn tôn eidôn sumplokên ho logos gegonen hêmin*)." (*Soph.* 259e)
>
> *Onomatôn gar sumplokên einai logou ousian.* (*Tht.* 202b6)[10]

Against this background it is hardly surprising, either, that Plato more than once raises a problem for Parmenideans about the relation between names and things named – a problem which he think ramifies into a quite general problem about the possibility of language itself (*Soph.* 244c4–d12; *cf. Parm.* 142a6: *oud' ara onoma estin autôi* [*sc. tôi onti*]):

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9 In Note 6 I marked some reservations about whether the Parmenides of the *Sophist* is the historical one. These reservations should be borne in mind in what follows. Though I do think that the position I sketch is one that Plato thinks is Parmenidean, that alone cannot give us any certainty that it is.

10 *Cf. Crat.* 431b9: *Logoi gar pou, hôs egôimai, hê toutôn* [sc. *rêmatôn kai onomatôn*] *xynthesis estin*.

> "Plainly, Theaetetus, someone who upholds the [Parmenidean] hypothesis will not find it the easiest thing in the world to answer the present question – or indeed any other question whatever… If you posit that there is nothing but the One, then presumably it is absurd to agree that there are also *two names* [for it, *viz*. One and Being]… nor have you any reason for accepting that any names at all exist… since to say that the thing is different from its name is to say that they are *two things*… whereas if the thing is the same as its name, then either the name is the name of nothing, or else if it is the name of something, it must be the name of the name, and not of anything else… and the One will be the One *of the One* alone, but also the One *of the name* alone."[11]

This last line has caused much anxiety among commentators on, editors of, and indeed transmitters of, the text of the *Sophist*. What the Eleatic Visitor means, I suggest, is simply a point about the inter-substitutability of synonymous names.[12] Given their uncompromising monism, Parmenideans must say that "One" and "Being" both name the same, and both are identical with what they are names of. If that is right, then by the indiscernibility of identicals it must mean that we can substitute "one" or being" or "name" for each other wherever they occur, without these substitutions making any difference to the meaning of the claims that they appear in. But that isn't so, even in the Parmenideans' own terms. "The One is the name of the

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[11] Reading *kai to hen ge henos hen on monon kai tou onomatos au to hen on* with the 1995 OCT.

[12] Klibansky and Anscombe make the same point in their posthumous edition of A. E. Taylor's *The Sophist and the Statesman* (London 1961), p.140 ff. With this reading of *Sophist* (244d12) *cf*. my *Reading the* peritropê: Theaetetus *170c–171c,* in: *Phronesis,* 51, 2006, 2, pp. 109–139, in which I argue that the *peritropê* argument also depends on the notion of inter-substitutability. That interpretation faced the objection that Plato could not have known about inter-substitutability. The objection is weak. There is every reason why Plato could not have read Leibniz, but no reason at all why he should not have worked out for himself at least some of the principles involved in Leibniz' Law. The present passage corroborates my claim that Plato both knows and exploits the principle of the inter-substitutability of identical terms. (As David Sedley has pointed out to me, another passage that also corroborates it is *Prot.* 355b.)

One" is something they want to say. But "the One is the One of the One" is not, and neither is "The One is the One of the name". They don't want to say these things, for at least two reasons. First, because these things sound like nonsense. (Notice the prominent role played in generating that nonsense by Parmenidean discomfort with the whole idea of an *of*-relation between a name and what it names, i.e. a representation-relation.) And secondly, because even if these claims are not nonsense, still each of them is supposed to be an *exclusive* truth (hence the word "alone" in my translation above). But they can't *both* be exclusive truths, because (if they make sense at all) they contradict each other.

Like Heracleiteanism, but of course for opposite reasons, Parmenides' view generates a deep paradox about the nature of representation, and hence about the nature of language in general. If Parmenides' theory is true, then it cannot be stated, any more than Heracleitus' theory can be stated if *it* is true.

However, Plato's main strategy against the Eleatic idealists in the *Sophist* is different from his *reductio ad absurdum* strategy against the Heracleitean naturalists in the *Theaetetus.* In the *Sophist* Plato does sometimes content himself with showing that Parmenidean idealism, like Heracleitean naturalism, has intolerable consequences, and reduces us to incoherence or silence. (So for example the *opsimatheis*, who deny in Parmenidean style that there are any general terms, "have their enemy who will contradict them at home", since they themselves are forced to use "to be", "separate", "from others", and the like as general terms: *Sophist,* 252c.) But this is not Plato's overall strategy against the Parmenideans. In fact, it cannot be.

It cannot be, because the Parmenideans themselves admit that the attempt to state their own doctrine reduces them to incoherence or silence. (Perhaps Heracleiteans would admit the same. If so, the argument of the *Theaetetus* needs to be taken further – and the *Sophist* takes it further.) The idea that there is a tension between what the Parmenidean is saying, and the fact that he is saying it, goes right back to Parmenides himself. In the lines of his poem that we call *DK* 28 B 8,50–52, Parmenides' Goddess describes her own words as "deceitful":

En tôi soi pauô piston logon êde noêma
Amphis alêtheias. doxas apo toude broteias
Manthane kosmon emeôn epeôn apatêlon akouôn.

At first sight, it appears that the Goddess is saying here that only her forthcoming words about "mortal opinions" are deceitful, and that by contrast what she has already said about "the truth" is not deceitful, but a "trustworthy word and thought". As a flatly literal reading of these three lines alone, that first impression is presumably correct. However, this ground is booby-trapped territory. Even the most inattentive reader of the fragments can hardly fail to be struck by Parmenides' predilection for arguing to the conclusions that only "is" can be said, and that "is not" cannot be said, by way of premisses that directly or indirectly say "is not". See, for instance, *DK* 28 B 2,3–8:

Hê men hopôs estin te kai hôs ouk esti mê einai,
Peithous esti keleuthos (Alêthei gar opêdei),
Hê de hôs ouk estin te kai hôs khreôn esti mê einai,
Tên dê toi phrazô panapeuthea emmen atarpon:
Oute gar an gnoiês to ge mê eon (ou gar anuston)
Oute phrasais.

If only "is" can be said, then we cannot also say that it *is not* possible for it *not to be*; for both these claims involve saying is "is not". And if "is not" cannot be said, then we cannot also say that this second road of inquiry is *panapeuthea*; for something is *panapeuthea* only if it is altogether-not-to-be-understood, which again involves saying "is not". Nor, for the same reasons, can Parmenides argue, at the opening of Fragment B 6, by way of the premiss that *esti gar einai, mêden d' ouk estin*. If nothing is indeed not, then by Parmenides' own principles we cannot say so.

My point is not that Parmenides here is incompetently falling over his own feet. My point is rather that Parmenides' argumentative purposes necessarily involve the subversion of the means that he is bound to take to those ends – namely, the means of language. Moreover, Parmenides shows every sign of being aware of the self-subverting nature of his own enterprise. The logic of monism requires Parmenides to identify thought and language themselves with what they are thought and language of, namely being itself. And we have

good evidence from Parmenides' own fragments that he does precisely that. "The same thing is there for thinking and for being" (*to gar auto noein esti te kai einai*), he says at *DK* 28 B 3, and "speech and thought and being must be: for being is, but nothing is not" (*khrê to legein te noein t' eon emmenai: esti gar einai, mêden d' ouk estin*) at *DK* 28 B 6,1–2. (For Parmenides to say that all three must "be" is, of course, precisely *not* for him to say that all three must "be" *independently of each other*. For him, for all three of them to be, is for all three of them *to be the same thing*.)

We have further evidence that Parmenides is committed to identifying thought and language with what they are thought and language of in his rather more obscure claim, in Fragment B 5, that "it is all one to me where I begin from: for I shall return there again" (*xynon de moi estin/ hoppothen arxômai; palin gar hixomai authis*). The point of this Heracleiteanly Delphic remark – Delphic at least as we have it, in the isolation of a one-line fragment – is, I suggest, that Parmenides' deduction of monism can start from anywhere. Any piece of language or thought, or any portion of the world, is equally evidence for his thesis that nothing can be coherently thought except being itself.

The argument is almost Bradleian. (No accident, of course; F. H. Bradley knew his Parmenides.) It is that properly analysed, any piece of language or thought or world at all will equally reveal the confusions involved in taking it to be really distinct from anything else that is real. For Parmenides the only possibilities are clear talk about The One, or confused talk about The One; confusion is possible, but falsehood is not. To be meaningful, language must be about what is; but what is is The One. So the more we clarify what we say, the more we see that we are really talking only about The One, and cannot be talking about anything else. The truth is, literally, everywhere. Enlightenment consists in coming to see the truth implicit in all the confused things we say, and in seeing how, when we leave our confusions behind, we will see that it is always The One that we have been talking about. Indeed, we will come to see that language itself is so much a part of this reality that talk about language being *about* reality comes to seem a mistake: thinking and speaking thoughts is already, insofar as it is anything real at all, not just *about* reality, but *identical with* reality. This way too we lose our grip on the whole idea of aboutness, reference, or

representation. Just as on the Heracleitean view, so also on Parmenides' view the ultimate truth turns out to be that language cannot really represent at all, it can only express.

The evidence-base for Parmenides' thesis is – everything. He is quite happy, for instance, to start from Plato's premisses:

> "What then?" said Parmenides: "If everything else necessarily partakes of the ideas, and if participation in an idea necessarily means being thought of a certain way, then don't you think that, by the same necessity, you must say either that everything is made out of thoughts and that all things think, or else that thoughts themselves are unthinkable things?" (*Parm.* 132c9–12)

Parmenides here states the conclusion of a dilemma that he thinks confronts Plato's theory of Forms, if that theory is presented in the naively mentalistic way in which, in the dialogue, Socrates has just presented it. Under pressure from the Third Man at 132b1, Socrates has suggested that the point of the theory of Forms is a point about the unity of our *thoughts* of things: it is because we can *think* of the same whiteness in indefinitely many different contexts that that whiteness can remain the same thing in all those contexts, without any question arising about whether whiteness itself participates in whiteness. The point of Parmenides' very tersely-stated response is that if Plato also keeps in play his fundamental thesis that the Forms are the key constituents of the world, then this move is bound to imply that by being constituted out of Forms, the world is constituted out of thoughts. Perhaps that view seems unpalatably counter-intuitive when offered without qualification: certainly it is bound to to Plato, since it is just Parmenides' own view. But then the only possible way to qualify it is to say that there is a distinction between thoughts in the usual sense of the word, and thoughts in the wider sense in which even a lump of earth, say, is allegedly a thought too. And then we have to say that some thoughts are, as it were, more "thoughtful/ mental" in nature, and others are less "thoughtful/ mental"; rather as Leibniz's monadology commits him to saying that while all of the world's constituents, the monads, are conscious, some monads are less conscious than others. Since this position is not noticeably less counter-intuitive than the hard-line claim that the world is constituted of thoughts, we should give up the attempt to appease intuition, and just stick, as Parmenides does, to the hard line.

Parmenides' method, just as much as Socrates', is elenctic: it is the elimination of confusions. When all confusions are eliminated, all we have left is all that can unconfusedly be said. But the only thing that can be unconfusedly said is being itself.[13] It can't even be unconfusedly said that this is the only thing that can unconfusedly be said. Nor can language, thought, or being be ultimately distinguished from each other, since insofar as they are real at all, they *aren't* ultimately distinct. Philosophy begins with the most obvious confusions, those of perception and tradition for example, and works upwards from them by drawing out of each of these confused sources what is unconfusedly true in it. But, Parmenides thinks, what is unconfusedly true in them is always the same one thing, being itself. Hence you cannot purify away the confusions latent in your starting-points in tradition, perception, and the like without so radically changing those starting-points as, in effect, to eradicate them. Ultimately this applies even to the starting-point that we are given by Parmenides' own elenchus. The point of philosophy is to eliminate confusions; but in the end, that means eliminating philosophy itself.[14]

In the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, Plato's vision of the final aims of philosophy is no less pure, but far less austere. From his earlier (and no doubt Parmenides-inspired) scepticism about the world of perception and change, as represented by *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and the "friends of the Forms" (*Soph.* 248a3 ff.), Plato has moved, by the time of these dialogues, to a view which he can present as making sense not only of the unchanging, but also of the changing world: a view to which it is central to claim, as I noted in answering question 4, that being is essentially power, the power to create.

If the alternatives are that no things mix, that all things mix, and that some do and some don't, Plato thinks the third alternative is obviously the one to take (*Soph.* 252e); if the alternatives are that no things move,

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13 Contrast, once more, the Parmenidean and Heracleitean extremes: on the one side the view that being is the only thing we can ever say, on the other side the view that being is something we can never say – something we should eliminate from our talk altogether (*Tht.* 157a–b).

14 "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)" L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* 6.54.

that all things move, and that some do and some don't, the third alternative is again the Platonic one (*Soph.* 249d1–4). And this is why the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* need to be read closely together – because their argument is one continuous and coherent movement of thought, expounding and rejecting two attractive but extreme views in turn, and then proposing what Plato takes to be a sane synthesis of everything that attracted us towards those two extremisms.

If either of those extreme views were right, it would not be possible, strictly speaking, for Plato so much as to present the argument of the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. Both Heracleitus and Parmenides in different ways imply the impossibility of genuinely meaningful utterance, because both in different ways attack the possibility of representation – the possibility that one thing should stand, semantically, for another. Heracleiteanism excludes this possibility because of the naturalism that it implies: which means, among other things, that the Heracleitean takes it that the world consists of nothing but sensations or experiences. Such things cannot be the ingredients of a credible theory of meaning. Even to speak of perceptions as representations, Plato thinks, we need to explain their representative properties by invoking the Forms. Hence the project of the *Theaetetus* is to demonstrate that Heracleiteans can provide no good theory of representation – by considering and rejecting what they might try to say to provide such a theory. And then the project of the *Sophist* is to show that the Parmenidean, who proposes the most influential objections to the whole idea of representation, can be refuted. At the heart of Parmenides' argument lies a doctrine about "is not" that Plato thinks is crucially mistaken.

So in the central arguments of the *Sophist* Plato – speaking much more directly and unambiguously than he does in the *Theaetetus* – takes on the refutation of this argument. And we come to my eighth question:

VIII. How does the *Sophist* explain non-being, negative statements, and falsehood?

As we might represent it today, Parmenides' argument is something like this:

1. If we can say "is not", then "is not" must be a meaningful phrase.

2. If any phrases are meaningful, it is because they refer to something. (The representation relation again.)

3. So if "is not" is a meaningful phrase, it must be a phrase referring to what is not. (1, 2)

4. But you cannot refer to what is not, for an obvious reason: because it is not something. Since it is not, it is not there to be referred to. (To repeat Parmenides' own words from DK 28 B 2,7–8: *Oute gar an gnoiês to ge mê eon (ou gar anuston) oute phrasais*.)

5. So "is not" cannot be a meaningful phrase. (3, 4)

6. So we cannot say "is not". (1, 5)

7. But talk about non-being, negative statements, and false statements all involve (attempting) saying "is not".

8. So talk about non-being, negative statements, and false statements are all impossible. (6, 7)

Plato's main attack is on (4), with preparatory disambiguations of (3). Regarding (3), he maintains that we need to make a distinction between different ways in which we might refer to what is not. Plato concedes to Parmenides that there is not and cannot be a Form of non-being. Being does not have an opposite, as Sameness and Rest have opposites, first because if it did, its opposite would have to be Non-Being "in itself" – about which Parmenides is simply right to say that there can be no such thing; and secondly because, for related reasons, a well-made division has to have positive characterisations on both sides of it. (As indeed I pointed out at the beginning.)

So what is the positive characterisation on the other side of the division with Being Itself? The answer is, of course, all the things that exist that are *other than* Being Itself: "We have shown what the Form of not-being actually is: for we have demonstrated the being of the Other, and how it is divided into small parts among all things, in respect of their relation to other things" (258d6–7). Each of these things can be positively characterised as whatever it happens to be; it can also be characterised as other than Being Itself. Neither of these characterisations is simply a negative characterisation. And this is how not-being can be: it can be wherever we replace the misleading negative term not-being, and replace it first with a positive characterisation of whatever it is we are talking about, and secondly with a contrastive (but not purely negative) characterisation of it as other than Being Itself.

Against Parmenides' step (4), then, non-being is possible, and so therefore is reference to non-being in negative statements, in what we call the identity sense of "is": "is not" can be truly said of things, when one thing *is other than* another. What about the predicative sense of "is" (as we call it)? Here too non-being is possible, and so therefore is reference to non-being in negative statements: "Socrates is not ugly" can be true, when Socrates is *something other than ugly*, e.g.[15] handsome. And finally, on these principles, false statement can become possible too: "Socrates is not wise" can be false, when the truth about Socrates, who is, is *something other than* "Socrates is not wise" (263d) – when, that is, our *logos* produces an image of how things are, which fails to represent how things are *as* they are.

This is quite a simple account, but – as Plato scholars have not failed to see – it raises some tricky questions. One problem is this: nothing we have said here covers what we call the existential sense of "is". In particular, we cannot analyse "Pegasus is not" as saying that "Pegasus is other than every thing". For that suggestion breeds immediate paradox, of a kind that is meat and drink to the Eleatics: it is surely odd to refer to Pegasus in order to say that Pegasus is not there to be referred to.[16]

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15 I take this "e.g." to be all the Stranger has in mind when he says, at 257d, that "there is a part of the Other which is opposed to the beautiful". He means no more than he says – that "other than beautiful" is one part of the Other, i.e. one way of spelling out or completing "other than…" In particular, he does not mean that when we say "other than beautiful" we must mean "ugly or middling in looks", that when we say "other than hot" we must mean "tepid or cold", that when we say "other than large" we must mean "small or equal" (*Soph.* 257b5), and so on. So he is not suggesting here what Mary Louise Gill and others have read into this part of the text, *viz*. the notion of an "incompatibility range". 257b5 is not evidence for that notion: it does not say "'Not-large' = 'middle-sized or smaller'", it says 'not-large' *no more means* 'middle-sized' *than* 'smaller'". To be sure, when something is other than F, it will also have *some* positive determination true of it – that is why "the not-beautiful is an opposition of being to being" (257e6). But Plato imposes no range-limits on what this positive determination may be. And that is just as well: we can truly say "The number 5 is not hot", meaning only that 5 is other than hot, and not at all implying the falsehood that "The number 5 is either tepid or cold".

16 Here Klibansky and Anscombe's first footnote on p. 174 of their edi-

Modern philosophers call this "the problem of empty names", a name which already hints at one of their best solutions to it (which is to ascend to the meta–language, and treat "Pegasus is not" as "'Pegasus' does not name anything"). Plato has nothing explicit to say about this problem in the *Sophist*. But he needs to say something about it, and preferably not just that Parmenides is right about this sort of not-being too, so that Plato has to admit the existence of every fictional being in Greek (not to mention barbarian) myth and literature. A better line is available to Plato. This is to treat being Pegasus as a matter of having a certain property or collection of properties, and then deny that anything (or at least, anything outside fiction) has those properties. (This is very like the other familiar modern solution to the problem of empty names, the one that leads Quine to parse "Pegasus is not" as "Nothing Pegasises".)

But, you might ask, *is* this solution available to Plato? Thanks to the work of Lesley Brown, Nicholas Denyer, Michael Frede, and others, it is now widely agreed that Plato does not make our modern distinctions between three senses of "is" – identity, existence, and predication. (The textual evidence that he does is at best scattered and controversial, while the textual evidence that he does not is strong and clear. Above all, if Plato recognised three distinct senses of "is", then by his own principles he would have to recognise three distinct Forms of being, which he plainly does not and could not possibly do.) I agree with this emerging consensus, which is why I have marked my mentions of these senses with the qualifier "what we call". But the trouble with my last paragraph's suggestion about how Plato might accommodate "Pegasus is not" is that it seems to commit us to treating some of his uses of "is" as importing identity (or non-identity) between two things, and other of his uses of "is" as saying that some thing has or lacks some property. If we say that, doesn't it follow that we are as good as admitting that there *is* a distinction in Plato between at least two different senses of *einai*?

Lesley Brown and Nicholas Denyer have argued that this does not follow. Brown puts it as a point about the "variable polyadicity"

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tion of Taylor's translation of the *Sophist*, elucidating 262e6–7, may elicit a wry smile: "That is, there must be a *subject* of which something can be significantly asserted or denied in every proposition, and mere *nothing* cannot be a subject." So if it is not *nothing*, what *is* the subject of this last clause?

of *einai*: *einai* can stand on its own, to do the work done by our "is" of existence; or it can be followed by a singular term, to do the work done by our "is" of identity; or it can be followed by a general term, to do the work done by our "is" of predication. Which of what we call the different senses of "is" is in play depends, for Plato, simply on whether the verb *esti* has any complement, and if so, whether that complement is a general term, like "beautiful" or "sitting",[17] or a singular one, like "The Beautiful Itself". Moreover, as very clear evidence that we have to deal with just one sense of *esti*, notice that Plato (and Aristotle too) both evidently think that "Socrates is handsome" entails "Socrates is", just as surely as "Socrates runs quickly" entails "Socrates runs".

I think Brown and Denyer's analysis is essentially right. I also think that further evidence for the Brown-Denyer thesis can be produced by turning to a ninth question:

IX. Why does Plato talk of a *sumplokê eidôn*?

Plato's weaving metaphor has not perhaps been taken as seriously by scholars as it deserves to be.[18] Confronted – by Parmenideans – with the question how it is possible for the whole of a Form to be present in more than one place, Plato's best answer is obviously not the sailcloth metaphor of *Parmenides,* 131b; it is the interweaving metaphor of *Sophist* (259e), *Theaetetus* (202b6) and *Cratylus* (388–389).[19] Think of particular things as *sumplokai*, the Forms as

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17 See Aristotle, *De interpretatione,* 21b6–13, and *Metaphysics,* 1017a25–30, for the analysis of "walks" (*badizei*) as "is walking" (*esti badizôn*), and the extremely revealing claim that this analysis is the logically perspicuous one – the one which shows the statement up as one which "signifies being" (*to einai sêmainei*). Both passages virtually read like commentaries on *Sophist,* 261e4–6, *esti gar hêmin pou tôn têi phônêi peri tên ousian dêlômatôn ditton genos*.

18 Though occasionally they also take it *too* seriously: Ryle claims in *Plato's* "*Parmenides*", in: *Mind,* 1939, that in the *Sophist* talk of *methexis* is completely replaced by talk of *koinônia.* And this is just untrue: see e.g. *Soph.* 255e6.

19 In responding to this challenge Plato also frequently resorts to the metaphor of letters – *Soph.* 253a, *Tht.* 202–203, *Polit.* 285c–d. This meta-

the threads that are thus interwoven:[20] then the question whether a thing X has a property Fness is the question whether the Fness thread is present in the interweaving that composes X. The difference between this question, and the question whether X *is* the Fness thread, is obvious. The difference maps the difference between predicating a Form of something, and identifying that thing with the Form; but it does not do so by laying down any doctrine about the verb to be; and it leaves it open that both predication and identification should be operations that involve being.

The interweaving metaphor very aptly shows, as the sailcloth metaphor did not, how it can be the *same* Form that is present in more than one thing: after all, the same scarlet thread can be present in more than one carpet. It is not even a weakness of the interweaving metaphor that the Forms stand in relations to each other: even a thread is a weaving-together of thinner threads.

> "He who is able to [perform divisions accurately] has an adequate sense of how a single idea is stretched right through many things, each of them lying apart from the others; [he sees too how] many ideas different from each other can be encompassed from the outside in a single idea, and again [how] a single idea can be composed by the twining together as a whole made of many ideas, and how many ideas are separated from all the other ideas at every point." (*Soph.* 253d–e)

As I have already suggested, the interweaving metaphor can also be used to make sense of the whole idea of language and imitations and images in general. Whether human or divine, images work by being interweavings of properties, Forms, where the interweaving in some sense *follows the same pattern* as the interweaving found in the

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phor might seem to face the objection that it takes for granted what it is supposed to explain, the type-token or Form-particular distinction. That objection seems misplaced to me: what the example of letters shows is rather that there are familiar cases where we are very happy to work with something like the Form-particular distinction, hence that this distinction is not as mysterious or puzzling as Parmenideans will want to suggest.

20 And in parallel to this, think of names too as interweavings of Forms (*Crat.* 388b13–c1): "A name, then, is a kind of instructive instrument, which separates being as a shuttle separates a web."

thing of which the image is an image. The crucial point about a true sentence, as we saw above, is that in one particular way, it matches the way things are; exactly the same can be said about an accurate image or representation. Images, whether linguistic or pictorial or otherwise constituted, repeat the patterns of the things that they image. As I said in answering question 4, this is in no sense a manifestation of deception or not-being; rather, it is just another way for the super-abundance of being to express itself. And the philosopher, the dialectician, is the person with the mastery of this craft of the separation and combination of *logos*:

> "*Str.* If someone is to give a correct demonstration of which of the kinds accord with which other kinds, and which do not, mustn't that person have a sort of knowledge of how to go through the *logoi*? And [likewise, if he is to show] whether there are some [kinds] that persist through all things, in order that they can mix together, and again [some other kinds, found in] the separations of things, these other [kinds] being the universal causes of separation?
>
> *Theaet*. How could he not need science – maybe almost the greatest science?
>
> *Str.* …Well, by Zeus! Have we stumbled without realising it on the science of free men [*cf*. *Tht*. 172d2]? Have we perchance found the philosopher first, when we were looking for the sophist? … The ability to divide by kinds, and avoid the mistake of confusing one Form with another, or the other with the first – shall we not say that this ability belongs to the science of dialectic?" (*Soph.* 253b8–d3)

Besides all these advantages of the interweaving metaphor, we can also deploy it to answer the other main objections of the *Parmenides* to the Forms – as I suggest in answer to my tenth and last question:

X. How is the *Sophist* an answer to the *Parmenides*?

Apart from the Sailcloth (which I have just considered under question 9), and the proposal that the Forms are concepts (which I considered in answering question 7), the two main objections to the theory of Forms in the *Parmenides* are the Third Man and the "greatest difficulty". The "greatest difficulty" is the problem how a world of Forms can be involved at all with a world of particulars, and especially,

how it can be known by particular minds. And this, of course, is exactly what the interweaving metaphor gives us a picture of. The world has an innate structure – the structure that it is given by the interweavings of Forms that are present in it – and understanding the world means mirroring this structure in our minds. (Plato would have understood immediately, and warmly applauded, Kepler's famous claim that understanding the cosmos means "thinking God's thoughts after him".)

As for the Third Man, this problem simply does not arise if you accept the picture of the Forms that goes with the interweaving metaphor. The key premisses in setting up the Third Man are the claims (a) that Fness is itself F (self-predication), and (b) that whatever is F, is F by partaking of Fness (participation). Suppose that we consider these claims in the light of the interweaving metaphor. Imagine a scarlet carpet. Any such scarlet carpet is scarlet *because it is an interweaving of scarlet threads;* and scarlet threads are themselves scarlet, but are not themselves scarlet because they are interweavings of scarlet threads (not at least in the way that the carpet is, though compare my remark above that even a thread is a weaving-together of thinner threads). By analogy, we should accept (a) the predication claim in the Third Man argument, but reject (b) the participation claim. *Not* everything that is F, is F by participation in Fness; for Fness itself is F, not by *partaking of* Fness, but by *being* Fness – just a scarlet thread is itself scarlet, not by having a scarlet thread running through it (which is how a carpet is scarlet), but by being a scarlet thread.

The interweaving metaphor can even dispose of the *Parmenides'* very first objection to the Forms, the question about whether there are Forms of mud, dirt, hair and the like (130c). The answer is that we might think so, if we think (in line with the one-over-many argument, naively understood) that wherever we have the same name we always and inevitably have the same Form. But the argument of the *Sophist* itself demonstrates that we don't have to think so (and accordingly, demonstrates that the one-over-many argument has its limitations, and needs to be handled with care). What the case of "is not" makes plain is the availability of either of two possibilities. The former is that not all names and other terms in our actual language are perspicuously assigned. The latter is that, alongside those features of the world which really do correspond directly to structuring Forms, there are also adventitious features of the world – features which emerge,

as it were as "spandrels", in virtue of the way the world is structured by the Forms (for this idea see e.g. *Polit.* 273b). Thus we get apparent features of the world such as dirt, hair, and other kinds of lowly matter, not directly because of the way the Forms are arranged, but as an indirect consequence of the way the Forms are arranged by *Nous* as the structuring of the world unfolds.[21]

In all these ways making sense of the *Sophist*, and (come to that) making sense of the sophist, is very literally a matter of watching Plato *making* sense: creating a theory of how, alongside the changeless world of the Forms, there can and must be a changing world of interweavings of those Forms. Not only the gods' interweavings, which constitute the world, but also our interweavings, which constitute *logoi* about – representations of – that world: either misleading and false images of it, like the sophist's, or faithful and accurate images, like those created by the person whom above all the sophist aspires to imitate: the philosopher.[22]

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21 That Plato will prefer the second of these possibilities is strongly suggested by his general aversion to positing verbal ambiguity, as noted by David Sedley: "In [Plato's] early dialogues Socrates' requests for definitions regularly (e.g. *Euthyphro,* 6d–e) ask for the *single* form common to all things that share the same name. And on this same basis, at *Republic* (596a) he enunciates the more overtly metaphysical one-over-many principle: any set of things that share a name falls under a single Form. This approach already seems to commit him to the… thesis [that] each name picks out a single reality at all its occurrences, even if that reality is a genus which contains specific differentiations" (D. Sedley, *Plato on Language*, in: H. Benson [ed.], *A Companion to Plato,* Oxford 2006, p. 224).

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