Maurizio Migliori

Plato's Sophist
Value and Limitation on Ontology

Lecturae Platonis 5

A cura di Maurizio Migliori

Volume 5

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Plato's Sophist

Value and Limitation on Ontology

Five lessons followed by a discussion with
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I wish to dedicate this work
To the memory
Of my dear friend
Mauro Mattioli

True friendship remains
One of the deepest emotions
That a human being can experience
Throughout his short life

Contents

Preface

First of all I must thank my friend and colleague Bruno Centrone for asking me to hold this round of lectures at the Department of Philosophy and Human Sciences at Pisa University. This has enabled me to achieve two results.

To begin with, the invitation to speak at such an esteemed university before so many eminent scholars and students keen to discover a subject matter in many ways "new" to them, has "prompted" me to examine more closely and review a whole host of data I had been poring over for some time. These elements are outlined here first, and are dealt with in more depth in response to the important issues arising from the debate.

Secondly, this opportunity has allowed me to appear in the series of *Lecturae Platonis* that I have been holding in Macerata for years, and which has had the privilege to host esteemed scholars such as C. Rowe, D. Sedley, G. Ferrari and (next year) S. Scolnicov. I would have never done a *Lecture* in my "home turf" as one of the main goals of this exercise is to foster debate and discussion among scholar and students that are used to other approaches. Only away from Macerata, then, would I be able to deal with this *Lecture* "fairly". I am happy to say that the experience in Pisa has further strengthened my belief that only when *in terra infidelium* – so to speak for a joke, can the resilience of one's own interpretational framework be truly put to the test.

The reader may appreciate this himself in the closing pages of this book, in the hefty section aptly entitled *Exchanges with the Author*.

At least, a special thanks to Marilisa Cannarsa for her help in editing work and to Alex Bygate for his kind assistance in the complete revision of the translation.

First Lecture

Plato's Writings and Dialectical Dialogues

To some extent my reading of the *Sophist* differs from tradition in both form and content. It is common knowledge that Plato's writing technique represents one of the central issues any Plato commentator will have to deal with at some point. It is both restrictive and misleading for the whole debate on the need for a fresh new interpretation on Plato to be merely confined to the, albeit crucial, question of his *Unwritten Doctrines*. The Athenian thinker has certainly "not written" his philosophy, as he claims himself in the *Seventh Letter*, 341 C: a simple effort to reconstruct his doctrine of ideas thoroughly will reveal this. Nonetheless, he has also written for sure about philosophy, and extensively to boot. It therefore becomes essential to understand the how, why and wherefore of his writing.

1. A necessary premise

An author is read in accordance with the way he writes. Hence, if he writes in prosody and is not read accordingly, much of what he has said is lost; if he writes to be read aloud, as Plato certainly does, and he is read mentally, much is also lost.

I "discovered" this aspect while studying *Parmenides*: after poring over the classification of arguments in the second part of the dialogue, I understood that Plato provides us with a clear suggestion that, once put into practice, helps reconstruct the framework of the arguments while leaving only a couple of residual issues (as proof that the model works). The suggestion is to be found in the answers of young Aristotle (who will become one of the Thirty Tyrants): mainly phrased as pauses (yes, forsooth, why not?) they sometimes turn into proper questions (what are you saying? What do you mean?). In this second instance they hint at problematic passage or a crucial issue. The point is that, reading the text in our

minds, we skip the youth's speech as it adds nothing to the furtherance of the reasoning and turn our attention to Parmenides' line of thought; by doing this we are unable to appreciate how the question interacts "theatrically" with the thread of the enquiry.

This example alone gives rise to a first suggestion: Plato is as good a teacher as he is master of the written form, maintaining that a writer is responsible for his works not unlike a father[1], and consequently never abandons his reader. In this sense we can talk of writings with a "protreptic" goal. I have already grappled with these thoughts before and laid them down in a more articulate and, hopefully, convincing manner in two essays[2]. Here, I shall briefly put forward those key arguments that can shed some light on the *Lecture* I suggest.

2. An extreme example

At times Plato is commonly known to perform operations in his dialogues that (seemingly) lack sense and anyway escape (immediate) logic. This often gives rise to random critical sniping: it is rather commonplace, then, for Plato scholars to chance upon interpretations whose baffling and unbearable "licence" demonstrate just how little reverence the original text is afforded.

Nonetheless, it is also fair to say that Plato himself does undertake some extreme deeds, such as, notably, making wilful mistakes (which he then points out, as all fine teachers do). For us to talk of "wilful mistake", I think three conditions need to be met first:

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[1] Cf. *Phaedrus*, 257 B, 261 A, 275 E, 278 A.

[2] *Tra polifonia e puzzle. Esempi di rilettura del "gioco" filosofico di Platone*, in *La struttura del dialogo platonico*, a cura di G. Casertano, Loffredo, Napoli 2000, pp. 171-212; *Comment Platon écrit-il? Exemples d'une écriture à caractère "protreptique"*, in *La philosophie de Platon*, sous la direction de M. Fattal, II, L'Harmattan, Paris 2005, pp. 83-118; Italian version: *Come scrive Platone. Esempi di una scrittura a carattere "protrettico"*, «Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e filosofia dell'Università di Macerata», 37 (2004), pp. 249-277.

1. the mistake must be manifest and not something we have inferred as a result of critical reasoning;
2. the mistake must be manifest from the viewpoint of Plato's logic; in short, the evidence must spring from the Author's words;
3. to establish the mindset we seek to illustrate, the text must contain a hint whose sole purpose is to allow the reader, who has meanwhile caught on to Plato's "game", to solve the mistake or at least understand its root cause. If this were not so we should think that, for all his preaching about educational caution, Plato is actually an irresponsible teacher for putting the philosopher reader in a position where he will be exposed to misleading information.

These three conditions are met in a passage in *Philebus*, 33 C - 35 C, which deals needlessly necessity with a pivotal concept in Platonic philosophy: namely, anamnesis.

Socrates seeks to stress the paramount role of the soul in all its affections, even those that are normally regarded as pertaining to the body; his argument aims to prove that the soul is the seat of desires, even physical ones such as hunger and thirst. To reach this conclusion**,** Plato must expound a treatment on forms of knowledge**,** drawing a distinction between 1) weak affections that escape the soul, in which case we experience no sensations, and 2) affections that seep from the body into the soul, thus giving rise to sensations. The *conservation* of such sensations is known as memory.

The first "oddity" is that Plato has embedded within such a straightforward discussion a wholly different issue, which seemingly lacks any connection whatsoever with the reflection underway here. Indeed, by taking on memory the boundary with reminiscence can be drawn (*Philebus*, 34 B 2 - C 2):

> SOCRATES – But do we not distinguish memory from reminiscence?
> PROTARCHUS – Perhaps.

> SOCRATES – And is this the difference?
> PROTARCHUS – What?
> SOCRATES – When the soul alone by itself, without the body, lives again and completely the sensations which she experienced in company with the body, we say that she has reminiscence. Or not?
> PROTARCHUS – Certainly.
> SOCRATES – And when she recovers again of herself the lost recollection both of some consciousness and of knowledge, those acts we must term reminiscences.

Socrates thus suggests a deep rift opens between memory, purely receptive and passive, and reminiscence, active and autonomous: this is an action undertaken by the soul alone; a strong feat, a "reliving", that is experienced at a sensorial plane and *on an intellectual level* in the empty space caused *in this case* by forgetting.

This analysis also seeks to explain the nature of pleasure and desire and their origin (34 C-D). An announcement of this kind seems baffling *in this context.*

The treatment below establishes that the seat of desires is the soul, for what is desired when the body is empty differs from what the body feels: namely, to be filled. Desire thus resides in the soul, which acts on the strength of sensation and memory (*Philebus*, 35 A 3 - C 1):

> SOCRATES – Then he who is empty desires, as would appear, the opposite of what he experiences; in fact, he is empty and desires to be full.
> PROTARCHUS – Clearly so.
> ***
> SOCRATES – And yet we say that he who desires, surely desires something.
> PROTARCHUS – Of course.
> SOCRATES – He does not desire that which he experiences; in fact he experiences thirst, and thirst is emptiness, and he desires replenishment.
> PROTARCHUS – True.

> SOCRATES – Then there must be something in the thirsty man which has some connection with replenishment.
> PROTARCHUS – There must.
> SOCRATES – But that cannot be the body, for the body is empty.
> PROTARCHUS – Yes.
> SOCRATES – The only remaining possibility is that the soul itself has some connection with replenishment by the help of memory; as is obvious, for what other way could that be?

Obviously, the text is plainly simple and straightforward. Unfortunately, though, it features a bizarre section that we have removed and marked with asterisks. This part raises an issue, the "first time", which appears not only "worthless" here but also unsolved. Yet, we shall see that it will be instrumental in spotting the slip Socrates makes at the end of the passage:

> SOCRATES – But how? Can a man who is empty for the first time, attain either by perception of replenishment or by memory to any apprehension, of which he has no present or past experience?
> PROTARCHUS – How can he do it?

Logically, the text rules out that memory may be resorted to. This claim is as unrequired by this reasoning as it is irrefutable, although it is expressly at odds with the solution put forward at the end of the section quoted. Having dismissed the idea that the soul may draw upon memory for the first time, Plato stresses that memory is the only way to explain desire.

Let us first say, however, that we are not looking at an unwitting mistake on Plato's part. Indeed, it is only thanks to the section marked with asterisks that our attention has been drawn: this is what forces us to acknowledge that the suggested solution is incorrect, as it does not apply to the "first time". Yet Plato also utters the rueful statement about «the only remaining possibility» and the question «for what other way could that be?». The underlying question is this: given that there is a "first time", if memory alone cannot always underpin the spiritual nature of desire, what else can we appeal

to? The watchful reader, who far from browsing the text is actually philosophizing along with it, ought to recall the "worthless" emphasis placed on the difference between memory and anamnesis, knowing that Protarchus can and must provide another answer based on the soul's active function.

This kind of process reveals a style of writing bent on urging the reader to *do* philosophy rather than *learn* philosophy. This goes some way towards explaining the framework of this otherwise absurd section.

Other examples of this seemingly paradoxical approach are to be found in the articles quoted. My interest at present is to show that we are witnessing a radically different style of writing from what we are used to: a writing that confronts the reader with "issues" while nonetheless providing the necessary tools to tackle them.

3. Neither True nor False

I now wish to put forward a second kind of observations to show that Plato is not lying, for sure, but is failing to tell the truth; rather, he speaks the truth to the extent and with the clarity that behoves his argument. This time I draw my examples from the *Apology*, a so-called "early work" in which Plato displays the cunning and drive of a skilled master, however.

This stands out with regard to the character of Socrates chiefly: Plato endeavours to defend him against charges of haughtiness and portrays him in such a manner that one speaks of a "Platonic" Socrates. At the same time Plato *must* adhere to the "historical truth", as handling a trial that resulted in a conviction required due care and attention. Hence, the pressure applied to his theatrical twist is such that it ultimately gives rise on a contradiction (though undetected by most, a testimony to the author's skill).

We are now in the second phase of the trial: once sentenced the defendant could propose an alternative punishment to the one requested by the prosecution, which in this case had called for the

death penalty. Diogenes Laertius[3] tells us that Socrates first proposed a 25 drachmae fine. When confronted with the judges' anger at the meagreness of his proposal, he then claims he ought to be kept at State expense. The outcome of this clash is that while Socrates had been found guilty by a vote of 280 to 220 in the first round, after his speech the judges voted massively in favour of the death penalty: 360 against 140. The narration is perfectly logical and convincing.

Things don't quite take this turn in the *Apology*, however, as Plato makes some low-key yet important changes. Socrates starts with reflecting on what is good and what is not, reminds the court of his merits, and finishes off by claiming that though penniless he is a benefactor to the city and should al least have more than the Olympic victor's reward of maintenance in the Prytaneum. As for the penalty, his position is clear-cut and ethically grounded:

> As I am convinced that I never wronged another, I will assuredly not do myself an injustice and I will not say to my prejudice that I deserve any evil and will not propose any penalty against myself (37 B 2-5).

Socrates is therefore unable to propose an alternative penalty as he *would do an injustice*. Plato thus provides the "true" motive behind what could be mistaken for haughtiness in Socrates: his master, a true philosopher and upright man, could not perform an unrighteous deed, and certainly not directed against himself. The facts, however, took a different turn and Plato cannot ignore them. Indeed, the contradiction looms at the end of this speech:

> Also, I have never been accustomed to think that I deserve to suffer any harm. Had I money I might have suggested an offence that I was able to pay, because I would not have been the worse, But I have none, unless you proportion the fine to my means. Perhaps I could afford a mina, and therefore I propose

[3] *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, 41-42.

> that penalty. But here are Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus, who bid me say thirty minae, and they will be the sureties. Let thirty minae be the penalty; for which sum they will be ample security to you. (38 A 8 - B 9).

The contradiction is out in the open, yet it could not be avoided for Plato had only two alternatives to choose from: he could either tell a lie but jeopardize his future credibility, as many eyewitnesses to the trial were still around, or he could refrain from defending his master at his own theoretical level. As the narrative of the story lends itself to this manoeuvre, Plato switches the order of the factors, placing the bid of maintenance at State expense on a theoretical level and reducing the counter-penalty of a fine to little more than a concession to friends. Yet the contradiction stands: the very unrighteous deed Socrates still ends up committing against himself is the one he had strictly ruled out beforehand. Anyhow, since most readers fail to notice this, Plato's literary and philosophical genius remains unvanquished (as is mostly the case).

Interestingly, this dialogue features another elaborate switch of data, this time pertaining to the actual charges. Diogenes[4] and Xenophon[5] record the wording of the indictment as based on two elements: Socrates 1) does not believe the gods of the state but introduces new divinities, *as well as* 2) corrupting the youth. Here Plato performs a dual operation. First, he keeps the indictment (obviously) but changes the order of the factors. The education issue thus becomes foremost, and thereon hinges Socrates' defence. In confirmation of the true state of things, though, the text says the charge of harming youth flows from the other, i.e. not believing in the same gods as the city (26 B). Plato then mentions in passing that the order in the indictment was: you do not believe in the gods of the city *and thus* you corrupt the youth; still, this does not alter the fact that the

[4] *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, 40.

[5] *Memorabilia*, I, 1.

charge pertaining to religion ranks lower in the defence framework (26 B - 28 A).

Plato actually pulls this off, also thanks to another operation he performs in this field. Socrates rightly recalls that old charges have been laid against him: even the judges have heard them since their earliest years, and Socrates fears them more than the accusations of Anytus and Meletus. Notably, mention is made of the *Clouds* by Aristophanes, first put on 24 years earlier in 423 BC, when the philosopher was 45 years old. There, Socrates is represented with two main traits: as a person who searches into things under the earth and above the heaven, and as one who turns the worse case into the better. In short, he is portrayed as a physicist and a Protagorean. The text does not say this is the actual accusation of Meletus, merely that it is rooted therein, but it does say this view breeds the conviction that, along with physicists and sophists, he too does not believe in the gods (23 D; cf. 26 D).

The consequence being that his defence is wholly grounded upon the blatant contradiction inherent in the charge of atheism (this is not the accusation raised by Meletus, though, but is the fruit of widespread public opinion), while stressing how Socrates sees his philosophizing as a kind of service to the gods (30 D - 31 A). The point here is that had Plato made Socrates deal with issues such as the relationship with God, holiness and unholiness, quite a different array of arguments would have had to be displayed. Moreover, these indictment elements were far too relevant to be left unaddressed: indeed, Plato put them on the agenda in *Euthyphro*, surely written at a time close to when the *Apology* was completed.

In short, this "minor" operation allows Plato to defend his master whilst preserving the substance of both prosecution and defence, all the while steering clear of issues he could not handle in the context of a public speech and would leave until a later dialogue. Judging from his mindfulness as to what can and cannot be said, his appreciation of the "how and when", and the freedom and skill he dis-

plays in weaving arguments and factual truths together, one is hard pushed to view this as an "early" work.

4. A Flaunted omission

One last observation centred on *Euthyphro* allows us to grasp another stock element of Plato's writing technique, albeit in its heightened form: the omission[6].

The dialogue is said to contain many definitions of holy. The first round of so-called definitions, though, is actually a sequence that by subsequent changes reaches back to a formula, first mentioned by Euthyphro, and later amended and revised: what all the gods love is holy, and what they all hate is unholy (9 D-E). However, this definition does not hold up against the overriding objection based on the alternative: is holy that which is loved by the gods or is it loved by the gods because it is holy? Perhaps too forcibly Plato puts forward an argument (10 A - 11 B) based on a distinction that will turn out to be decisive also for our reading of the *Sophist*: the difference between active and passive, between doing and suffering. The conclusion is that being loved is a mere attribute, a consequence that sheds no light on the nature of what is holy, which, in turn, is so in itself and thus is loved by the gods for what it is.

At this point, Socrates delivers a speech teeming with mathematical and geometrical references, odd for an "early" work, in which he suggests a diairesis, a speculative tool that we therefore encounter in Plato's works much sooner than scholars traditionally recognize. Justice is then divided into a part that attends to men and one that attends to the

[6] I do not confront again the issue of Plato's manifest decision not to "define" the Good; cf. on this subject M. Migliori, *Sul Bene. Materiali per una lettura unitaria dei dialoghi e delle testimonianze indirette*, in *New Images of Plato, Dialogues on the Idea of the Good*, edited by G. Reale and S. Scolnicov, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2002, pp. 115-149.

gods. This type of attending (a further diairetic passage) does not improve or benefit the recipients of such care, as this is impossible in the case of the gods, but amounts to partaking in the attainment of a result, such as servants do to their masters.

This leads us straight into the key issue: what work must men partake in for their actions to be holy? In other words, what are the results the gods seek to attain by the help of our services? Euthyphro's answer "they are many and fair" is idle as it can apply to other activities, such as war and husbandry. A specific answer must be sought that explains what these many and fair results the gods strive towards are. But this is where the dialogue stalls:

> SOCRATES – And of the many and fair things done by the gods, which is the chief or principal one?
> EUTHYPHRO – I have told you already, Socrates, that to learn all these things accurately will be very tiresome. Nevertheless let me simply say that: if someone is able to please the gods in word and deed, by prayers and sacrifices, these are holy actions, that are the salvation of private houses and public goods of the state; just as unholy actions, which are contrary to those loved by the gods, are the ruin and destruction of all (14 A 9 - B 7).

Significantly Euthyphro has plainly reverted to a previous definition: pleasing the gods in word and deed, by prayers and sacrifice. Rather than ask himself what goal might the gods urge men to attain, he repeats that holy is what is pleasing to the gods, while forgetting that this tells us nothing about the nature of holiness.

This could be regarded as a token of the deep-seated weakness in the traditional view of God, and it would not be farfetched. But Socrates' comeback is truly shocking:

> You could have answered in much fewer words the chief question which I asked, Euthyphro, if you had chosen to. But I see plainly that you are not willing to instruct me: indeed even now, just as you were about to, you drew back. Had you answered me I should have fairly (ἱκανῶς) learned of you what is the holiness. Now, as the loving follows necessarily

> the beloved, whither he leads, what you think is the holy and the holiness? (14 B 8 - C 5).

If we really seek to understand what is going on, we must withstand the spell of the dialogue and remind ourselves that neither Socrates nor Euthyphro exist, and that Plato's hand has wrote the words we are poring over; be it Euthyphro's *error* or Socrates' rebuke, when he retorts that another answer should have been given; this answer was possible and it would have clarified the definition of holiness fairly. The author knows this answer, indeed he makes Socrates say that had it been uttered, *i.e. if Plato had written it*, he would have known, *i.e. the reader would have read*, what holiness is. Yet the author is unwilling to say so! Still, he does suggest *the whereabouts* of the error responsible for bringing the dialogue to an "aporetic" conclusion.

5. An early conclusion

The examples could keep rolling in, but we must stop and think as to why Plato does all this. Here is not the place to reassess the whole question of Platonic writing. Let us simply record that he devises a style of written communication, which he refers to as unserious and playful activity both in *Seventh Letter* and in *Phaedrus*, going on to claim that a philosopher is

> the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily *much that is playful*, and that no written discourse, whether in prosody or in prose, deserves to be treated *very seriously* (*Phaedrus*, 277 E 5-8)[7].

And in *Seventh Letter*, 344 C 1 - D 2:

> So, every serious man must carefully avoid writing really serious things, lest thereby to prey those to the dislike and stupidity

[7] Cf. *Phaedrus*, 276 C 2-3; 278 D 3-6.

> of the people. In one word, our conclusion must be that whenever one sees a man's written compositions – whether they be the laws of a legislator or anything else in any other form – *these are not most serious things for him, if he is serious*: rather those abide in the fairest region he possesses. If, however, he put into writing these as really serious things, "then surely" not gods, but mortal men "have bereft him of his senses"[8]

For sure such amusements are not futile but most fair (*Phaedrus*, 277 E 1-2), written as reminders but also as treasure for others who follow the same path (*Phaedrus*, 276 D 4); the engagement is such that one's whole life can be dedicated to their pursuit (*Phaedrus*, 276 D 7-8). And yet they are only amusements. Being Socratic, Plato thinks that philosophy consists in both teamwork and personal discovery.

This always requires, and therefore warrants, great "educational forbearance" on the master's part, as he does not want to stifle the learner's (in our case the reader's) quest for truth by revealing it outright. This gives rise to a manner of teaching that (especially in its written form) always hints at the truth without disclosing it, divulging information that is true without being *the all-out truth*; instead, the reader's involvement is needed for processing and building on the information given. Plato makes use of the fabrications of his narrative technique to lay out a game that must be engaged in, *if one seeks to do philosophy*, i.e. if the text is to be thoroughly understood.

From the viewpoint of this "serious game" the Platonic corpus appears truly "protreptic" in that philosophy is put forward to urge the philosopher reader *to discover the truth himself with few suggestions*[9]. It follows that submitting ever more intricacies as the works progress will cause the selection of "true philosophers".

Written Platonic philosophy, then, can at the same time be said to be unwritten: notwithstanding its "accomplished" body of thought,

[8] Homer, *Iliad*, VIII, 360, XII, 234.

[9] Cf. *Seventh Letter*, 341 E.

Plato never truly "states" his theories, not even those universally ascribed to him such as the theory of Ideas.

6. Our dialogue

Having established that I intend to read the dialogue against this backdrop, what is the first, immediate follow-up to this argument? The answer is the necessary classification of the Sophist within an interlinked body of dialogues.

We are aware that Plato's writings are bound by no common thread, with an important exception: namely, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, and the first two texts (*Sophist* and *Statesman*) of an "unfinished" trilogy that was meant to include the unwritten *Philosopher*. These dialogues have a great deal of common elements.

A. *Theaetetus*, Sophist and *Statesman* feature the same characters and run in a sequence, a unique trait in itself: adjournment is a commonplace practice in Platonic dramaturgy, but a promise to rendezvous the next day (as in the closing lines of the *Theaetetus*) has *never* been followed up by an actual meeting (as in the opening of the *Sophist*).

B. The dialogues expressly refer to one another. This fact cannot be underplayed, not merely for its *uniqueness* but also because the citations often seem to have little inner justification and appear "self-serving". The fictional encounter in the *Parmenides* is quoted in the *Theaetetus*, 183 E, and in the *Sophist*, 217 C; the *Theaetetus* is recorded in the opening of the *Sophist*, 216 A, and twice in the *Statesman*, 257 D, 258 A; the *Sophist* is repeatedly recorded in the *Statesman*, 257 A, 258 A, 258 B-C, 266 D 5, 284 B 7[10], 284 C and 286 B.

C. All these works tie in with Eleaticism, with one key footnote: no reference has been made to this school prior to the *Parmenides*. A "naïve" reading of the Platonic text would suggest either a complete lack of

[10] Particularly, this ἐν τῷ σοφιστῇ seems a cross-reference to a text, not to a previous discussion.

interest or gross ignorance on the Author's part; unlikely for a thinker who has travelled Italy, knows Gorgias, and has fully grasped the connection between Eleaticism and Sophistry[11].On the other hand, if we are reasoning in terms of an extremely well-crafted form of writing, intent on measuring the information the bare necessities, one understands why this school is only introduced formally – starting with the dialogue in praise of its master and founder – when the issue of "dialectics" is to be made explicit. Eleaticism is recalled later on in *Theaetetus* but the argument is conducted along the Heraclitean-Protagorean axis and the Eleatic question is "adjourned" (183 C - 184 B). Indeed, a stranger from Elea plays the role of master both in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. Then, all falls silent: on the subject of Eleaticism Plato goes from total silence to mighty praise in the dialectic works, only for it to sink into oblivion anew.

At this point, if we consider these dialogues as a single bloc, the reasons for their peculiar cross-referencing become clear in the light of that unwritten *Philosopher*, which seems to be the true destination of this "Eleatic" development. The *Parmenides* amounts to a preface, instrumental in showing the complexity of Platonic dialectics, which has its own early Eleatic origin. Then the *Theaetetus* sets out the theme of science, although dealt with from a chiefly "Socratic" viewpoint; the interlocutors consider the outcome far from unsatisfying:

> SOCRATES – But if, Theaetetus, you should ever want to be pregnant again of something else after those, and you will become so, you will be full of better things for the present investigation, and if not, you will be more sober to other men and gentler, because you wisely don't fancy that you know what you don't know. Indeed,

[11] Cf. M. Migliori, *La filosofia dei sofisti: un pensiero posteleatico*, «Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e filosofia dell'Università di Macerata», 33 (2000), pp. 9-30; *Gorgia quale sofista di riferimento di Platone*, «Giornale di metafisica», NS 21 (1999), pp. 101-126.

> this is all my skill can do; I can no further go... Tomorrow morning, Theodorus, let us meet again here (210 B 11 - D 4).

It appears that, having taken Protagorean relativism apart and struck down certain definitions of science – deemed unsatisfactory and inadequate – the work done so far would still be highly esteemed even without further progress; however, in the event of an added treatise its true worth would emerge. Still, one cannot go any further *with Socrates*: this is as far as his art will go. In fact, he agrees to meet the next day Theodorus, the man responsible for bringing along the Eleatic philosopher who will take them beyond Socratism towards the *Philosopher*.

While upholding the logical-dramatic scheme of the *Parmenides*, this combination of Eleaticism and Socratism becomes essential in its "negative" version for defeating the foe. A philosophy that can beat Sophistry can only be framed if the its original instruments are employed. This requirement is expressed at the very beginning of the *Sophist*, embedded in a paradoxical question by Socrates, who wonders whether the Stranger from Elea is not perhaps a god in disguise. Theodorus takes this question seriously, stating that his friend is not of the disputatious sort and is not a god at all, but a philosopher (*Sophist*, 216 A-C). In this way Plato stresses that Elea yields as many terrible disputants as great philosophers: both Gorgias and Plato tap into Eleaticism with two widely diverging outcomes.

As evidence of the writing technique we have pointed out beforehand, our dialogue continues the thrust of the foregoing *Theaetetus*, albeit tacitly. The issue of science is taken up once again, though differently from the previous discussion, as this time it is an enquiry into the figure of the philosopher, which *seemingly* takes its cue from the fact that Theodorus actually refers to the Stranger from Elea as a philosopher twice (*Sophist*, 216 A-C). In reality this conceals some "trickery" as Plato believes science to coincide with dialectic philosophy. Thus the enquiry of *Theaetetus* is pursued, and diairesis is therefore employed to distinguish the figure of the philosopher from kindred ones: first one

must tell whether sophist, statesman, and philosopher are regarded as one and the same or separate figures. Purposefully, the Stranger's first claim is that they are regarded as three distinct figures (*Sophist*, 217 B), and by quite a length. As if to confirm the deep-rooted bond among this set of dialogues, Socrates mocks Theodorus at the beginning of the *Statesman* for rating the three issues all at the same value and placing them in perfect sequence, as if in an arithmetical ratio (1, 2, 3). Instead they are actually three separate concepts that are more detached from one another than in an arithmetical ratio (1, 2, 4) (*Statesman*, 257 A-B).

At the same time, these terms often overlap and merge: it is no accident, then, that as the *Sophist* progresses we shall come across both the Statesman and the Philosopher, just as the Sophist and the Philosopher are also encountered in the *Statesman*[12].

In short, a clear design can be said to emerge from the set of dialogues:

– after an historically accurate introduction that provides an outstanding example of dialectic philosophy (*Parmenides*)

– the issue of science is confronted, thereby ousting Protagorean relativism (*Theaetetus*),

– and the dialectic process is first employed to mark out the Sophist's opposite character (*Sophist*),

– then to highlight the features of a character that has much in common with the Philosopher (*Statesman*),

– and, ultimately, to attain the Platonic solution (the unwritten *Philosopher*)[13].

[12] About the presence of the philosopher in the *Statesman*, cf. M. Migliori, *Arte politica e metretica assiologica. Commentario storico-filosofico al "Statesman" di Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1996, pp. 349-354.

[13] About the reasons for not writing this dialogue, cf. *Arte*..., pp. 369-371.

Second Lecture

The Sophist's Manifold Nature

We have already said that this set of dialogues is marked by a common bond. Even the very existence of the *Sophist* is only fully grasped as from the *Theaetetus*. In dealing with the figure of the scientist, i.e. the philosopher, it is necessary to proceed dialectically. In fact, the scientist must be set apart from other figures by means of a double manoeuvre from those whom it is detached and opposed to, and from those whom it is close to and may resemble. Evidently, the diairetic process takes effect even before it has been laid out as a theme.

We find evidence of this just as the enquiry starts to show signs of strain: in fact, with regard to the true, not fake, philosophers (216 C 5-6): 1) some think nothing of them and others can never think highly enough; 2) sometimes they appear as statesmen and sometimes as sophists; 3) sometimes they seem no better than madmen. As we can see, the distinction surrounding their nature calls at once upon the sophist and the statesman.

1. Introduction to the Diairetic Method

Let us briefly go over the narrative context of the dialogue. The encounter involves a set of characters with markedly different roles. Two of them are as important in their own right as they are inconsequential to the narrative flow: Socrates, now elderly and nearing his sentence, and his dear friend Theodorus, a distinguished mathematician from Cyrene. The latter is responsible for drawing the other two interlocutors into the dialogue.

Having made his first appearance in the dialogue bearing his name, young Theaetetus is set to become one of the greatest mathematicians of his time. He has the same age his friend and future Academy master Young Socrates, whose character is quiet in the

present and in the foregoing dialogue, but is set to become the Stranger's sole interlocutor in the following dialogue, the *Statesman*.

The second character is the mysterious Eleatic visitor, a disciple of Parmenides and Zeno (216 A), an unlikely third-generation Eleatic heretic. Speaking of him, Theodorus claims he is a true philosopher (216 A 4) and that he is not a god at all, although like all philosophers he is divine (216 B 8 - C 1). For this reason he may speak of philosophy and thus allow us to further our enquiry on *episteme*. This conceptual context differs radically from the Socratic one in *Theaetetus*, as it is also locked in lively contest with Eleatic philosophy whose dialectical framework it nonetheless exploits.

The problem is presented in a classic Platonic manner, as an issue regarding the link between names and things: given that there are three names (sophist, statesman, and philosopher) one must establish whether there are also three genera (τὰ γένη, 217 A 7). The issue revolves around defining the nature of the sophist, since Socrates claims there is understanding about the name. Let us see, then, whether such understanding also exists about the thing itself through a *logos*[1].

> We ought always for every subject reach an agreement about the thing itself through a definition, and not merely about the name without the definition (218 C 4-5).

The next issue to decide on relates to the method of inquiry, its alternatives being the development of a lengthy speech or a dialogue with an interlocutor. Significantly, the model evoked for this purpose is the one from the second part of the *Parmenides*, i.e. the alleged dialogue conducted by Parmenides before a much younger Socrates (217 C). This reference can help us to grasp a number of key factors more easily.

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[1] Though normally untranslatable, we shall translate this term with "definition", but "reasoning" or "explanation" can also apply.

First off, the Eleatic master is on no accounts handed the opportunity to develop a Socratic maieutic practice. As extensively laid down in the *Theaetetus*, the specific nature of this method lies in inquiry through discussion.

Secondly, the methods set out *here* as alternatives do not differ that radically: the first one is expressly presented as "talking to oneself" (αὐτὸς ἐπὶ σαυτοῦ, 217 C) while the second as proceeding by the method of question and answer (217 C). Plato clearly believes that the dialogue as a method for inquiry does not necessarily imply conducting conversations out loud.

Thirdly, the master from Elea replies consistently with this formulation (217 D - 218 A). He claims to prefer to talk with another when he responds pleasantly, otherwise he would rather talk to himself (τὸ καθ᾽αὑτόν, 217 D 2-3). He then goes on to explain himself better still. He can either spin out a long soliloquy (κατ᾽ ἐμαυτόν, 217 E 2) or engage in conversation with another, but feels ashamed lest he gives the impression he wants to show off. Yet there would be a valid reason for this: regardless of how the matter has been framed, the problem will certainly require a very long speech. At the same time, he feels that refusing the courteous request of persons whose society he is a newcomer to, especially after what Socrates has said, may seem rude and worthy of a savage. For this reason the question and answer method shall be chosen and young Theaetetus should respond.

Groundbreaking issues are clearly not at stake here, and neither are we faced with a clash between sophistic and Socratic methods. The choice merely hangs on reasons of "social" opportunity.

The Stranger suggests starting from the Sophist but, given the complexity of the matter, the method to be applied had better be tested beforehand on some simple, easier and well known thing, such as the angler. This choice is not accidental, though, as the opening sequence is akin to the one in the sophist's first diairesis for they are both hunters.

The diairesis of the angler is not devoid of interesting elements. Plato, for one, claims that productive art includes powers which materially produce things, along with imitative art, for both cause previously non-existing things to exist. Plato has thus succeeded in drawing our attention to a distinction that is most useful in the way the sophist diairesis is actually structured. Indeed, sophistry as imitative art is finally going to appear, in the more philosophically relevant and conclusive diairesis as productive art.

In that occasion, this passage, along with the definition of productive art as an activity that yields new things, will be expressly recalled (265 B).

At the start of the diairesis, furthermore, the whole class of knowing and learning, along with trade, fighting, and hunting, are placed in the sphere of acquisitive art (217 C). Lastly, Plato has already raised the issue he will tackle throughout the dialogue, when he speaks of a transition from not-being to being.

Let us now consider the example of the diairesis[2] of angling.

art
productive *acquisitive*
by exchange *by conquest*
struggling *hunting*
lifeless *living things*
on land *in liquid*
air *water*
by nets *by strokes*
at night *by day*
from above *from below*

[2] To make the trees easier to read, the subsisting diairesis element is in italics, the discarded one in bold.

The outcome of the diairesis is that the angler possesses an acquisitive art: that of acquiring by conquest hunting water animals, fishing by strokes in the daytime upwards from below.

The nature of this diairesis shows that we are talking, at one, of a concrete art and the Idea thereof. The distinction here is manifestly impossible. Without empirical knowledge, however, this process would even be unable to start, yet the point of arrival is a definition surrounding an Idea. Besides, Plato draws our attention to one of the problems that besets a diairesis, i.e. the limits of language; the text itself emphasizes that hunting after lifeless things has no appropriate word (220 A).

Finally, with his repeated emphasis that the attributes stated represent a mere half of those yielded by the analysis, the Author introduces a set of methodology problems that will be clarified in the *Statesman*, as we shall see in the *Fifth Lecture*:
a) that the division must be twofold, *insofar as possible*;
b) that the sundered and cast off part must never be forgotten.

This procedure has not only brought about an understanding of the name, but also the *logos* of the object itself has been suitably grasped (221 B 1-2). On this basis, one can move on to the next diairesis of the sophist.

The procedure is made gradually more intricate, though, as we come across four variants of the diairetic tree, whence a total of seven definitions spring forth. Bearing in mind that Plato's final diairesis is not only new and radically different, but also turns out to be dual, one can see how the complexity of the procedure is great, a fact that cannot be stressed enough.

For his part, Plato keeps addressing the complexity of the topic: he forthwith speaks of this art as many-sided (223 C), often making the point again (226 A; 240 C); this also explains the repeated claims about this figure that is so hard to "catch" (218 C-D; 231 C, 236 D, 241 C, 261 A) yet arouses such wonder (τὸν θαυμαστόν, 225 E 4, 236 D 1).

2. The First Three diairesis of the sophist

The **first diairesis** (221 C - 223 B) provides us with the **first definition**: *the sophist is a hunter after rich young men*.

Sophistry is an acquisitive art that conquers through hunting living-land-domestic animals, using persuasion in private, claiming to do it for virtue but actually aiming at payment in money.

This is his diairetic tree:

art
productive *acquisitive*
by exchange *by conquest*
struggling *hunting*
lifeless *living things*
in liquid *on land*
tame wild
by violence *by persuasion*
in private in public
for recompense as a gift
with pleasure *claims to do it for virtue*
for maintenance *but aims at payment in money*
art of flattery *sophistry*

In developing this diairesis we have abided by the pace of Platonic exposition. Notably, if set against the foregoing diairesis, Plato appears to have switched the order between animals dwelling in liquid or on land, thus allowing the right-hand line to keep forth. Even so, the progression thereafter is not straightforward and does not always continue in the same direction.

The problem is that Plato later suggests always taking the part to the right (*Sophist*, 264 E). Rather than being driven by theoretical motives, this suggestion rests manifestly on technical and formal grounds. The figure above clearly shows that, although the use of italics does provide some assistance, the framework is much harder to fathom if any other process is pursued.

Besides, in this diairesis Plato begins to wake us up to the truth that the diairetic process ought to be much more complex in practice. When discussing the hunt of tame animals the Stranger outlines several problems; these include man not being a tame animal or not being hunted. Theaetetus obviously puts forward a solution that speeds up the process, but it is easy to see that any other answer would have doubtlessly raised other different considerations (222 B).

The truth is that here we encounter a concise summary of a lengthy analysis and discussion, which Plato has conducted orally and certainly could not render in the dialogue. Anyhow, the first sophist's definition displays a number of negative features, such as his yearning to seize (let alone "kill" as in hunting) or his nature as a sham educator, wilfully deceiving for the sake of material gain from this fraudulent activity.

The **second diairesis** (223 C - 224 E) provides us with **four definitions** that are variants of the *sophist merchant and manufacturer of cognitions for the soul*. Sophistry is an acquisitive art whereby goods are exchanged by selling both own products and those of others, taking place in the city or trading with another city (wholesaler), and such are cognitions for the soul and about virtues.

art
productive *acquisitive*
hunting *exchange*
of giving *selling*
direct selling *mercantile*
own products *products of others*
retailer *wholesaler*
for the body *for the soul*
pleasantness *cognitions*
of other arts *of virtues*

The development of this diairesis is far more complicated than this scheme suggests, though. First we are told this is the "second" definition after the one of the sophist as hunter of rich young men (224 C 9 - E 4), but a third definition is made to follow thereafter (τρίτον, 224 D 4), emphasiz-

ing that products may be exchanged as well as self-made and this is repeated twice (224 E). As it is, we are faced with two different steps on the same diairetic tree:

5a	direct selling	*mercantile*	
6a		own products	*products of others*

5b	direct selling	*mercantile*	
6b		*own products*	products of others

These are thus the second and third definition, in Plato's own words. However, he presents *three* models of trader in the end summary:

> In the *second* place, he was a merchant in the cognitions of the soul … In the *third* place, he has turned out to be a direct seller of the same sort of cognitions?… Yes; and in the *fourth* place, he sold the cognitions which he himself manufactured (*Sophist*, 231 D 5-10).

It appears, then, that the "second" one is indeed the merchant, without distinguishing model A (trading in other people's products) from model B. Moreover, another two models (c and d) are added: the third has become the direct seller of other peoples' notions while the fourth is the direct seller of his own products, warranting the diagram below:

5c	*direct selling*	mercantile	
6c	own products	*products of others*	

5d	*direct selling*	mercantile	
6d	*own products*	products of others	

It seems then that *Plato's own text* contains four variants of the same diairetic tree, all arranged in a "wilfully" untidy manner. Still, contrary to appearances, all the terms of the variants are laid out, although the reader alone can reconstruct the four models *by working on the text*.

Plato may well partake in this "game" as he had forewarned *the philosopher reader* of the scant importance of these variants:

> In the third place, I believe it's impossible to call by any name other than that used just now he who settles down in a city, and by purchasing or by making himself some cognitions about these items, intends to live by selling them… the part of the acquisitive art which exchanges, by retail or selling own products, both ways, whatever the selling of notions about these subjects, you will always, evidently, call it sophistry (224 D 4 - E 4).

It is clear that, in the same diairetic diagram, small adjustments may yield different kinds of definitions.

Also, when we talk about "game", we are justified by Plato himself, for he

a) ultimately presents us as second definition the one he had yet defined as second;
b) he presents as third and fourth variants he has not previously mentioned;
c) he leaves out the third variant of the first list in the final summary, which is restricted to the main three models;
d) but the models are four, and they cannot be otherwise, for the reason that the relation is between two couples of intertwined terms.

As for the resulting figure, it is a far more positive sophist than the previous one who, as we have seen, was a hunter and a fraudster. There is no harm in selling useful products at the right price, quite the opposite. Nonetheless, it is a "servile" activity also because this "own production" is solely performed with sales in mind.

Another point of note is that in this diairesis Plato replaces the "exchange-conquest" pair presented in the first diairesis with the immediate pair "hunting-exchange", using the second term in "fighting-hunting". These are also signals as to how the diairetic process ought to shun pointless formalisms. The modus operandi is somewhat akin to equations: a good teacher, while urging his pupils not

to leave out any passages, duly skips the more elementary ones during a lecture. Plato himself confirms this to be the case in the Statesman, where he draws attention to the techniques of the diairetic method and the pitfalls of an exceedingly hasty process:

> STRANGER – We had better not cut off a single small part from many larger parts nor act without reference to Ideas, but the part should be also an Idea. To separate off at once the subject of investigation, it is fine if only this separation is rightly made; and just before you thought you were right and hurried the steps, because you saw that you would come to man. But chip off too small a piece, my friend, is an unsafe procedure; it is safer to cut through the middle; which is also the more likely way of finding Ideas, that is the principle in our philosophical enquiry. (*Statesman*, 262 A 8 - C 1).

Also in this case we are clearly confronted with technical advice, aimed at preventing senseless risks of error.

The **third diairesis** (224 E - 226 A) provides us with the **sixth definition** (fifth in the final summary, though, for we know Plato to skip one): *the sophist is an eristic*. Sophistry is an acquisitive art of conquest that, by struggling fought in controversies and carrying out disputations about justice and injustice in private and with Eristic art, yields monetary gain.

art
productive *acquisitive*
by exchange *by conquest*
struggling hunting
competition *fight*
violent *controversy*
forensic *disputation (in private)*
about many subjects informally *about justice / injustice (eristic)*
chatting *sophistry*

The difference is that, while "chatting" affects all subjects and is done for pleasure, wasting time and money, this sophistry takes an interest in

private disputations, deriving great wealth from them. Two things are emphasized here: on the one hand the skilfulness, itself amplified throughout the diairetic proceedings in the prominence awarded to the possessor of Eristic techniques, who is juxtaposed to those lacking them (225 C); on the other hand is the issue of money-making, further heightened in the wording of the definition that sets off from this very point (226 A).

One must draw attention to the Author's expository learning, for he separates the two diaireses "by conquest" (the 1st and 3rd) with one of exchange, so as also to underscore its distance. In fact, notwithstanding the money-making, the first sophist is an "educator", this one is a kind of antilogy expert who, rather than practicing in courts of law, favours private disputations, handling fundamental issues such as justice and injustice.

3. The Fourth Diairesis

The **fourth diairesis** (226 B - 231 B) provides us with the **seventh definition**: *a sophist of noble stock, purifier of the soul*. But we cannot place it along with the others sequentially.

It is fair to say that all evidence indicates that Plato seeks to steer us towards another frame of reference. Indeed the Stranger begins by quoting a proverb to say that this "many-sided animal" cannot be caught with one hand only. Yet, if it is to be caught, another track must be tried in its pursuit (226 A-B). It is clear that the object here is not the same as with the foregoing diaireses: another hand is required; there is *a likeness* to be found.

Another factor supports this break: the fourth diairesis is very long, taking up the same space as the other four put together. If this factor alone does not make it the most important, it is certainly the one that concerns the Author most. Indeed, the diairesis opens with a *sunagogè*, an example that groups sundry activities together, seemingly different but with a common feature: they are all examples of the art of distinguishing. And it is this factor from which the diairetic model sets off, not from art as in the other diaireses.

art of distinguishing
the good from the wicked (purification) like from like
the body *the soul*
for evil chastisement *for ignorance teaching*
education instruction
for whom supposes that he knows of handicraft arts
admonition *refutation*

Here, Plato also explains through a parallel body-soul reflection that disease is a kind of disagreement occurring in kindred elements, whereas ugliness as a class – unique class, it is emphasized – is a lack of measure and a deformity.

Indeed, in the souls of bad men all opinions, desires, pleasures, angers, and reason are always in contrast whilst the Stranger believes that they are necessarily akin (228 A-B). In this picture, ignorance amounts to an "involuntary" want of measure, as the mind is bent on truth but misses its mark, so it appears ugly, ungainly, and lacking in measure. Instead, intemperance and vices are akin to a disease of the soul (228 C-E).

The main thing, though, is that we are here presented with an art which seems not to fit into the pattern outlined so far, to the extent that we are hard pushed to state clearly if it belongs to the acquisitive or productive art. Actually, one simply needs to go back to the idea of "transition from not-being to being" seen in the angler's diairesis (219 B) to understand that it is a productive art[3]. This conclusion, however, must be attained by the reader himself through his own reasoning, as the text makes no reference to it. The reason for

[3] In the light of the clarifications made in the first diairesis in the *Statesman* (258 B - 260 B), perhaps it had better be placed in the diairesis of critical theoretical science. This is merely a thought as to what is "possible", though, which we cannot develop here.

this will become clear after the last diairesis, where we shall witness shortly how the productive art become that of reference.

Meanwhile, the distinctiveness of this odd strain of sophist appears somewhat flaunted: this character tackles the decisive kind of ignorance:

> this sort of ignorance is separate, large and bad, and may be weighed up against all other sorts… to suppose knowing something that is not known (229 C 1-5).

These sophists

> seem to think that all ignorance is involuntary, and that who thinks himself wise will not learn any of those things that he supposes to know (230 A 6-8).

Besides, they employ a method of refutation to handle the matter, in the belief that a fatherly warning does not go far enough:

> They ask questions about subjects that a man thinks he is saying something but is really saying nothing, then easily test the inconsistent opinions of these men who are wandering here and there; these they then collect by reasoning and comparing them to one another, show that they are in contradiction with themselves in the same things about the same issues and in the same respect. They, seeing this, are angry with themselves and grow gentle towards others (230 B 4-9).

It is noteworthy how this last sentence closely recalls the conclusion in the *Theaetetus* on Socratic maieutics (210 B 11 - D 4) quoted in the *First Lecture* above. The final assessment is very clear-cut: just as physicians consider

> that the body will not receive benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so they thought the same about the soul. It will not receive benefit from the offered knowledge until someone, with a refutation, induces the refuted man to feel ashamed and purging him of opinions that hinder the learning purifies him and makes him think that he knows only

> what he knows, and no more… For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we must admit that refutation is the greatest and more effective kind of purification; and we must think too that he who has not been refuted, even if he happened to be the Great King himself, being unpurified in the greatest things, is uninstructed and disgraceful in those things in which he who would be truly happy ought to be purest and fairest. (230 C 4 - E 3).

Further evidence of this character's oddity can be found when the Stranger of Elea is worried of ascribing this purifying art to the sophists, lest they are assigned too high a credit. He therefore points out that these activities are much kindred, though the likeness is reminiscent of that between a wolf and a dog, namely between the fiercest and gentlest of animals. Still, great care is called for in this sort of comparisons, seemingly tenuous, as likenesses can be misleading (231 A-B). Only with these provisos does the Stranger accept such a character as the sophist of noble stock (231 B). Unlike the previous ones, he indeed seems a true educator, chiefly interested in elevating the pupil's soul and laying down the conditions for the attainment of knowledge and virtue, while paying no heed to money.

Dwelling on all these qualms and reservations has shaped a Sophist figure whose features are distinctly chiselled out, namely:

– *he is an educator who deals with knowledge;*
– *he believes firmly that ignorance is involuntary;*
– *he shows pupils their own limits;*
– *he brings out the contradictions in their own statements,*
– *so as to purify them with the discovery of their own "not knowledge"*
– *thus making them more demanding of themselves*
– *and more understanding of others*.

All this cannot but bring Socrates to mind.

On the strength of its "painful" nature, this presence must lead us to think that Plato knew he could not avoid this positive and celebratory reference to his master, friend and truly disinterested educator.

We have found only one reason to explain this "necessity": in this first section the Author seeks to present a somewhat exhaustive classification of the sophists operating in his day.

We may then assume that for his contemporaries every one of these figures had to correspond to a distinct character. Nonetheless, given the dearth of our sources, this kind of name game is downright hazardous for us, if not impossible[4].

Were this argument, quite legitimately, rejected, one should then undertake to identify the reasons that led Plato to deploy an "odd sophist" such as Socrates.

If it is accepted, however, this passage can be seen as evidence of the Author's fairness: driven by his will to recreate the "types" of sophist, he cannot earnestly leave his master out. At the same time, in an attempt to steer clear of any confusion that would have been unbearable to him, he repeatedly underlines (again, in the final summary in 231 E) the problems this odd presence evokes: from the wolf and dog comparison, via the opposition of functions, to the diversity of the diairesis, everything points at the need to set apart this character from the previous ones.

Finally, as evidence of the absolute anomaly of this subject, when shortly before the last diairesis Plato recalls the previous ones belonging to the acquisitive art, only the hunter, the fighter and the merchant (265 A) are cited.

There is one last, important observation to be made. We have omitted from the diairesis a number of passages that have little bear-

[4] For instance, I used to believe (quite wrongly) that Hippias might be among those importing and selling all kinds of wares; now I am quite sure it is Protagoras, since a practically identical definition is found in the dialogue bearing the same name (313 C-E). As for the first subject, it could be Prodicus, notorious for his greed (Philostratus, *Vitae Sophistarum*, I, 12, DK 84, A 2; *Greater Hippias*, 282 C; *Cratylus*, 384 B). It is clear, though, that the terms of reference are too weak for us to construe verifiable theories thereupon.

ing with the sophist, and deal more with the need to tell soul and body apart

			the body		
	animate			inanimate	
inward		outward		bathing	adornment
ugliness	disease	arts of bath-keeping			
gymnastic	medicine				

A first reading shows that a well-structured diairesis cannot be constructed by relying on the instructions in the text. This may not amount to a problem since the references to the body are subordinate to the main explanation, the one regarding the purification of the soul.

More importantly, Plato already states here that the separation need not always be twofold. Indeed, the many purifications of the body are grouped together under one name (226 E) and then the names of the variety of techniques relating to bathing and those of inanimate bodies are withheld (227 A).

This case is not alone. Also with regard to the forms of education, they are said to be of many kinds and only the two main ones are quoted (229 B). Furthermore, when speaking of vices (228 E), three are mentioned: cowardice, intemperance, and injustice (which are later joined by haughtiness in 229 A); ignorance too is also said to be of many guises (228 E). Actually, this point had arisen earlier still, steeped in the long array of examples Plato often submits in the more ramified passages of the diairesis: at the very beginning, when speaking of the productive art, he groups together agriculture, any art tending to the body, the arts of constructing artificial objects, and the art of imitation (219 A-B).

That a diairesis may not always necessarily be dichotomic can also be inferred from the long list of activities constituting the unique art of distinguishing (226 B). This is expressly stated later, when the topic of the art of disputation informally is approached, recognized as being divided in many small parts and taking various shapes (225 C). In short,

Plato already hints at a methodical aspect that he will later manifest in the *Statesman*, as we shall see in the *Fifth lecture*.

Ultimately, we also find methodological instructions: this process aims to grasp what is and not kindred in the arts and disregards other elements, such as ridicule for example (227 A-B).

4. The "final" diairesis

After such a painful admission, Plato shows he has completed his "roll call" of the sophists of his day, highlighting this with a summary of six forms of sophistry and with a departure from the direct diairetic form in favour of a clear statement of the problems ahead.

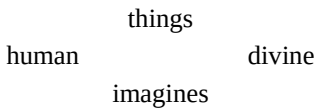
The procedure undergoes changes, too: the development is no longer done by defining and classifying, but point-by-point and also somewhat tortuous. We are approaching the fundamental issue – which must evidently be illustrated, understood and then resolved – ultimately to bring about a diairesis and a conclusive definition that is radically different from the previous ones.

After a lengthy treatise that we will address in the next two *Lectures*, in the end the **fifth diairesis** (264 B - 268 D) provides us with the **eighth definition**: *the sophist is a conscious dissembler*. Sophistry is a human *productive art*, which produces apparent images using the body, mimetic art based on opinion, work of a *conscious* dissembler who operates privately with debates.

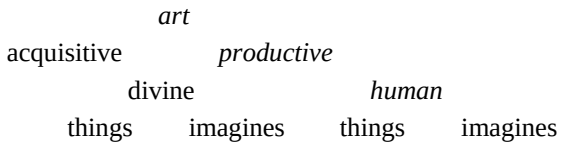
art
acquisitive *productive*
divine *human*
things *imagines*
likeness *appearances*
through instruments *through body (mimetic)*
with scientific knowledge *with opinion*
of a simple imitator *of a dissembler*
demagogue *sophist*

The demagogue dissembles in public in long speeches, while *the sophist makes conversations in private*.

In this diairesis Plato gives us robust evidence as to the complexity of all diairetic processes, which cannot always necessarily be traced back to a simple twofold division. Indeed, having divided productive activity into human and divine, he claims another twofold classification is needed before any more ground is covered. Thus a vertical division is added to the lateral one already made, such that both species (human and divine) are evenly cleft (265 E - 266 A). The outcome of this operation may be summed up graphically with a cross-like model:



It should be noticed that Plato himself is responsible for complicating the model in such way, maintaining that in his model there is a twin division of productive art (266 B). In all fairness, nothing seemed to stop him from proceeding in a more basic and straightforward manner, separating the diairesis in the traditional manner.



Yet, had this pattern been adopted, firstly, he would have been unable to utter indications as to the method, and, more importantly, the interweaving of divine and human activities would have been lost. Plato is very keen on this latter aspect, though, inasmuch as it drives him to make examples quoting dreams and freakish optical phenomena (266 B-C).

Nonetheless, this diairesis is utterly different from the earlier ones, first of all because a productive art is identified. Plato displays this breakaway, without expressly laying it out as a theme, because, for no apparent reason, first he recalls that previous diaireses were peculiar to

acquisitive art, then he says that productive art must now be separated since imitation is a form of production (265 A-B). This is all the more important because, if we accept this definition of productive sciences as causing "not previously existing" things to exist, we are faced with two outcomes:

1. *this type* of sophistry, being radically detached from the forms submitted in the phenomenological-descriptive cadre made up by the first three diaireses, is of a kind that the philosopher only is capable of expressing after a long theoretical treatise; yet it gives rise to something new, thus it is "useful", albeit as a negative occurrence, which philosophy must measure itself against;
2. this is all the more true since *philosophy itself* falls into this classification of productive arts and sciences. Plato himself bears this out somehow: in the final reiteration of the diairesis he unexpectedly stresses that this sophistry imitates the art of raising contradictions, being a convoluted expression wherein dialectic, i.e. philosophy itself, can be sighted (268 C).

In fact the Author does stress that we are operating in a very serious environment. The evidence for this is that a parallel has been drawn with the analogous divine capacity. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that a distinction is made between imitation with science and imitation with opinion (267 E 1-2).

All this confirms the sense and value of this diairesis when set against the three foregoing ones[5]. As we have said before, the first ones possess an eminently descriptive feature, inasmuch as they mirror the image of how sophistry has been historically perceived, amounting to a kind of self-consciousness of sophistry itself. In this sense, far from producing anything, sophists can be said to have had a technical role at best: they have

[5] I maintain they are three because the "socratic" one must be kept well apart: if the sophist is a conscious dissembler, that sophist of noble stock whose aim is to purify certainly falls outside the scope of this definition.

circulated a number of ideas concerning virtue commercially. But this image cannot satisfy the philosopher. The shift to the new, different diairesis, in actual fact, takes place when the Stranger raises a classic "Platonic" problem: since the sophist is identified by different notions, he should either be given many and sundry names or a common element containing all the different definitions should be found.

A research of this kind is typically a philosophical one, all the more so in this case. The unifying element is soon established and is based on the assertion that, as the sophist claims to have the power of disputing of all things (232 E), he clearly has only an apparent art and not the truth (233 C-D).When a man says he knows all things and can teach them to others at a small cost, in actual fact he possesses a purely imitative art, he is an enchanter and a worker of wonders (234 A - 235 A). Yet, before the sophist can be dislodged and this definition pinned upon him, a grave philosophical problem needs to be addressed first: that of falsehood and not being. Only once the Eleatic position has been overcome, for it always provides the sophist with a loophole, will it be possible to frame a definition of the conscious dissembler that is theoretically sound and well-grounded. Hence we can say that this "other" definition, hailed by both the Stranger and Theaetetus in the closing lines of the *Sophist* (268 C-D) and subtly but clearly upheld by Socrates and Theodorus in the opening passages of the *Statesman* (257 A), may only be truly attained by the philosopher.

As evidence of Plato's downright unusual communication technique, neither in this case does he miss a chance to "game" with the reader. This diairesis, in fact, ultimately presents us with two expressly cited figures: the demagogue and the sophist. The "game" is that they are both "sophist" characters, since the former is none other than the Political sophist outlined far more precisely and powerfully in the *Statesman*. At any rate, more on this in the *Fifth Lecture*.

5. Annotations

I would like to go back to a number of elements contained in the passages we have examined, illustrating above all how Plato repeatedly

draws our attention to the shortcomings of the terms, and thus to the inherent weakness of the names.

As early as the angler's diairesis, hunting after lifeless things is said to have no appropriate word (220 A), then a hitch is recorded about the hunting by nets and by strokes, and Theaetetus says not to bother with names (220 D). In the second diairesis the two arts dealing with the sale of products for the soul are said to have ridiculous names (224 B); moreover, in the third diairesis the art of disputation informally is wilfully left without a name (225 C); ditto for the art of distinguishing like from like, which is acknowledged as having no name (226 D). Once again, the many names for the arts of adorning inanimate bodies are deemed ridiculous (227 A).

The Stranger goes as far as to say that, from the point of view of dialectic it is irrelevant what names are given to the many arts of purification for animate and inanimate bodies: what matters is for purification of the soul to be distinguished from other forms of purification (227 B-C). Finally, even in the final diairesis, first we witness that someone else is lumbered with the task of "making a class" and giving a fitting name to the art which produces appearances through instruments (267 A-B). Then the ancient predecessors are berated for their idleness, which prevented them from making clear distinctions. This, in turn, has begotten a certain dearth of names, as exemplified by the trickiness of designating imitation with opinion and imitation with science (267 D-E)[6].

[6] All this constitutes the backdrop to the all-round judgment expressed in the *Seventh Letter*. With regard to the use of names – a first step on the stairway to science (342 A-B) – Plato underlines both their instability and utterly accidental nature (343 A-B), which causes all discourse based on mere names to be built on shaky foundations indeed.

Third Lecture

The driving force of Plato's Philosophy

It is normally held that it is ontology which is at the heart of the Platonic philosophy which emerges from the *Sophist*. Here we shall endeavour to show that such a heart is *explicitly* located elsewhere by the very words of the Stranger of Elea.

As we have already indicated in the previous *Lecture*, following the summary which in some way closes the series of the first diaireses (231 C-E), Plato presents us with a new point of departure of a sort which is initially introduced without diaireses, neither in law nor in fact. Instead a line of reasoning is developed which (and Protagoras is quoted in this long section), by defining the unifying element in the various activities of the sophist in the art of disputing of all things, allows us to come to an immediate conclusion: namely, such a technique is devoid of real depth, and only rich in apparent knowledge (232 D).

Plato's objection to this is less naive than it might appear. He does not deny that one may learn to dispute everything, with an expert too, but excludes that this may be done on a "scientific" plane, as he indeed affirms (233 A 5-6):

> But how can anyone who is in himself ignorant contradict he who knows, saying something valuable ?

This affirmation renders explicit the basic reason for the Platonic rejection of this practice which would be permissible only if one knew everything, which is impossible. In this respect, it may imme-

diately be made clear that theirs is only an apparent science and not a real one[1]:

> Exactly; and what we now have said is probably the best thing that has been said about them (233 D 1-2).

The wonder is how these people manage to engender in the young the conviction of knowing everything and being wiser than everybody else. Otherwise, they would not be able to get paid by their pupils (233 A-B). Yet, to an intelligent young man, it ought straight away to seem incredible that they claim to teach everything about all things and, what is more, in a short time and charging so little with regards to the promised results. Obviously it is a joke (234 A).

Thus, via the joke, it is a short step to that art which can truly hope to do and produce everything, and requires great ability – the mimetic art. In order to explain it, there is the example of the painter who really does produce everything, but in images, and can even make naive youngsters believe that a picture seen from afar is reality. Likewise, the sophist, by bewitching them with words, succeeds in deceiving young people who are still far from the truth, and in showing images of everything based on words in such a way as to seem true, and to appear knowledgeable about everything himself. Then, obviously, the facts will demonstrate to the young when they become adults that things are not as they had been led to believe (234 B-E).

We are then looking at a mimetic joke, like that of a conjuror (τῶν γοήτων ἐστί τις, 235 A 1), a kind of conjuror and imitator (γόητα μὲν δὴ καὶ μιμητὴν, 235 A 8), which imitates what is true and real (μιμητὴς ὢν τῶν ὄντων, 235 A 1), which belongs to a class of game (τῶν τῆς παιδιᾶς μετεχόντων, 235 A 6), and needs to be classi-

[1] It should not go unnoticed that this confirms the haughtiness of the seventh kind of "sophist", the one who cleanses from the presumption of knowledge.

fied among the "wonder workers" (τοῦ τῶν θαυματοποιῶν τις εἶς, 235 B 5-6).

It would be necessary then to proceed to the diairesis of imitative art, as has been done previously, for

> neither this one nor any other class shall ever boast of having escaped the method of those who are able to inquire into both each individual thing and all (235 C 4-6).

In effect, one can make a division of imitative art, but the Stranger himself declares that he does not know in which of the two divisions the sophist should be placed, whether in that of one who produces an exact copy of the object, or in that which creates the appearance, in the sense that it causes a thing to appear in an appropriate fashion precisely because it does not do so exactly. Here the sophist's' strength emerges for the first time, as he has taken refuge in a class which is extremely difficult to explore (236 D). This is immediately corroborated by revealing the basic theoretical reason:

> My dear friend, we are certainly engaged in a very difficult inquiry; for how a thing can appear and seem but not be, how a thing can appear and seem but not be, how a man can say a thing which is not the truth, all that has always set many problems, in the past as in the present. How must one speak to say or think that falsehood really exists, and avoiding c contradiction saying this sentence, Theaetetus, this task is a difficult one... This sentence has ventured to assume that "not-being" is, for otherwise falsehood would not come into being (236 D 9 - 237 A 4).

Therefore, the problem ties in with the position of Parmenides, quoted here, and his denial of not-being [2].

[2] Nevertheless, in confirmation of the argument that Plato is "playing", a passage is cited in which the difficulty (or the impossibility, even) of avoiding the aporia clearly emerges: here, the Goddess *says* that one ought to shun the path of research wherein "are the things that are not", εἶναι μὴ ἐόντα. As one can see the

There follows an introduction to his reflection on being and non-being, which will be the subject of the next *Lecture*. We now want to recall attention to the fact that, at a certain point, 242 B, Plato presents a long digression (or so it appears) right at the point of asking how to commence the research. For this reason the Stranger calls for an analysis of the antecedent positions.

1. An Introduction to the Presocratics (242 C - 243 C)

It is necessary to recommence from Parmenides and the Presocratics in order to put them to the test, inasmuch

> each one appears to me to narrate some kind of myth, as if we were children (243 C 8-9).

Indeed, all it takes to expose their inconclusiveness is to run through the sundry positions: one[3] draws together three beings – at times jarring, at others fitting; another draws two together – dry and humid or hot and cold – and they fit neatly; while the "Eleatic Family" (a lovely expression denoting the existence, not of a school, but of a common mental attitude prior even to Xenophanes) unites all in one.

In a final, definitive confirmation of an eminently theoretical reconstruction of the historical picture, Plato quotes certain Ionic and later Sicilian Muses, namely Heraclitus and Empedocles, who interweave the two positions, so that being is both one and multiple, both united and divided by Love and Hate: in his opinion, the most rigorous is Heraclitus (242 E), of whom he offers a paraphrase of fragment 10: "accord always via discord".

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crime of assigning a positive predicate to the negative one has been committed, and this should have been avoided.

[3] Given the elements to our knowledge, I believe these philosophers are unlikely to be identified; by withholding the names, Plato himself must have considered this information of secondary importance after all.

All are to be respected, but it must be emphasised they have failed to show respect for their readers, in as far as they haughtily bring their reasoning to a close whilst sparing themselves the trouble of adequately clarifying the terms used. Thus, the Stranger, who also believed in his youth he had grasped the meaning of the discourse on not-being, finds himself once again in an awkward situation. It may be, then, that being could also undergo similar trouble, though not evident right away, while the problem with not-being is quite clear (243 B-C).

In this way, Plato has managed to place the reflection on not-being in a sphere that belongs not to a logical-terminological but to a "metaphysical" reflection. Such intention is stated outright in the text:

> Many problems we shall examine after this, if it seems good, but now we must consider the first and greatest of them (243 C 10 - D 2).

2. The Fundamental Problem (243 C - 245 E)

The nature of this fundamental problem is, seemingly[4], simple to determine:

> You clearly think that we must first consider the 'being'. (τὸ ὄν) (243 D 3-4).

The Stranger suggests asking all those who uphold a dual principal, such as hot and cold, what this "being" signifies for them[5]. Indeed, he rolls two problems into one question: when they say that both "are" and each one "is"

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[4] The fact is that the term "being" is particularly ambiguous as it can either mean "being" as a specific concept and "reality" in general, namely that sweeping category wherein all is contained, and whose nature is defined by something else. This is the underlying issue and must be borne in mind to avoid gross error.

[5] 243 E 2, τὸ εἶναι τοῦτο; the question will be submitted again, using ὄν (243 E 8, 244 A 6, 244 B 11), τὸ ὄν (244 B 7).

- do they mean that being is something else other than the two propounded principles? In this case the all would turn out to be constituted of three principles and not two;
- *indeed* (243 E 4, γάρ), if the two terms are both qualified as "being", they cannot be described as two but only one anyway.

It must be made clear that Plato is posing two questions here. We need not be misled by the use of "indeed", for it explains why the pluralistic principle is prevalent in those who do not belong to the "Eleatic Family". In the first case, the two terms become three and we thus have a kind of outburst of pluralism; in the second case the two principles are traced back to a monist position.

That such is the case the text in itself is proof: indeed, the Stranger from Elea maintains that the question must be legitimately posed *both* to the pluralists *and* to the monists (244 B). In other words, to those who multiply the terms of reference as well as to those who trace them back to oneness. Besides, the second passage is justified in so far as the argument will mainly concern the "monist" position (243 E-244 A), which is thus immediately brought to the fore.

A note on Parmenides

There is a second and very interesting reason, which can justify this heightened attention on the pluralists: the objection raised here fits very well, that is to say it is a theoretically winning argument, against the Parmenidean doxa, which one can suitably apply inasmuch as it is easy only for Parmenides to affirm that the sole possible predication is that *both are and are alone*. This point escapes most commentators for they do not see that, as Reale rightly observes, there is a kind of "third way" in Parmenides: his doxa does not expound the pure not-being but submits a plausible view of appearance, condemning the error of mortals who have admitted two principles, though regarding one as being and the other as not-being: «Mortals have thus made the mistake of failing to grasp that the two forms are hardwired into a higher and necessary oneness, that is

the oneness of being»[6]. In what sense, then, can the two terms, in that they are and are alone, be said to be "two"?[7]

Lastly, even though the Platonic argumentation is more widely applicable, it seems to go against this anomalous and improbable "pluralistic" attempt to uphold monism, which this position inexorably goes back to. That such is the case appears both confirmed and made clear in the discussion that follows.

The all, the whole and the parts

It must be understood, then, what is meant by this word "being". The monists are addressed here, those who argue that one thing alone is, and that something is being (ὂν, 244 B 1). The obvious question is if this "Being One'' is one or two things. The first observation, off the cuff, is that the answer is not easy for them (244 C-D)

- because applying two different names while affirming that the thing is one is ridiculous;
- because the name itself is something for which duality is implied in the same moment it is given;
- because a name cannot be said to be identified with a thing, otherwise it is either the name of nothing or just the name of a name.

Clearly, the treatment is actually anti-Eleatic and highlights how such a theoretical position may express an inconsistent monism, not

[6] G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica*, 5 voll., Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1975-1980, numerous editions, 1992[9], I, p. 129.

[7] That such is the state of things is also confirmed in a number of otherwise ambiguous Aristotelian passages. One example for all: *Metaphysics*, A, wherein the Stagirite first recalls how Parmenides refused to accept a not-being alongside being (5, 286 b 28-30), then, having come round to acknowledging phenomena, he lay down two causes and two principles (986 b 30-34); what follows thereafter is the misconstruction of this position (one term would gain the function of being and the other of not-being) that undoubtedly owes to a theoretical interpretation.

only because two names (being and one) are brought into play, but simply for having to give a name to reality.

The "one" theme takes on such a leading role that it later allow Plato's attack to become more direct and more relevant theoretically aided by a typically Platonic topic: the relationship between one and whole, and the co-related problem all-parts. This fact is particularly noteworthy as the Stranger suddenly asks a question that is almost a "red herring":

> Shall they say that the whole is other than "being one" (τὸ ὅλον ἕτερον τοῦ ὄντος ἑνὸς), or the same with it? (244 D 14-15).

It addresses a theme which the Author has drawn much attention upon in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*. As I am unable to broach these issues here, for this would break the flow of the analysis of this text, any further reference to these other two dialogues is dealt with in *Appendix I*.

The identity between the two terms, and the fact that this being-one is a whole, means the whole (ὅλον) can be tackled head on. The attack is then more clearly directed at Parmenides, whose passage from fragment 8 on the "Sphere" is recalled and much criticized. The Sphere has parts; what is divided into parts can surely partake of the One in all its components. For this reason, it can be both an all (πᾶν) and a whole (ὅλον); thus it is one, but it cannot be the One in itself, which cannot have parts (244 E - 245 A). Hence, if the Eleatic One is a Sphere, it is not the One in itself.

Having thus extended the discourse to the parts, one may ask the decisive question on being-one, in its relationship with the one, the being, the all, the whole. As this passage is crucial, we shall analyse it piecemeal.

1. The question (245 B 4-10)

> STRANGER – Then shall we say that being, which is affected by One, is both one and whole, or we must not say at all that being is a whole?
> THEAETETUS – You have put forward a difficult choice.

> STRANGER – Indeed you speak most truly; if being having been affected is one in any way, appears not the same as the one, and the all (τὰ πάντα) will be more than one.
> THEAETETUS – Yes.

The question is very straightforward: can the being that partakes of the one, understood as a whole, to be one and whole[8]? The query may seem odd for Plato had claimed only a few lines earlier:

> nothing prevents that which is divided in parts suffers the One's action in all its parts and in this way, being an all and a whole, may be one (245 A 1-3).

Some variations apply but the question remains unchanged; even though this sentence seems to imply that the all is a whole and also one, in that it partakes of the one. Now, conversely, the issue is taken up once again, assuming that this one is also multiple, and turning the question of the whole into a problem**.** Hence, the all is one and many, while the being (understood as the reality) is one-many, a unified multiplicity.

But is it necessarily a whole, too? Plato puts forward a series of arguments to demonstrate that it is impossible to claim the opposite.

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[8] As one can see, the terms to be deployed are three and not two, as is often the case; on this, see for instance the treatise by G. Sasso, *L'essere e le differenze, Sul "Sofista" di Platone*, pp. 57 ff., above all pp. 62-63; by failing to grasp the difference between sum of the parts and whole, and therefore between a total of parts "abstractly" lacking true unity and a "whole" that is truly unified by a principle of order, he believes that the being all already implies partaking of the One. The upshot being that the difference in wording which Plato showed such keenness for, as we shall also see in *Appendix I*, has been lost. Perhaps this depends on the type of approach adopted by the author, which is overtly theoretical (see p. 7), and therefore causes him to express surprise that Plato does not "establish" «the concept of all as "total of parts", as "unity of parts", as an organic "interweaving" thereof» (p. 64). Yet the very reference to the "organic" should allow the difference to arise between a corpse (total of parts) and a living body (endowed with an organic principle of order).

2.1. First argument against the separation of being and whole (245 C 1-7).

> STRANGER – And if being is not a whole, through having been affected by this, but the whole itself exists, being lacks something of itself.
> THEAETETUS – Certainly.
> STRANGER – Upon this argument, being, deprived of itself, will not be being.
> THEAETETUS – True.

If the being is not whole and the whole is, the being is not really existent because it lacks the wholeness that is.

2.2. Second argument (245 C 8-9).

This argument takes up the foregoing premise, the separation between being and whole, applying it to the all, which no longer emerges as one. Not in the one-many sense, though, but in the sense that we would be confronting two different and mutually incommunicating realities. The first one shaped by the fact of being, the second marked by the concept of wholeness:

> STRANGER – And, again, the all becomes more than one, for being and the whole have each separately their own nature.
> THEAETETUS – Yes.

2.3. Third argument (245 C 11 - D 2).

This one starts off with the outright negation of the whole, thus affecting the being and the becoming:

> STRANGER – Besides, if the whole does not exist at all, these things themselves come into being and this, besides not being, could never become being.
> THEAETETUS – Why so?
> STRANGER – That which becomes always becomes as a whole, so that he who does not put the whole among the existing things, cannot speak neither being nor becoming as existing.
> THEAETETUS – Yes, that certainly seem to be true.

First of all, it is emphasised that, whereas realities belong to the being, if whole is not then it must follow that, ultimately, the being is not. Secondly, the becoming is also dismissed. In a nutshell, once the whole is removed, being and generation also fall away: what becomes does so as a whole, so if the whole is not existent, neither are being and generation. The pivotal function of the concept of whole and, consequently, of the whole-parts game, as a necessary pre-condition for the admissibility of some sort of ontology must not be underestimated, especially if it is placed in relation to those principles cited early on in the *Timaeus*:

> Thus this concisely is my thought, by my opinion. There were three separate things, being and space and generation, also before the generation of the heaven (52 D 2-4)[9].

Evidently, the whole-parts game comes prior to these "first elements".

One might further add an *irrelevant* observation for the current treatise, in as much as it is affirmed that the not-whole (τὸ μὴ ὅλον, 245 D 8) cannot just be any quantity, as it would amount to the whole of that quantity. This means that what is set against the whole as the dimension which has influence on ontology itself must be *indefinite*. One's thoughts immediately turn to the many references to the Non-one (as radically opposed to the One) throughout the *Parmenides*[10], in the conversations between *Peras* and *Apeiron* in the

[9] On this point, please refer to our *Ontologia e materia. Un confronto tra il* Timeo *di Platone e il* De Generatione et corruptione *di Aristotele*, in *Gigantomachia, Convergenze e divergenze tra Platone e Aristotele*, edited by M. Migliori, Morcelliana, Brescia 2002, pp. 35-104; the analysis of the *Timaeus* has been taken up and developed in *Il problema della generazione nel* Timeo, in *Plato Physicus, Cosmologia e antropologia nel* Timeo, edited by C. Natali and S. Maso, Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam 2003, pp. 97-120.

[10] See our analysis in *Dialettica e verità. Commentario filosofico al "Parmenide" di Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1990, 2000², pp. 463-466.

Philebus[11], and to all the indirect testimonies on the subject of the polarity of One – Great-and-Small[12].

At this point the Platonic analysis comes to a halt. This is a conscious choice on the Author's part, in so far as he states that both the dualistic and the monist position are affected by a host of other problems. The job is far from done, not all the speakers of being and not-being have been lined up for inspection, but let what has been said suffice (245 E).

Early findings

This incompleteness does yield one piece of data, though. If the being, τὸ ὄν, is the matter under scrutiny, this does not imply that ontology is the foundation of reality, in as much as the text clearly states that:

a) The Eleatic error does not arise simply by applying two concepts, being and one, but from the mere use of a name; Plato therefore strikes on the strength of the impossibility of an absolute and consistent monism;
b) the problem raised immediately thereafter is that of the identity between this being-one and the whole;
c) those realities (i.e. the Sphere) that have parts can be all and whole – and therefore one, but not the One in itself, which cannot have parts;
d) consequently, the being which partakes of the one will be both one and many;
e) furthermore the being is whole, on pain of not being;
f) if being and whole are sundered, the all would be twofold and no longer one;

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[11] See our analysis on this subject in *Arte*…, pp. 331-349.

[12] See G. Reale, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone. Rilettura della metafisica dei grandi dialoghi alla luce delle "Dottrine non scritte"*, CUSL, Milan 1984, new edition passed on to Vita e Pensiero, repeatedly reviewed, edited and integrated with new indexes, Milan 1991[10] ("final" version), 1997[20] (integrated with several appendixes, new indexes and updates), pp. 214-227.

g) if the whole is not, there can be neither being nor generation;
h) the not-whole must be indefinite.

In short, it has been demonstrated that the issue of being is intrinsically bound to other questions affecting it in a variety of ways. Above all, it has been stated that being is one-many and that the dimension of the whole affects the ontological dimension.

3. The Gigantomachy (245 E - 249 D)

The Stranger claims that the discussion should proceed, confronting those who reason in a different way. Actually the interpreter's standpoint here changes, as the object of scrutiny shifts from the *number* of principles at stake to their *nature*. What actually begins now is the gigantomachy between, on the one side, the materialists who identify body and being and trace the whole dimension of being back to contact and resistance and, on the other, those claiming the existence of *eide*, intelligent and bodiless forms, and place the physical world not in the dimension of being but in that of an "ongoing becoming". A first distinction between these two positions is thus established; and it is an important one for, if unchallenged, it will then be subject to relativization throughout the argument. It must therefore be understood well. The proponents of Ideas take a softer line, while the materialist standpoint is more difficult and all but impossible to grasp.

The materialists (246 D - 248 A)

The text clarifies from the outset that the mindset of the materialists is crude and blinkered; hence it can and must be enhanced in its reasoning. In a nutshell, Plato acknowledges that the position under discussion now is not the current one historically, but one better adjusted to ensure the juxtaposition is as civilized as possible. With this mind he concludes these observations by saying

> We are no respecters of these persons, but we look for the truth (246 D 8-9).

"These" materialists are then asked whether they would admit to the existence of a mortal animal and, if so, whether it would be a body animated by a soul. They are then asked to say if they accept that the soul is just because it possesses justice and bad due to the opposite presence. Then, if realities such as justice and wisdom are capable of overhauling the soul with their presence, they are patently something, albeit neither visible nor tangible. Herein lies the strength of Plato' argument: the mere acknowledgment that any given being is bodiless is enough to bring down such a mindset. While these people may claim the soul in itself is material, they cannot do the same for the virtues. Consequently, saying virtues do not exist is just as embarrassing to them as maintaining they are bodies. Plato naturally claims this argument is only valid for those materialists who have improved, because the others would have stubbornly asserted that nothing which they are unable to squeeze in their hands can exist (246 E - 247 C).

At this point, the Platonic reasoning takes a sudden and, in some ways, extraordinary turn. The Stranger seems concerned by the situation in which his objection has landed the "improved" materialists. Indeed, they find themselves in the impossible position of defining reality with a term common to the material and the non-material alike. They are, that is, in grave difficulty. For this reason the Stranger utters a proposal *that is seemingly directed to them, but turns out to be a metaphysically decisive assertion in the end* (*Sophist* 247 D - 248 A 3

> STRANGER – … Perhaps they may be in difficulty; and if they suffer such a case, consider a possibility that they may accept and agree our proposal, i.e. that a being is of such a sort … I say that anything which possesses any sort of power or can naturally either affect (ποιεῖν) anything, or suffer (πάσχειν) in the smallest way by the slightest cause, even if only once, all this actually exists; for I offer a definition; *the beings are nothing else but power* (δύναμις).
> THEAETETUS – They accept this definition, having nothing better at present than this to say.

> STRANGER – Very good; perhaps something other may later appear to us, as well as to them; for the present, this definition may be regarded as abiding by consent between them and us.
> THEAETETUS – It abides.

Let us not underestimate the conclusion which somehow pinpoints this assertion: reality is nothing else but *dynamis*. Even though a different opinion is assumed here, this definition will be immediately submitted in the next treatise, moreover quite needlessly in fact.

The friends of Ideas (248 A - 250 D)

In fact, the discussion continues by taking on the supporters of Ideas, starting from what probably amounts to the main point of convergence with Platonism: the distinction between being and becoming:

> STRANGER – And you say that with the body we participate in becoming through perception, but with the soul we participate through reasoning in actual being; this you affirm to be always the same and in like manner, whereas becoming is different at any time?
> THEAETETUS – Yes, we say that.
> STRANGER – But, excellent men, what do we say is this "participation", in relation to both? Is it not what we have spoken of just now?
> THEAETETUS – What?
> STRANGER – A suffering or doing by a certain power (πάθημα ἢ ποίημα ἐκ δυνάμεώς τινος), which proceeds from things meeting with one another. Perhaps you, Theaetetus, may fail to catch their answer to these questions, and I recognize probably because I have been accustomed to them.
> THEAETETUS – And what is their speech?
> STRANGER – They do not concede what we were just now saying to the earthborn about being.
> THEAETETUS – What was that?
> STRANGER – Didn't we offer as an adequate (ἱκανόν) definition of the beings whenever the power of suffering or doing (πάσχειν ἢ δρᾶν) is present even in the slightest things? (*Sophist*, 248 A 10 - C 5).

Plato tells us a lot in this passage:

a) he presents his frequently recurring theory of the separation of the two dimensions of reality: there is a dimension of being which remains identical and attainable from the *logos* and a constantly changing dimension of becoming which, being bodily, we reach with the body through the sensation; so far we are in the realm of Platonism;
b) his attack on the Friends of Ideas actually stems from this shared platform which, in Plato's view, implies what has already been defined as the hallmark of all beings – a doing and suffering;
c) the Stranger of Elea is also in a position to foresee what the Friends of Ideas will think of this for, unlike Theaetetus, he has a certain familiarity with them. This information is clearly theoretical since everything here, starting with the character of the Stranger himself, lacks any realistic-descriptive value: these Friends of Ideas are "eleatising";
d) they do not feel undermined and therefore will not agree to the definition which, on the other hand, the materialists accepted. In short, their position is better but, whereas once the materialists have been engaged (namely, rendered less crude) they are also easier to undermine, this proves much more difficult with those with whom the discussion ought to be easier and more direct, given the common premises;
e) the key point, though, is the actual wording of the definition, which is even more radical than the first; in fact it is claimed to be an *adequate* definition that manifests itself in even the slightest degrees: beings are the power of doing or suffering.

This then is Plato's vision of what is real: a dynamics, i.e. a dialectic, not a static ontology.

In reality, Plato has called our attention to these processes right from the beginning. In the angler's diairesis, as he speaks of the productive art, for no apparent reason he hastens to emphasise that what brings into existence something that did not exist before pro-

duces, while what is brought into existence is produced (219 B). Indeed, by reason of its profound importance, this theme recurs with even greater bearing in a series of other texts that we cannot analyse here. For further reading please go straight to *Appendix II*.

It remains, however, that Plato has twice defined the power of doing or suffering as a fundamental hallmark of the whole reality. On this matter he debates fiercely with the Friends of Ideas who acknowledge the power of doing and suffering, but confine it to the sole dimension of becoming, while excluding it from being. Naturally, Plato's position contemplates the power of doing-suffering even in the upper sphere. To be fair, the objections raised by the Stranger affect Philosophy at all levels (248 A – 249 B):

1. on a *psychological plane*, the fact that the soul knows and the being is known implies doing and suffering, something that they will deny lest they contradict themselves;
2. on a *gnoseological plane*, they would have to admit that a being (known by a cognitive act) is in motion by reason of being known; this is unfeasible for the motionless reality such as the one they envisage;
3. on a *cosmic plane*, features such as movement, life, soul and intelligence cannot be allowed to go missing from a reality which is all, and that, steeped in its sanctity, would be devoid of intelligence and immobile; even less bearable is the idea that it may possess intelligence but not life, or that it may feature both but is devoid of a soul. Ultimately, it would be nonsensical to endow it with a soul but make it immobile.

It must then be recognized that what moves as well as movement are real[13].

[13] Note that moving things as well as movement itself are entities (καὶ τὸ κινούμενον δὴ καὶ κίνησιν συγχωρητέον ὡς ὄντα, 249 B 2-3). This is no oddity. In the aforementioned articles we have tried to underline how in the *Timaeus* Plato places much emphasis on the position of "generation" as a freely existing reality among the original actions behind the formation of the cosmos.

The Stranger draws the broad theoretical consequences from what has been said, barring the two extreme positions (249 B-D):

1. if all beings were immobile, there would be no knowledge of anything for anything whatsoever. There would be no life, soul, intelligence, and even no discourse;
2. if everything were in motion, nothing would remain as it is, namely, in the same relationship and in the same fashion. Nothing would be stable and constant so the mind would be unable to function.

At this point it can be stated once and for all that the adversaries contemplated in this category are both the proponents of the One and those of multiple Ideas who claim that the all is immobile. It behoves us to polemize against this **"**Eleatising**"** position and those who set everything in motion, insofar as both terms must be admitted: a philosopher cannot accept these views that do away with knowledge, reason or mind (249 C 7, ἐπιστήμην ἢ φρόνησιν ἢ νοῦν), but

> as children pray, that everything that is immobile also is in motion, he must say that both the being (τὸ ὄν) and the all (τὸ πᾶν) are both the things (249 D 3-4).

I do not believe there is any need to point out how Plato once again underlines the being-whole pair.

Theaetetus thinks that it is over, whereas at this point true ignorance reveals itself: by saying that the being is both motion and stillness, one is confronted with the same objection raised against those claiming that everything is hot and cold: are there two terms or three? It is necessary then to decide and examine in depth the question of the being itself.

Fourth Lecture

Ontology and Meta-ideas

We are now faced with the problem of connections. Motion and rest are in utter opposition to one another, yet they both are. Being is a third thing, which binds them together on the strength of a shared asset, namely, the fact of being. However, this allows neither both nor each one to be in motion or at rest. Being is neither the two things together nor one of the two, but is a third one when rest and motion are said to be.

But if being is a third thing, there is a problem: it seem impossible that the being cannot be neither in motion nor at rest. This shows how being and not-being are beset by the same troubles, and thus we should endeavour to salvage them both (250 E - 251 A). Shortly after, in fact, it is stressed that an attempt must be made to attain the notions of both being and not-being (254 C 5-7).

1. The problem of Predication (251 A - 253 B)

The first issue under scrutiny is the classic problem of the relationship between the unity of the subject and the multiplicity of its predicates: every thing may be addressed in many ways and with many names. This lends credit to those who deny that many are one and one is many. Hence, the unskilled, young and old late learners[1] are led to believe they must state that “man is good” cannot be said (for this would mean that the one is many) but only “man man” and “good good”.

An attack is unleashed against this position, which runs along two lines of reasoning. The first consists in demonstrating that three

[1] We are not interested here in dealing with the identity of these thinkers.

possibilities, three alternatives, exist: each idea is not connected to the others, all ideas are connected to one another, some ideas are connected and others are not. The complexity of the issue is not dealt with from the outset, though. A theatrical device is employed (Theaetetus is lost for words) to evaluate, firstly, the logical consequences flowing from the three different positions. This way, only one position is proven possible, and hence the dialectics of genera may be introduced, through which the issue of not-being can be solved.

Advocates of the incommunicability of ideas are presented with two objections.

1. The first one is of a broader nature (251 E - 252 B). If the utter impossibility to communicate is declared, then motion and rest cannot be said to participate in being. In this case all those philosophers whose arguments we have assessed beforehand are proven wrong: those maintaining that the all is in motion, those who reckon it is at rest by virtue of its being One, and even those claiming that things exist on the strength of ideas that are always the same. By the same token, even those who in some way mingle and separate sundry elements would be proven wrong. In short, while rendering discourse impossible, this sort of statement would also invalidate any kind of philosophy.

2. The second one (252 B-D) is *ad hominem*. Those denying all sorts of predications and connections, even just to make such claims, must use expressions such as “in itself” or “separate from”, even though these highlight the opposite of what their users seek to assert.

The argument against those who believe everything communicates with everything else is easier to frame. Theaetetus himself remarks that, if this were true, motion would be said to be at rest and rest in motion, which is utterly impossible (252 D).

Thus the third possibility remains, namely that some things may mingle and others may not. The explanatory parallel, recurring often in Plato, employs letters of the alphabet. Indeed, at times they con-

nect with one another, and at other times do not, and vowels make up the common thread that binds them together. This inevitably points us towards those arts, such as grammar and music (art of sounds), where the possible connecting links are known.

2. The dialectics

The issue of science that knows the connections of genera is raised alongside that of the types of possible connecting links:

> Then what? Since we have agreed that the genera also have the same condition of mixing with one another, then is it not necessary that he who would correctly show what genera will join and with which they can unite and what others exclude one another, proceed by the help of a specific science (ἐπιστήμης) in the path of argument? And also know if there are specific kinds who through all of them connect them together so that they are able to mingle and again, in divisions (ἐν ταῖς διαιρέσεσιν), whether there are others, which through wholes are causes of the division? (253 B 8 - 253 C 3).

A number of elements in this passage must be singled out. Firstly, the need for a science of connecting links. Secondly, and "above all", some classes lead to unity just as others divide. Thirdly, the broad wording of the connecting link is specified by an explicit reference to genera, which wind through all the others thus enabling the connection. Lastly, there is an outspoken call for the diairetic method, i.e. divisions.

A number of elements are swiftly brought forward to shape this science: Theaetetus deems it the "very greatest of all sciences" (253 C 5), while the Stranger sees it as the science of free men (253 C 7-8), adding that the philosopher has been met in the process, thereby manifesting the identity between dialectics and philosophy that is overt in Plato and displayed here. First it is said that the philosopher has been chanced upon (253 C), then that

> the division according to genera and believing neither that the same Idea is other nor that the other is the same, is the business of the dialectical science (253 D 1-3).

Dialectics is thus qualified as the science of discerning, mainly grounded on the Same-Other pair; then, the Stranger points out that

> you will not give the power of dialectic to anyone else, but the one who philosophizes purely and justly (253 E 4-6).

Finally, lest any doubts remain, this is said to be the seat of the true definition of the philosopher:

> Indeed, we shall find the philosopher *now and later* in a place of this kind, *if we look for him* (253 E 8-9).

Notice this truly puzzling addition: just as Plato provides an accurate description of the nature of the philosopher, he quips that the definition thereof will be found in this sphere, *if there is a will to look for him*. The oddity is manifest: this search is triggered by the question on the definition of science raised in the *Theaetetus*; it then takes on the Stranger's recommendation on how to catch the philosopher (i.e. the scientist) when set against figures like the sophist and the statesman. And how could one then pass up the chance to deal with the philosopher himself? The truth is that Plato famously never actually drafted the *Philosopher* dialogue, and not for want of time. Readers like me, who are utterly convinced of the unique nature of Platonic writing, will see no problem with that. Plato's own protreptic style of writing cannot but be based on references and omissions, in a word "games". For sure Plato did not intend to write the *Philosopher*, but sought to draw his reader as close as possible to this level of reasoning. Thus he scatters warnings here and there, such as the one above, which foreshadows the possibility that interlocutors may cut the debate short just when it gets interesting.

But we know and recall that there are no interlocutors and there is no debate: this is *fiction*. In actual fact there is only one great master, a philosopher gifted with true writing genius, who can lead us

wherever he wants. He also tells us a great deal, though... for example that he will never write the *Philosopher*.

Having given an accurate description of the nature of the philosopher, Plato cannot refrain from specifying the different connections that can be established by

> the one who is able to do this, to distinguish clearly <1> one Idea extended in all ways through many, each one lying apart, <2> and many Ideas differing from one another encompassed from without by one Idea; <3> and again, one Idea put into one pervading many such wholes, <4> and many Ideas separate and utterly apart. This is to distinguish according the genera, to know in which way each genus is able to establish connections and in which way not (253 D 5 - E 2).

It follows that dialectic science, the art of separating what is unlike and joining what is alike, must deal with a variety of connections. Indeed, it must tell apart:

1. a single Idea extending anyhow through many other Ideas, which remain distinct units; clearly an analytical activity in search of a pervasive idea but fails to bring the other ones together, which in fact remain distinct;
2. many Ideas encompassed from without by a one Idea; it is a matter of grasping a connection here that somehow remains extrinsic, in the sense that it amounts to a mere container wherein other Ideas find a location and unity;
3. a single Idea running through many others, unifying them while maintaining its own unity; in this case we have a strong unity abiding within single Ideas that are thence unified;
4. many separate and distinct Ideas; some terms then fail to achieve true unity.

As we can see, the following processes are valorised: a) two unification processes, one is just as weak and pervasive as that of meta-ideas, omnipresent but hardly amounting to unity (take, for example, the idea of “rest”), the other is strong and connotative of the same

unified Ideas; b) two diversification processes, the first maintains an extrinsic unity whereas the second states that the concepts are incapable of connection. Therefore

- some genera acknowledge connection with one another, while others do not;
- some genera acknowledge connection narrowly, others more broadly;
- some genera connote Ideas, others gather them in a single framework.

We should then add that both the philosopher and the sophist are hard to track down, for opposite reasons to do with their "dwelling places": while the sophist is shrouded in the darkness of his abode, the philosopher bathes in such light that

> the soul's eyes of the many cannot endure the vision of the divine (254 A 10 - B 1).

Still, we must continue to enquire upon the sophist. To let us proceed, Plato presents us with a reflection on possible connecting links between supreme genera. A number of meta-ideas are selected for the purpose of assessing, firstly, the nature of each one and, secondly, its chances of connection with the others. In dealing with being and not-being in this manner, even if we were to fall short of a clear-cut solution thereof, we would still be in a position to justify those who, like the two interlocutors, assert that not-being is not-being (254 B-C).

This takes us back to the fundamental question whence it all began. Let us then start afresh.

3. The Problem with saying "is not"

The sophist, master of the art of conjuring misleading images has got into a most troublesome place to explore (236 D), that of Not-being. Plato goes further than merely quoting Parmenides; indeed, to illustrate this struggle he sets out a slew of arguments in support of the impossibility to state and, consequently, deny not-being.

First aporia (237 C - 238 A): Not-being is not applicable to any being, and neither to something; in fact, "something" is not a word that can stand alone for it is always referred to a being. Moreover, this "something" may be one, two, or many. Whoever does not say "anything", then, must say absolutely nothing; yet, as it is impossible for a man to say and say nothing, he must be said not to say at all. Hence, if we claim that someone says "not-being", then we are acknowledging that who says not says anyway**.**

There is a strong case underpinning this argument: any kind of argument refers to an ontological dimension: it is always a matter of "being that is said". There is a significant point to be mentioned, however, as it is patently non-Eleatic: along with the ontological dimension Plato calls attention to the numerical one.

Theaetetus believes the argument can go no further, but an even greater aporia lies in wait, and it deals with the same principle of the discourse.

Second aporia (238 A-D): whereas "that which is" may be attributed to some other things "which are", on no account can anything which is be attributed to "that which is not"; indeed, this will be neither singular nor plural in number. In this case, however, it cannot be expressed in words, as we use the singular or plural when we speak, even of "not-being". Hence, if it cannot be defined by number, we must say that not-being is unutterable.

This argument clearly bolsters the authoritativeness of the numerical dimension in the sphere of predication. With yet another twist the Stranger admits that he was mistaken in reckoning this aporia as the graver one, for an even more serious case lies ahead.

Third aporia (238 D - 239 A): this very much deals with an Eleatic philosopher who seeks to confute not-being: he is forced to contradict himself. He spoke of not-being, in fact, and meanwhile he has said it is unutterable and unspeakable. In order to refute not-being, he has spoken of it as existent, in the singular, and implying a form of unity, all the while maintaining that it is unutterable.

In short, if we want to speak of not-being in the right way, it must not be mentioned, but how can it be refuted then? The rout, a kind of self-defeat of Eleaticism, is manifest and both historically and logically motivated:

> Then, what might anyone say about me? For a long time and even now one would find me defeated in the refutation of not-being. And therefore, as I was saying, we must not look to the right way of speaking about not-being in my speech but come, let us look at yours (239 B 1-5).

The Eleatic concedes defeat, as he himself has laid it out and acknowledged it in his argument, but also recognises it as ongoing for quite some time. It is indeed hard, impossible even, not to think of Gorgias and his brilliant pamphlet On Not-being, which Plato has shown to abide by in his dialogues[2]. In that essay, driven by anti-Eleatic rather than nihilistic intent, the best rhetor among the first-generation sophists wields against the Eleatic school the same tools that Eleaticism had crafted.

The argumentation has come to a close, and Plato confirms this with a classic move by recalling the starting point of our discussion: the Sophist has most shrewdly dug himself deep into his inaccessible hole (239 C); from this position he will easily outsmart interlocutors by asking them what is meant by image.

4. The Need to overcome Eleaticism

Plato underlines that the answer *is not to be sought in Eleaticism itself*. The Stranger indeed claims it must be sought in the words of Theaetetus, who must endeavour to speak of not-being in the right manner. Given that the time for this task is still not ripe, one must at

[2] Cf. On this point my arguments in *Dialettica*…, pp. 385-390 and in *Gorgia quale sofista*…, *passim*.

least venture to answer the Sophist's question as to what is meant by "image" (239 B-D)[3].

Theaetetus' first reply takes the easy route of phenomenological evidence: one should point to water, looking glasses and paintings to show that images exist. The Stranger, however, stresses forthwith that the solution is not so simple: this Sophist will not let himself be beaten by such examples. By developing the argument exclusively along the lines of reason, he will spurn any empirical reference, mockingly deny everything, and even pretend he knows nothing of sight at all (239 E - 240 A)[4].

To illustrate what an affray of this kind entails, Plato presents us with a new, brief display of sophistry, in which the Stranger leads the onslaught and Theaetetus digs in (240 A-B). Although schematized, the development still unfolds rather rigorously:

Q. What is meant with "image"?
A. An image is something other of the true thing but fashioned in its likeness.
Q. But is this something some other true thing?
A. It is certainly not true, but only a resemblance thereof, because the true thing is other.
Q. The true thing really exists?
A. Yes.
Q. And the not true one is the opposite of the true? Then the like object is not real if it is "not true"?
A. But it is in a certain sense, at least as an image (εἰκὼν, 240 B 11).
Q. Then an image (εἰκόνα, 240 B 13) is in reality, although it is not really?

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[3] As rightly emphasized by D. O'Brien, *Le non-être, Deux études sur le* Sophiste *de Platon*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 1995, p. 10 n. 1, this is where the "eleatic" part of the discussion ends and the more "sophistic" consequences of concepts such as image and falsehood are dealt.

[4] Once again, the treatise in the second part of Gorgias' *On Not-being* springs to mind.

A. It seems we are forced to admit the existence of this highly unusual intermingling.

Plato immediately explains the strength and pertinence of this argument. To begin with, the Stranger points out that the sophist has compelled them to acknowledge the existence of not-being, and this has consequently made the sophist's art nigh impossible to define. Hence, if his art is art of illusion, then it leads the soul of the beguiled to think what is false. This means thinking "that which is not" not as something which does not exist, but as something which exists in a certain sense, as well as thinking that things which certainly exist do not exist at all. Clearly, though, no rational man can accept such conclusions (240 C - 241 A).

In brief, the sophist is set to win for he prompts those who somehow speak of falsehoods to fall into contradiction, as they link being with not-being. On the other hand, one cannot give up on the idea of seizing the sophist. Plainly, an altogether entangled inquiry lies ahead, and Plato has unsuccessfully sought to clarify its nature straight away. Indeed, at this stage, the Stranger makes Theaetetus a most unusual appeal, bidding him (241 D 3)

> not to regard me as a kind of parricide.

We stand before a plea and a denial. The Stranger *fears* he may deemed a parricide, i.e. a negator of Eleaticism, and therefore urges that he be spared this wrongful charge. These words are wasted on the reader: this "parricide" is one of the ugliest misrepresentations of Platonic thought. It is a question of how to save philosophy and being, in other words, Parmenides himself. The only way to reach this twofold goal is to urge not-being to somehow be. Without this device no one can avoid falling into contradiction

> when he speaks of false speeches, or opinion, or images, or copies or imitations, or appearances of these things (241 E 2-3).

In order to confront all these issues, and falsehoods in particular, not-being must to some extent be acknowledged. This way only can

the sophist be vanquished and philosophy restored, while truly gainsaying absolute not-being without contradicting oneself. Parmenides may only be saved by urging him to entertain a different view of being and not-being. This is no parricide, but a process of overreaching and fulfilling of Parmenides' positions.

Lastly, the Stranger beseeches Theaetetus for one last thing, which Plato intends as a further warning to the reader to bear in mind throughout this reading: he says he should not be deemed mad if he appears to turn things on their heads. This is then what lies ahead of us!

5. The Dialectic of Meta-ideas

Two points must be fully clarified before we resume and take in the play of comparison among the meta-ideas set forth by Plato with an eye on necessarily asserting the existence of not-being.

First of all, Plato provides us with neither a detailed nor theoretically warranted list, but merely mentions the meta-ideas he deems more suited to his ends. The text clearly states that such ideas are selected by taking

> a few of those which are considered most important (254 C 3-4).

The fact that fundamental concepts such as Whole-Part or One-Many are left outside this analysis tellingly illustrates how this list neither is, nor seeks to be, exhaustive; instead, it is merely put together for operational purposes.

Besides, Plato performs here one of his greater games: he repeatedly states that there are five ideas, while there are surely six or, better still, eight. All this may be seen in a paradoxical light, even by those accepting the idea that Plato may engage in a protreptic game with the reader. None too subtly, however, the text itself urges us to dwell upon the number, since this is unduly highlighted. I shall merely quote the lines in which the numerical reference is outwardly explicit.

The first genera are tackled: Being, Rest, and Motion. It is affirmed that *two* (254 D 7) of these, R and M, are incapable of connection with one another, while B surely has connection with both of them, for both of them are; that makes *three* classes (254 D 12). Each one is other than the remaining *two* (254 D 14) and the same with itself; therefore we have *two* more genera (254 E 3). Same and Other, in addition to the previous *three* (254 E 3). We must then lead the inquiry into *five* kinds (254 E 4) and not *three* (254 E 5), given that the newly added ones cannot be mistaken for any of the others.

Furthermore, Same will later be deemed a *fourth* genus in addition to of *three* (255 C 5) and Other is a *fifth* (255 C 8), this being an utterly unnecessary inference, reinforced by remarking that Other is the *fifth* Idea (255 D 9). It follows then that one speaks of *five* genera (255 E 8), while Other is both other than the *three* (256 C 11) kinds and than the *fourth* one (256 C 12), since they have been reckoned as being *five* in all (256 D 1). For his part Theaetetus immediately reasserts this to be the case, for their number cannot feasibly be *less* than what has been recorded.

In our view, there are two reasons for this redundant emphasis on the numerical dimension. The first is of a theoretical nature. The fact of doggedly keeping tally of meta-ideas demonstrates how numerical structures pre-exist this dimension of supreme Ideas.

The second reason ties in with this game. Plato has hinted at, urging us to dwell on the actual number of these five Ideas, which are six, but more truthfully eight. There is no gainsaying that they are six, considering that for some reason the list surprisingly does not include not-being, the real driving force behind the whole discussion and its very *raison d'être*. Thus speaks Plato, while repeatedly recalling that the treatise is directed at being

and not-being alike[5]. As it happens, when Theaetetus (quite pointlessly) steps in to say they are five, he adds that their number cannot feasibly be *less* than five (256 D 3-4). This is an artful turn of phrase to confirm the nature of the "protreptic game" Plato is engaged in. Ultimately, they are bound to be eight, as the end of the treatise will show, and its very significance will revolve around this.

The discussion then continues in a highly schematic manner, dealing with a range of possible relations.

Distinction between the genera (255 A-E)

Those reasons for discerning between various genera must first be established. This is achieved both by reaffirming that partaking of something does not amount to being that thing, and by highlighting the significant outcome of a possible identification of the terms.

I. Motion, Rest, Same (255 A-B)

If M = S, then R, partaking of S, would partake of M and thus be in motion. The same reasoning goes for R; M and R thus partake of S and O but are neither S nor O.

II. Being, Same (255 B-C)

If B = S, then when we say that R and M are, we should say they are identical[6].

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[5] As we have pointed out in the *Third Lecture*, for example, as early as 243 B-C it is stressed that the same problem with being also applies to not-being, albeit more poignantly.

[6] O'Brien, *Non-être*…, pp. 64-65, needlessly complicates the issue, in my view. He asks himself why an identity of being and same makes every thing "same as itself" as well as "same as all others". His answer hinges on an argument centring on the opposition between same and other. I believe the explanation is even simpler: if some things are defined by one term only, i.e. they coincide with it, they are consequently the same as each other. And this applies regardless of the term used to affirm the identity, and not just to the Same.

III. Being, Other (255 C-E)

If Plato has so far exercised "logical common sense" in his doings, the conceptual distinction he adopts to establish the nature of Other, however, is of crucial importance in his philosophy. The discernment is between realities in themselves and by themselves (καθ' αὑτά) and those which are relative to some other (πρὸς ἄλλα). The first kind includes substances and Ideas as to species, whereas all sorts of relatives such as small/great and master/servant fall within the second category.

One must distinguish between realities in themselves and by themselves and relative realities. Then, O is always relative to something else, that is some different O, while B refers to relative realities and those in themselves alike. Hence, if O = B, then we would have an O that is relative to some other as well as in itself.

Another point immediately is stressed: the Other is pervasive as it spreads to all Ideas; in fact, all these differ from one another not on the grounds of their nature but because they partake of the idea of O.

Relations between the genera (255 E - 256 E)

Once the five kinds have been decided, we go back to the start and thence evaluate the possible instances of connection.

1. M is not R, it is other than R; the two concepts do not seem to envisage a mutual participation of one another;
2. M is, thus partakes of B;
3. M is not S, it is other than S, but it is the same for everything partakes of S; hence, M must be said to be the same and not the same for the terms are not applied in the same sense;
   3.1. M is the same in the sense that it partakes of S;
   3.2. M is not the same in the sense that it partakes of O, thus it is other and not the same;
4. And if M partook of R in any way, there would be no absurdity in calling it stationary.

We must necessarily dwell upon the Stranger's bizarre hypothesis, which seems to run against the opening statement. This urgency

rings in Theaetetus' words, which tell us we stand before a momentous passage:

> It would be most correct, if we shall concede that some of the genera are willing to mix with one another, and some not (256 B 8-9).

The answer all but beggars belief. Surely, the second part of the sentence can be construed as some kind of warning, reinforcing the conviction that R and M cannot mingle. But the text plainly makes no such claim, especially if we consider that the Stranger has merely enquired whether M can be said to be at rest.

One is warranted in inferring that, this way, Plato is trying to steer the reader's attention towards a particular situation. In reality, insofar as their definitions R and M have been reckoned incompatible; however, insofar as partaking they are compatible but cannot be coexistent (an object cannot be at one and the same time in motion and at rest). With regard to the Same, though, we have just warranted the need to assess matters from two different perspectives, which may give rise to seemingly contradictory assertions. This can be a patently undeveloped example of a like situation, to which it is directly linked; a situation in which a thing may most certainly be said to be moving yet at rest. If we take a man seated on a train we can truthfully claim he is both at rest and in motion. Moreover, if we take a motion that is steady and equidistant from a given point, how does it relate to that point?

In confirmation of this view, Plato immediately sets forth another example of a seemingly contradictory statement[7].

5. M is other than O, as it is other than S and R, thus it can be said to be other and not other.

[7] Another famous, even obvious, example applies. Plato ultimately claims that all realities partake of the same and of the other, which surely is not a problem, unless these terms are tinkered with indiscriminately (259 C-D).

6. M is other than B, therefore it is and is not.

Not-being as Other

Plato is now capable of drawing the end conclusion from previous arguments: as this issue finds widespread use we shall be able to say that, due to the Other, all classes are not, yet are. Every one of them *is* in itself, and *is not* in relation to all the other possible genera.

> For every Idea, then, a lot is the being but an infinity quantity is the not-being (256 E 5-6).

The intrinsically dialectic nature of this statement must not go unnoticed, in that it upholds the universality of relations as the founding element of reality. Failing this, Platonic dialectics and diairesis would lack any philosophical worth. Indeed, the Stranger is swift to state that even being in itself (257 A 1), which in itself is one, is other, and thus *is not* an infinite number of times. Moreover, before any further progress is made, Plato reaffirms that there must be agreement on the fact that to have connection with one another is in the nature of classes.

Nonetheless, from the standpoint of the present enquiry, one must start from the notion that, far from something in opposition to being, this not-being is merely other than being. This always holds true: the negative particle applies just to the negated term and surely speaks of nothing in the positive sense: not-big can mean both the same and the small[8].

[8] Cf. O'Brien, *Non-être*…, p. 14: «Briefly, Plato distinguished in this page of the *Sophist* (257 B-C) between *the great*, *the not-great*, his negation, and *the small*, his opposite. "Opposite" and "negation" have not the same sense, even if the opposite is "indicated" by negation. The negation ("not-great") points out the otherness ("other than …"), but does not point out the opposite (even if it can replace it)». O'Brien later (p. 59) distinguishes three senses of negation: absence of identity (as between Motion and Same), absence of participation (as between Same and Greatness), and presence of an

> we shall not concede that it is said that the negation signifies the opposite, but this only, that the negative particles put before words, reveal something other than the words which follow, or rather than the things represented by the names, which follow the negation (257 B 9 - C 3).

The negation therefore does not indicate a thorough opposition, be it contrary or contradictory, and neither does it refer to an indefinite opposite. Instead, it constitutes an overture to a range of possible positives. This dialectical stance is radically different from Hegel's. Whereas the German thinker traces all differences back to the contradiction, Plato's manoeuvre is diametrically opposite: negation is at first neither contradiction nor opposition but expresses a difference, which is specified by the term it applies to, but unspecific in terms of what it may signify in the positive.

In confirmation of Plato's game, this clarification is quickly followed by the next treatise, which he performs on the negative terms only. Still, his words by no means deny the statement expressed above, as these negatives are always used to speak of what is other and not of what is contradictory. Indeed, the inference is once again that otherness is the underlying element upon which reality is framed. The Stranger, then, maintains that (257 C - 258 B) the Other is structured like science, which to some extent is one, yet it features various parts with particular names according to the thing it is applied to. Nonetheless, they are all equally part and being, just as beautiful is part of the things which are to the same extent as not-beautiful. All the same the Other that is features many parts that are,

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opposing element (as between Motion and Rest). But O'Brien is also convinced that opposites can never contemplate participation (pp. 62-63). If this were always true, then the Other would not be the same as itself and the Same would not be unlike others. Indeed, O'Brien is then forced (p. 65) to discuss the fact that Same and Other are not as in opposition to one another as Rest and Motion.

so that part of the Other which is in opposition to being is by no means a less real being: every thing is an other.

Ontologically, then, this negative is not lesser than the positive it negates: an opposition arises between two kinds of being, one defined in the positive and one defined as other than it. Others exist inasmuch as they are an effect of a determined negation. Indeed, it is reasserted:

> Then, as it seems, the opposition of a part of the nature of the other, and of a part of the nature of being, opposed to one another, is no less, if I may venture to say so, real of being in itself, for it implies not the opposite of this, but only this much, an other than being (258 A 11 - B 3).

Three issues must be carefully assessed here.

First off, that part of the other opposed to being is relative not-being, which must be distinguished from absolute Not-being; just as relative being must be distinguished from absolute Being. We can now see how the number terms in question is eight: 1. Absolute Being; 2. Absolute Not-being; 3. Relative being; 4. Relative not-being; 5. Rest; 6. Motion; 7. Same; 8. Other (demonstrating greater overall significance as the bedrock for the framework of relations reality is grounded upon).

Secondly, this relative not-being cannot be said to have less existence than being, for it is opposed to it, viz. being, in a partial way. The conclusion is as follows, then:

> Clearly this is the not-being, which we were seeking on account of the sophist (258 B 6-7).

Thirdly, there is a need to highlight the statement saying it is *a part* of the other. One should steer clear of the belief that relative not-being is identical to the Other. The Other is a composite system that says not-beautiful, not-good, not-being; the degree to which these classes are far-reaching varies according to the negated term.

On the other hand, that part of the Other which is in opposition to being is utterly far-reaching and applies to all classes and realities[9].

6. The Dialectics of Being and Not Being

Without expressly saying so, Plato displays this assortment of meanings in the conclusion, which only becomes clear if the reader applies the distinctions therein, yielded by the development of the discourse:

> <1> Let not any one say, then, that while affirming the opposition of not-being to being, we venture to assert the being of not-being; for we long ago have said goodbye to a contrary of being, whether it is or not, and whether it is possible or not to reason about it. <2> But, as for what we have now said to be Not-being, either let someone convince us with a refutation that we do not speak beautifully, or, so long as he cannot, he too must say, as we are saying, that there is mingling of genera, and that being and other have gone through all genera and one another, so that the other, even if it partakes of being, is not, by reason of this participation, that of which it partakes, but other, and being other than being, it is necessarily not-being. <3> And again, being, partaking of the other, would be other than the remaining genera, and since it is other than all of them, it is neither each one of them nor all the rest but itself alone. <4> So that being undoubtedly is not in countless cases and for countless reasons; the same also applies for other genera, individually and all together, that in many respects are, but in many respects are not (258 E 6 - 259 B 6).

In short, Plato has maintained that:

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[9] This gives rise to a very peculiar couples relationship. Whilst Being and Same are distinct in terms of nature and semantics, i.e. they cannot be used in the same sense, relative Not-being and Other are distinct in terms of nature (they do not feature the same opposite) but not of semantics, in that they may be used *in a specific sense* to mean the same.

1. his discourse does not reintroduce absolute Not-being, the one contrary to Being, which cannot be and must only be negated (which means rejecting arguments in the first part of Gorgias' treatise);
2. with regard to the being of not-being

2.1. unless the reasoning expressed above can be refuted, it will stand true (the paradigmatic approach, so typical of Platonic epistemology, is thus stressed)[10];

2.2. the Other and Being must be acknowledged as utterly pervasive; hence they necessarily connect with one another too;

2.3. the Other, while surely partaking of the Being, is not Being; namely, it is other than Being;

2.4. in this sense, it also is not; namely, it expresses that meaning of Other which coincides with relative Not-being;

3. Being is only one of the meta-ideas. It is neither each one of them nor all of them together, but it is itself only;
4. each class, such as Being, in many ways is and in many more is not.

The last two statements are the most poignant and significant. Plato essentially asserts how despite its importance and pervasiveness Being is not the category that defines the All or other meta-ideas (neither as single entities nor as a group), even if all reality ac-

[10] For an exhaustive explanation of this statement, please refer to my two papers on dialectics in Plato: *Dialektik und Prinzipientheorie in Platons* Parmenides *und* Philebos, in *Platonisches Philosophieren*, Zehn Vorträge zu Ehren von Hans Joachim Krämer, herausgegeben von Thomas Alexander Szlezák unter Mitwirkung von Karl-Heinz Stanzel, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim-Zürich-New York 2001, pp. 109-154 (there is a Italian version: *Dialettica e Teoria dei principi nel* Parmenide *e nel* Filebo *di Platone*, «Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Macerata», 34, 2001, pp. 55-103); *Pervasività e complessità della dialettica platonica*, in *Platone e Aristotele. Dialettica e logica*, M. Migliori e A. Fermani Editors., Morcelliana, Brescia 2007, pp. 187-241.

knowledges being and not-being (that is the kind we have found to be a part of the Other) as predicates..

If we should run through the theoretical accomplishments from the *Sophist*, we could tag them as topical or more wide-ranging. With regard to the topical ones, let us say that:

1. Absolute Being contrasts with absolute Not-being, which results excepted; the single terms and the pair are by no means pervasive; Not-being is not; Absolute Being is one of the more far-reaching genera;
2. Relative Being (that is specified) links up with relative Not-being (potentially endless); taken by themselves, the two terms are pervasive and their relation with the Same-Other pair is diversified: relative Being disengages itself unequivocally from the Same, while Other and Not-being are more easily interchangeable, to the extent that this Not-being is a part of the Other, and the Other is a not-being;
3. Same (specified) links up and exists alongside the Other (endless); taken by themselves, the two terms are pervasive;
4. Rest is in opposition to Motion; the pair is pervasive but the individual terms are not.

Let us now examine the more wide-ranging outcomes. By showing us some of the possible connections, Plato has produced added clarifications on the dialectics applied to purely ideal beings. Yet, above all, he has also demonstrated that:

1 The Being – Not-being dialectic neither plays an exclusive role nor has gained the upper hand, in that:
1.1. relative not-being depends on the other;
1.2. other categories are just as pervasive as Being;
2 All does not correspond to Being (and neither to One).

If we were to delve into these issues, we would have to broaden the scope of our reading by a long stretch and to *Parmenides* in particular. This kind of operation, though, is not only ill-advised but also impossible in the present context. I will therefore retrieve from an earlier work of mine[11] the table of dialectics of Being, as it ap-

[11] *Dialettica*…, pp. 476-479.

pears in the Fifth Thesis, and attach it as *Appendix III*. We shall see that, what Plato is usually held to have "revealed" in the *Sophist*, e.g. the intermingling of being and not-being, has already been asserted in the *Parmenides*.

7. The rout of the sophist

Plato has long dwelt upon these issues to show what degree of caution must be exercised when handling these concepts. For this reason he maintains that any dissenting voice must simply find something better to say than what has hitherto been said (259 B). Although no self-congratulatory or dogmatic stance is recorded, this does not mean that a different and conflicting view cannot be met with strong condemnation: if any disheartened individual were to find pleasure in dragging words one way and another, claiming the great to be small, the same to be other, etc, he will be doing nothing worthy of much consideration. Plato here sets the final consequences of a task he began in polemic with Zeno in the opening sections of the *Parmenides*; then, he referred to these issues as hackneyed for the theory of Ideas successfully cast them aside (129 A - 130 A)[12]. But whereas back then, standing before the master who had crafted dialectics, he had been lavish with praise and compliments, we see that now, in the midst of a conversation logically set almost two generations later, after the boom of sophistry, he is scornful: the development of the discussion has shown how this manner of proceeding rests on the trick of using the same word in a different sense every time. Anyone still tak-

[12] Even in *Philebus* Plato glosses over the aporiae he considers the better-known (14 C-E), such as those relating to the multiplicity of predications or of the parts of a thing. As for these sensible difficulties, Socrates says the common view is to overlook them as they are childish and hamper discourses; also, they are only used in anti-logical operations surrounding the statement «the one is many and endless and the many are one» (*Philebus*, 14 E 3).

ing this approach seriously is just as new to the problem as a child would be (259 B-D).

That is why we must seek to establish the possible connections by carefully fine-tuning our choice of concepts. Indeed, separating all from all is wrong and utterly baneful for philosophy and the Muses, as all reasoning is blighted. In this case we cannot say anything (258 E - 259 B).

False speeches

There is clearly little to be gained by wasting time toying around with concepts, so we must all the more be capable of confuting the sophist thoroughly. The strong condemnation of sophistry by no means forestalls Plato's argumentative process, quite the opposite in fact. The Author plainly seeks to afford no respite to his opponent. Amazingly, a key point has been scored, and yet a further escape route for the sophist may be glimpsed. And this is the path the Stranger has now set out to obstruct.

The strength of the sophist's starting position lay in the fact that, given the impossibility of thinking not-being, he could deny the existence of falsehoods and mistakes. The mere assertion of not-being thwarts this belief, but not completely. One must also show how relative not-being can mingle with discourse and opinion, thus yielding falsehoods. The sophist will duly reject this mingling, and will deny again the existence of falsehoods, claiming that in this sphere everything is being and one cannot speak of not-being. In short, he could say that the art of appearance does not apply in absolute sense to all sectors, for opinion and language are not allowed to mingle with not-being (260 A-E).

As Theaetetus himself notes, this heightens the difficulties that are faced in this "pursuit": no sooner is one hurdle, the being/not-being connection, overcome than it confronts us again in the guise of the not-being/language connection (261 A-B). The time has now come to conduct the enquiry in this sphere, that of language and opinion.

The original problem arises once again: we have to establish whether words all agree with or exclude one another, or whether sometimes they agree and sometimes they do not. Furthermore, the agents of actions are called nouns, and what designates an action is called a verb. Nouns alone or verbs alone are unable to make up a sentence, which in fact come about when these terms are used together. This represents the primary level of agreement among terms for the purposes of forging language (262 A-E).

Secondly, every discourse must have an object (Theaetetus) and a quality (true-false). If we take, for instance, "Theaetetus is seated" we have a short discourse regarding Theaetetus; the same goes for "Theaetetus flies". The difference, though, is that one is true and the other false. The true one speaks of beings as they are, while the false one states things other than they are. It exhibits as beings not-beings that are other than those applied to Theaetetus. There is no cause for outrage as there are many beings and many not beings; it is not a discourse on nobody, as it concerns Theaetetus, and neither is it a discourse that speaks of nothing (in which case it would be no discourse) as it states that he flies. This assertion speaks of other things as if they are same, and of not beings as beings (263 A-D).

The same reasoning is applicable to thought, since thought and language are the same. Whereas the former is an unuttered, inner conversation of the soul with itself, the latter is an uttered, outward dialogue. The silent, inner process within the soul is called opinion, while imagine is what seeps into the soul from the outside through the senses. If opinion is the end of a discourse, and imagination is a blend of sense and opinion, then they all may be true or false since they are akin to language (263 D - 264 B).

Thus, false opinion and false speech are possible and this spells the rout of the sophist.

Fifth Lecture

The relative importance of the *Sophist*

In this last *Lecture* we would like to express an overall judgment on the dialogue. Its relevance is not an issue here, however, we shall seek to lessen the all-too forceful opinion that criticism have often displayed towards it. It is a well-known fact that being and ontology are one of the milestones in the history of Western thought. It comes as no surprise, then, that later thinkers have identified the issue of being as the dialogue's philosophical centre point, and the *Sophist* as one of Plato's more important writings. Our intent is to withstand these critical appraisals, at least in their more radical guise.

1. The Philosophical Contents of the Sophist

First of all, one should establish as closely as possible the meaning of the dialogue in its Author's mind. With Plato this task is far from easy, for it is one of the issues that arouses the liveliest debate among critics. As elsewhere, I suggest following the classification put forward by Szlezák[1] in an attempt to single out three elements in the dialogue:

a) The overriding issue, the aggregating force that breathes life into the text and which Plato never lets his readers forget about;
b) The thematic hub of the writing, the philosophically crucial question which assesses the worth of the overriding issue and/or confers it legitimate meaning;
c) The foremost problem which the argumentative development must grapple with.

This model has always appeared to me as capable of yielding some kind of clarifying effect. It is especially helpful in showing

[1] T. A. Szlezák, *Come leggere Platone*, Rusconi, Milano 1991, pp. 126-127.

how the various facets of the discourse are *not set alongside one another but necessarily recall each other*. The aim is to identify three elements, strongly-linked yet not mutually coinciding, among the wealth of opinions in Plato's text. Weaving them into one another will provide us with the thread that can guide us through the dialogue.

If we look for them inside our tangled text, we can say that:

a) The overriding issue is surely the definition of sophist, hinted at in the unavailable diairesis of the philosopher, whence it is severed from;
b) The thematic hub is the possibility of speaking of "not being" as Other (hence the connection between genera), alongside the relevant method and including diairesis and definition;
c) The foremost problem is the defining framework of reality that is established by a suggested theoretical move rather than by ontology. This motion revolves around the concepts of whole and part, and the connection-distinction between one, whole and all, before coming to a head in the "doing-suffering" pair.

If what I have surmised here bears some degree of likelihood and if the interweaving of the different strands is so clear as not to require any further ado, the attempt to *relativise* the widespread overstatement of the *Sophist* may seem doomed from the start, judging from the heft of the issues outlined above. Still, a trustworthy confirmation does exist, and it appears in the first page of the *Statesman*.

It is at this point, just as the new dialogue begins in seamless formal and substantial continuity with the *Sophist*, once the causal link with the *Theaetetus* is established by having Socrates recall talking with the youth "the day before", and just as we are reminded we are inside a "trilogy", thus shoring up the resolve, expressed in *Sophist* 217 A, of defining sophist, statesman, and philosopher, that Plato highlights the theoretical disconnection between the two texts. Without this break-off, though, one would be at odds understand why Plato has written two dialogues instead of one, and why the young and skilled Theaetetus has suddenly and without apparent reason been replaced by his friend

Young Socrates, who has appeared in two dialogues without uttering a single word and, in the eyes of his contemporaries, was known as one of the leaders of the Academy.

In short[2], Plato is very keen to underline continuity but wishes to avoid it turning into a speculative assessment. Hence, he devises a game: the mathematician Theodorus unwittingly seems to hold the three subjects of sophistry, politics and philosophy as having equal worth, and places them on the same footing. Indeed, he states that if Socrates is thankful (once) after this first treatise, he will be thrice as much at the end of the discussion. The philosopher does not forgo the chance to tease his old friend on his own ground, that of mathematics. Not only are the three subjects quite unlike one another, but the value ratio between them is markedly hierarchical and vertical. Whereas Theodorus' speech seems to place them in a 1:1:1 ratio, they start to rise in a progression that not only is non-mathematical (1:2:3) but also is higher than a geometrical progression (1:2:4). Thus**,** the mathematical trick shows that, despite their link, the distance between these figures in terms of worth and importance is considerable.

From Plato's standpoint, then, the *Statesman* is a much more relevant dialogue than the *Sophist* in the ascent towards the *Philosopher*. As for the *Philosopher* its importance was such that Plato has chosen to confine it to the oral tradition.

Our task has thus changed: we must establish the reasons why this dialogue is less important than most critics think.

We have already hinted at a possible first reason. This dialogue deals with the dialectics of being, eking to what has already been stated in the Fifth thesis of the *Parmenides* (cf. *Appendix III*). And all the evidence in both dialogues points to the conclusion that this

[2] To examine these statements in more detail, please refer to the commentary in *Arte politica…*

standard of reflection, that of ontology, is important but not metaphysically crucial.

A second reasons hinges on the role of the *Sophist* in the march towards the unwritten *Philosopher*. As we have said above, it is a question of examining in detail two passages of the diairesis, and of assessing two distinct characters such as the sophist and the statesman, with whom the character of the philosopher is more easily mistaken. But if the true statesman is a philosopher whose business is politics or a politician dedicated to philosophy, the sophist is that conscious dissembler who wrecks the very foundations of rational thought, as we have seen expressly stated in the *Sophist*. If the *Statesman* has a *construens* function, the *Sophist* merely represents the *destruens* part of the process, albeit a necessary and worthwhile one.

Oddly, the wide-ranging and detailed treatise on the *Sophist* appears wanting in two key points, especially if read in the scope of a unity of dialectic works and in the spirit of "seamless" continuity with the *Statesman*.

Ironically, the first issue at stake is the definition of sophist. Plato has crafted a "delightful game" on this point. The end of the dialogues seems to have settled matters once and for all: the Stranger wraps up his definition by saying that it is the very truth (τἀληθέστατα, 268 D 4). And indeed it is. Yet it is not quite exhaustive or, to be fair, it is but we have to wait until the *Statesman* to find out.

Here the Stranger beholds an oncoming motley crew of odd characters, whose outlandishness takes him aback. This scene give rise to a memorable exchange (291 A 5 - C 6):

> YOUNG SOCRATES – Who are these people whom you speak?
> STRANGER – They are men also very strange.
> YOUNG SOCRATES – Why?
> STRANGER – A very various race, at least as they appear now; for many of them are like lions and centaurs and other such monsters, and many more like satyrs and such weak and shifty creatures; and they quickly change into one another's natures

> and power; only now, Socrates, I think I begin to understand who they are.
> YOUNG SOCRATES – Tell me; you seem to have caught something strange.
> STRANGER – Yes; for ignorance the strangeness striks everybody, and just now I myself fell into this experience – suddenly, I am surprised, seeing this troop who busy themselves with the affairs of the state.
> YOUNG SOCRATES – What troop?
> STRANGER – That of all the sophists, the greatest wizards and most practised in this art, who must be separated from those true statesmen and kingly men, no mater how difficult this separation is, if we are ever to see daylight the object of our present enquiry.

Looking beyond the emphasis, then, we find that *just now*, incredulously, the Stranger has grasped that the truest and most dangerous form of sophistry is the one that applies its skills, deceit and "mimicry", to politics. And since there is no Stranger but only the philosopher-writer Plato, *only at this point* does he call attention upon this character with such emphasis as to leave no doubts about his "greatness". The question is so crucial that Plato deems this "game" unfit to be left entirely to his reader's wits. He takes up the matter anew, and closes it with a damning judgment against all so-called politicians

> as being not statesmen but partisans, which preside the most monstrous reproductions, and themselves are reproductions; the greatest imitators and charlatans, they become also the greatest of sophists.
> YOUNG SOCRATES – It is likely that this name quite rightly appears to be in reprisal against the so-called politicians.
> STRANGER – Be it so. For us, this is undoubtedly similar to a drama: and the troop of Centaurs and Satyrs we contended to see a short time ago, and which we were in need to separate from the political science, has so now been expelled with a great effort.

This troop of monsters is therefore made up of the greatest and most harmful sophists, those of a political kind.

Does all this refute the *Sophist*? Not at all, it simply sharpens the reader's wits and tames his pride. Let us go back to the fifth diairesis (264 B - 268 D), and to the eighth definition: *the sophist is a conscious dissembler*. Let us read the passages before the last two: sophistry is a human art of image-making through body, a mimetic art of appearance based on opinion. This may be wrought by

a simple imitator	*a dissembler*
demagogue	*sophist*

The demagogue dissembles in public in long speeches, while *the sophist makes conversations in private*.

At this point, one is struck with the realization that the definition is given in the passage before last! There is already a conscious dissembler, and it is the sophist. The distinction afterwards only refers to the field of action, but that "demagogue dissembling in public in long speeches" is a fully-fledged sophist, and – as the *Statesman* clarifies – of the worst kind.

Plato had already told us everything, but hadn't alerted us to this fact. Almost expecting us to flounder, he chose to lay it out again in the *Statesman*.

I do not wish to appear repetitive, here: but if this way of progressing is not a game, albeit an *earnestly* philosophical and earnestly protreptic one, then what is it?

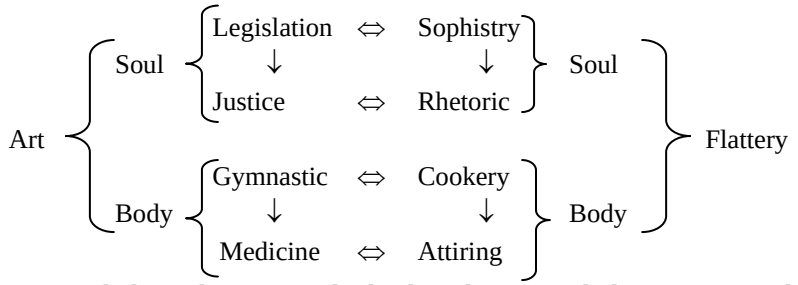
2. The diairetic Method

The second level of "incompleteness" is to be found in the indications on the diairetic method[3]. Contrary to common opinion this

[3] To examine these short notes more closely, please refer to the above quoted *Pervasività e complessità della dialettica platonica…*

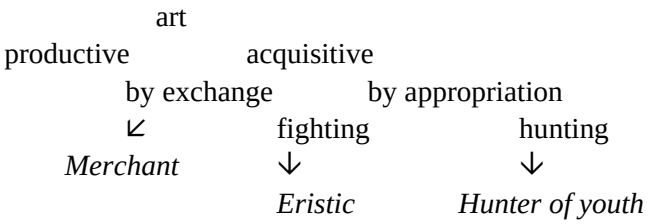
appears early on in the Platonic dialogues. To my mind, the distinction between the two strands of wisdom, as highlighted in *Apology*, 20 D-E, already presupposes a diairetic activity. This seems to appear in the *Euthyphro*, 7 B-D in the distinction between enmities about numerical data and those about ethical judgments and qualitative assessments, and to a greater extent in the distinction, submitted by Socrates, between that part of justice which attends to the gods and the one which attends to men (11 E - 12 D). The next distinction (13 A-E) is just as diairetical: the attention that either benefits whom it is given or is a sort of collaboration to a project, an aid to realise something.

If one seeks something more clearly structured and "undeniable", the diairesis of *Gorgias*, 463 A - 466 A; 500 E - 501 C; 513 D-E; 520 A-B, seems rather articulate, as summarised below:



Nonetheless, there is no doubt the "diairetic" dialogue par excellence is the *Sophist*. The method is outlined here in a clear and uncomplicated manner, and then consistently applied to the very end. Still, this new "introductory" dialogue does appear wanting in a few crucial aspects, which appear settled in the *Statesman*, and in later works as well.

The first major clarification is that the division must not always be twofold. As we have seen, this point was made as early as the *Sophist* with regard to clear-cut statements as well as for the presentation of different sophist characters. If we were to outline a comprehensive diairetic tree of the sophists found in Greece, we would have to split it three ways:



Yet, only in the *Statesman* does Plato expressly state how sometimes it is impossible to make a twofold division, and so one must proceed as when slaughtering sacrificial livestock, neatly carving limb from body (287 B-D). For sure the act of separation should always be as close as possible to the number two, for Ideas are thus more easily discerned (262 B-E). However, one must first identify the "limb" of the object under scrutiny. The division will hinge on the reality before us, and does not have a sole and exclusive formal structure.

Secondly, only the *Statesman* clarifies the role of those parts that are "discarded" as the process unravels. The "sundered" elements are not cast-offs, in fact, and must never be forgotten (*Statesman*, 280 B). Instead, they are parts of a process that only makes sense if the differences between the terms examined are fully grasped. In other words, they must both remain at hand but with profoundly different roles: one constitutes a passage of the definition; the other element clarifies the meaning of the passage itself.

Ultimately, the twofold nature of the diairesis only comes forth in the later dialogues. So far we have basically followed the process leading up to a definition: a diairetic tree that unwinds downward until the "definite" term is reached. This complex procedure, as exemplified here by the differentiation of characters as well as diairetic trees, allows us to glimpse the other model (or function, if one chooses) of diairesis, made topical in the *Statesman*. At the end of a lengthy discussion, the Stranger states:

> that when there is an Idea it is necessarily a part of the thing of which it is said to be Idea, but there is no necessity that a part should be a Idea (263 B 7-9).

Furthermore, this second function is also philosophically decisive: no Idea is thoroughly simple, but is always made up of parts that are Ideas themselves. An Idea can only be known, if the structure of the Ideas that constitute it is also known. The first model underscores the "downward" movement leading to the understanding of a concept (albeit wrapped up in a bundle of connections); in this process a term is discerned from and connected to a wealth of others. The second model highlights the inborn complexity of the concept itself, discerning and sorting the multiplicity within each unit.

Based on these premises, it is easy to see why Plato suggests a methodical procedure that can be comprised of two processes, one of separation and one of collation, to be implemented in a manner akin to weaving, i.e. schematically:

1. having taken a whole based on the communion of certain things
2. all the differences founded on the Ideas must first be grasped
3. and then gather them together in an entity that embraces kindred things based on some kind of likeness (*Statesman*, 285 A-B).

The weaving of the two processes along with the division of Ideas, as expressly stated here, are also confirmed and explained in the *Philebus*, 16 C-E, whence the following pattern can be drawn:

1. In every enquiry one Idea defining the subject of enquiry must be laid down;
2. Having grasped this Idea, one must examine whether it may contain another two, three, or more Ideas.
3. One must proceed in like manner for each one of these units.
4. Ultimately, the original unit shall be seen to be one and many and endless, but also as numerous as the many that constitute it.
5. One should likewise proceed with the endless: the definite number of the many must be established first, and it is intermediate between one and endless; only then can every Idea be let loose and be allowed to slip into the endless.

We can see that this outlook on reality is perfectly consistent with what has been said above on the nature of the diairetic method, which is not one and is not just dichotomic. On the basis of the above considerations one understands the importance bestowed by

the Academy upon the diairetic process. Being at the same time both classificatory and defining, this process seeks to identify the single element within an intricate context and/or the intricacy within a single element (being the same from a reversed viewpoint). In both cases the diaireses are necessary to identify those "syllables" belonging to a unitary paradigm, to a "grammar".

With this procedure due credit is given to the differences and the various parts, whose opposition to one another makes up reality as a whole. In this sense we can say that it is a typically dialectical method.

As a final note, the diairesis has been adopted into Platonic dialogues quite early on but, despite its ample use in the *Sophist*, one must look beyond this text for rather better exposition of its features.

Appendix I

The Whole-Part relation in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*

Given the concise nature of an appendix[1], we shall merely express the issues schematically and with direct reference to the original texts.

1. The Parmenides

The Part-whole theme is central to the *Parmenides*. Indeed, the development of the dialectical example «does also present a constant element recurring at all levels: each one of these passages sees two processes at play, one of unification and one of division and multiplication»[2]. The ultimate reason for this is to be found in a vision of reality made up of "doing and suffering action" (cf. *Appendix II*) and does carry one primary consequence: «this dual process of unification (in a one-whole) and division (in a whole-part) hinges on the dogged and ongoing game of the whole and part relationship. Thus reality is described as a mixture: the others are "one perfect whole, having parts"»[3].

As always the Platonic treatise is far from simplified; but is made more complex in that it is revolves around four terms (one, whole, all, and parts) that at times overlap and at others are distinct.

The parts and the whole

The first point is that the two terms, whole and parts, are correlative; therefore each one necessarily implies the other

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[1] For any further reading, please refer to my two articles on dialectics quoted at p. 88 n. 10.

[2] Migliori, *Dialettica*…, p. 454.

[3] Migliori, *Dialettica*…, p. 458.

> Every part is part of a whole… And what is a whole? Is it not that of which no part is wanting? (137 C 6-8).

Still, the two terms do not hold a bi-univocal relation. Let us look again at the text, here abridged of all the (positive) replies uttered by a very young Aristotle.

> <1> All the parts are contained by the whole… And the one is and neither more nor less than all its parts... And the one is also the whole... If all the parts are in the whole, and the one is both all the parts and the whole, they are all contained by the whole, the one will be contained by the one; and thus the one will be in itself. (145 B 8 - C 7)[4].

A reality in its wholeness, then, is both the totality of parts and the whole. If we regard it as the totality of parts, these must be placed within the whole in itself. Thus a relationship is set up between the itself as whole and the itself as totality of the parts.

> <2> But certainly the whole is not in his parts, neither in all the parts, nor in some of them.
> <2.1> For if it is in all, it must be in one; for if there were any one in which it was not, it could not be in all the parts; indeed, if this part is one of all, and if the whole is not in this, how can it be in them all?
> <2.2> Nor can the whole be in some of the parts; for if the whole were in some of the parts, the greater would be in the less, which is impossible (145 C 7 - D 6).

If we consider the whole, this time it is not in the parts, unlike the previous scenario. The strong theoretical argument for this lies in 2.2: the whole is greater than the part and therefore cannot be contained therein. But if the whole is not in one, it can neither be in all. To sum up, if the whole has a certain feature, nothing can force every single part to show the same feature.

[4] Cf. also 157 C-D.

> <3> The one then, regarded as a whole, is in another, but regarded as totality of parts is in itself (145 E 3-4).

The so-called "false antinomy" is revealed here, perhaps as a result of its significance. We stand before two opposite scenarios regarding the same reality but viewed from two different standpoints: regarded as a whole the one is in another, while it is in itself if regarded as totality of parts. In short, every reality is in another, and is meanwhile comprised of an array of parts that, by reason of being parts, are beneath.

On the strength of this argument, Plato points out that in addition to these two relations (1. the parts in relation to the whole; 2. the whole in relation to an additional reality, an overriding all) there is a third one, between the one-part and the other parts, being that array of parts in which the single part is contained. The one, in fact, is not said to be "in another" but "in others". Also, Plato stresses how incompatible relations thus come into being, in the sense that if one acts, the other cannot be.

> The one was shown to be in a whole, i.e. in itself … And the one is also in others… In so far as it is in others it would touch others, but in so far as it is in itself *it would be debarred from touching others*, but being in itself would touch itself only (148 D 6 - E 3).

Plato makes the following point here. If we take the single part/other parts relation, we shall be looking at a set of direct associations that are unlike and at odds with are looking at, if we consider the totality of parts/whole relation instead. This somewhat obvious procedure is justified on the grounds that a part of a reality is, in turn, a unitary reality, i.e. a whole:

> Well, must not a beginning or any other part of the one or of any reality, as it is a part and not parts, be also of necessity one, being a part? (153 D 5-7).

The priority of the whole

Plato clarifies another point. The fact of executing a development process whose goal is to accomplish a parts-based reality could sug-

gest that the unitary principle is only reached at the end. In actual fact, the opposite is true, since the idea of this reality must be embedded in every single passage for the procedure to work:

> And the one comes into being together with the part that first comes into being, and together with the second part and is not wanting in any part that comes later, whatever it is and in whichever order, until it has reached the end and becomes one and whole; it will be wanting at no time of the process of becoming, neither in the middle, nor at first, nor in the end? (153 D 8 - E 4).

Only in the end, then, an act of completion is recorded. This comes about only now because the whole, ever-present in the guise of "logic", ultimately finds itself accomplished as it has realized the totality of the parts in itself.

Lastly, Plato underlines the pre-eminence of the whole, made up of parts, and the fact that these parts belong to this whole and none else:

> And parts, as we affirm, belong to a whole?.. But a whole is necessarily unity of many; and the parts will be parts of it: each of the parts is not a part of many, but of a whole... If anything were a part of many, being itself one of them, it will surely be a part of itself, which is impossible, and it will be a part of each one of the other parts, if of all; for if not a part of some one, it will be a part of all the others but this one, and thus will not be a part of each one; but if not a part of each one, it will not be a part of any one of the many; and not being a part of any one, it cannot be anything else of all those, if it is nothing, neither part nor anything else, of none (157 C 4 - D 7).

The complexity of the above-indicated connections is noteworthy. Surely, the part is one of the many parts that make up the whole. For this reason, one must clarify that it does not belong to the multiplicity of the parts in which it is, but to the whole. The underlying argument is akin to the one above negating that the whole belongs to the parts: if it is a part of many it must necessarily be a part

of all, but then it would surely have to be a part of itself, which is impossible. Yet, if it is not a part of any, it can be a part of none, and even less of all, for it faces the risk of coming to nothing: it would be a part that is a part of nothing. The conclusion serves to reaffirm and shed light on the above:

> Then the part is not a part of the many, nor of all, but is of a certain Idea and of a certain one, which we call a whole, which reaches its perfection as unity of all; of this the part will be a part (157 D 7 - E 2).

Thus all the elements are revealed: the part is not a part with reference to the group of parts it belongs to (be it the many or all); instead, it pertains to a unity, warranted by a logic that is the Idea, a whole that exists all the time and reaches completion at the very moment it embodies the totality of the parts. The part is a part of this whole.

An early outcome of all this is to bear down on how manifold reality itself is perceived.

> If, then, the others have parts, they participate in the whole and in the one.... Then the others than the one must be one, a perfect whole having parts (157 E 2-5).

Briefly, if we speak of a manifold reality as having parts, we speak of it as a unity, i.e. as a reality that participates in the whole and in the one. And this applies to the single part, too:

> And the same argument holds of each part, for the part must participate in the one too; for if each of the parts is a part, the term "each" means, certainly, that it is one separate from the others and being in itself; if it must be "each".… But clearly, participating in the one it must be other than one; for if not, it would not merely have participated, but would have been the one; whereas except the one itself no thing can be one.… Both the whole and the part must participate in the one; for the first will be one whole, of which the parts are parts; and the second one, as part

> of the whole, will be one and singular part of the whole (157 E 5 - 158 B 1).

It becomes clear, then, that a pyramid-like structure takes shape before us. It is made up of many wholes, comprised of parts that are, in turn, one and whole. But for the very reason they are "one", thus partake of the one, they are not a perfect unity but constitute an array of unified parts. Given the significance of the argument, which propounds a reality flowing from a process of unification, a doing and suffering action relate an inevitably "mixed" reality, Plato asserts that "one" is veritably only the One in itself.

Natural endlessness and the unifying intervention

Plato does not stop at this conclusion but presses on, drawing several more from this line of reason:

> Then, that which participates in the one, will be other than one… the others than the one, being others, will be somehow many; for if they were neither one nor more than one, they would be nothing.… As those which participate in the one-part and in the one-whole are more than one, must not those things which participate in the one be infinite in number?... Let us look at the matter thus. Is it not one that which partakes of the one, and does not partake of the one at the very time when it begins to partake of the one?… They are then multitudes in which the one is not present… And if we were to abstract from them with the mind the very smallest fraction, must not that fraction, as it does not partake of the one, be a multiplicity and not one? (158 B 1 - C 4).

The discourse picks up from the multiplicity of that which partakes of the one, but this time it examines the many (so to speak) prior to this partaking, i.e. as a sheer multitude wherein no process of unification is at work. Hence, even if we thought of taking a tiny part, we should forthwith see it as an unlimited multiplicity, for it does not (yet) partake of the one. This means that reality in itself is

endless; if this is not *de facto* the case, then credit is due to the action of the Idea:

> And whenever we look at the reality in itself other than the Idea, whatever the examined part, always we will see it as being endless in number (158 C 5-7).

The text the goes on to say that the action of the Idea is immediate: assuming that part and whole exist, it follows that a principle of order is already working on reality, framing it "horizontally" in relation to the other parts and "vertically" in relation to the whole:

> And yet, when each part has become a part, then it will have a limit in relation both to each other and to the whole; and similarly the whole will have a limit in relation to the parts (158 C 7 - D 2).

Plato is now in a position to "hint" at one of the strong points of his metaphysical thought:

> The others than the one happen to have a relation with the one as with themselves; in them, as far as we can see, a different element appears which gives them limitation in relation to one another; whereas their own nature gives them in themselves endlessness (158 D 3-7).

The nature of manifold reality, if taken in itself, is marked by the Endless, the *apeiron.* Only the action of something else on it does allow the presence of the limit, the *peras***,** which determines every reality that, as such, is measured. This something else that achieves the unity of others is the Idea, in which a principle of order manifests itself and without which the Endless would spread everywhere:

> And so necessarily, the being which is conceived by any mind must, I think, be broken up into minute fractions; indeed, it would always be as a set without unity. And such being when seen at a distance and dimly, must appear to be one, but when seen near and with keen intellect, every single thing appears to

> be endless in number, since it is devoid of one, which is not? (165 B 4 - C 2).

Some additional references

We wish to submit three more points in support of what the *Parmenides* has allowed us to establish.

A first, clear confirmation concerns the outlook on reality as being arranged into vertical "systems and sub-systems". Outlined in the *Statesman*, it is rightly allied to the issue of the diairesis:

> STRANGER – … It is a better division, more consistent with the Ideas and with the dichotomic method, if you divided the number into odd and even, the human species into male and female; and separated off Lydians or Phrygians, or any other people; they could be opposed to the rest only when it is impossible to find two separable terms which were both genus (γένος) and part (μέρος).
> YOUNG SOCRATES – Very true; but just about this, Stranger, how can we have knowledge more clearerly that a genus (γένος) and a part (μέρος) are not the same, but things different from one another.
> STRANGER – Excellent man! You Socrates are asking me a very difficult task… later, in a leisure hour, we will follow up the tracks of this matter. Nevertheless, you must care not to imagine that you ever heard me expressing clearly this difference... that the Idea (εἶδος) and a part (μέρος) are distinct from one another… When there is a Idea it is also necessarily a part of the thing of which it is said to be an Idea, but there is no need for a part to be an Idea. In this way rather than the other you must say, Socrates, I would always speak (*Statesman*, 262 E 3 - 263 B 1).

The dialectical method itself, then, is warranted since every Idea is constituted of other Ideas. As we have seen, the whole is always comprised of parts that are in turn a whole.

An easy rebuttal of this claim is that Ideas are in themselves unitary and plain. For this reason a distinction need be drawn: Ideas are ontologically mixed even if plain, for they are perfect and unmingled wholes. This state of affairs is validated, for instance, by the

Soul that God himself has brought to life in the *Timaeus*, 34 B - 35 B, by means of a winding process of miscellany that ultimately yields a single idea (μίαν ἰδέαν, *Timaeus*, 35 A 7), i.e. a "plain" reality. Another example lies in the distinction between the two Ideas (εἴδη δύο, *Philebus*, 51 E 5) of pleasure, where the difference rests on the degree to which they are "mixed". In fact we have: 1. impure pleasures (referring to the endless and thus having no measure) that are mixed and mingled with pain; 2. pure pleasures that (by fulfilling the action of the limit) are measured (ἐμμετρίαν, *Philebus*, 52 C 4; ἐμμέτρων, *Philebus*, 52 D 1), thus mixed, but not mingled.

The second substantiation is drawn from the *Philebus*, in which by virtue of God's power a limiting force comes to bear upon a reality marked by endlessness; this gives rise to a mixed cosmos in which

> there is much that is endless and an adequate limit, and overhead, a cause far from negligible, which orders and arranges years and seasons and months, and may be justly called wisdom and mind (*Philebus*, 30 C 4-7).

Lastly, in the absence of this one-many view of reality, whereby every real thing is structurally both one and many, the outrageous assertion in the *Philebus*, 15 D 4-6 would be devoid of meaning:

> We say that *the identity* (ταὐτὸν) of one and many in the reason recurs every time in each sentence, always in the past and present alike.

2. The Theaetetus

The passage we are keen to examine begins where Theaetetus recalls (201 C) the words of an unnamed thinker[5], according to whom knowledge is true opinion combined with *logos*. To this extent realities must be set apart from another, because those which do not en-

[5] The philosopher is likely to have actually lived, as Socrates asks to match up what they have both heard on the subject.

visage *logos* cannot be true objects of science. Asked whether he is able to elaborate on this distinction, the youth says he is unable to recall it but could only follow the reasoning if another person were to state it.

This somewhat paradoxical situation leads up to a crucial interlude (201 E - 206 C) whose relevance can be grasped more easily if the foundational procedures espoused by Plato and singled out by Hans Krämer[6] are borne in mind.

The first procedure adopts a modus operandi based on simplification: by breaking features down into ever smaller parts, in accordance with mathematical models, one seeks to attain the plainest root elements. This procedure is especially applicable to measurable realities. The second is the generalizing method, of Socratic origin, rising from the particular to embrace the general and on to the universal. Both cases ultimately lead to principles but in two very different senses. The first case illustrates the principle upon which a reality is built around; in the second, the principle whence reality itself is brought forth.

This already tangled issue is bedevilled further by the fact that reality for Plato is essentially a mixture: that whence a thing is generated is often also that which it is made of[7]. The difference lies in that at times the component is and is in the admixture only, at others the component retains an ontological primacy, abiding in itself as an

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[6] Cf. H. Krämer, *Platone e i fondamenti della metafisica. Saggio sulla teoria dei principi e sulle dottrine non scritte di Platone*, with a collection of essential documents in a bilingual edition with bibliography, translated by G. Reale, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1982, 1994[5], pp. 160-163.

[7] With an added problem, though, which Aristotle unsurprisingly insists upon: Ideas are separate yet they must act within reality, as a radical separation gives rises to destructive contradictions, as Plato himself recalls in the last two objections raised by Parmenides in the dialogue named after him (133 B - 134 E).

indispensable condition for a derivative, subordinate and dependent reality.

Primary elements and derivative realities (201 E - 202 D)

We may now go back to the *Theaetetus*. Socrates steps in with an odd turn of phrase: he suggests trading one dream for another, citing a theory he has learnt from yet another nameless source. Their argument runs as follows; the primary elements (πρῶτα στοιχεῖα, 201 E 1) which make up (συγκείμεθα) all things can only be named, as they accept no predication. Predicates such as "being – not being" cannot be attached to them, and neither can those root concepts that define a datum (such as "this", "itself", or the like). Their attribution, in fact, implies a reference to a conceptual landscape populated by sets of pairs such as same-other and one-many, which in the case of "primary" data do not even come into play.

A *logos* cannot therefore be feasibly applied to any elements of the primary kind (ὁτιοῦν τῶν πρώτων, 202 B 1), but can only be named. Conversely, as the other things are made up (συγκείμενα, 202 B 3) of a combination of these elements, they contemplate a combination of names, hence a *logos*. In fact

> a combination of names is the essence of a *logos* (202 B 4-5).

It cannot be ignored that the concepts expressed by this "dream", if not belonging to Plato, are nonetheless kindred to Platonism, at least on three points.

With regard to the nature of *primary elements* one only need take the *Timaeus* and the ongoing, unabated emphasis on the obscurity of that which is "primeval" (i.e. not comprised of the elements, for Plato): the receptacle is a «difficult and obscure genus» (49 A 3-4), «which in a hardly comprehensible manner (ἀπορώτατα) partakes of the intelligible», «which is very difficult to catch (δυσαλωτότατον)» (51 A 7 - B 1). As for *chora*, it is «perceived by a kind of spurious reason without the help of sense, and is presented to us in a

dreamy manner» (52 B 1-3), and so on. Plato insists on the obscurity and a-rationality in the treatment of somewhat primary realities[8].

As for *logos*, it is hard not to think about the *Seventh Letter*, 342 A-E, where logos is regarded as the second level of knowledge below the noun and is made up (συγκείμενος, 342 B 6-7) of nouns and verbs.

Lastly, there is something inherently Platonic in the casual way realities are said to be the result of combinations and "mixtures".

It seems, then, that the dream is a necessary device for hinting at, without going into detail, a wide range of theoretically weighty elements that will be handled more thoroughly in other Platonic writings. Besides, it provides the chance for another one of Plato's games. He speaks of primary elements, cited once as such (201 E 3) and then as primary (202 B 1), or as elements (202 B 6), to highlight a problem. In fact, while these elements are unknowable and devoid of *logos*, they are, *however*, *objects of perception* (ἄλογα καὶ ἄγνωστα εἶναι, αἰσθητὰ δέ, 202 B 6); syllables, on the other hand, are known and expressed, and are apprehended by true opinion. This considerable difference is worthy of much thought.

Moreover, the dream forces us to confront the question of primary realities and of elements, which we know are two distinct issues; indeed, Plato hurriedly draws our attention to this diversity. Primeval elements, as such, are actually prior to the system of predicates, and consequently to the pair being – not-being. It is hard not to think of the Idea of Good and the wording in the *Republic*:

> and yet the Good is *not* being, but far exceeds the being in dignity and power (*Republic*, VI, 509 B 8-10).

It is clear that a similar ambit of reality cannot be rationalised, and hence it is not knowable according to a standard cognitive

[8] To read more on this subject, cf. our points in the two articles on *Timaeus* cited at p. 61 n. 9.

model. In this light the abovementioned *perceptibility* stands out in all its ambiguity; it finds radically different application (or non-application) depending on whether the subjects of the analysis are primary realities, primary elements, or non-primary elements. As Plato says in the *Timaeus*, if primary elements, for instance, cannot be perceived by the senses, the parts of a machine or the letters that make up a syllable indeed can. At the same time, some primary realities may not have *logos* but be just as knowable by an immediate insight, an intuitive foreknowledge of this reality. The whole reasoning we are set to examine, then, is marked by a bizarre indistinction of data that, instead, ought to be utterly set apart from a merely platonic viewpoint.

Socrates draws the conclusion that, according to the their position, the soul that has true opinion without *logos* is true but cannot know, for it is unable to motivate its opinion. If, instead, it acquires *logos* it also acquires full scientific knowledge. In his answer to Socrates, Theaetetus confirms he has already been acquainted with this same "dream" that has just been outlined (202 B-C).

Socrates expresses his glee in triumphant tones, for there can clearly be no knowledge without true opinion and without *logos*. At the same time, however, he raises an issue regarding one of the statements made that he is unhappy about, despite its elegance. As usual Plato "plays" but he cannot be allowed to bear the responsibility for misleading his reader: somehow important matters must be better clarified.

An in-depth look at letters and syllables (202 D - 206 C)

The question is to take up again this distinction between elements (free of the "primary" tag, here) that are not knowable, whereas the "class of combinations" (202 E 1) is knowable. The relationship between letters and syllables is thus resumed, and with it the whole-parts connection but not from the point of view of "primary" elements. Indeed, letters are primary in relation to the simplifying grammatical process; yet one only need think at the difference be-

tween vowels and consonants to understand that letters are knowable and definable. Besides, they are also mixed as the sounds they represent are both human and determined.

Socrates raises a twofold question: how did we gain knowledge of letters? Is it true that syllables have *logos* but letters don't? An eminently phenomenological enquiry is thus set forth, based on common experience. Throughout the simplifying process, in fact, syllables clearly feature a *logos* that the letter alone cannot have: SO is explained by S and O, while S does not feature a like explanation. This holds true for all letters, even for vowels that have a sound along with the vocal utterance. It is, however, noteworthy that just as Socrates claims letters to have no *logos*, he also fields a host of data showing how much *logos* can also be bestowed upon single letters: S is a consonant with sound, B is a mute consonant, O is a vowel (203 A-B).

Anyhow, this is not the element Plato is interested in. The truly "crucial" question is something else altogether: it remains to be seen whether the syllable is comprised of the sum of the elements or it consists in a single form (ἰδέαν, 203 C 6) arising out of their combination. In short: is it a whole made up of parts or is it a whole equipped with its own principle of order, a being of whom letters are elements and that, as we have seen in the *Parmenides*, 153 D 8 - E 4, is only perfectly fulfilled when all the parts are provided?

The first option is selected. In this case, though, the problem disappears, since, knowing the couple, the elements that should be unknown, are necessarily known. If the syllable is "formed by" something, either the elements are known or it cannot be brought into being.

The fact is that a mistake has been made: the right benchmark is provided by the second assumption:

> Indeed we ought to have maintained that a syllable is not the elements, but rather one single form framed out of them, having by itself a separate Idea in itself one, other from the elements (203 E 2-5).

Clearly this confirms what has already been said with regard to the whole-part connection. The whole is prior to the part, even though it is made up of those parts. In fact, it is noted that what is being said about letters applies to all other elements as well (clearly second, not primary elements).

At this point, though, instead of finishing off, Socrates starts to raise a number of issues. First of all, the two extreme theoretical positions take shape: a) the syllable cannot have parts for otherwise the whole is the totality of the parts; b) the whole made of parts is a single form different from the totality of the parts.

Theaetetus upholds this second assumption. Yet when asked the second question, on whether all and whole are the same thing, he replies that the problem is not clear to him. When Socrates urges him to answer frankly, he says they are different things. Socrates approves of his courage but must now consider whether the answer is right (204 B).

To establish whether the whole (τὸ ὅλον, 204 B 7) and all (τὸ πᾶν) differ, one must first ascertain whether all in the plural (τὰ πάντα) and all in the singular (τὸ πᾶν, 204 B 10) are two separate concepts. The impossibility of this diversity is mathematically proven: 6 is both 6 x 1, 3 x 2, 4 + 2, and so on. This 6 is the same number, then, either taken as a whole or as a sum of parts. As many things are defined by number, from a stadium to an army, in these cases too the entire number of anything is not unlike that of the parts. Therefore the sum of the parts is a whole and that which has parts is comprised of the parts[9]. For it to be different, then, the whole

[9] It is noteworthy to point out that the whole reasoning here is developed in accordance with the simplifying process, as it befits the treatise on the whole/part relationship. It is no coincidence, then, that the issue on the nature of the number is skipped outright: this nature reflects a precise idea, whereby 6 is unlike 7; it follows that their components differ, and that (more important still) the former is even and the latter is odd.

cannot be made of parts, otherwise it would be an all, comprised of the totality of its parts.

Socrates, however, maintains that a part cannot help but be part of a whole. Theaetetus, in turn, notes that a part can be part of the all. In this light, it appears, then, that whole and all bear the same features. Both whole and all lack absolutely nothing: if an object lacks anything it is neither whole nor all. On this basis, the two elements are said to be the same thing, so that in both cases they will amount to the sum of the parts.

If this oneness of whole and all holds true, two possible outcomes arise when we examine the syllables. Either the syllable does not include its own elements among its parts, which is manifestly absurd and nonsensical; otherwise, if the syllable exists through its elements it must be knowable as they are. We have returned to the scenario in which, in an effort to avert it, the syllable had been presumed different from the elements. The outcome of the present reasoning, then, is that:

> a syllable must surely be some unique indivisible idea (205 C 2).

Yet even this statement, scarcely believable in itself, is far from exhaustive. In fact, this brings back to the fore the debate on primary elements, which, not being composite, lacked *logos* and were unknowable: this same predicament has now befallen the syllable, in that it is a single idea and has no parts. This aspect is so crucial that it is repeated and recalled several times[10].

Similarly, the scheme in which this line of reasoning has trapped us is repeated (205 D-E), but with some interesting insight. It is stressed that if the syllable is a whole constituted by many elements, the parts that make it up are knowable. At this point, though, Plato provides a clarification, which seems to suggest that not all has been solved:

[10] 205 C 2, 205 D 1-2, 205 D 5, 205 E 2.

> if the totality of the parts appears us to be the same as the whole (205 D 9-10).

If the syllable, in the contrary, is a unit devoid of parts, then the letters as well as the syllable will be unknowable.

These are theoretical assumptions, though, that Socrates *de facto* contradicts through shared experience: the process of learning passes through the identification of elements. From this point of view it must be said that, with regard to the learning process of the subject matter, the elements are more knowable than the composite. Should anyone claim the element to be unknowable, then, he must be said to act for a joke.

The conclusion is such that one cannot say the syllable is knowable and the element is not. This is the only certainty arising from this treatise. If we examine the final pair of assumptions, we should infer that a) the syllable does not hold inside a principle of order, it does not have an Idea, it relies on the parts comprising it and is knowable on the strength of them; otherwise b) it is not knowable, due to its being an Idea.

Plato has manifestly left us before a problem, which might be "solved" by referring to the *Parmenides* for issues regarding method, and to the *Timaeus* for issues regarding content. In this context nothing more can be said. As with the topic of episteme, on this point too Socrates is unable to address the whole-part relationship properly, as well as the interrelation of the simplifying and generalizing methods, and the twin questions of separation and the collation. The reason for this is that he lacks the element which only the Eleaticism of Parmenides and of the Stranger have bestowed upon Platonism: dialectics.

Appendix II

The Doing-Suffering Pair

This is clearly not the right place for an exhaustive treatise of the issue, which is central to the picture of Platonic philosophy that the *Sophist* presents us with. We shall merely provide the reader with a cursory look at a variety of points and writings that back up what the *Sophist* has stated outright.

1. Uniting and dividing: the Parmenides

Plato has mentioned several times that a process of division and multiplication is underway. In view of its *being* and *being one*, in fact, reality in its immediacy appears split into countless parts: the simple act of establishing a *one that is* leads to a process of infinite division, into ones that are and beings that are one (*Parmenides*, 142 D - 143 A). At the same time, lest a pure chaotic infinity is reached, the one is said to be implied in every single part of being. The same process of effecting divisions and multiplications, then, requires an activity that is both unifying and limiting (*Parmenides*, 144 C-D, 144 E - 145 A, 158 A-D). This spiel is repeated several times in the *Parmenides* with regard to equality and inequality (149 E, 161 D-E) in terms of both the one-whole and one-part (cf. *Appendix I*).

Not satisfied, Parmenides dares to assert that two interrelated processes are underway; these recall and reject one another at the same time: the coming of the one implies the end of the many and vice versa. Plato ties all the other process in with this setup, so that on the one hand we have the one, connected to the process of aggregation, assimilation, and becoming like; on the other we have the many, connected to the process of separation, diversification, and to growing and diminishing (*Parmenides*, 156 B).

Once this principle of unity is lifted, when the one is not and pure multiplicity is examined, the others in relation to each other, then

> each (of others), it appears, taken as a whole, is a multiplicity infinite in number; and even if a man takes the smallest fraction, this, which seemed one, in a moment evanesces into many, due to the ongoing fragmentation, and from being the smallest becomes very great, as an object conjured up in a dream (*Parmenides*, 164 C 8 - D 4).

Yet the presence of two processes, pitted against one another, necessarily points to an doing and suffering action.

2. Doing and suffering

Plato first drew the reader's attention upon this extraordinary pair in a somewhat uncanny text in the *Euthyphro*. Just as Euthyphro has accepted the notion of holy as that which all the gods love, Socrates raises a further objection (10 A): is holy that which is loved by the gods or is it loved by the gods because it is holy? The question is simple, as is the answer it calls for: the holy is loved by virtue of it being holy and not the other way round, namely, it is not holy because it is loved (10 D). Nonetheless, Socrates undertakes a lengthy examination that is hard to follow, a) to show the difference between that which suffers an action and the actor thereof, b) to affirm that, although the object has its very own nature, it is qualified by the agent's action. A thing is not in itself patient, but it is as much as it suffers the action of an agent; a thing is seen inasmuch as somebody sees it, there are no beholders by virtue of things that are seen. In the same way, a thing is beloved because there is someone who loves it, and not the contrary, namely, the reason for someone loving something is that it is loved.

The reasoning is set forth with regard to an outward action that does not meddle with the nature of the object but merely attaches another attribute to it. Let us leave aside the fact that one could easily construe actions carrying substantially different effects, hinted at when speaking of generated realities (10 C) that exist by virtue of being generated. Plato here points at this pair, stressing that suffer-

ing an action only occurs when an action takes place; in turn, this hinges on the nature of the agent, not of that which suffers.

We are just looking at nothing more than a warning sign here. More relevant still are a number of passages, in which Plato bluntly highlights the importance of this pair with respect to ontology. One only need consider the famous passage in *Phaedo*, 97 B - 99 C, in which topics discussed included the philosophical education of Socrates and the Anaxagoras' philosophy, and his regulating Mind:

> I argued that if anyone desired to find out the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of anything (γίγνεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται ἢ ἔστι), he would have to find out what state of being or suffering or doing was best for each thing (ἢ εἶναι ἢ ἄλλο ὁτιοῦν πάσχειν ἢ ποιεῖν) (97 C 6 - D 1).

The text moves along from classic ontological concepts (being, generating, destroying) to this "odd" association between being and doing/suffering. This pair reappears when Socrates says it would have been enough for him to understand

> how it is best for each one to do and suffer what he suffers (καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν ἃ πάσχει) (98 A 5-6).

Plato rejects the absolute One in an equally telling manner, by resubmitting an argument first set forth in the *Republic*:

> For, reality as a whole cannot at the same time both suffer and do (πείσεται καὶ ποιήσει); if so, one would be no longer one, but two (*Parmenides*, 138 B 3-5).
> The same thing cannot do and suffer (τἀναντία ποιεῖν ἢ πάσχειν) opposite things (*Republic*, IV, 436 B 8).
> Then nothing will convince us that the same thing can suffer or be or do opposite things. (τἀναντία πάθοι ἢ καὶ εἴη ἢ καὶ ποιήσειεν) (*Republic*, IV, 437 A 1-2).

3. The view of reality in the Philebus

If timely hints and quotations may leave us somewhat cold, then an elaborate theoretical proposal that casts its shadow over an entire

dialogue, of which it constitutes a cardinal element should arouse quite a different reaction altogether. Famously, in the first part of the *Philebus* Plato develops a long metaphysical treatise in which reality is described as a mixture that depends on the action exerted by a limiting principle, *Peras*, over an indistinct and endless reality, *Apeiron* (16 C - 17 A; 23 C - 31 E). This is not the place to dwell upon such treatise, which amounts to the boldest written example of Platonic protology. Let us just stick to a number of basic issues[1].

The text shows that *Peras* defines an otherwise indefinite reality. It is a principle of order, then, a limiting factor that puts an end to the action of the opposites, which mark the endless, by introducing number: thus, opposites are made measurable and compatible with one another. *Peras* is therefore the principle that actually makes the existence of the mixture possible. Socrates expressly states that this is true for all reality, from material things to music, and from the seasons to the many fine things in the soul (25 D - 26 C).

Yet, this *limiting Limit* alone is not enough. The dialogue claims that God performs the function of efficient cause (26 E - 27 C; 30 C-D) that acts according to a worthy motivation: the Goddess steps in for she sees the wickedness of endless things, the goodness of order, and that it can be brought about through the action of *Peras* (26 B 7 - C 1). On the strength of a higher godly Cause, then, *Peras* can accomplish the order that is *good for itself*; in this way things can be redeemed. In line with this outlook, *Apeiron* acts as a kind of material cause that is affected by the regulating action. And all is mixed.

A picture of reality clearly emerges that makes everything depend on the doing/suffering action pair.

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[1] For further reading, please refer to my book: *L'uomo fra piacere, intelligenza e Bene. Commentario storico-filosofico al "Filebo" di Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan, 1993, 1998[2].

Appendix III

The Dialectics of Being in the *Parmenides* (161 E - 162 B)

I will simply summarize the facts arising from the text in a necessarily sweeping manner.

We are now in at the *Fifth thesis*, «where *the negated One is and is not together*. The negated One, however, is a "this"; it is an object of discourse and knowledge, so to some extent it is. Otherwise… we would end up by speaking of the Not One that is not or the One-that-is. The dialectics of being is thus dealt with in this ambit: it appears, then, that the Not Being can be stated as different, and that there are several ways of partaking in the Being and in the Not Being»[1].

The text presents us with four options:

1. the being of Being that is, i.e. the affirmation of pure Being;
2. the being of Being that is not, i.e. relative affirmation of the Becoming;
3. the not-being of Being, i.e. the relative negation of Becoming;
4. the not-being of Not Being that is not, i.e. the negation of pure Nothing.

This is clearly a simplified model, because in actual fact Being and Not Being can be interwoven in eight ways, four affirmative and four negative:

a) the being of the Being that is, i.e. the affirmation of pure Being;
b) the being of Being that is not, i.e. the relative affirmation of Becoming;
c) the being of Not Being that is not, i.e. the affirmation of pure Nothing;
d) the being of Not Being that is;
e) the not-being of Being that is, i.e. the negation of pure Being;

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[1] *Dialettica e verità*…, pp. 477-478.

f) the not-being of Being that is not, i.e. the relative negation of Becoming;
g) the not-being of Not Being that is not, i.e. the negation of pure Nothing;
h) the not-being of Not Being that is.

It is now clear why Plato has operated a number of omissions: with regard to points d) and h), manifestly unacceptable for they speak of a positively existing Not Being and to points c) and e) patently self-contradictory. Only the two extremes remain, then: the affirmation of pure Being and the negation of Nothing, and the middle ground of phenomenal reality that is and is not, and thus it becomes.

«The fact that this treatise has been carried out in the *Fifth thesis* demonstrates that, in the absence of the One, the fundamental dialectical exchange is between Being and Not Being; and on account of this, with the exception of Being that is affirmed and Not Being that is negated, everything becomes. However, the Thesis reaches a conclusion whereby, in the absence of the One, this Becoming is proven to be inexplicable as no consistent form thereof can be identified. The absence of the One lends support to the claim that this reality is in motion and yet is not, it mutates and does not mutate, it is born and dies yet it is not born and does not die. The absence of the One, then, outlines a kind of reality that can easily fall prey to Zeno's antinomies. This is the only thesis among all the ones examined that we believe closes with a true aporia, revealing the unfeasibility of this assumption»[2].

[2] *Dialettica e verità*…, p. 478.

Exchanges with the Author

Bruno Centrone*

Maurizio Migliori has provided us with much food for thought in his stimulating, sometimes provocative, lessons on the *Sophist*. I will especially dwell upon the dissenting and divergent points, because to emphasize my assent to certain other points would not add a great deal to the theses of the author. Nonetheless, I wholeheartedly agree with several arguments. To name but a few, the thesis on the protreptic nature of the dialogue, the idea that the diairetic procedure in the "dialectic" dialogues comes across as a complex notion and not easily attributable to predetermined patterns. Moreover, it is rightly noted that no parricide actually takes place in the dialogue, but an "overreaching and fulfilling" of the positions of Parmenides. Finally, I also subscribe to the belief that the *Sophist* ought not be regarded as the peak of Platonic thought.

1. A question of method

First, though, I wish to make some observations regarding the ermeneutical and methodological premises laid down by Migliori in the first reading. Given that we are dealing with a "hawkish" esoteric, it is surprising that in many ways his criteria of Platonic ermeneutics often appear closer to those of Schleiermacherism, opposed by the Tübingen school (often with very good reason), and to some of its recent developments by contemporary commentators even more so from the German academic field (Michael Erler and especially Theodor Ebert spring to mind, leaving the Straussian school aside). Plato lays out before his readers a range of problems, which the more alert ones are in a position to unravel and solve without straying from the written text, or at least from the body of Platonic works (intra-textual esoterism). In doing this

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he makes use of riddles, odd references, and sometimes actual tricks, such as the deliberate insertion of argumentative fallacies.

I am personally somewhat wary of some extreme applications of this method, and I would distinguish between

a) problems consciously submitted as such and left unresolved, which the mindful reader can actually tackle himself in the light of other Platonic writings. This I believe is the case with the aporetic dialogues (supposing – not without hardship – that the reader or listener of the day could lay his hands on the entire body of Platonic works *at the same time*; more likely, the aporetic dialogues amounted to a kind of protreptic to oral teaching, regardless of the subject being taught; and

b) riddles and "tasks", betoken by alleged errors made at some point in the reasoning, which Plato *deliberately* plants in key spots to stimulate thought in the more watchful readers.

Of all the necessary preconditions Migliori lays down for reasonably speaking of willful errors, I agree with the first one: the error must be manifest and not inferred by us. Yet, when the second precondition states that it must be manifest *from the standpoint of Plato's logic* and can therefore be inferred through it, we run into a problem: Plato's logic, in fact, is in itself the riddle that ought to be solved beforehand, and each scholar perhaps fancies himself to be more steeped in this logic than others. For the very reason that the error can be misleading, I believe it must be *undeniably* apparent. But I don't believe this to be the case, for instance, with the passage from the *Philebus* examined by Migliori. I shall then set out to fix some points about this argument, at least insofar as I can make out.

The anamnesis at 34 B 2 ff. is thus identified in its otherness from *mneme*:

1. the soul retrieves *without the body* sensations experienced beforehand *with the body* (μετὰ τοῦ σώματος);
2. the soul retrieves *without the body* sensations (or *mathemata*) experienced beforehand and thence *forgotten*.

The one thing that seems clear to me in this distinction is that anamnesis necessarily entails *mneme* (μνήμην ... ἀναπολήσῃ πάλιν). In this situation the former coexists with the latter (that is why, to say it all, καὶ μνήμας might be preserved). The distinction between anamnesis and *mneme* does not imply their mutual exclusion: there can be *mneme* without anamnesis (when it is σωτηρία of sensation, 34 A 10), but not anamnesis without *mneme*. When it is said, A 35 - B 11, that the soul apprehends the replenishment by help of memory, I sight no error therein. If anything, perhaps the use of the more specific term, anamnesis, would have been more fitting. Still, even this is not entirely convincing. Although we are speaking here of anamnesis with regard to feelings experienced beforehand *with the body*, the problem surrounding the "first time", however, cannot be explained by anamnesis alone. The soul's active power explains its ability to recover feelings currently absent or forgotten, but in the abovementioned case this ability must also be shared by animals, whose desire to drink cannot but be structurally akin to man's. This anamnesis must always be active even in a standard appetitive process. That we are speaking of anamnesis here may, I fear, recall the full-rounded anamnesis in the *Phaedo*, a reminiscence of ideas that, in its highest fulfillment, is most likely reserved to the philosopher. It would consequently follow that the distinction made in the *Philebus* is overplayed. Unlike with philosophical anamnesis, there simply is no condition prior to incarnation where the soul could have sensations, although such a thing could explain how the recollection of a given sensation might arise in the case of a "first time".

On the whole I am wary of readings of this kind for an even broader reason: if the alleged riddles have escaped the attention of readers for millennia (to my knowledge Migliori's reading of the *Philebus* passage is utterly original), then Plato has spectacularly failed in his endeavours as a writer, in those paragraphs at least. Considering it is hard enough to find the answer to riddles manifestly laid before us as such, then perhaps it behoves us not to go

looking for riddles that ought to be reckoned as such first, and upon whose nature all may not agree.

2. The importance of the Sophist

Turning our attention to the *Sophist*, one of the hallmarks of Migliori's reading is the relative importance of the dialogue, and ontology in general, for Plato. I am loath to venture along this path because "assessing" the importance of a dialogue is perhaps a wellnigh impossible operation. Just as Migliori is willing to assign it even a relative importance, so we may easily concede that the dialogue does not represent the highpoint of Plato's philosophy.

I shall merely point out that one of the arguments fielded strikes me as somewhat unconvincing; it centers on the distance between the sophist, statesman, and philosopher characters and their different ranks, and maintains that the incomplete trilogy actually represents a steady advance towards the (unwritten) *Philosopher*. The argument applies to the characters and not to the contents of the dialogues, but there is no gainsaying that things of greater worth may still appear in a work whose subject matter is of lesser value. If Migliori were right the *Statesman* ought to be deemed a philosophically more relevant dialogue than the *Sophist*, which is certainly a fair enough assessment. Still, in the author's outlook, would it not perhaps be better to acknowledge that, each in its own way, both dialogues contain explanatory applications of a method whose uses were surely not meant to run out with the end of the dialogues?

Another strong point in Migliori's reading is the relative importance of ontology, and once again the matter cannot be lain to rest in a few sentences. For sure, though, the relativizing process is less likely to succeed from within the *Sophist* (unsurprisingly, Migliori must once again rely on the *Parmenides*, cf. pp. 95 ff. and *Appendix III*) and only seems feasible if external elements are considered (and, in my view, rightly so at that).

At this stage, however, one cannot ignore the fact that Aristotle, who is also the main witness to the *agrapha dogmata*, seems not to have lent much weight to the possible super-essentiality of One or of Principles. In his criticism of the substantiality of One and Being, viewed by Platonists as genera, they seem to be pegged at the same level and the issue is famously regarded as the most important and necessary one for establishing truth (*Metaphysics*, *Beta*, XI aporia). From an esoteric perspective that hinges largely upon the reliability of the Aristotelian account, this aspect becomes hard to disregard. Yet, if cutting ontology down to size is a reasonable effort, the *Sophist* of all the dialogues seems like the least suitable for the purpose.

3. The supreme genera

The *Sophist*'s partial downgrade is tied with the idea of the protreptic game, which Migliori insists upon at several stages. He claims one of the signals that Plato is speaking "in jest" is to be found in the less than unequivocal indications given on the number of classes. Although the number is set to five, the reservations and allusions are such that Migliori concludes the terms involved are actually eight, having previously added absolute not-being, relative not-being and relative being. Now, one can safely agree that the number five has no definitive connotation, if anything because even the "supreme" becomes a relative term when there is a *plurality* of *megista*. But what are the terms involved actually? Are they ideas, meta-ideas, genera, classes, mere logical connections? An underlying problem of the *Sophist* is the nature and actual status of the *ghene*. Migliori speaks of 'meta-ideas', or at times only refers to this genera as 'ideas'. He also considers those categories obtained by negating a term, i.e. not-beautiful, not-big, not-good (cf. pp. 84-86) to be genera. At this point, clearly, the genus loses any ontological heft as it is unable to carry out an effective division of reality. After all, academics had notoriously disregarded any ideas concerning negative realities.

This situation appears even more manifest in the case of absolute not-being, which Migliori includes among the terms under scrutiny, only to recall later (p. 87) that Plato had made clear his discourse did not retrieve absolute not-being, and had reaffirmed that not-being is not. All this demonstrates that the terms involved cannot be construed as genera or ideas in the full sense. That an idea or class might refer to not-being would mean true *teras* for the *Sophist*. If the question merely rests on defining even casual clusters of beings or possible logical connections, there is no problem. However it is very difficult, and I think even Migliori would not go that far, to claim that this is simply Plato's will. Perhaps the game is to talk in terms of genera or *eide* but to conceive them in a different manner? At this point, though, the number eight (along with the number five) also loses any importance.

The most troublesome of all seems to be the distinction that Migliori traces between relative not-being and other. Not-being, in the words of Plato himself, is a part of the other. Migliori claims the difference here is not at a semantic level but is to be found in the nature of the concepts, and backs this up by showing that their respective opposites are not the same: the opposite of other is same, and that of relative not-being is relative being. For the sake of precision, though, if other and relative not-being are not semantically distinct because they can be used in the same sense *in a specific sense* (the italics are the author's, p. 87 n. 9), the same must apply also to Being and Same, where "being" means likeness in a specific acceptation. According to Migliori (cf. pp. 84-86) the other determines genera (not-beautiful, not-good, etc.) and these are pervasive to varying degrees depending on the negated term. Hence, it does not correspond to not-being, which is, in turn, juxtaposed to being and is all-pervasive. It seems undeniable to me, however, that not-being can only be said to be part of the other at the extensional level. Having said this, though, the distinction is hard to keep up: it follows that whatever is not-x must be deemed other than x (and thus is a kind of the other), but it is also a kind of not-being on account of its being not-x. The part of the other that is opposed to being is a "genus" of all the

other parts that are in opposition to big, beautiful, etc, and constitute the range of the other. If the deduction of not-being as genus is based on its opposition to being in the range of the other, then all the "genera" of the other (not-big, not-beautiful, etc) are summoned to form as many genera, with seemingly disastrous consequences.

In this way any casual cluster of composite beings would identify a *ghenos*. I am neither sure of the meaning of the phrase «these negatives are always used to speak of what is other and not of what is contradictory». Indeed, "not-beautiful" does not necessarily mean "ugly", and this is undeniably stated in the *Sophist*, but the fact that a negation does not mean opposition does not warrant Migliori's branching out into the contradiction, when he claims the negation does not refer to an indefinite opposite. Even when meaning "other than big", not-big identifies a necessarily indistinct class of things and both terms encompass the two sides of the contradiction (each x is big or other than big).

Generally, what are the conditions for the distinction and inference of the existence of a genus? Whereas the semantic level is undoubtedly crucial (cf. for instance 254 D 11-12), the issue of semantics pertaining to single classes must necessarily undergo a clarification of the functions of the verb "to be", (i.e. existential, copular**,** of identity) and Migliori fails to confront this aspect head on. Much learned opinion has said that Plato has made use of these distinctions without directly or openly elaborating them theoretically. What cannot be denied is the persistence of ambiguous uses (the crucial question is whether they are the result of poor distinction or deliberate will). An example for all is at paragraph 256 A 3-5: motion is other than same, and therefore is *mè tautòn*, not-like, for it is not *the* Same; there is a manifest shift here in the word "is" from identity to copular function. Clearing such ambiguities is then an indispensable preliminary exercise in order to establish the correct framework of the genera and, consequently, for a rightful assessment of platonic ontology in general.

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Overall, it is hard to argue with someone you agree with. Moreover, when the agreement is practically across the board, as in the case of Migliori's *Lectura Platonis* on the *Sophist*, overreaching the mere contents and stretching to the methodological framework of the enquiry, then it just gets harder. What I find convincing and worthy of endorsement are, on one side, the conclusions of the analysis, in addition to its very own methodological framework on the other. This is rooted in a broad examination of the dialogue in its totality, a tense and timely confrontation with the written text carried out with a string of pressing arguments, and (ultimately) a constant referral to the other Platonic works which find *in the Sophist* the reason for their being and fulfilment.

Rather than start a discussion here, I shall simply provide a number of additional elements I believe to be of interest to the debate itself, extending it to another dialogue, the *Phaedrus*. The Author has shunned a direct confrontation with this dialogue but I think a few very close points of contact can be found with regard to the main conceptual hurdles identified within the *Sophist.*

Lastly, given the necessary brevity of this contribution to the discussion, we shall proceed somewhat schematically, drafting in broad detail the key features of this contact.

1. Phaedrus *265 C 9 - 266 B 1: the diairetic and synoptic procedures*

The first and more remarkable point of contact between *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist* is surely the presentation in the former of the two fundamental moments of Platonic dialectics: the diairetic and synoptic procedures.

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The examination of the three speeches on Eros in the first part of the dialogue (the first is by Lysis, the other two by Socrates) leads Socrates to present the two principles in detail:

> SOCRATES – There are *two kinds of procedures*, of which it wouldn't be bad if someone could have the skill to catch the power.
> PHAEDRUS – What are they?
> SOCRATES – The first way to proceed consists in *returning to a single Idea by taking a global look at scattered particulars in many ways* (εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνορῶντα ἄγειν τὰ πολλαχῇ διεσπαρμένα), so as to clearify, by defining each of the things we want to teach…
> PHAEDRUS – And what about the second kind of procedure, Socrates?
> SOCRATES – It consists, on the other hand, in being able to divide into Ideas (κατ'εἴδη δύνασθαι διατέμνειν), according to the natural formations (κατ'ἄρθρα ᾗ πέφυκεν), and attempting not break any part as a bad carver might. Just as our two latest discourses assumed the madness as a single Idea; and then, as the body, which is one, becomes two parts with the same name (διπλᾶ καὶ ὁμώνυμα), called left and right side, so our two discourses conceived of madness as naturally one Idea for us; the first discourse, cutting off the left-hand part, continued to divide this (ὁ μὲν τὸ ἐπ'ἀριστερὰ τεμνόμενος μέρος, πάλιν τοῦτο τέμνων), and did not desist until it found in them a sort of left-handed love, which it very justly reviled; but the other discourse, leading us to the right-hand part of madness, found another love having the same name as the first, but divine, which it praised as the author of our greatest benefits.

In this passage where Socrates explains the operations hitherto performed in the dialogue[1], we therefore find a remarkably clear exposition

[1] For an in-depth look at the relationship among the several discourses on Eros put forward in the *Phaedrus* and on the operations Plato performed in the dialogues, please refer to my own paper: *Eros tra retorica e filosofia. Il "gioco" polisemantico*

(it has been noted in fact that «this elucidation on the two functions of the dialectic method, synoptics and diairetics, is the clearest and sharpest Plato has ever spoken on this topic[2]) of those two moments of διαίρεσις and συναγωγή whereupon Platone will hinge the entire dialectic reflection contained in the following dialogues[3].

Claiming this dual dialectic process, and especially the diairetic one, is an immediate cross-reference to the *Sophist* is almost a mundane observation. In actual fact, with regard to this dialogue and (to some extent) to the *Statesman*, the relevant passage presents further elements of likeness I feel are noteworthy:

1. the constant mention to the question of names, indeed ongoing throughout the whole *Phaedrus*. In this sense the dialogue shows how the εἶδος – ὄνομα relationship cannot always be qualified as simple and bi-univocal (in the sense that every name corresponds to a form and/or a form to every name)[4], but turns out to be much more complex, as exemplified in the case of *eros*, i.e. the only name that conceals many different and, sometimes, opposing forms (the human and "left-handed" part, and the divine "right-handed" part). In this sense one should construe, on the one hand, the Socratic warning to beware of all those realities

del Fedro, in *La struttura del dialogo platonico,* edited by G. Casertano, Loffredo, Naples, 2000, pp. 297-319.

[2] W. Jaeger, *Paideia, Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin und Leipzig 1944 - Oxford University Press, New York 1945; Italian translation by L. Emery e A. Settis*: Paideia. La Formazione dell'uomo greco*, Introduction by G. Reale, Indexes by A. Bellanti, Bompiani, Milan 2003, p. 1667.

[3] Cf. *Fifth Lecture*, pp. 81 - 84.

[4] Cf., for example, *Phaedrus* 238 A-B; 238 A 2-5: «Now excess *has many names, and many members, and many forms* (πολυώνυμον – πολυμελὲς γὰρ καὶ πολυμερές). And of these forms the one which rises above the others gives its bearer the name derived from it».

(like Eros) that have "two parts with the same name" (*Phaedrus* 266 A 1)»[5], and, on the other, the outspoken allegation, fully detectable in the critique issued against the Lysian oration[6], of the fallibility of names and the intrinsic inadequacy of this cognitive level. Just as in the *Sophist* where «Plato repeatedly draws our attention to the shortcomings of the terms»[7], and the difficulty of conducting an enquiry on a multiform reality[8] is repeatedly stressed, *Phaedrus* advises against establishing a simplistic relation between the level of Forms and that of names. This link is seen as one of the crucial hubs for implementing a correct semantic and ontological investigation of reality;

2. the example of the carver to demonstrate the right way of separating Ideas. In outlining, albeit broadly, the hallmarks of the diairetic procedure, which consists in subjecting the object of enquiry to a series of cuts and divisions[9] and reaching, as stated in *Phaedrus* 277 B 7-8, «that which can be sundered no further» (μέχρι τοῦ ἀτμήτου τέμνειν), Plato provides a crucial methodological indication for establishing a correct diairesis: Ideas need to be severed where the joint is by nature and without breaking any part off, trying not to make the same mistake that befalls those hamfisted butchers who slaughter without heeding the natural separation of the limbs (*Phaedrus* 265 D). The same parallel between the ramification of Ideas and the separation of animal limbs is not taken up again in the *Sophist*, but in the *Statesman.*

[5] And, consequently, his warning at 237 C that one must know the nature of what one is advising about so as not to risk failure, having failed to come to an understanding with one another and oneself.

[6] Beautiful for the choice of words but inadequate for its content, having utterly disregarded the "dual limbs of *eros*".

[7] *Second Lecture*, p. 49.

[8] Cf. *Sophist* 223 C, 226 A, 240 C.

[9] *Phaedrus* 266 A 3-4: «cutting off the left-hand part, continued to divide this».

> As Migliori notes, this dialogue clarifies many of the operations performed in the *Sophist* and where «Plato expressly state how sometimes it is impossible to make a twofold division, and so one must proceed as when slaughtering sacrificial livestock, neatly carving limb from body (287 B-D)» and that «one must first identify the "limb" of the object under scrutiny»[10].

This clarification in the *Statesman* actually seems to hold true for the *Phaedrus* as well; the diairesis Plato implicitly employs here and reveals only later on[11] does not proceed rigorously by two. Indeed, once the presence of two kinds of madness is established (μανίας δέ γε εἴδη δύο) (265 A 9), and having set apart the human and negative side of the μανία from the positive, divine one (265 A 9-11), the latter is further split into four parts:

> The divine madness was *subdivided into four kinds* (τέτταρα μέρη διελόμενοι), with reference to four gods: we have assigned the prophetic inspiration to Apollo, the initiatory to Dionysus, the poetic to the Muses, the erotic to Aphrodite and Eros[12].

If we can observe for *Phaedrus*, as Migliori has done for the *Statesman* and the *Sophist*, that «the division will hinge on the reality before us, and does not have a sole and exclusive formal structure»[13], it should also be said that the clarification of the diaireses completed within the dialogue comes with the emphasis that the discourse

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[10] *Fifth Lecture*, p. 100.

[11] As M. Migliori has noted in *L'uomo fra piacere, intelligenza e Bene*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1993, pp. 21-22: «Plato's game often consists in hinting at things and, later, revealing what has just been hinted, or in not finishing an argument and then submitting a conclusion without declaring it as such».

[12] *Phaedrus* 265 B 2-5.

[13] *Fifth Lecture*, p. 100.

made is indeed convincing, but not thoroughly (265 B 8: «composing a discourse not wholly lacking in persuasive might», οὐ παντάπασιν ἀπίθανον λόγον) given that, while having grasped the truth, he has also been thrown off course at times (265 B 6-8: «on the one hand getting to some truth and, on the other hand, even straying off the track»).

A groundless discourse

The second discourse of Socrates, the one called upon to provide the definitive word on eros, is not false but, having been expressed in poetic form, it inevitably ends up as proving itself a "game" (265 C 8-9 «it seems to me that in everything else *we have truly played*» τῷ ὄντι παιδιᾷ πεπαίσθαι). As rightly observed, the poetic allegory offered by Socrates' discourse «though highly powerful – cannot replace the argumentative groundwork of the objective determinations contained therein, and therefore it cannot hold good as a *dialectical* treatise. And the discourse on Eros is a "game" insofar as it is detached from a dialectical treatment that is valid to all effects and purposes»[14].

That Socratic discourse is "groundless", in the sense it is not shored up by an adequate rational exposition, is also confirmed by an immediately subsequent statement, in which some things are claimed to have been «said at random» (ἐκ τύχης ῥηθέντων). This utterance can neither be ignored nor taken literally[15] and should rather

[14] T. A. Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin 1985; Italian translation by G. Reale: *Platone e la scrittura della filosofia. Analisi di struttura dei dialoghi della giovinezza e della maturità alla luce di un nuovo paradigma ermeneutico*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1988, 1989², p. 95.

[15] As Szlezák observes, *Platone e la scrittura…*, p. 93: «no-one should want to take this limitation literally: Plato does not make Socrates speak at random. However it would not be less wrong to act as if this limitation did not exist; it too does not occur in the text by chance».

be framed and appreciated in the light of that perspective of inadequacy and groundlessness that marks the *Phaedrus*. The mythical exposition of the different kinds of madness and their inner workings, and the subsequent clarification of the two dialectical procedures employed (albeit little more than sketched out) certainly cannot be deemed enough to found the treatise upon. Hence this treatise, which surely has not been steered at random, nonetheless remains "groundless" (ἐκ τύχης).

The inexperience of Phaedrus

This, after all, is the high point that Socrates might have reached in a discussion with Phaedrus: an intelligent, willing, yet unskilled, young man, who has never heard of the two dialectical procedures (cf. 265 D 2; 265 D 8) and often appears appeasing throughout the dialogue rather than truly swayed by the Socratic argumentations[16].

Phaedrus' inexperience and his inability to follow a "philosophically grounded" discourse on dialectics account for the plainness[17] and conciseness of the exposition of the two dialectical procedures, as well as for the impossibility of providing the elements for its foundation *within the dialogue itself*. If this is true, one cannot disregard that in the Platonic dialogues, as Migliori states, «there are no interlocutors and there is no debate: this is *fiction*. In actual fact

[16] In this sense one cannot but agree with Szlezák: «Socrates is alone in debating with Phaedrus: what he has to say is directed at him personally; he would say these things differently to another, or perhaps he would not say them at all, depending on the situation and the nature of his partner in the conversation» (Szlezák, *Platone e la scrittura…*, p. 76).

[17] Brisson (*Platon, Phèdre*, Traduction, introduction et notes par L. Brisson, suive de *Le pharmacie de Platon* de J. Deridda, Paris 1988 pp. 53-55), has rightly noted that, aside from the clarity with which these two dialectical procedures are presented in the *Phaedrus*, this exposition appears nonetheless more simple and «beaucoup plus primitive» than the long and elaborate diairesis in the *Sophist* and in the *Statesman.*

there is only one great master, a philosopher gifted with true writing genius, who can lead us wherever he wants»[18]. Yet even if what has been said for *Euthyphro* also holds good for *Phaedrus*, namely that «to understand what is going on, we must withstand the spell of the dialogue and remind ourselves that neither Socrates nor Euthyphro exist, and that Plato's hand has wrote the words we are poring over»[19], then we must also say that the Author has decided *Phaedrus* was unable to enlighten us any further on this topic.

Besides, however concisely, the reference to the dual ascensive and descensive processes reaches the clearest of conclusions: the ability to perform this dual motion is the condition for thought and speech[20] and those who are able to perform it can be rightly called dialecticians (*Phaedrus* 266 C 1: διαλεκτικούς). Lastly, Socrates claims to be a true worshipper of persons with these features: «And if I find any man who is able to see the One and the Many, him I follow, and 'walk in his footsteps as if he were a god"» (*Phaedrus* 266 B 5-7).

2. Phaedrus *270 D 1-8: the doing-suffering pair*

In view of the main role assumed by the reference to the doing-suffering pair in Migliori's *Sophist* lecture, there is a further point in the *Phaedrus* I wish to dwell upon. As highlighted in the *Lecture* and restated in *Appendix II*, this pair constitutes one of the core issues of Plato's vision of reality. Moreover, as well as representing the true "heart" of the *Sophist*, it makes an appearance in the *Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Philebus* and even in one of the very

[18] *Fourth Lecture*, pp. 72-73.

[19] *First Lecture*, p. 22.

[20] Cf. *Phaedrus* 266 B 3-5: «I am myself a great lover of these processes, Phaedrus, *i.e. of division and generalization; they help me speak and think*».

early dialogues such as the *Euthyphro*, albeit in different contexts and guises. Naturally, it also makes an appearance in the *Phaedrus*.

After having established a parallel between the procedures of medicine and rhetoric, based on the notion that «in both arts a nature must be defined (διελέσθαι): the nature of the body in medicine, and that of the soul in rhetoric» (270 B 4-5), Socrates notes that, with regard to the soul and the body, but more in general «*about any other nature* (περὶ ὁτουοῦν φύσεως)», it has to be seen whether

> it is a simple or multiform thing (ἁπλοῦν ἢ πολυειδές)… And if simple, then to enquire what power it has, i.e. what and whereupon is its power of doing and what and wherefrom is its power of suffering (τὴν δύναμιν αὐτοῦ, τίνα πρὸς τί πέφυκεν εἰς τὸ δρᾶν ἔχον ἢ τίνα εἰς τὸ παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ). And if multiform, having numbered the forms, to establish for each one of them what is understood when it is one, i.e. wherefore it may do itself by nature or wherefore and wherefrom suffer (τῷ τί ποιεῖν αὐτὸ πέφυκεν ἢ τῷ τί παθεῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ) (270 D 1-7).

What holds true for the body and soul, then, also applies to the nature of any other thing. In any case, it is a question of knowing the nature of what is being spoken of,

1) to see whether it is simple or includes several forms (πολυειδές);
2) if it is simple, one must ascertain its power of doing, and upon what, and its possibility of suffering, and by what;
3) if it has manifold forms, instead, it is a question of:
   3a) counting them;
   3b) and seeing for each one of them (ἐφ'ἑκάστου) its own capacity of acting and suffering, and by what.

It is obviously a somewhat cumbersome task, which (it must be noted) Plato neither takes up again nor develops *inside the dialogue*. Only the rough guidelines of this procedure are outlined without

elaborating it: Phaedrus has in fact not an inkling as to what is on Plato's mind[21]. But while in the *Phaedrus* this core vision of reality and the pervasiveness of an *all-defining* dynamics (*Phaedrus* 270 D 1) are merely hinted at, in the *Sophist*, on the other hand, the will to furnish a *suitable* definition (ἱκανόν) (*Sophist* 248 C 4) of such a dynamics (which is, unsurprisingly, taken up and presented throughout the oeuvre[22]) is expressly stated. Indeed, the dialogue reaches its peak in the declaration, perfectly mirroring the one in the *Phaedrus*, that every reality *even the slightest one* (*Sophist* 248 C 5) is defined by a power of doing and suffering. Once again we are forced to say, quoting Migliori's remarks on the *Theaetetus*[23], that "one cannot go any further *with Phaedrus*".

*3. Between witting and unwitting deceit (*Phaedrus, *261 E - 262 B)*

The last issue I briefly wish to signal (though fleetingly touched in the brief referance to the issue of the link between names and forms, so crucial to both the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*) relates to the subtle yet treacherous relationship between witting and unwitting deceit. Plato presents once again the theme of deceitful speech with such insistence that, in this sense, it represents one of the *golden threads* throughout the *Phaedrus*. Here, alongside the fundamental discriminant between truth and deceit, true and false discourse, another key *discrimen* appears: that between witting and unwitting deceit (or self-deceit).

In this sense, Socrates sets against the character of Lysias, who has driven the discourse back to the only aspect he is familiar with,

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[21] In 270 D 8 in fact, Phaedrus, quite unconvinced by the philosopher's words, says: «Perhaps, that's right, Socrates».

[22] «In reality, Plato has called our attention to these processes right from the beginning» (*Third Lecture*, p. 66)

[23] *First Lecture*, p. 26.

the negative one, by ignoring the ramifications of the notion of Eros and has therefore unwittingly deceived himself, he who, by distinguishing between *the likeness and unlikeness of beings in a precise manner* (τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῶν ὄντων καὶ ἀνομοιότητα ἀκριβῶς) (*Phaedrus* 262 A 6-7), succeeds in «deceiving another without being deceived in turn» (*Phaedrus* 262 A 5-6). The knowledge of truth, then, the knowledge of «what each of the beings is» (*Phaedrus* 262 B 7-8) not only represents the *conditio sine qua non* for the making a true speech, but also the irrevocable condition for a *consciously* deceitful oratory art.

The distinction between that form of witting ignorance and that «very large and dangerous» (*Sophist* 229 C 1) ignorance that occurs «when a person supposes that he knows, and does not know» (*Sophist* 229 C 5), also represents one of the basic points in the *Sophist*. In this dialogue, indeed, as Migliori has shown, following a first diairesis (*Sophist* 221 C - 223 B) that maps out the Sophist's character as a sham educator and therefore conscious dissembler[24], a fourth diairesis (*Sophist* 226 B - 231 B) is developed. Here, just as in *Phaedrus*[25], by insisting on the need for bearing the subtle distinc-

[24] This definition will be taken up again and endorsed by the eighth definition of the fifth diairesis, 264 B - 268 D: the Sophist is a *conscious dissembler*.

[25] «SOCRATES – If we inquire in this way, I think that it will be made clear. When will there be deception, when things have a large or small difference from one another? PHAEDRUS – When the difference is small. SOCRATES – But it is evident that you will be less likely to be discovered in passing into the other extreme in small steps than when you go all at once at great strides» (*Phaedrus* 261 E 6 - 262 A 4). See also *Phaedrus*, 262 B 2-9: «SOCRATES – In men who have notions which are at variance with realities and are deceived, it is clear that the error slips in through certain resemblances (δι'ὁμοιοτήτων τινῶν). PHAEDRUS – It just happens this way. SOCRATES – So, is it possible that someone has the skill to turn everything, inch by inch, to the opposite direction, by the help of resemblances (διὰ τῶν ὁμοιοτήτων), bringing it from being into its contrary from time to time, or to avoid it by

tions in mind and strongly underlining the importance of resemblances[26], the possibility of a serious case of *involuntary* ignorance gradually emerges. This ignorance is all the more troublesome as «no one who thinks himself wise is willing to learn any of those things he believes he knows» (*Sophist* 230 A 7-8).

The two dialogues, therefore, seem to come to remarkably like-minded opinions.

4. Conclusions

This swift yet necessarily abridged *excursus* through several points of convergence between the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist* and other dialogues examined in the *Lectures* denotes a strong element of continuity between the *Phaedrus* and the group of dialectical dialogues (*Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman*). In this sense it appears possible to maintain that, as esteemed scholars have argued[27], the *Phaedrus* can be construed as the last dialogue of maturity – immediately prior to the dialectic works – that foreruns and prepares the dialectical dialogues themselves. The unequivocal signs (though neither confronted systematically nor philosophically well-grounded) given off by the *Phaedrus* on the issue of doing and suffering, the clear references to dialectics, even furnished with methodological instructions, the reference to diairetic and synoptic procedures and to the multiple connections that can be made between names and forms, and, lastly, the reflection on the delicate question

himself, if he doesn't know what each of the beings is? PHAEDRUS – It is quite impossible».

[26] Given that *likenesses themselves can be most deceitful* (*Sophist* 231 A-B).

[27] Cf., for instance, Reale, Platone, *Fedro*, introduction, translation, notes and addenda by G. Reale, Rusconi, Milan 1993, p. 29; Brisson, *Platon, Phèdre*..., p. 34; R. Hackfort, *Plato's Phaedrus*, Translated with an introduction and commentary by R. Hackforth, University Press, Cambridge, 1952, pp. 3-7.

of deceit will all be picked up and developed in the *Sophist* and the other dialogues belonging to the same batch of writings.

If this reading is legitimate, then perhaps one could attempt to add another element to the picture of connections and complementarity outlined by Migliori[28], by saying that prior to the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* block, and before the «introduction» represented by the «outstanding example of dialectic philosophy»[29] provided by the *Parmenides*, it seems possible to establish a "poetical introduction" of the *Phaedrus* who conceals precious indications on content and methodology behind his «flowing vein»[30], preparing the reader for the wearisome meander down the path of dialectics.

[28] Cf. *First Lecture*, pp. 24-27.

[29] *First Lecture*, p. 27.

[30] The expression belongs to L. Stefanini, *Platone*, 2 voll., Padua, 1932-1935; new updated edition 1949²; anastatic reprint of II ed., Istituto di storia della Filosofia, Padua 1991, vol. II, p. 24, who believes some scholars place *Phaedrus* behind the dialectical works for an eminently "aesthetic" reason: «the consensus is due to an aesthetic need for balance and proportion, which critics unwittingly heed when they claim the doctrinal roughness of the *Republic* is followed by the flowing vein of the *Phaedrus*, and in forestalling that, once the uphill climb of dialectics has been resumed in the *Theaetetus* or in the *Parmenides*, this is cut short again by the maddening force of the *Phaedrus*».

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As a premise let me say that it is hard to ask questions or raise considerable issues when moving along a line of substantial agreement with the reading of the dialogue put forward by Migliori.

1. Traces of the school of Elea prior to the dialectic dialogues

In evaluating the batch of dialectic dialogues among which the *Sophist* is grouped, Migliori writes: «All these works tie in with Eleaticism, with one key footnote: no reference has been made to this school prior to the *Parmenides*»[1].

I find this statement troubling if we consider a dialogue such as the *Euthydemus*, which must surely be ranked among one of Plato's first works[2]. This dialogue, in fact, appears strongly linked to the *Sophist* from a number of different aspects[3] and, given the theme

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[1] *First Lecture*, p. 24.

[2] The "stylometric" method places the *Euthydemus* in the same groups as *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Cratylus*. It is considered as one of Plato's early dialogues and, more precisely, among the last ones of the first group (cf. L. Stefanini, *Platone*, Cedam, Padua, 1932, 1949[2], pp. LXII - LXXII).

[3] This point cannot be adequately illustrated here; let us simply bear in mind that in the *Euthydemus*, Plato employs the two Eristics, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, *to stage* many aspects of sophistry – neither examining them in depth nor establishing them – which are discussed and theoretically explained in the *Sophist.* In this light, the *Sophist* can be regarded as a "boetheia structure" for the *Euthydemus* (about this concept cf. T. A. Szlezák, *Come leggere Platone*, Rusconi, Milan, 1991, pp. 66-92). For example: 1) the fact that the two main characters in the dialogue are Eristic refers us straight away to the *Sophist*'s scope: in fact, the Eristic is defined in the third diairesis as a *kind* of sophist dedicated to controversy on justice and injustice for money-making purposes (*Sophist*, 224 E - 226 A); 2) in very close kinship with the *Sophist*, the

that is being addressed, we especially find the same evaluation of Eleaticism as the "strength" of the sophists that is most vivid in the *Sophist*.

Indeed, as the *Fourth Lecture* has highlighted, in this dialogue Plato identifies the sophist's strength in the Eleatic concept of Being and Not Being: while in pursuit of him, one realizes he has «in the cleverest manner got into an hard place to explore» (236 D 1-3), namely in the mimetic art that, for it to be acknowledged as purveying falsehoods, necessarily refers to Not Being. By shifting the discourse to Not Being the sophists manage to lead their interlocutors into contradiction: theirs is an art of appearance, as the Stranger from Elea acknowledges, they are deceivers, although

two are outlined as false educators, whose aim is money in return for which they promise to teach virtue (*Euthydemus*, 273 D); 3) Socrates indicates the hub of their teaching in the statement asserting their omniscience and in the promise of bestowing this upon those who are willing to pay (294 B); we therefore find in the words of the Stranger from Elea a perfect correspondence with the declaration Socrates is entrusted with in the *Euthydemus*: first, he indicates, as a feature of the sophistic art of confutation, a certain ability to discuss all subject matters, so as to demonstrate knowledge all, then he rails against this clearly hollow promise (*Sophist*, 232 E - 233 A); 4) that sophistic art only offers an illusion of wisdom is confirmed both in the *Euthydemus* and in the *Sophist* by the ongoing reference to the dimension of magic and spell-casting (cf. *Sophist*, 233 C; 234 E - 235 A; 234 C; *Euthydemus*, 288 B; 289 E - 290 E; 303 B - C 3: ultimately, in this sort of *Eristic comedy* narrated by Socrates to Crito, the spell-casting dimension is actually *staged*; 5) lastly, just as the *Sophist*'s great worth is to provide us with the *negative* side of the philosopher, as illustrated among others in the *Fifth Lecture*, also in the *Euthydemus*, Plato constructs the *negative* figure of the philosopher, albeit with a different breadth and depth of philosophical intent, by employing two characters whose attributes are opposite to the philosopher's: the Eristics Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

> how a thing can appear and seem but not be, how a man can say a thing which is not the truth, all that has always set many problems, in the past as in the present (236 D 9 - E 3).

Parmenides, in fact, views Non Being as impossible to either be spoken of or thought. Therefore, a thing cannot be said *not to be* true, as it would amount to speaking of Not Being. In this way false opinion must be negated along with not being.

Having established this strength, Plato shows in the *Sophist* the way to strike it down:

> in self-defence, I must test the philosophy of my father Parmenides, and force Not-being to be in a certain sense, and Being, on the other hand, somehow not to be (241 D 5 - 7).

As the *Fourth Lecture* has shown, Not Being can be somehow force to be by accepting that not-being can not merely be thought as negating existence, as Not Being in the absolute sense, but also as a negation of a given quality, therefore in the sense of Other:

> When we speak of not-being, we speak, apparently, not of something opposed to being, but only different (257 B 3 - 4).

If we outline the positions, the *Sophist* theorizes that

- sophists hide in Not Being and are thus hard to drive out, for Not Being cannot even be uttered without falling into contradiction: indeed, they make false promises, but this cannot be proven as they are capable of asserting that falsehoods do not exist, on the basis of the Parmenidean concept of Being. This is, in fact, the strength sophists draw from the Eleatic doctrine.
- The Stranger of Elea also shows the path to follow to defeat the sophists.

In the *Euthydemus*, though *not stating it outright*, Plato illustrates the strength sophists draw from Eleaticism, bringing two Eristics into the fray, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. They give Socrates and the host of youths around them a demonstration of the Eristic art, laying down many of the Sophisms presented against the backdrop of the

Parmenidean concept, shaped to suit their ends: the two often base themselves on the Eleatic concept of Being that, by negating Not Being, also negates the Other, because that which is other *is no longer what it was before, it as not become other,* thus it *simply is not.*

2. Some of the Sophisms in the Euthydemus

Let us look in detail at where this "Eleatic root" can be unearthed[4].

Sophism 3: *The youth Cleinias' search for wisdom* (283 B-D)

Dionysodorus asks if the boy is wise or unlearned. If he is unlearned and it is wanted that he become wise, it is wanted that he is no longer what he is now, therefore it is wanted that he dies. The Parmenidean backdrop is evident when being (that is used with a copulative function: being wise, being unlearned) is dropped to move on to considering not being: at this point, in fact, it is assigned an exclusively existential value, thus allowing the passage from the statement of changing to dying. Starting from the Eleatic conception, any form of becoming and change becomes impossible because to say "Cleinias, who was unlearned, has become wise" means to say he is not what he was, i.e. he exists no longer, and is dead. It is possible to trace in this passage of the reasoning that strong sophistic motive, which finds its theoretical explications in the *Sophist*: becoming is impossible for it implies Not Being in an absolute sense. This logic shows well how easy it is to puzzle one's interlocutor, and lead him to inferences he cannot refuse.

Sophism 4: *the impossibility of lying* (283 E - 284 A)

Lying is impossible: anyone who lies talks about the object of the lie, i.e. he speaks of this thing that, as it is being spoken about, must

[4] The numeration given to sophisms follows their order of presentation within the dialogue; we have reconstructed this sequence but cannot adequately explain it here.

exist and must be separated from the others. Whoever speaks, then, says that which is, therefore he says the truth. Eleaticism is easily traceable in this impossibility of speaking falsehoods, because, if one speaks, one only speaks of that which is, therefore not being and falsehoods disappear together.

Without theorizing them, this sophism shows two points that the *Sophist* will treat with considerably greater philosophical depth: a) the connection between false and Not Being, whereupon the reasoning is based; b) the manner in which Eleaticism unwittingly provides the sophists with "strong" cases.

Sophism 5: *the objection of the youth Ctesippus to the impossibility of lying* (284 B-C)

Ctesippus observes that, even assuming it is true that whoever speaks says that which is, Dionysodorus has not spoken of things now. Euthydemus answers this objection by shifting the reasoning towards Not Being: that which is not is not absolutely; no-one can do what does not exist; speaking is like doing, so no-one can speak of that which is not. The backdrop is still Parmenidean: Not Being can neither be uttered nor thought.

Sophism 7: *the impossibility of juxtaposing two interlocutors* (285 D - 286 B)

The game is based on two premises, the second of which takes us back to the Parmenidean concept of Being: a) there are words (λόγοι) for each being; b) there are words *only for that which is*.

Given the first premise, Dionysodorus asks whether these words will speak of being as it is or as it is not: Ctesippus answers boldly «as it is», meaning they will say the truth; Dionysodorus recalls, in fact, no-one speaks of how a thing is not because not being is not spoken of. But then it is impossible for two speakers to contradict one another, either if they speak of the same thing as they will be saying the same thing, or if they speak of different things because there is no common ground whereupon to measure one another.

Sophism 11: *kinship ties* (297 D- 298 C)

Given that a man cannot be both father and not father, if Sofroniscus is acknowledged as being father (of Socrates), then Chaeredemus cannot be father (regardless whose) for he *is other* than the father (of Socrates) and thus *is not* the father (of Socrates) and vice versa. This game works thanks to the absolute value assigned to names, against the Eleatic logic that negated the Other likening it to Not Being. This is expressed through Socrates' clarification, who says that Chaeredemus is other than *his* father and not *from the father* in an absolute sense. Absolute negation is one thing, negation as affirmation of a diversity is quite another thing. Hence, Plato already hints at the solution he will give in the *Sophist*.

3. A further confirmation

Comparing the two dialogues, then, yields the conclusion that in the *Euthydemus* Plato enacts or, if one prefers, gives *a practical demonstration* of what he theorizes and solves in the *Sophist*. Through the two Erists' *modus* of proceeding, the Author shows the sophists' strength in action, which seemingly makes them unassailable and invincible, without however delving into the theoretical roots of that strength. Eleatic philosophy is not dealt with and, as we have seen, a potential solution is merely hinted at; this, however, has no effect here, to the extent that Socrates is apparently beaten by the two brothers' sophisms after all.

This almost *hidden* presence of Eleaticism seems also justified in what Socrates says when commenting the sophisms of the two Erists with regard to the alleged impossibility of lying and contradicting oneself:

> I have often heard this thesis from many people and have been amazed always. It is employed, in fact, by the disciples of Protagoras, and *others before them.* To me it appears quite wonderful, and that in demolishing the others, also demolishes itself. I think I am most likely to learn the truth about it in the best way

> from you. What else can it mean if not that saying falsehoods is impossible? (286 C 1 - 6).

Socrates speaks of this reasoning on the impossibility of saying falsehoods as a very commonplace and unoriginal discourse, also used by others: the followers of Protagoras, whom he explicitly refers to, and «others before them». Critics unanimously see in them the Eleatics, to whom these sophisms must be necessarily reconnected, as we have seen.

Indeed, while starting off from very distant positions, Eleaticism and the Protagorean doctrine achieve the same result on this ground, negating the possibility of falsehood and contradiction; after all, that is just what Eristics are interested in[5]. By taking Protagoras' thought to its logical consequences, one can reach the stage of negating falsehood, bestowing values of truth to every opinion; basing oneself on the Parmenidean univocal Being, one reaches the point of negating falsehood, because falsehood leads back to Not Being that can neither be spoken of nor thought. Furthermore, playing on the Eleatic univocity, the sophists are capable of making their interlocutors constantly fall into contradiction.

Based on this argumentation, I think Plato can be said to at least hint at Eleaticism, even though obviously in an undeclared and technically shallow manner, much before the dialectic dialogues. After all, this manner of proceeding by hints and references that is found in the *Euthydemus* agrees perfectly with that «extremely well-crafted form of writing, intent on measuring the information the bare necessities»[6] that Migliori recognises as typical of Plato: this dialogue is among the early dialogues and it is clear that – in line with

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[5] Cf. L. Maccioni, *Filosofia e matematica in Platone. Osservazioni sull'*Eutidemo, il Tripode, Naples, 1978, p. 52.

[6] *First Lecture*, p. 25.

the dictates that find expression in the *Phaedrus*[7] – it could not thoroughly deal with a problematic such as the one raised by Eleaticism, in an oeuvre that, within the limitations of written communication, seems nonetheless addressed to "(relatively) simple souls", which must therefore be spoken to in simple terms.

[7] Cf. *Phaedrus*, 277 B 8 - C 3: «… after recognizing the nature of the soul with the same criterion, by uncovering the kind of discourse more suitable to every nature, may the discourse be thus framed and regulated, providing complex discourses to a complex soul, and simple ones to a simple soul».

Diana Quarantotto*

Within the framework of this discussion I wish to deal with two of the many issues Migliori raised in his interpretation of the *Sophist*: the number of supreme genera and the criteria for discerning them, and the common thread that weaves through ontology, the dimension of one and many, the dimension of whole, of all and of parts, and that of doing and suffering.

1. Supreme genera

Migliori believes the *Sophist* contemplates eight supreme genera (pp. 79-81, 86-89): absolute Being, relative Being, absolute Not-being, relative Not-Being, Same, Other, Motion, and Rest. Of these eight, Plato expressly introduces and defines five: Being, Same, Other, Motion, and Rest. The remaining three**,** in accordance with the protreptic objectives of the Platonic texts, are implicit and can be inferred by carefully reading the textual hints and the philosophical content in the dialogue: relative Being, relative Not-being, and absolute Not-being. The aim of these pages is to suggest that relative Being and relative Not-being, even though they correspond respectively to meanings of being and not-being that are set out and defined in the *Sophist*, are not self-contained genera, for they are "generable" from the five supreme genera and the relations existing among them. On the other hand, Absolute Not-being does not represent a genus as it does not fall within the "operational objectives" of the theory of μεγίστα γένη.

This "counteroffer" hinges on two assumptions relating to the meaning and to the explanatory range of the theory of supreme genera. This I shall express in a dogmatic manner, so to speak, for the sake of brevity. As the first assumption goes, not only the five supreme genera Plato has laid down fail to exhaust the whole range of existing genera, but, above all, they are

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not located at the same level as the others. Rather, the five supreme genera are "structural" genera that, all together and in relation to one another, bear witness to some of the most important "inner workings" of Being[1]. According to the second assumption, the theory of supreme genera aims to illustrate the "inner workings" of being that are necessary and instrumental to the sophist's capture; i.e. to the solution of the issue of falsehood and not-being. It does not contemplate the unraveling of the endless questions that are indeed linked to the issue of falsehood and not-being but that, though mentioning them, Plato decides to overlook[2].

Absolute Being and relative Being

Let us first consider the distinction between the genus of absolute Being and that of relative Being. With this distinction Migliori "splits" the only kind of Being expressly construed by Plato. To begin with, I must admit its precise meaning somewhat escapes me and I shall consequently confront the issue on the basis of following three assumptions. The difference between absolute and relative Being corresponds to the distinction between being viewed in itself and being of a specific thing[3]; alternatively, to that between existential being and copulative being; lastly, to the one between being of what is in itself and the being of relative things.

If absolute and relative Being coincide with the being view in itself and the being of a specific thing, respectively, there appears to be no need to count relative Being among the kinds of Being. To underwrite this distinction, in fact, the Being need only be established as a genus set apart from all others: absolute Being is the genus of Being itself,

[1] Cf. 259 A 4 - B 6.

[2] Cf. 241 B 9 - C 1; 245 D 12 - E 5; 261 A 4 - B 4.

[3] In the light of Migliori's assertions at pp. 87-89, this seems the most likely assumption.

whereas relative Being (construed as being of a specific thing or of many) is given by the partaking in Being of other genera[4].

Even the assumption that absolute Being corresponds to existential being, and relative Being coincides with copulative being seems to fail to warrant the position of two genera of Being. The distinction between existential and copulative being stems from the twin function of the genus of Being itself: as a genus wherein each of the others participate, and it is by reason of this[5], and as a bridging element among them (akin to the role vowels take on in relation to the other letters)[6].

One's attention could thus turn to the distinction between being of what is in itself and the being of relative things. Nonetheless, this assumption too seems to present a few problems. What Plato states at lines 255 C 12 - D 7 suggests that "being in itself" and "being in relation to some other thing" are two separate ways of being, arising from the nature of a specific genus and its participation in Being.

Relative Not-being and Other

With regard to the distinction between relative Not-being and Other, Migliori (pp. 84-86) argues that, while constituting a part of the Other, relative Not Being is an additional, self-contained genus for it possesses a higher degree of pervasiveness than other parts of the Other. Indeed, as a part of the Other that opposes Being, relative Not-being is utterly pervasive and affects all genera. The other parts of Other, instead, do not oppose Being but each one opposes a specific genus. Therefore their degree of pervasiveness is more bounded as it depends on the negated term (not-beautiful, not-good, not-right, etc.).

Relative Not-being, then, coincides with all those genera that are separate from the Being genus, but considered *for the reason that*, though partaking of Being, they are *not* Being. This "class" or "meta-

[4] Cf. 254 D 10; 256 A 1; D 8-9; E 3; 258 A 7-9.

[5] Cf. *supra* note 3.

[6] Cf. 251 A 8 - C 1, 253 A 4-6, B 8 - C 3.

class" of genera, however, does not in turn seem to constitute a self-contained genus, for it is the mere result of the act of establishing Being and Other. Indeed, it is on the very strength of the relations other genera establish with Being and Other that, though participating in Being, they are not identified with Being (i.e. they are relative Not-being)[7]: these relations (with Being and Other) are enough to "beget" relative Not-being (that is, to announce that all genera separate from Being, owing to this, *do not be*) and to demonstrate its pervasiveness.

Absolute Not-being

Along with relative Being and relative Not-being, Migliori believes the third genus to be implicitly construed in the *Sophist* is that of absolute Not-being (pp. 84-86)[8]. If absolute Not-being is understood as a genus in opposition to Being, however, this hypothesis appears refuted by the statement at lines 258 E 6 - 259 A 1. Here, in fact, is where Plato asserts he can announce the existence of not-being without falling into contradiction; the reason being that he has dropped the issue relating to not being, construed as the opposite of Being.

On account of the fact that it does not partake in Being, the absolute Not-being, understood as the opposite of Being, can neither be thought nor spoken of[9]. Consequently, it can neither belong to that system of supreme genera that is construed to warrant the possibility to think and speak of not being, in the absence of which the sophist cannot be apprehended[10].

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[7] Cf. 256 D 5 - E 2, 258 D 5 - E 2, 259 A 4 - B 1.

[8] In some occasions, however, even Migliori affirms that absolute Not Being is excluded (cf. pp. 83-84).

[9] Cf. 237 E 1-6; 238 C 8-10; 241 A 5-6.

[10] There is a sort of negation that might correspond to absolute Not Being. When the minotaur is said not to exist, in fact, his participation in Being is excluded *tout court*. Plato, on the other hand, seems not to want to deal with this issue in the *Sophist* as it is not functional to the sophist's "capture". In fact, he

2. Ontology and the "foremost problem"

In disagreement with one of the most widespread readings, Migliori believes that «the heart of Platonic philosophy which emerges from the *Sophist*» (p. 51) is not ontology. "The defining framework of reality" is rather marked by a theoretical move revolving «around the concepts of whole and part, and the connection-distinction between one, whole and all, before coming to a head in the "doing-suffering" pair» (p. 94). In Migliori's view, the dimension of numbers, that of the whole and the parts, and that of doing and suffering are not merely distinct from ontology but even appear prior to it (pp. 61-63, 72-74, 80-81, 123-126): such dimensions amount to «a necessary pre-condition for the admissibility of some sort of ontology» (p. 61)[11].

The fact that the enquiry on being is developed through an ongoing reference to the notions of "one" and "many", "whole" and "parts", "doing" and "suffering" suggests that their importance cannot be underestimated. Nonetheless, the steps[12] Migliori takes to then develop his argument do not imply, in my view, that the one and many, the whole and the parts, doing and suffering are realities that are "distinct" from being and antecedent to it. These steps are indeed compatible also with a milder reading, namely the idea that, rather than coinciding with dimensions distinct from and antecedent to ontology, such concepts represent determinations/relations belonging to all that is in that it is.

Insofar as the relationship between being and whole is established at lines 245 C 1-3, D 4-6, for example, that if being were not

assumes that every discourse, even false ones such as "Theaetetus flies" relates to something that is: in this case to Theaetetus (cf. 263 C 9-11).

[11] The notion of "pre-condition of ontology" is in actual fact used by Migliori (p. 61) only with reference to the all, the whole and the parts. What Migliori says at pp 61-63, 71-74, 80-81, 121-124 and especially at pp. 94-95, however, suggests that also one and many, doing and suffering are understood as preconditions for being.

[12] Cf. 245 B 4 - D 2; 237 B 10 - 238 C 10; 254 D 7 - 256 D 4.

a whole it would be in want of itself, and would be unable to engender itself, i.e. to come into being. Hence it merely seems possible to infer that whole is a condition of being, and not that it represents a pre-condition for it: all that is, for the reason that it is, constitutes a whole, for if not then it could not be. Plato says nothing in the abovementioned passage suggesting that the whole is a "reality" antecedent to being. Indeed, the theory that being and whole are distinct, and that whole can exist in itself seems only put forward to underscore the absurdity of the consequence flowing therefrom: the fact that being would be in want of itself. By saying that if it were not whole being would be in want of *itself*, Plato seems to regard being and whole as co-original and interdependent realities: whole is one of the things that found just what the being is.

A like argument also seems to apply to the relationship between being and numbers. The intrinsic nature of this relationship is (negatively) established at lines 238 A 1 - C 6. Here, absolute not-being is absolute due to the impossibility of predicating of it either unity or multiplicity. Hence, unlike things that are not, those that are, in that they are, represent a unity or a multiplicity: saying that something is, or better still, simply saying something amounts to bestowing it automatically unity or multiplicity. As with the whole, one and many also seem to constitute conditions, and not preconditions, of being; in other words, property of all that is in that it is. In fact, at line 238 a 10 numbers are included among the things that are, and not among the realities that forerun being.

As for doing and suffering, or better still, the power of doing and that of suffering, these concepts are defined at lines 247 C 9 - D 4 as principles *ingrained* and common to corporeal and incorporeal things alike: they represent what by virtue of which they both are. Such realities, therefore, do not appear unconnected or antecedent to being. On the contrary, the idea that being is none other than *dynamis* (247 E 3-4) is understood as a definition to all effects.

The hypothesis that one and many, the whole and the parts, and doing and suffering constitute determinations/relations belonging to all

that is, in that it is, rather than realities that are distinct from and antecedent to being, also appears corroborated by the structure of Platonic enquiry on being, as developed in the *Sophist*. This enquiry on being, in fact, immediately takes the shape of a search for its quantitative and qualitative properties (242 C 4-6, 250 C 1-10): the aim is to establish what is being and what are its predicates. The main motivation for such a structure, that is, the idea that being is endowed with qualitative and quantitative properties, is to be found in the first critique of monistic theories: if being were in want of determinations it would be unutterable, in other words it would be kindred to absolute not-being (244 B 9 - D 12). Out of all the infinite properties of the things that are, one and many, the whole and the parts, doing and suffering perform a very special role because they embody attributes of being in that it is: indeed, these properties are not only shared by all things that exist, but are intrinsic conditions of their being.

The perspective of the enquiry on being and not-being, furthermore, is not of genetic-evolutionary kind but is static. It hinges on demonstrating the possibility of falsehood by defining the bonds of *participation* occurring between genera in relation to one another. The issue centering on the priority or antecedence of relations among genera or "dimensions" of reality therefore appears beyond the scope of the research presented in the *Sophist*.

These considerations aside, I agree on the point that "the foremost problem" in the dialogue is not that of ontology. My impression, which I summarize hastily as a mere talking point for the debate, is that this problem is less concerned with one or many, whole or parts, doing or suffering, all viewed as conditions or preconditions for being, than with the relations occurring among being, thought and speech: the criteria whereupon the inner workings of being are defined coincide with its criteria pertaining to its intelligibility and utterability.

The issue of the relations among being, thought, and speech seems indeed to constitute one of the recurring themes in the *Sophist*, as well as the theoretical picture wherein the search is devel-

oped. It manifests itself from the very beginning, within the aporia raised by the last definition of the "sophist" (falsehood and error are impossible, for *saying* something is equal to *saying* something that is, whereas not-being is *unthinkable* and *unutterable*[13]), and is taken up again at the end of the dialogue as the relations between Being, Other, Opinion, and Speech are defined[14].

Purposefully, also the aporia concerning the impossibility of negating not being gains significance: if not being is *unthinkable* and *unutterable*, then it is also impossible to negate, i.e. *say* that it is not[15]. Based on this acknowledgement, then, the problem of not being is rephrased and redefined as a problem on the correct linguistic formulation of not being (τὴν ὀρθολογίαν περὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν)[16].

The relations between being, thought, and speech also play a major role in the critique of monistic theories. The first confutation, indeed, is based on the idea that if being were one, it *could not be named*[17]. Moreover, motion and rest are not only regarded as beings or properties of what is, but also as conditions for the intelligibility of things that are: the intelligibility of being requires of it that it neither be fully in motion nor fully at rest[18]. Even the idea that one and many are determinations of being in that it is, does seem to lead back to the conditions of utterability of being: whatever is is either one or many, because *saying* something amounts to assigning unity or multiplicity to it[19]. Within the context of the enquiry into the possible sorts of relationships among genera, the first option (i.e. the idea that genera do not participate of one another at all) is

[13] Cf. 237 B 10 - E 6.
[14] Cf. 260 B 10 and ff.
[15] Cf. 238 D 4-7.
[16] Cf. 239 B 1-5.
[17] Cf. 244 B 9 - D 12.
[18] Cf. 248 D 10 - 249 D 4.
[19] Cf. 238 A 1 - C 6.

ruled out as incompatible with the intelligibility and utterability of being[20]. In turn, intelligibility and utterability of being constitute the criteria whereupon the third assumption is preferred[21]: participation between some genera is possible and not between others. This third hypothesis is placed in relation with the same possibility of dialectic philosophy. Among other things, it seems construed as a method that, on account of its conforming to the "inner workings" of being, allows for correct *thought* and *speech*[22].

Our discussion thus seems to have come full circle: mainly on the strength of being's criteria of intelligibility and utterability, we have been able to detect and ascertain the "inner workings" of being; in turn, they constitute what is needed to "seize" the sophist, justify dialectic philosophy and tell the true philosopher and the mere dissembler apart[23].

[20] Cf. 251 E 7 - 252 C 9.

[21] Cf. 259 D 9 - 260 B 2.

[22] Cf. 252 E 9 - 253 E 6. For this purpose, it is also meaningful that the same theory of supreme genera is presented as a model whose function is not only that of justifying the possibility of false discorse and opinion, but also of allowing for the confutation of sophistic *logoi* based on the different meanings of words (cf. 259 A 10 - B 4; 259 B 8 - D 7).

[23] Although phrased in a summary and loose manner, it does not seem to me that this assumption has been confuted by the observations on names, which Migliori refers to at p. 48. The criteria of intelligibility and utterability of being do not relate to names per se, but to the rules and structures of predication. Besides, when practicing dialectics, i.e. when genera are distinguished and their relations identified, Plato himself introduces names for those things that appear in want of them. At least in the context of the *Sophist*, then, the "frailty" or "inadequacy" of names does not seem to represent a cardinal aspect of speech.

Final Observation by Maurizio Migliori

I must first of all express my heartfelt thanks to all my interlocutors for their evident and diverse efforts, and must apologize with my two loving "critics". I deeply regret not being able to give them the chance of a further counter-reply (to which I could perhaps add a few... brief considerations), but I sincerely hope this thought-provoking comparing and contrasting work is undertaken elsewhere. I must especially apologize for the lengthiness of the answers that I hope will be warranted in the light of three factors.

The first is that their objections have raised central issues that I feel would be wrong not to address in depth; secondly, a number of objections have revealed to me the possible misunderstandings accidentally fielded by my arguments and, worse still, a certain number of oratory slips that could have lead into error – and for which I apologize to my readership. For the sake of fairness, I have made no amendments to the previous text but, also as a tribute to the reader who has shown the endurance to come this far, I have felt the need to seek to clarify my thought.

Lastly, I have received confirmation of the necessity of acknowledging the weight of the paradigms: what appears central and meaningful in one paradigm can appear downright minor to anyone moving within a different field of thought. This is especially true when the conversation partners are thoroughly fair-minded and very approachable, as in this case. Perhaps it is for this reason that the divide and the communication problems appear more overt. This, however, only warrants a greater effort to make oneself understood.

I fear all this may engender boredom in the reader, but I believe it is a risk worth taking: should I fail to be convincing, at least I will have got my position across more clearly. In the end, along with a few "converts", I will at least be confronted by many dissenting with greater precision. This would be a fine result already (although I wish to beguile myself and hope for a more positive outcome).

1. In conversation with Fermani and Palpacelli

I wish to thank my two kind and competent young assistants, whom I have perhaps involuntarily put in an awkward position by asking them to discuss theses they substantially agree with. I must also thank them for adding observations, pertinent and I believe interesting for the reader, in support of the interpretative picture I have submitted, wisely drawing them from dialogues I had not made reference to.

As for the absence of critical remarks, I think this is due to the young age (and fondness for the writer): we all agree on the fact that, as Plato and Aristotle teach us, the fine pupil is the one who continues on a same course while finding new routes. These may also well be "critical" ones. But for this, thank goodness, *the younger generations* have all the time in the world. My heartfelt wish is for them to succeed in fulfilling this task.

I am furthermore most thankful to Palpacelli because she has given me the opportunity to clarify what I have must have phrased rather loosely on the relationship between Plato and the Eleatics. I harbor no doubts that Plato must have had an early encounter with Eleatic philosophy even before his first written work. Diogenes Laertius tells us he was the pupil of an Eleatic, Hermogenes[1], so we are inclined to cast aside the idea of his late acquaintance with this school. Moreover, as I point out in the text (p. 25 and n. 11), elsewhere I have tried to prove that Plato appreciates from the outset the link between Eleatism and the development of sophistry. It follows that the lack of obvious quotations and the creation of that grand *coup de theatre* – the onset of Parmenides in the dialogue bearing his name – I believe are the outcome of choices made in relation to the particular form of Platonic writing. I think this clarification has reestablished the agreement somewhat.

[1] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the philosophers*, III, 6.

Clearly, I am keen to confront the pressing questions that my other two conversation partners have kindly but firmly lain before me. They are "hefty" issues that cannot be dealt with in a single dialogue but require lengthy preambles, which this context cannot suitably guarantee. Once such observations have been made, though, they can neither be discarded nor ignored as they provide an opportunity for useful clarifications and amendments. Bearing in mind I am not expecting to sway anyone, least of all colleagues and scholars as in this circumstance, I merely seek to frame a few clarifications in legitimate defense of my theses. The debate will thereafter continue, among us and doubtless beyond us.

2. A clarification with Bruno Centrone

I have already said publicly and have no qualms committing it to writing, that I am *truly envious* of the accuracy and intelligence with which Bruno Centrone frames his arguments. I am therefore twice as happy for the many points of contact, as he has himself highlighted, that touch on fundamental issues. As for the divergences he rightly focuses on, I will seek to answer clearly so that my meaning is not misconstrued.

A strange "orthodox"

The first question to be addressed deals with my "loyalty" to the methodical setup of the Tubingen-Milan school, and the bemusement at finding such "surprising" elements in the writings of a «"hawkish" esoteric"», as I surely am and have always claimed to be. However…

However, first of all I wish for this word "esoteric" to be banished, for I feel it is utterly misleading. My belief is that Plato seeks to help his pupils "make philosophy", building up their own thought along lines he would feel are right, but which the subject must *uncover* himself. This he put in practice with his interlocutors, judging on what can be reconstructed in *Letter VII*, for example. The func-

tion of the interpersonal dialogue was to inspire and examine; its purpose was not to communicate or "teach" in the sense we commonly ascribe to the word. Plato indeed possesses his own philosophical model but it is "socratically" certain that, if spelt out, the other one would be bereft of the opportunity of discovering it and thus truly gaining possession of it.

If this is his underlying belief, he surely could not have handled things differently in writing. Hence, a writing technique capable of somehow adhering to this educational tenet is crafted. The primary goal has less to do with communicating than with rousing the intellect; one should write only in relation to the further thought the reader can and must develop (surely, providing a "philosophical" nature is given). It is in this sense that Plato himself speaks of writing as of a "game most earnest".

I feel I am thoroughly steeped in the Tubingen-Milan perspective, also because at first the game refers to the dialogue itself, then to other dialogues, and then to something the dialogues lack, and rightly so, for it constitutes the ultimate and conclusive solution. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the protreptic element in this plan of mine becomes a great deal more decisive than any of the other renowned advocates of this hermeneutical framework have claimed. We have all always agreed that our shared inspiration cannot bar in any way even remarkable differences in method and outcome alike.

Secondly, on the issue at stake, one should recall that *voluntary error* is an extreme and very rare game that must appear *amendable, if not amended*, in the light of the dialogue itself. This is because an Author such as Plato, who is deemed responsible for the consequences flowing from his works, cannot be thought to spread falsehoods and errors lightheartedly. Besides, Plato's game is more than just riddles or puzzles. To begin with, it is *always* a problem and *always* a cross-reference, therefore also stimulating and rousing, and *then* also a riddle and puzzle and, *ultimately*, even a signaled error (this serves as a merely hypothetical grading

that is also exemplified in the sequence of dialogues themselves, steadily more revealing while being more difficult and obscure at the same time).

The main issue for me was to reinforce this kind of approach to Plato's "philosophical writing", while I am sure that only a whole book of "examples of games" drawn from almost every Platonic dialogue can show in a suitably convincing way that this is the underlying technique of Platonic writing. Naturally, I am sure that all the examples provided may, and will, be re-interpreted in a manner unlike mine, but I hope that the sheer quantity and variety of the evidence put forth can generate enough *critical mass* to persuade as to the *appropriateness* of regarding this approach as not only correct but also necessary.

Rules against misuse (to be expected and easily practiced)

This applies to the future, however, which lies in the lap of the gods as the saying goes. Insofar as the present day, I must clarify my point. For sure, Centrone is right to be wary and I should be just as much as him, if not more: for sure there is a clear danger that this model might open the floodgates to the kind of mishandling, or worse, done in the name of irony, the master key to open all doors in the difficult passages of the dialogues. For this reason we should establish sound rules to agree upon.

I must therefore explain the sense of the second rule, which states that error must be visible in the light of "platonic logic". In fact, I am speaking in a technical sense here: employing contemporary logic to point to an error in the text seems irrelevant to me. Moreover, I would tread carefully also when employing Aristotelian logic. I contend that, whatever the issue, it had to stand out in the eyes of Plato and his readers of the time, and not to post-Aristotelians and post-Kantians like us. As I spell out in the text, «the evidence must spring from the Author's words» (p. 13) and not be drawn from our more sophisticated logical instruments. In this keynote I agree with Centrone on the fact that the error must be "*undeniably* apparent" (p. 128), as long as Platonic writing tech-

nique and 2500 years of philosophy in between are not forgotten. This tells us to exert even greater caution, as we know that Plato may well have made some mistakes, even of a logical kind, without realizing.

The passage in Philebus

And so we ought to go back to the text I have brought forth as the *highest* example of Platonic "game".

It seems to me the issue laid out by Centrone, if I grasp the thrust of his argument, can be summed up in three statements:

a) No problem is given as the text states that the soul can only experience anamnesis based on memory, or *mneme*;
b) No error is given;
c) No other solution is given as the anamnesis cited here is not the one in *Phaedon*, as it is not the heavy-duty anamnesis restricted to Ideas and perhaps suited for philosophers only.

I see a range of problems here; the first kind arises from the text, while the second relates to Centrone's observations.

I cannot avoid asking myself why Plato made such a stark distinction between anamnesis and memory, given that anamnesis plays no part in the issue. An implied answer, supplied not by Centrone but by most literary criticism, is that so many are the oddities in Plato that the question is not even worth asking. Yet that is just what good hermeneutics should strive not to do, in my view: each "oddity" ought to be identified and motivated. At worst, one should acknowledge that a fitting explanation cannot be given, but the quirk must not be simply glossed over.

The second question thus springs to mind: why does Plato set forth the problem of the "first time"? What is its function in the discourse? Taken out the "game" part, I cannot see it has any. And this is all the more bizarre, for it "flaunts" what seems to me a conspicuous conceptual error (that Plato simply cannot have made).

This is in fact the third, decisive question: Plato is seeking to explain on what basis the soul expresses a yearning, such as to drink.

Indeed, the answer he gives is naturally *wrong*, for this yearning can only be explained from the "second time" onwards. And what happened the first time? Plato cannot be said to have flouted the question because *he* raised the issue to begin with, *for no apparent reason*. Furthermore, he claims this treatise serves to enlighten on longing, and on pleasures *and their origin* (34 C-D).

A description of a process that has skirted the major issue, after pointing it out in the first place, would be downright unworthy. Indeed, we would be looking at a philosopher who is as unskilled in his writing as he is naïve in his reasoning, to the point of unwittingly providing a wrong answer to a problem he had raised himself. Not a genius, then, but a fool of baffling proportions; worse still, a "bad teacher".

Centrone replies that, indeed, there is nothing else in the text, as the anamnesis mentioned therein relies on a previous memory. This is very true[2], no doubt, but if we just dwell on this point we should also say that Plato

1) after making a pointless distinction between memory and anamnesis
2) raised a problem ("the first time") that he has failed to solve, and
3) worse still, has wrapped up the problem with a wrong answer.

My answer is that here lies a reference to the need for a *further* consideration on anamnesis; one that is not made here. Forsooth, we face an extreme game and Plato is in grave danger of misleading the reader. Yet, on account of this fact, I am inclined to believe that (for want of any other reason I can come up with) he has fielded all the terms, in the shape of hints, which must be implemented philosophically to find a solution, and to piece the puzzle together.

I feel that Centrone might outline a dual counter-inference.

[2] To the extent that I believe a copyist, in reasoning just like Centrone, must have felt the need to add: καὶ μνήμας.

First of all, there is the reference to animals. It is a theoretically sound objection, unbeatable even, I fear. I must say quite frankly that I do not know how Plato would respond to this objection. I am conducting a screening of the Platonic dialogues (for reasons unrelated to the present work) and I will henceforth try to make out whether, in the web of intricate and intriguing relationships linking his diverse ideas, Plato sheds any light on the matter. I must say, however, that it is a "theoretical objection" that perhaps identifies a true weakness in Plato's own reasoning, but which cannot and must not allow us to make inferences on the text. Thus the abovementioned rules are heeded. Truthfully, it seems to me that no reference to this problem appears in the text, and I am consequently at a loss for words as Plato says nothing on the matter. The position of a philosophically correct objection, though "additional" to the text under scrutiny, does not warrant any form of straying from the text itself.

Secondly, Centrone seems to make a stark distinction between two diverse and separate forms of anamnesis: one that is closely linked to memory and the past, and another that is built into the nature of the soul and its otherworldly "source", a knowledge of ideas that is perhaps suited to philosophers only. Equipped with a less "transcendent" outlook on the issue (differing once again from a host of kindred scholars), I ask myself: when the worst sort of human being picks up a thing and says "beautiful" or "good", what is the driving force that warrants such opinion? Is it perhaps not the Idea of Beauty that abides even in him? And when he says that two pieces of wood are the same, on what basis does he say this, if not because he somehow possesses the idea of "Same"? And if the *soul* of the newborn longs for certain things while recognizing others as negative, to which it reacts in kind, what is it that stirs the body to action, to long for pleasure and shun pain, given that it has no previous experience and can thus recall nothing?

I cannot come up with an answer other than "anamnesis". Perhaps it is still bound up with a very specific form of memory that

seems very much kindred to what we would call today an innate or *a priori* capacity, touching on supreme ideas as much as on the human being's fundamental workings.

Now, this solution may well be rejected, providing a different answer is put forward to the three questions below:

1. why does Plato speak of anamnesis?
2. why does he raise the issue of the "first time"?
3. what solution is suggested in this text to the underlying problem: what spurs longing in the soul?

The paradoxical success of Platonic writings

There is an interesting objection in Centrone's reasoning: if I am right, then Plato has failed miserably (and not just here) in his quest as a writer.

That is my thought exactly. Plato seeks to stem what he sees as the shortcomings in writing, but he is fighting a losing battle. As academic debate at the time showed writing is entrenched to such an extent that any effort to promote a "different" use of writing proves fruitless almost from the outset: the written words communicate, and that is their main if not sole function.

Plato's outright failure is first exemplified by the fact that a debate broke out soon after *sense* of his philosophy. But above all, we stand before a *unique* case where, despite having access to the entire written output and a great deal of additional – even firsthand – evidence from contemporary sources and after two centuries of significant and plentiful research, we still stand before a "mystery" that should no longer exist: when it comes to Plato critics agree on practically nothing. No wonder we are discussing anamnesis here, a core concept and not that thorny in itself, from fairly distant positions.

Unless the explanation for this apparent paradox is sought in the specific pitch, as unique as it is unsuccessful, of platonic writing I am really at a loss as to where to look for it.

Yet this is also the source of its timeless, exceptional success. Assuming Plato's intent in writing was to prompt his interlocutor to

think and to "make philosophy", there is no doubt he fulfilled his goal. Contrary to his expectations, however, this success owes less to "his" philosophy than to the generous array of stimuli, challenges, and questions that pepper his works, and have fostered thought among skeptics and dogmatists, metaphysicians and scientists, philosophers and men of letters.

3. A clarification with Diana Quarantotto

In the case of Diana Quarantotto's objections, which I shall seek to answer later, I must first make some clarifications beforehand. This is for two reasons: first, I fear a deep yet subtle rift runs between us, and secondly, because this serves me to express a number of elements that will come in handy in the debate with Centrone.

Quarantotto manifests what she believes is the *theme* in the *Sophist*: «the relations occurring among being, thought and speech» (p. 163). I feel there may be a possible ambivalence here that I wish to clear up.

It is undoubtedly true that «the criteria whereupon the inner workings of being are defined coincide with its criteria pertaining to its intelligibility and utterability» (p. 163). Nonetheless, it is a question of understanding whether for the *Sophist* this issue requires in-depth examination or is a commonly used tool; in other words, if it is an assumption supporting platonic philosophy altogether, or a problem that is somehow confronted and worked out in this dialogue.

My answer is that it is a tool, as all the examples laid out by D. Quarantotto clearly show. To clarify the problem, I will schematically (and trivially) draft my position: both Ideas and Principles are existing beings, canons of reason (and therefore bedrock of truth), and cause of the being of things that correspond to ideas themselves.

I am inclined to dismiss the idea that all this might work[3], but that is how I believe Plato's reasoning to run.

It is precisely for this reason that what cannot be stated rationally does not belong to the dimension of the Real. The gap between the two spheres is such, however, that it gives rise to tensions and even aporias, but this has all to do with Plato and his philosophy, ands nothing to do with Migliori's (or anybody else's) interpretation thereof. Once again, I believe the (albeit necessary) theoretical appraisals ought to be kept apart from the historical reconstruction.

This calls forth a second issue, namely, whether among the various elements fielded, any of the positions are overriding or they are all on a par with one another. My answer is that Platonic procedure is perfectly circular, albeit with some consequences. If I have to a) say that Being partakes in Motion on the basis of phenomenological evidence that beings are in motion, b) say that Being partakes in Rest on the basis of phenomenological evidence that beings are at rest, c) deny that Being may simultaneously and in like meaning find itself in both states, based on logical evidence arising from the law of non-contradiction that excludes it, then this means that either Being itself is in motion or it is at rest. This also explains why, on the one hand, beings may either move or be at rest, and, on the other, we are right in thinking this.

The reasoning is perfectly circular in that it may be traced in either direction, on a dual course: from phenomenological to rational and from empirical to ideal. I am not concerned here in the slightest with the accuracy of the reasoning: I am saying that in my belief the Platonic procedure is such and it is thoroughly consistent both with his vision of reality and with the methodical instructions he delivers on dialectics.

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[3] *For me* (but I think *for us*) it is not possible to reason consistently along these lines, in a thought process affecting both ideal and conceptual reality, and that finds in empirical reality an assured evaluation but problematic, given the ontological height difference between the two worlds.

In this same dialogue Plato seems keen to remind us of the simplicity of this passage, when, in speaking of negative terms, he claims not to regard them as opposites, but as unlike; hence, the negative particles (the many *not*-)

> put before words, reveal something other than the words which follow, or rather than the things represented by the names, which follow the negation (257 B 10 - C 3).

So far, it seems to me that Quarantotto's position is somewhat removed from mine, which is fine. However, I feel that the "logical-predicative" theme in her reasoning has gained overwhelming weight over the ontological issues in a Platonic sense; namely, that Being is a concept (and indeed it is) rather than a subsisting Idea that contains (!) parts which are Ideas in turn, as Plato expressly states[4].

In this sense, I find myself reading (hopefully misconstruing their sense) phrases such as: «This enquiry on being, in fact, immediately takes the shape of a search for its quantitative and qualitative properties (242 C 4-6, 250 C 1-10): the aim is to establish what is being and what are its predicates» (p. 163). I feel that a strong hermeneutical slant is detectable here, a "logical-predicative" take that bears close resemblance to present-day thinking but is only partially found in Plato. This causes logical-linguistic data to be overrated, as in fact occurs in Quarantotto's analysis, thus making way for other elements whose nature is perhaps more Aristotelian than Platonic[5].

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[4] It is no accident, in fact, that I have dedicated to this point and all those akin to it, from the whole-part issue to doing-suffering, almost the whole treatise from p. 98 onwards. We shall now seize the chance to try to assess the entity of this problem, but to me this view of inner structure as subsisting realities is underrated to say the least.

[5] Taking advantage of the friendly atmosphere in this debate, I wish to remark "cheekily" that I am always very much surprised to find the Aristote-

But it is now high tide the thematic issues are dealt with.

4. The importance and the purpose of the Sophist

Centrone is certainly right in urging me not to exaggerate in grading the relative importance of the individual dialogues, also because an operation of this kind can lend itself to misunderstandings, as if I failed to view the *Sophist* as one of Plato's "great dialogues".

Nonetheless, I was interested in highlighting three points:

a) The *Statesman* reviews and expands on a number of key points in the *Sophist*, also including the very definition of sophist, as I have sought to show in the *Fifth Lecture*;

b) The *Sophist* makes an analysis *in the negative* (in the sense that it gets to the bottom of an error) in order to dislodge a foe, the sophist; the *Statesman* carries out a like operation *in the positive* to establish the character closest to the philosopher, the true statesman;

c) There is a sort of "theoretical ascent" towards the *Philosopher*, wherein Plato should have elaborated on "Exactness in itself (αὐτὸ τἀκριβὲς, *Statesman*, 284 D 2), but was *unwilling to commit it to writing.*

I now wish to add a fourth point to the above. I am convinced that understanding Plato's political philosophy (i.e. two texts with the gravitas of the *Republic* and the *Laws*) without the *Statesman* is an impossible task. In this dialogue Plato has "stowed away" the key to understanding his position[6]. Besides, this may perhaps help explain

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lian expression "being in that it is being" and the like in a treatise on Plato (cf. pp. 161-164).

[6] To back up these statements I must necessarily refer to my commentary, cited at p. 27 n. 12, and to my articles dedicated to Plato's ethical-political outlook (*La prassi in Platone: realismo e utopismo*, in *Il dibattito etico e politico in Grecia tra il V e il IV secolo*, edited by M. Migliori, La Città del Sole, Napoli 2000, pp. 239-282; *Cura dell'anima. L'intreccio tra etica e politica in Platone*, «Ordia prima» (Cordoba, Arg.), I, 2002, pp. 25-65; *La filosofia politica di Platone nelle* Leggi, in *Plato's*

several comments of mine that are not meant to "belittle" the *Sophist*, but just to lessen the excessive weight (in my view) that Western and certainly "ontological" philosophical tradition has assigned to it.

Sundry preliminary remarks

Before confronting this crucial issue, I must however make a few points quite clear.

The first is that I believe the far-reaching debate (already underway for centuries) has adequately demonstrated that, because of the very nature of Platonic writing, Plato's texts can be put together in such a way as to yield effects that may be in opposition to one another. To steer clear of this outcome I reckon Plato's context and reasoning ought to be reconstructed in every (feasible) case to appreciate the problems arising therefrom. I also believe that we ought to curb, insofar as possible, our tendency to ask questions that the text neither formulates nor warrants. While utterly correct from a theoretical standpoint, this action of "asking" (all but inevitable at times) often leads to bewilderment on a historical level, and to downright "twisted" effects in Plato's case. I will therefore merely seek to establish, with (I fear) some degree of repetition of the analysis previously made, whether a number of "interpretations" of mine are warranted by the development of Platonic reasoning and the textual references.

Secondly, I must "dogmatically" draw attention to a fundamental point. As I have sought to argue throughout all my essays in recent years, Plato is by no means "Descartian"; on the contrary, he seems to loathe "clear and distinct" ideas as he prefers to multiply the explanatory patterns so as to explain reality, inasmuch as it is possible.

Laws: From Theory into Practice, Proceedings of the VI Symposium Platonicum, Selected Papers, Edited by S. Scolnicov and L. Brisson, Accademia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2003, pp. 30-41; *L'unità del pensiero politico di Platone*, «Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica», 95, 2003, pp. 337-388.

In a nutshell, to the risk of sometimes bordering on contradiction, he favors the "both … and…" pattern to the "either … or..:" one, so typical of modernity[7].

If I may add further examples of this constant variation of interpretational structures, I have asserted the Same-Other pair to be immensely important and thoroughly far-reaching. Nonetheless, neither this may be stated in the absolute sense given that, if I may quote the *Parmenides* once again, Plato demonstrates how one cannot trace everything back to this pair, for the all-part connection somehow goes "further":

> Everything in relation to every other thing, is either the same or other; or if neither the same nor other, then in the relation of a part to a whole, or of a whole to a part (146 B 2 - 5).

In a like fashion, I have endeavored to show (pp. 82-83) that even the antithesis of rest and motion, repeatedly put forward[8], appears to have been relativized in at least one passage[9]. If I may suggest an additional text in support of this (seemingly) bizarre assumption, just as Plato is engaged in debate with the "friends of ideas", he employs a (seemingly) neutral example to state that

> on this view, being (τὴν οὐσίαν), acted upon by knowledge, in so far as it is known is therefore in motion; for it is suffering an action, and this in a state of rest cannot occur, as we affirm (248 E 2-4).

It is an odd statement, bringing into play the concept of rest that had hitherto never been spoken of. Yet this announcement seems to

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[7] This explains why Plato may end his treatise in a non-dogmatic way by inviting those who disagree to say something better than what has been said so far (259 B), while underlining that, if this is not done, then the elaborated discourses must hold.

[8] 252 D, 254 D, 255 A-B, 255 E.

[9] 256 B 8-9 cited at p. 83.

suggest that rest is in motion on account of its being thought. I say this for the umpteenth time: such an explanation can be overruled but these oddities need explaining. Still, I think it is easier and more persuasive to accept the idea that Plato sees that what is at rest in one sense may be in motion in another.

The use of "being"

All this leads to a further important point for our discussion. It seems clear to me that at times Plato uses "being" as a by-word for reality itself and at other times as a specific "genus". One could say this proves that his philosophy is an ontology. In my opinion, instead, it simply reflects the acceptance of a use of language that is immediately intelligible, if not "prosaic".

If we look at some instances drawn from the text, the issue in the "historical" treatise revolves around the concept of reality, defined as beings, τὰ ὄντα. This use is perfectly applicable at first, since questions are raised as to the nature and number of these beings (242 C 5-6; C 10). Then, the Ionian and Sicilian Muses support the use of the singular term τὸ ὂν (242 E 1), being. To these philosophers, this "being" is both one and many. This use is repeated, for instance, when it is said that

> innumerable troubles will befall him who says that being (τὸ ὂν) is either two things or one (245 D 12 - E 2).

It seems clear to me that the focus of the discussion here is reality, which may be read from a monist or pluralist perspective, and not "being" in the technical sense as a specific category. Indeed, "all" is also used as a synonym[10].

Furthermore, in the struggle over the "substance" (246 A 5: περὶ τῆς οὐσίας) in the Gigantomachy, it seems clear to me that this sub-

[10] Cf. τῶν πάντων, 242 D 6; τὰ πάντα, 244 B 3; τὸ πᾶν, 242 E 5, 243 D 9, 244 B 6, 250 A 2, 252 A 6.

stance, having an earthly form, cannot be understood as being in the technical sense but applies to reality. The same yardstick also applies to the claim whereby to the others, the "idealists"

> certain intelligible and incorporeal ideas (νοητὰ ἄττα καὶ ἀσώματα εἴδη) are the true substance (τὴν ἀληθινὴν οὐσίαν) (246 B 7-8).

They believe that this substance (οὐσίας, 246 C1) of materialists is not as such**.** It follows that both groups contemplate a substance (οὐσίας, 246 C 6), but while one sees it as ideas (ἐν εἴδεσιν, 246 C 8), the other drags everything down to matter (εἰς σῶμα πάντα, 246 C 9).

These references seem to me to leave little room for doubt on the meaning of being in this context.

Yet a second problem arises. In the debate between monists and pluralists, the charge leveled against them is that whenever they say something "is" or "becomes" one or many, they utterly fail to explain these terms and their meaning is misconstrued. To avoid misunderstandings, the term "being" is said to require closer examination, lest the same trouble experienced with not-being is encountered (243 C-D).

In an effort to clarify the matter further, the Stranger expresses the will to

> know, inasmuch as possible, from the assertors of the all <is> one, what they mean by 'being'[11].

Aside from the oddity of implying the being into which the enquiry is centered, it seems clear to me that problems arise when this text is examined in the light of the (legitimate and, *for us*, virtually unavoidable) distinction between the predicate and the existential "is". Clearly,

[11] 244 B 6-7: παρὰ τῶν ἓν τὸ πᾶν λεγόντων ἆρ᾽ οὐ πευστέον εἰς δύναμιν τί ποτε λέγουσι τὸ ὄν;

the implied being whereupon the question is centered is the predicate being, although the enquiry in progress assigns it an existential value right away. This constitutes a problem for us, but much less for Plato who seems to think along the following lines: whoever claims that A is b, is saying A, which *exists* by virtue of being a subject of predication, has the quality of b. Hence, Plato seems to split the meaning of "being", which must also necessarily acknowledge the existence of the terms involved for the quality to be expressed.

The assertors of two principles, e.g. that all things *are* hot and cold, have been previously asked what they understand as "being". Either this is a third principle in addition to the other two, or it is the principle that brings everything back to unity (243 E - 244 A), because by qualifying the other two it also brings them back to itself. Also in this case, the shift from the predicate to the existential[12] dimension is immediate[13].

Beyond ontology

The core issue is the (methinks necessary) *relativization* of ontology in the sphere of Platonic philosophy.

This relativization is not validated through other works, as Centrone seems to suggest (p. 130); these are "provided" in support of a thesis primarily based on the fact that, in this same dialogue, Plato casts before materialists and "idealists" alike the doing and suffering

[12] In a like manner the text in 256 A 3-5 recalled by Centrone (p. 133) should be tackled: Plato holds that «motion is other than same, and therefore is *mè tautòn*, not-like, for it is not *the* Same; there is a manifest shift here in the word "is" from identity to copular function».

[13] Monists are questioned instead about how they can say that the only reality is, using two terms and thus splitting the real that is one and being. This is hardly surprising: the one that is, the non-Eleatic one that is found in the second thesis of the *Parmenides* divides itself for ever, since both one and being branch off into one and being (*Parmenide*, 142 B - 143 A).

pair as a suitable (ἱκανόν) feature of reality. Let us recall the key passage:

> I offer a definition; *beings are nothing else but power* (δύναμις) (247 E 3-4).

The paradoxical game that allows Plato to reach this definition (a crucial point for me) fails to rouse my interlocutors, including Quarantotto[14], for whom doing and suffering «represent what by virtue of which they both [corporeal and incorporeal things] are» and «the idea that being is none other than *dynamis* (247 E 3-4) is understood as a definition to all effects» (p. 162). I fear we are using different language here but I shall suggest two questions nonetheless.

First of all, not only I ask myself if "being" corresponds here to the specific category or is a byword for reality, but I also wonder if the use of the plural (ὄντα, beings) may be underestimated. To me the idea of construing "beings" as referring to being in the "technical" sense seems less reasonable than identifying them with reality, viz. its single constituent parts. Plato himself clarifies this applies even to trifling actions (247 E) and to the slightest thing (248 C). Moreover, in giving examples against the friends of ideas, knowing and being known are spoken of as actions done and suffered (248 D-E); this bears no immediate relation with the concept of being.

[14] I must reply to a doubt raised by Quarantotto (p. 161 and n. 11): I believe that doing and suffering, whole and part are prior to and pre-requisites for the dialectics of being; I do not think one and many share the same nature, but lesser, unlike Unit and Dyad of Big-and-Small, which I consider at a higher level still. If I have nothing to say on the latter point here, I hope that the manner in which I have dealt with whole, all, and part has not lead to confusion among pairings of terms I think are quite different (clearly, "in a certain way", for the one-many pair can easily be traced to the Unit-Dyad pair, but Plato does not seems to me to be performing this operation *in his writings*).

More generally, I feel this notion of doing and suffering explains well Plato's heightened emphasis on the processes of unification and division, and the constant reference to the whole-parts connection. Unsurprisingly, this very method is defined here as the one enquiring on every single element and on all alike (καθ᾽ ἕκαστά τε καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα, 235 C 4-6, quotation at p. 53). Even when introducing the relation between genera, the terms used (encompassed, pervading, extended, put into; cf. 253 B-E) seem to emphasize that it is a question of doing.

Still, even though I am not fully convinced of the theory that these elements constitute a ramification of being, in that they «represent determinations/relations belonging to all that is in that it is» (p. 161), its plausibility cannot clearly be disputed *a priori*.

This is where the second question arises. Does the definition quoted above provide us with the inner structure of a reality, as Quarantotto seems to think, or does it lead us back to the deeper and higher nature of that which is defined? If I take the diairetic procedure as laid out in the *Sophist*[15], I believe the definition of a term can be said to lead to a "higher" structure of reference, and not to an inner one.

Furthermore, if being is the underlying structure of reality, why does Plato employ expressions such as that in 249 D (quoted at p. 68), in which he claims that both being (τὸ ὄν) and all (τὸ πᾶν) are in motion and at rest? How can these duplicities of references be justified if being is all?

Quarantotto is surely right in highlighting that «the issue centering on the priority or antecedence of relations among genera or "dimensions" of reality therefore appears beyond the scope of the research presented in the *Sophist*» (p. 163), but that is just what brings forth the "oddity" of

[15] I say this because in the writings on dialectics (cited at p. 88 n. 10) I have sought to emphasize how two models of diairesis exist in Plato.

the dialogue structure. Plato speaks of being and not-being and must do just that; he speaks of supreme genera in order to broach the Other, and emphasize the theme of relation and/or non-relation among genera. All this is acceptable. But why speak of whole and *dynamis*? What is the reason for this "pointless" digression that (apparently) bears no relation with the issue at stake? After having set forth the issue of not-being and even established the premises, the apologies, and the requests for attention (241 B - 242 B), why does Plato deliver an unusually lengthy speech (242 C - 249 D) that, far from dealing with either being or not-being, broaches other issues (concerning very relevant concepts), and ends with the decisive question of the rejection of the absolute immobility of Ideas?

My explanation for the "oddity" is that, conscious of the possible "ontological" reading of the treatise, Plato felt the need to point out that things were not as they might seem. He wanted his philosopher readers to have no doubts (!) that the issue at stake was neither that of the Parmenidean One, nor the generically Eleatic being. At the same time, he stresses repeatedly that the terms actually involved in explaining the nature of reality are of a different kind. And this he states outright: the hallmark of reality as a whole, and therefore of every single element, is that doing and suffering are.

Finally, other than a sense of ontological priority on his part (and I apologize for the unavoidable word play), I cannot seem to ascribe any interpretation to the statement in which Plato even highlights the subsistence of the whole; namely, when he says that

> he who does not give whole a place among beings (ἐν τοῖς οὖσι) must not deem being (ὡς οὖσαν) neither being nor generation (245 D 4-6)[16].

[16] Special attention must be given to the fact that claiming the whole to be among the beings cannot be construed in favour of ontology, given that a statement of this kind concerns the ontological pair *par excellence*, being

I wish to make an additional observation to Quarantotto's hypothesis relating to the existence of relative being and not-being (which we shall go back to later), which «are not self-contained genera, for they are "generable" from the five supreme genera and the relations existing among them» (p. 157). I shall make a "small" adjustment to the objection itself. On the basis of express Platonic quotations, I have repeatedly said that Plato holds "simple" ideas to be composites of other ideas, so that each idea is a part of others and its parts are in turn ideas[17]; yet the mere fact that they are "derived" or "constituted" is not in itself enough to claim they are not self-contained ideas. The objection is that such genera belong to a different ontological level, i.e. not supreme genera on a par with the five Ideas submitted. Hence, we should have:
a) being as a basis for reality,

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and becoming; these seem to me to be clearly dependent on the position of the whole here.

[17] A few quotations to this effect: cf. *Statesman*, 262 B 5 - C 1, cited at p. 38; *Statesman* 285 A 3 - B 6: «All things yielded by an art do certainly in some sense partake of measure. But these persons, because they are not wont to inquire dividing *along real Ideas*, jumble together widely different things, in the belief they are alike, and also fall into the converse error of not dividing into parts things that are other. Whereas the right way is, if one has seen the community of many things, to go on with the enquiry and not desist until one has found all the differences therein, *at least all those that are qualified as Ideas*; once many kinds of unlikeness have been identified in a multiplicity, one should not be disheartened nor desist until all of them having any affinity have been comprehended within the bounds of one similarity, and embraced within the essence of a single genus»; *Statesman*, 262 A 8 - B 2: «STRANGER – We must not cut off a single small part (μόριον), from these big and many parts, nor act *regardless of Ideas* (εἴδους), but the part (μέρος) should at the same time be *an Idea* (εἶδος)»; *Statesman*, 262 E 3 - 263 B 1, cited at p. 110; *Phaedrus*, 265 C 9 - 266 B 1, cited at p. 136.

b) its ramifications made up by supreme genera (which become four);
c) The ones I refer to as further subordinated relative being and not-being (which I shall clarify later).

Now, I do not feel this Platonic text warrants stratification to such a degree, for these concepts are placed at the same level, overall. Indeed, if I had to arrange a ranking I would grant priority to Same and Other.

Moreover, if a kind of identity is established between being and whole, it must follow that being can be divided and is made of parts just like every whole, and that is therefore not one but partakes of one. We therefore have a partaken unit and the pure Unity. I cannot see how this can be construed as a superiority of Being over the One, which instead is utterly devoid of parts (244 D - 245 A). And this is where I draw the line, for proceeding along these lines one would have to broaden the whole debate to Plato's entire metaphysical outlook.

Finally, it seems to me that, conscious of this possible reading, Plato himself actually opposes it in the final negation of not-being, wherein he also states:

> And again, being, partaking of the other, would be other than the remaining genera, and since it is other than all of them, it is neither each one of them nor all the rest but itself alone (259 B 1-4).

Thus being is being only and must be kept apart from other genera, both taken one by one and all together. Hence, these cannot be "parts" of being.

Finally, if being is a genus on a par with others, how can ontology be fundamental and central in Plato?

I fear that all this is not enough: one would have to establish if and how my hypothesis (and the other one) agrees with the other dialogues, with the extensive whole-all-part treatise therein, and with the dialectical outlook supported by Plato in many other works as well as the *Sophist*. One would then have to examine what Aristotle has to say and the subsequent debate in the Academy. How-

ever, the discussion would take us back to Plato's broad outlook[18], and therefore ranges far beyond the scope of our comparison. I can only confirm my belief that a comprehensive view of all this is impossible, aside from the assumption I have drafted.

If I may allow myself a pleasurable break before the more taxing pages ahead, how could we moot so much the sense of that Good which is *superior to being*, ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας if being were always, necessarily and philosophically that which identifies the whole?

5. Supreme genera

Still, this does not alter the fact that the *Sophist*'s central treatise deals with being and not-being and those meta-ideas, which Centrone and Quarantotto rightly urge me to go back to.

Aristotle

I shall say from the outset that I will not confront the reference to Aristotle that Centrone asks of me. And for a reason I hope he will agree. I am convinced the Aristotelian testimony should be adopted, even though I do not share Centrone's statement that «an esoteric perspective… hinges largely upon the reliability of the Aristotelian account» (p. 131). Our conviction is that it behoves us to work, as always, with all the sources available to us, although the main one lies in the dialogues themselves. As proof of this, I suggest counting the pages Reale dedicates to the dialogues in his important volume

[18] If I may go back to the passage in the *Timaeus*, cited at p. 61 that establishes as elements prior to the cosmos «three distinct realities, being, space, and generation», I wish to note that it surely assigns great meaning to being, but 1) alongside *genesis* and space, 2) as being subsequent to Necessity, the divine Cause and the Paradigm (in order to explain these "dogmatic" statements I must necessarily refer to my analysis of the *Timaeus*, i.e. the two essays cited at p. 61 n. 9).

on Plato[19], and the ones on the Aristotelian testimony or indirect sources generally.

I also maintain that, in an effort to avoid misunderstandings, the following must be clearly distinguished: 1. unwritten doctrines that are obviously unavailable to us; 2. indirect testimonies, above all that of Aristotle, which also field the "unwritten doctrines" while discussing Plato's philosophy, 3. the dialogues that, while always leading to further clarifications, provide us with "elements, indications, parts" of Platonic philosophy, and therefore with data on the "unwritten doctrines".

Going back to the Aristotelian source, the problem is that a) one must first reconstruct (or at any rate regain) the philosophical context of the Stagirite, and then b) assess his testimony[20] in that it is surely affected by the perspective into which the philosopher puts himself. Now, if this has only a relative bearing on naked facts[21] or for some testimonies[22], it conversely becomes absolutely decisive in the case of theoretical issues such as the one under examination.

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[19] Reale, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone*….

[20] Thereby being mindful to separate that which is attributable to Plato from both what is of uncertain attribution, and what is surely ascribed to other Academics; in the latter group, one should distinguish that which applies to the individual academic and what is nonetheless important for reclaiming the range of debate within the Academy (and such that would somehow also involve Plato).

[21] For instance: Aristotle speaks of "unwritten doctrines". This may be interpreted as one sees fit, but the fact remains that he and his "listeners" (we are dealing with lectures, not written works) conceived the notion of identifiable "things" in correspondence with the "unwritten doctrines" clause.

[22] For instance: Plato's philosophical training laid out in *Metaphysics* A is utterly believable and persuasive… yet the Eleatics are missing. Still, one only needs to think about Aristotle's views on dialectics and Eleatism in general to see the reason for this bare "underrating". It is no accident, then, that even the slightest reference to *Parmenides* is outright missing in Aristotle.

And I do not even want to approach the Aristotelian concept of the One.

Supreme genera

The sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher are three genera (τὰ γένη, 217 A 7), and they are ideas, otherwise a correct diairesis would be impossible to make, given that the diairesis must always move along with ideas. Thus, so does the angler. Not supreme genera, but genera[23]. What are they then?

It is the question Centrone raises on supreme genera: «Are they ideas, meta-ideas, genera, classes, mere logical connections?» (p. 131). If we are to set off from what Plato allows us to state and understand, it must be said that here he tells us nothing outright on the sense of these genera, nor on what they are. He just says they are the greatest, which implies there are also lesser ones, thus upholding the systemic and pyramid-like nature of Platonic philosophy. I have no reason, then, to think any different from what I have said: they are metaphysical beings that determine reality as a whole, ideal as well as empirical, and they are principles of true reasoning, beings whose nature is simple but are articulated in their innermost structure; Ideas that exercise their primary action on the very system of Ideas. In this sense I believe they may rightly be dubbed meta-ideas.

I think that both my "critics" have pinpointed a true weakness in my exposition: genera cannot be said to be eight, while giving the impression they are somehow placed on a par with one another. The risk is tangible, and Plato himself ultimately vehemently denies having reintroduced absolute not-being. Nevertheless, I think this example of *excusatio non petita* stems from Plato clear perception of a

[23] I have no answers at present to the possible question on identity or difference between genera and ideas. I feel the two terms have a tendency to flow into one another but I am unable to say any more. If that were not the case, I would have no reason to study Platonic philosophy, as I keep on doing.

possible, and unacceptable, misunderstanding. I am therefore overjoyed to be able to clear it up.

I wholeheartedly agree with the fact that the number of supreme genera is not important in itself, also because Plato states his will to examine some of the major ones (254 C 3-4); we are therefore looking at a list that is meant to be neither somehow exhaustive.

However, I do not think one can disregard the fact that Plato resorts to numerical values seven times (*again, without any plausible reason*) in the brief passage from 254 D 7 to 254 E 5, i.e. in 14 "lines"[24]. Furthermore, another four numerical values appear between 255 C 5 and 255 D 9, and again three in three lines (256 C 11 - 256 D 1), plus a lone reference at 255 E 8. If read aloud, as I think ought to be done, one is shocked by the excessive use that is almost embarrassing for its *utter pointlessness*. To make matters worse, Theaetetus remarks that their number cannot be *less* (256 D 3-4).

Should this "oddity" not raise doubts that perhaps Plato is seeking to draw our attention to the numerical data? No problem if that is not the case, but another explanation must be found for this "oddity", for I think we must refuse to accept the notion that an author who is so skilled at calibrating his words so wisely and carefully can suddenly just…. "go mad"[25].

My hypothesis is that Plato wants to point out a problem to us. It is the very one my critics rightly bid me to go back to; the one wherefore I

[24] Given the dialogue structure, in actual fact, they can hardly be regarded as true lines: having put them together with the computer, they have become *seven*.

[25] In this work I think I have pointed to the tangled web of definitions Plato suggests in relation to the sophist's second diairesis. Unless these "games" have some kind of motive (I have explained my theory on the matter) we ought to muster the strength to say we stand before a "deranged" author, who is even incapable of presenting a four-party diagram in a clear and consistent manner.

think these supreme ideas, these meta-ideas, can be said to be five, but they are *also* six, and *also* eight to boot, whatever Descartes thinks.

The "relative"

Diana Quarantotto rightly asks me to clarify in what sense one can speak of absolute being and relative being, and she formulates three theories on the matter (pp. 158-159). In turn, I am tempted to answer that all three are valid to some extent. But then I would have to back this statement up with evidence from Plato's text, so I hope I shall be forgiven for deciding against this action (given also that the present text is too long already).

For the time being I shall limit myself to proving that this distinction does indeed exist in Plato.

My starting point is the dialectics of being in the *Parmenides*, quoted at pp. 125-126, in which we find

1. the Being that exists, whose *mere* being is stated;
2. the Not-being that is not, whose mere not-being *is stated*;
3. Being that is not, whose being and not-being are stated *alike*.

I have no qualms in saying that this classification gains great significance in my view, to the extent that I have taken the liberty to express, at the start of my commentary, a possible explanation as to why Plato omits the other four assumptions that surely any fool can put together with little effort.

We shall then have to see whether the *Sophist* also fits into this pattern, in a bid to provide a fitting answer to the objection, as well as to persuade the many (far too many, methinks), who reckon Plato is a (truly bizarre) philosopher who keeps changing his mind one dialogue from the next.

I would first like to confront the objection below, less apparent to me, that «absolute Being is the genus of Being itself, whereas relative Being (construed as being of a specific thing or of many) is given by the partaking in Being of other genera» (pp. 158-159). If I understand correctly, this means that by partaking in absolute being – that which is

absolutely and therefore cannot not be – the various genera would then possess a relative approach, which in one sense is and in another is not.

The problem arises from the fact that the features of the former do not seem to match those of the latter, since the former utterly rules out not-being whereas the latter implies it.

By the same token I have misgivings about the feasibility of considering "being for itself" and "being for another" as just two different ways of partaking in one being. What (i.e. which ontological dimension) would justify the difference in this different way of partaking? Our way of thinking along the lines of pure concepts, more or less loosely connected, seems to me unlike that of Plato. He establishes a rather strong link between conceptuality and reality, in such a way as to appear (almost) utterly alien to us.

6. Not being

The issue at stake is that of not-being, and that there are two "concepts" which I have dubbed "absolute not-being" and "relative not-being" for want of a better tag.

An insurmountable difficulty

First, however, it is worth recalling how Plato stresses the objective thorniness of this troubled topic. Well, it seems to me even Plato's speech is fraught with such difficulties. His words ring as a kind of "warning", so much that they underline the ongoing existence of the difficulties, in the past as well as the present (236 D 9 - E 3; cf. the text at p. 151).

But this is not the only warning sign: the solution eschewing contradiction is a tough one (236 D 9; 237 A 1); the sophist has fled to a reality that is intrinsically fraught with hardship (236 D 2: εἰς ἄπορον εἶδος; cf. then also, 239 C 6-7: εἰς ἄπορον τόπον). The Stranger asks not to be deemed mad if he turns things upside down and back again with every step (242 A). And in the end it even looks

as if he wants to reject as worthless a part of the discourses that need doing on these issues (259 B-D).

This is what we ought to find in the text, then. If anyone is capable of finding a simple, straightforward solution, we ought to infer that either we are looking at an oversimplifying mock-solution, or that Plato has made these statements for some game that needs to be revealed. In my opinion, though, there is no such simple solution.

The presence of not-being

I think it is clear that the treatise concerns being and not-being alike. Everything centers on the effort to speak of not-being, namely to say that not-being is, without contradicting oneself and accepting the risk of appearing a parricide[26]. In this sense, then, I think the terms involved are six for sure, judging from the theme and the words of Plato himself, stressing how the treatise on being and not-being must be confronted and solved together[27].

As Quarantotto has rightly observed (p. 160), absolute not-being certainly «can neither belong to that system of supreme genera that is construed to warrant the possibility to think and speak of not being, in the absence of which the sophist cannot be apprehended». Still, if I may start off with an image (and using appropriate language), the outcome does not belong to merely added terms, but is a structural element of the calculus. By the same token, it seems to me that without this term the argument does not work for Plato.

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[26] Indeed, in the *Statesman*, 284 B 7-8, this treatise (*too long for his liking too*) is recalled: «as in the case of the sophist we forced not-being to be» (καθάπερ ἐν τῷ σοφιστῇ προσηναγκάσαμεν εἶναι τὸ μὴ ὄν).

[27] Plato reminds us: first it is assumed the same difficulty also affects being (243 B-C), then it is said that we face the same troubles for being as we had with not-being, hence an effort must be made to save them together (250 E - 251 A). Indeed, shortly after, it is stressed that the effort must extend to being and not-being alike (254 C 5-7).

It remains to be seen, then, whether and how we can speak of "two" kinds of not-being, bearing in mind that we stand before the need to establish how far it is possible to:

1. speak of not-being, given that it necessarily has to be said[28];
2. negate absolute not-being without falling into contradiction.

Absolute not-being

I must have been especially unsuccessful in my exposition on this topic, considering that both my interlocutors seem almost shocked[29] to learn that, deep down, I too recognize Plato as negating not-being. I call upon the usual dialectics of being in the *Parmenides* to maintain that I have never harboured any doubts on the matter. Moreover, I see it as a necessary milestone throughout the reasoning, so I simply cannot be guilty of an oversight of that kind, even if it had been intended. The problem is another altogether, and it is twofold.

First of all, this not-being is already present in Plato's text. Indeed, just as the Stranger winds up his speech denying having reintroduced not being, he also starts off from this very issue, namely (237 B 7-8) the fact of

> *speaking the sentence* 'absolute not-being' (τὸ μηδαμῶς ὂν).

He then denies the possibility of assigning it to something or predicating anything to it (237 B - 238 C), finishing off by saying (238 C 8-10) that

> not-being in itself by itself can rightly neither be spoken, said or thought (τὸ μὴ ὂν αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτό).

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[28] After all I have recalled (p. 53 n. 2) that Plato himself quotes (not unintentionally, I think) the passage in *Parmenides*, where the Goddess fails to heed her own prohibition, *saying* that one must avoid the path whereby "are the things that are not".

[29] Cf. p. 132; p. 160 n. 8.

Furthermore, it is also difficult to negate without falling into contradiction. Indeed the Stranger emphasizes how he has gone on uttering "not-being" and speaking of it, and recalls how this paradoxical situation has already spelt victory once before for one of being's foes, and I am inclined to read this as a reference to Gorgias (238 D - 239 B).

Even though this remains absolutely true in parts, these observations belong to the aporias of Eleatism *that Plato intends to overcome*. Quoting from this passage and grouping it altogether with Plato's philosophy has the effect of rendering the subsequent effort inexplicable.

Instead, it is a question of understanding in what sense the difficulty abides in Plato. I shall give the answer away: *in the Platonic text* one can say that the absolute, definite and stated exclusion in a certain perspective, is not likewise in another.

I take Quarantotto's position as a yardstick. First she says that «on the other hand, Absolute Not-being does not represent a genus as it does not fall within the "operational objectives" of the theory of μεγίστα γένη» (p. 157), then she accordingly argues that by virtue of its partaking in being, absolute not-being can neither be thought of nor uttered[30]. Now, if this were true absolutely, whole sections of the text that undoubtedly speak of it would have to be overruled; among these is the latest and final negation that, by utterly excluding this Not-being, shows that it can indeed be thought of and uttered! At least in some sense that somehow requires an explanation.

After all, as well as specifying the problem of not-being that is (as we shall see later), the Stranger hopes

[30] Nonetheless, I wish to point out that the quotations backing this "fair" statement are not "pertinent"; this is because, as I have just said, in 237 E 1-6; 238 C 8-10; 241 A 5-6 we are in the midst of the aporiae of Eleatism, i.e. we are deep inside the position that *must* be overcome, by showing that (clearly in different senses) Not-being can be said, namely, one can say both "this *is not* that" and "*not-being is not*". As Plato indeed says!

> that we, who speak of *not-being as really not being*, may somehow escape unscathed (254 C 8 - D 2).

The problem of Not-being-that-is-not has by no means been banished from the scope of Plato's reasoning but abides in a manner that is even more troublesome if possible.

On the strength of the final negation and consistent with the dialectics of being in the *Parmenides*, my hypothesis affirms that Not-being is assumed as not-being, in that "is not" is it only possible attribution, it is assumed *as removed*, as *necessarily negated*. Unless this operation is carried out, absolute "Not-being" cannot be spoken of, reverting to the position of Parmenides. As Plato's text shows, however, it is not possible to avoid speaking of this Not-being as well; providing that one clarifies immediately that, unlike the other one (the Not-being that is and is not) it is utterly removed and negated. The *negation* of absolute Not-being is in fact necessary for the problems relating to our capability to speak and think, requiring it to be distinguished from the *affirmation* of the other.

This allows me to explain in what sense I believe the strong unity between reason and ontology, so typical of Platonic thought, struggles to withstand the test: on the one hand absolute Not-being certainly cannot be ranked among the genera on a par with the others, for it is not in any sense; on the other hand one cannot submit the issue of Being and not submit that of Not-being at the same time, and thus distinguish the two senses in which this negative term is submitted. This however cannot constitute a purely logical operation, devoid of reflections on the level of reality, at least for Plato. But Not-being is not…

After all, what else is the meaning of the oft-cited words from the *Parmenides*: "not being of the Not-being that is not" other than that a term (the Not being that is not) is submitted as removed (it must be stated as not being)?

Even in the *Sophist*, finally, when speaking of false opinion as the statement of a not being, the Stranger asks the key question: whether falsehood is uttered (240 E 1-2)

> by opining that things *which are not* are not, or that things *which are absolutely not* in a certain sense are (τὰ μηδαμῶς ὄντα).

The answer applies to the second possibility, since the first statement, upholding the non-existence of things that are not, takes on a value of truth. Underlining the absoluteness, that is missing from the answer, serves well to express the notion that falsehood is only given when operating upon a "full" not-being, not one that in a certain way is. Indeed, in such a case that which is not can also be said to be nonetheless. At the same time, falsehood is claimed to consist in saying that things which most certainly exist from all perspectives do not exist at all (240 E).

All this is necessary to isolate, as in the chart in the *Parmenides*, a Being that is being only, and a Not-being that is not being only, telling them apart from that being which is and is not.

In short, Not being cannot be placed at an ontological level, but neither can it be banished from our line of reasoning. This is a "dangerous" position that explains Plato's vehement closing speech, denying having reintroduced absolute Not being as something that is.

Relative not being and Other

Plato tells us right away what relative not being is. After outlining the problems arising in Eleatism from the view on and even the negation of absolute Not being, Plato speaks of this Not being in the image of the copy, that is not the true thing but exists in that it is a copy (240 A-C). Apparent images, which are the raison d'etre for the whole treatise, certainly are and yet they are not what they seem to be. They cannot be said not to be absolutely, but they are not *in relation* to that which they seem to be. This being and not being "in that it is …", i.e. "relating to…" constitutes relative being and not being.

Let us take another text: sophistry is the productive art, so says the final definition in the dialogue. Productive art is that which al-

lows a previous not being to turn into being[31]. What do we talk of with this not-being? Certainly not of absolute Not being but, rather, of an x that is not y, and is no longer or not yet, or not fully etc; in short, it is other than that specific being it refers to (because an other is such only in relation to an other).

On the relationship between relative Not being and Other, though, Quarantotto lays before me a crucial point, since I argue that «while constituting a part of the Other, relative Not Being is an additional, self-contained genus» (p. 159).

Now, if a part is also a genus, as I have said before, this should not represent a problem to anyone. It is then a question of ensuring whether Plato himself tells us it is.

Plato speaks of the *Idea* of Not being (258 C 3, εἶδος ἕν; 258 D 6, τὸ εἶδος; 260 B 7, τι τῶν ἄλλων γένος). Unless we want to argue he is speaking of absolute Not being in these cases, we must recognise he is speaking of something else; that is, as we fully well know, of a part of the Other, an Idea that is part of another Idea. In this sense I can concede straight away that it is ranked at a lower level than the *five* genera. But in one sense only, if I have interpreted Plato's words well.

The negative and the other

At this point it is a question of understanding what could be the difference between the all, i.e. the Other, and this Not being that is a part. Indeed, nothing in the text justifies assigning to Plato the absurdity of a part perfectly matching with the whole.

As I have said before, a first solution deals with semantic value and nature: the Other is utterly pervasive and in opposition to the Same, whereas relative Not-being in itself cannot but be juxtaposed to Being (relative in itself). Its importance is due to the fact that there is no way out from the absolute Eleatic negation unless its existence is acknowledged.

[31] 219 B 4: μὴ πρότερόν τις ὂν.

If this "Not being" is a part, there must be more. In other words, there are other negatives that are "other" than other positives: the not-beautiful (that is certainly other than ugly) is the part of other relating to the beautiful, and so on. For sure, with regard to being, this not-beautiful is also relative not-being, but this needn't be emphasized here as its core feature is given in relation to the beautiful.

I understand that, based on this difference, it comes easy to object that the pervasiveness of relative Not being appears such that it can coincide with the Other. This objection is technically correct but Plato's text does not seem to suggest this. Or, better still, on the one hand it denies it when speaking of part, on the other hand it also highlights the possibility of an equivalent view of the two terms. Indeed, it underlines the infinity of not-being (256 E 5-6 cited at p. 84) in that

> for every genera, the nature of the other, making each of them other than being, makes it not being; and therefore of all of them we may truly say that they are not by themselves (256 D 12 - E 2).

Being itself is as many times not being, as there are genera, i.e. infinitely (257 A). In this case the identity of the two "genera" is specified as that which enables us to say for every other that "it is not that something". But if this were the only and final position, i.e. if we had to acknowledge one identity only, we would have to say that Plato was *wrong* in claiming Not being to be part of the Other.

I think the only acceptable way is the one I supported in the preamble (cf. pp. 180-182); that of accepting the co-presence of different interpretative frameworks, and recognising that from a certain perspective all the others are not being, and from another perspective there are distinct parts of other itself.

Some clarifications

Given the importance of this issue I cannot fail to give ample space to a number of considerations submitted with the usual precision by Bruno Centrone, and that I will discuss one by one.

First of all, he states: «It seems undeniable to me, however, that not-being can only be said to be part of the other at the extensional level. Having said this, though, the distinction is hard to keep up: it follows that whatever is not-x must be deemed other than x (and thus is a kind of the other), but it is also a kind of not-being on account of its being not-x. The part of the other that is opposed to being is a "genus" of all the other parts that are in opposition to big, beautiful, etc, and constitute the range of the other» (pp. 132-133).

As I have said already, the objection is right on the mark, but two problems follow, *with regard to Plato's text*: 1. not only it fails to explain the difference between the whole Other and the part, but also threatens to negate it; 2. it makes the assumption that the part (not being) is whole (genus) to the other parts (the many others); this perhaps explains why Plato favoured another approach: to ensure the Other only remained unitary, and therefore warrant the existence of realities that, as parts of the Other, are not pure negatives (as we shall shortly see).

Centrone goes on: «If the deduction of not-being as genus is based on its opposition to being in the range of the other, then all the "genera" of the other (not-big, not-beautiful, etc) are summoned to form as many genera, with seemingly disastrous consequences. In this way any casual cluster of composite beings would identify a *ghenos*» (p. 133).

It is another insightful objection, which I think may only be answered in three ways: 1. these are not random clusters since, with reference to Ideas, they must express an objective order; 2. Plato speaks of the not-large as an other and not as an opposite (257 B), i.e. he tries to grant him a dimension in the positive that seems applicable to both small and equal; 3. on the strength of what can a small or equal thing be said to be not-large, unless a *ghenos*? What does it partake in for us to grant it this quality? I think Plato's answer could be: in that part of the Other relating to large.

It should be noted: I am not saying the process works but that it clarifies the statements in Plato's text, turning things upside down and back up (as the Author had promised).

Centrone goes on to say he is unsure of the meaning of my statement that «these negatives are always used to speak of what is other and not of what is contradictory» (p. 85) and notes: «"not-beautiful" does not necessarily mean "ugly", and this is undeniably stated in the *Sophist*, but the fact that a negation does not mean opposition does not warrant Migliori's branching out into the contradiction, when he claims the negation does not refer to an indefinite opposite. Even when meaning "other than big", not-big identifies a necessarily indistinct class of things and both terms encompass the two sides of the contradiction (each x is big or other than big)» (p. 133).

Anyone who, like me, has studied *logica minor* on books of Aristotelian-Thomist tradition cannot but agree entirely: I have no doubts on the matter. But I do suspect Plato seeks to avoid this quandary, if I interpret his words right[32]. Namely, we can surely trace Plato's position back to a contradictory pair consisting of a specific term on one side, and an unspecific one on the other. And I would wager that the philosopher himself knows this fully well (unless Aristotelian logic is thought to have a sudden and "miraculous" origin). Still, it seems clear to me that he is trying to suggest an additional framework that would

[32] In this sense I am loathe to apply further logical sets to Plato's text. As an example: for O'Brien, *Non-être* …, p. 65, the mutual exclusion of same and other does not amount to contrariety, even though the absence of one implies the latter's presence, but not in the sense motion and rest are, for they do not partake mutually, whereas this occurs with same and other, albeit in different ways. Therefore, the other is not in opposition to the being it partakes in; it follows that neither the part of the other in opposition to being, i.e. not-being, is in opposition (p. 66). But the existence of a not being that is not in opposition to being looks troublesome: the whole reasoning seems to me to hinge on the application of logical sets far more rigid than Plato's plurality of approaches.

provide a specific significance to a term he refuses to condemn as "pure negative". To this effect he says:

> we shall not concede that it is said that the negation signifies the opposite, but this only, that the negative particles put before words, reveal something other than the words which follow, or rather than the things represented by the names, which follow the negation (257 B 9 - C 3).

Perhaps we can say it does not work. After all, however, if we had the time, will and skill to take on the other great dialectics, that of Hegel, would we not find ourselves facing "logical" hurdles of a same and surely not lesser kind?

This tangled web explains my hypotheses, whose purpose is to give a sense of meaning to the statements in the text. In short, not-being is a part of the other because it possesses a different semantic value and nature, and because there are *other parts* of the other. One can clearly seek another solution but in any case one has to justify:

1. the explicit affirmation of the "not being" genus;
2. the *positive* affirmation of "negative" elements such as not beautiful;
3. the gap between other and not being, which is a part thereof;
4. the relationship between not being and the "negatives" such as not beautiful.

And all this must be performed without weakening an ontological discourse that is developed on a "pure *gene*" level.

With regard to the nature of this negative genus, Centrone's other question surely remains untouched (p. 131): if the negative is admitted «At this point, clearly, the genus loses any ontological heft as it is unable to carry out an effective division of reality. After all, academics had notoriously disregarded any ideas concerning negative realities».

I agree, but once again I ask myself if the same can be said for Plato, since he maintains

1. that the nature of the other has parts like science (257 C-D), i.e. these negatives have full texture, just like various arts and sciences;

2. that the part of the other opposed to the beautiful has a name, and is unlike the beautiful in nature (257 D);
3. that the not-beautiful turns out to be the opposition *of being to being* (257 E); this claim leads this "not being" to be as all things other;
4. that these "negatives" are thus by no means lesser than their positive counterparts (257 E - 258 A).

All this is explained by the fact that the nature of the other belongs to the things that are, and the parts of this nature must equally be supposed to exist (258 A-B). Ultimately, these parts are indeed the not being that was being enquired upon, which has its own nature (258 B).

The positivity and existence of these "negatives" in Plato's philosophy should therefore no longer be questioned.

7. Conclusions

I ignore how many (if any) readers (freely and unfettered by exams) have had the strength and/or the patience to come this far.

For the few who have, I think we can close the full circle as my critics have pushed us towards playing a while at that "game" that Plato wanted to set in motion. And I am sure the readers have made other considerations, perhaps more profound still.

My task lies solely in accepting the implied but fair charge of having sallied forth with great confidence in classifying these supreme genera. I had to express myself differently, perhaps mapping out the game as follows:

A. I have no doubt there are six genera.
B. But how can they be six if there is a duplicity of meaning with both Being and Not being? They are eight then.
C. But how can they be eight, since absolute Not-being must be rejected outright, and relative Not being is a part of the Other? If relative Not being is missing, we can neither admit relative Being; in this sense they are five only.

Thus they are eight in one sense (for it can and must be said: the not being of Not-being that is not), in another they are not and cannot be eight, so they are six. And perhaps, half spoken in jest and half to be on the safe side, they can also be said to be five!

Just as Plato says in the *Sophist*!