



Lorenzo Giovannetti  
**Eidos and Dynamis**

The Intertwinement of Being and Logos  
in Plato's Thought

*Foreword by Francesco Aronadio*

ISTITUTO ITALIANO PER GLI STUDI FILOSOFICI

DYNAMIS

3



Lorenzo Giovannetti

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in Plato's Thought

*Foreword by Francesco Aronadio*

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*To the memory of my mother*



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Lorenzo Giovannetti

## Foreword

A tendency increasingly characterising the studies devoted to the major thinkers of antiquity is compartmentalisation. Most papers and monographs concerning authors such as Plato and Aristotle focus on very specific aspects of their thought or on certain works, while it is rather difficult to find studies which have a wider scope and deploy interpretive complex approaches regarding the philosopher under investigation. Arguably, this derives from the enormous amount of critical studies concerning classical philosophers along with the variety of exegetical approaches that have already been proposed, not to mention that narrow-scoped research is more feasible, which very often and unfortunately originates from contingent factors such as delivering research results through relatively short articles. This book is going against the flow. Bravely enough, Lorenzo Giovannetti thematises the key Platonic notion of *eidos* in its full extension, thereby addressing

the inner structure of Plato's ontology and epistemology. To achieve this, the strategy deployed is complex, but at the same time unitary and consistent. It can be summarised in three fundamental points.

Firstly, the variety of the theoretical roles played by the notion of *eidos* is "tamed" by employing two exegetical devices, convincingly labelled "Anatomy" and "Physiology", which by themselves already enable one to see how the notion of *eidos* individuates a dynamic series of conceptual implications and is no static agglomerate. Apart from the metaphorical suggestion, these two devices allow one to respectively examine structural and functional aspects determining the role played by the notion of *eidos* in Plato's thought. Insofar as Plato's text makes it possible, this double approach is able to provide a coherent framework concerning the characters and modalities by which Plato introduces the *eide* in different places of his work, which sometimes even appear to be in tension with each other. Accordingly, it focuses, on the one hand, on the ontological features of the *eidos* (for instance, its being *auto kath'hauto* or its being intelligible), namely those traits which belong to its structure, thereby granting its ontological self-sufficiency and identity, regarded by Plato as essential requirements of his notion of Form. On the other hand, it focuses on the functions performed by the *eidos* (for instance, its acting as object of knowledge or linguistic reference), which are essential to both understanding, in Plato's perspective, the architecture of reality and catching sight of the deep root connecting such an architecture and the very possibility of having knowledge. The structure and functions of the *eidos* are then carefully outlined with regard to the more relevant textual evidence from the dialogues, and, at the same time, is oriented towards depicting the theoretical implications of the notion of *eidos* by making extensive use of the tools of conceptual analysis. I shall not anticipate the results of Giovannetti's analysis. I only

wish to highlight that his study aims to systematise a series of fundamental features of the *eidos*, which are well known if taken singularly, but are very often addressed, as it were, as heteroclitite set. By contrast, here a consistent and exhaustive framework is proposed where the key notion of Plato's thought is presented in its unity and complexity.

Obviously, this result would lose its significance – and honestly would not be possible in the first place – without engaging thoroughly with the variety of interpretations proposed in the last and the current century. This is the second point about this book. In the ensuing pages, an extensive discussion of the main exegetical stances will take place (mainly, but not exclusively in the footnotes). This means that the reader is able to clearly locate this book within the critical debate: the many positions are very well and widely outlined, the Author's position is clear, and the innovative aspects are clearly laid out as well.

The third point is the special attention paid to the interpretation of specific passages, commonly regarded by the literature as essential to disclosing the core of Plato's ontology and the way it grounds knowledge and language. Specifically, I am referring to the pages of this book where passages from the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* are analysed in detail. To those who are acquainted with Plato's treatment of the *koina* in the *Theaetetus*, it is clear that Plato is reflecting on the nature of the very conceptual tools of his ontology and the way they provide a basis to any cognitive ascent from sensible things to the intelligible. Hence, it was necessary for the purpose of this book to include an analysis of this passage along with the complex discussion from which they originate, namely the failure of the first definition of *episteme* in the *Theaetetus*. Even more necessary to the purpose of this book is closely addressing the central pages of the *Sophist*. Giovannetti analytically examines the passages where Plato introduces his doc-



trine of the *koinonia*, the *symploke* of Forms and the question concerning the relation between language and reality. These topics are essential to understanding the dialogue, but they must also be put in connection with the broader reflection of the Athenian philosopher, thereby closing what was open through the Anatomy and Physiology of *eidos*.

As already noted, the combination of these three points results in a new coherent framework concerning Plato's thought. The exegetical devices offered in this book is certainly one among many possible perspectives from which to read Plato's thought, but it is, I submit, very solid, which grants it a particular fertility. Despite being focused on Plato's ontology and the way it is connected to knowledge and language, I think this exegetical approach can be exported to the other great Platonic interest, namely the ethical and political reflection. More immediately, however, the exegetical perspective opened by this volume constitutes an excellent basis for further theoretical investigations: the interpretation of the structure and functions of the notion of *eidos* here proposed is, for example, very helpful in order to understand the very peculiar conception of metaphysical realism that can be found in Plato's texts.

Francesco Aronadio

## Abbreviations of Titles of Plato's Works

<i>Charm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Crat.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Euthyphr.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
<i>Gorg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>Hipp. M.</i>	<i>Hippias Major</i>
<i>Lach.</i>	<i>Laches</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysis</i>
<i>Men.</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phaed.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phaedr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Polit.</i>	<i>Politicus</i>
<i>Parm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
<i>Protag.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Respublica</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	<i>Sophista</i>

*Theaet.*

*Tim.*

*Theaetetus*

*Timaeus*

Translations of Plato's Works

*Parmenides*: M.L. Gill and P. Ryan

*Phaedo*: G.M.A. Grube

*Republic*: G.M.A. Grube rev. by C.D.C. Reeve

*Sophist*: C. Rowe

*Symposium*: A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff

*Theaetetus*: C. Rowe



## Note on the Text

References to pages and lines of Plato's works are based on Burnet's edition for the Oxford Classical Texts, *Platonis Opera*, Oxford University Press (1900-1907).

I sporadically refer to the Greek-English Lexicon by H.G. Liddell, R. Scott and H.S. Jones through the abbreviation *LSJ*.



## Introduction

Writing is like sculpture. I say this in a very precise sense in that something can be brought forth in both writing and sculpture only through removal. Just as the sculptor chips away a marble block to reveal a statue, the Platonic interpreter needs to select one possible path and remove many related topics or different ways to address the one selected in order to achieve the final form of the work. As a result, there is but one well-defined figure whose existence excludes many others. The value of such figures, which are, beyond the metaphor, the interpretations, cannot rest on the nonsensical attempt to give one actual form to all the numerous possible figures. By this, I am not trivially saying that just one interpretation is correct and therefore it cannot coincide with those it is incompatible with. Instead, I am claiming that the same topic (or set of topics) can be correctly scrutinised in a number of ways, and yet one work assumes its form only if one criterion is used to



select what is relevant and how it is to address or connect to other subjects. The present work is one such attempt.

It starts from two very well known facts about Plato's philosophy. On the one hand, Plato considers to be real some entities that are independent to the maximum degree, self-identical, eternal, removed from every day interaction with things and beliefs about them. On the other, he claims that such entities are intelligible, that they can be grasped by, or are at least essentially related to, the exercise of thought, language and definition. Moreover, this is not perceived as a contradiction, nor in tension. The overall objective of this book is to understand in what sense the ontological dimension bears on cognition (i.e. knowledge, thought and language) in Plato's philosophy. In other words, I shall not examine Plato's theory of knowledge or Plato's theory of reference. Rather, I shall concentrate on a key assumption to properly understand Plato's view on knowledge and language: being, reality, existence along with its peculiar features (i.e. whatever *does not* come from the mind) is required to understand why knowledge and language work. The main result of this research is that Plato assumes that being and λόγος, i.e. thought and language, are strictly intertwined. To achieve this result three highly commented topics are addressed: the so-called standard theory of Forms, the first definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* along with its criticism, and some crucial sections of the *Sophist* dealing with the notion of being and the analysis of true and false statements. In dealing with these topics, as hinted at through the similitude of sculpture, I shall focus on following the thread of the intertwining of being and thought, either relying on established pieces of literature or by narrowing the scope of my analysis.

I regard the main acquisitions of my study to be the following. Firstly, it is an attempt to look at Plato's theory of Forms as can be found in the middle dialogues in a new way,

specifically, in a way that acknowledges the internal complexity of the notion of εἶδος and how, in the εἶδος, being and a variety of cognitive functions are joined. Secondly, in providing a new interpretation of some sections of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* I show that despite some innovations the fundamental assumption underlying these texts is the same as the theory of Forms: thought and language are possible or can work in the way they do because of ontological matters<sup>1</sup>. This core idea is presented as a general result of a synoptic survey of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. G. Calogero, *Storia della logica antica, vol. I: l'età arcaica*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 1967, new edition B. Centrone (a cura di), Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2012. According to Calogero, the principal problem faced by archaic thinkers was how to determine the condition of intrinsic intelligibility of reality, i.e. why reality is by itself fit for being grasped by thought. Calogero argues that before Plato the problem of the difference between thought and its object is not clearly perceived. Therefore, the laws belonging to the domain of thinking were not distinguished from those belonging to reality. For Calogero, truth and reality are undifferentiated and he thus speaks of their «original indistinction» or the «the original coalescence of reality, thought and language» and may be summarised as follows: 1) Indistinction between reality and truth. This indistinction amounts to the coincidence of ontology and logic: the necessary structure of reality is the same as the necessary structure of thought. 2) There is no authentic epistemological issue: the self-imposing character of reality in one's experience is such that it is manifestly evident just because it takes place. Something is real because it is visible to thought, but only that which is effectively real is properly viewed within thought itself. 3) There is an uncriticised coincidence between truth in thought/reality and the linguistic expression of truth. This view was born as a positive account of the pre-Socratic philosophies, especially Heraclitus and Parmenides, and it has been debated mainly among their scholars, cf. for instance A.P.D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Parmenides Publishing, Las Vegas Zurich Athens 2008, pp. 51-55. The details of Calogero's interpretation of the pre-Socratics, especially regarding single passages, may well be discussed. What is interesting for us here is that this overall reading of the origins of philosophical speculations in Greece could represent a fertile interlocutor for my interpretation of

theory of Forms and as an interpretation of specific sections of the two later dialogues. The connection between ontology or being and cognition is also closely connected with the concept of truth. This is so not just because in truth one has some mind-related activity that on the other side has reality (to put it in the crudest way), but also with regard to the specifically Greek conception of truth. As is well known, Plato has no specific word for “reality” and he uses variations on the Greek terms for “being” or “truth”. Moreover, it is common that the predicate “true” is applied to non-representational items, i.e. objects or state of affairs in the world. Finally, his talk of Forms is often accompanied by the idea that they are the *real* or *true* being to be contrasted with the sort of items that can be perceived and that change over time. This has led many scholars to individuate in Plato a complex conception that encompasses an ontological as well as a logical conception of truth<sup>2</sup>. I shall not address Plato’s conception of truth directly, although in my analysis of the final pages of the *Sophist* I shall explain how a very precise ontological view makes linguistic truth possible. However, this book is clearly in harmony with

Plato insofar as he is surely distinguishing knowledge and language from reality, but is also keeping reality and cognition in a very strict relation.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Szaif, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, Alber Symposium, München 1993; B. Hestir, *A Conception of Truth in “Republic V”*, «History of Philosophy Quarterly», 17 (2000), pp. 311-332; M. Vegetti, *Quindici lezioni su Platone*, Einaudi, Torino 2003, p. 153; B. Hestir, *Plato and the Split Personality of Ontological Alētheia*, «Apeiron», 37 (2004), pp. 109-150; B. Centrone, *ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ logica, ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ontologica in Platone*, «Méthexis», 27 (2014), pp. 7-23; J. Szaif, *Plato and Aristotle on Truth and Falsehood*, in M. Glanzberg (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Truth*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 9-49; C. Rowett, *Knowledge and Truth in Plato. Stepping Past the Shadow of Socrates*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 34-54; N.D. Smith, *Summoning Knowledge in Plato’s Republic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019.

the exegetical stance that for Plato truth has a broader nature. My contribution to this is that the assumptions underlying such a conception are complex and philosophically very interesting to explore.

I now turn to summarising the structure of this work. This work consists of three parts, the first of which is quite different from the other two. Whereas the latter follow a classical pattern, i.e. starting from textual places and ending with more general considerations on the topic, the former does not focus on a particular dialogue or set of passages in the attempt to give a shape to the notion of εἶδος with particular regard to the peculiar role that this notion plays towards cognition. It should be considered as the exposition of the interpretation of the notion of εἶδος, which is presupposed throughout the discussion of further subjects in the other chapters. In doing so, I shall extensively rely on some important acquisitions in the literature. Many have analysed how Plato describes his notion of Form and some have provided brief surveys connecting what Forms do and what their features are. My original contribution will be in framing the topic in a synoptical way in order to highlight some facts about Plato's notion of Form. The first chapter is devoted to the presentation of the *functional* analysis of the notion of εἶδος. What emerges is that the εἶδος essentially performs a fourfold function: it is the source of determination of whatever participates in it, it constitutes the object of knowledge, it is the object of definitional enquiries and it makes linguistic reference and description possible. What immediately emerges is that for Plato the εἶδος has a non-cognitive function (i.e. it *makes* things thus and so, for instance the Form of Beauty makes things beautiful) and three mind-related functions.

The second chapter is devoted to the analysis of the *structural* features of Forms, namely the traditional features of Forms such as self-sufficiency, unity, eternity, intelligibili-

ty etc. Again, what emerges is that among the features of the εἶδος mind-related (intelligibility) and mind-unrelated features (e.g. unity and eternity) are kept together, and also mind-unrelated features play an important role with regard to cognitive functions. Significantly, these two chapters are labelled Physiology and Anatomy of εἶδος, respectively. The label is entirely metaphorical, but it is meant to convey the idea that function and structure of the εἶδος are essentially and inextricably connected. The third chapter is devoted to making clear my disinclination towards some traditional ways of interpreting the notion of Form which are based on the universal/particular dichotomy. Very briefly, Forms are universals or particulars or hybrid entities joining the previous two notions. I offer a survey of the dominant view concerning what an εἶδος is and I briefly discuss what is new in my account as is laid out in the previous two chapters. Of course, this would require an entire work on its own, but it is nonetheless useful to give some argument for it. In a nutshell, I claim that my account shows that one cannot understand *what sort of entity* the εἶδος is without bringing in its functional aspects involving cognitive activities. Importantly, this first part focuses on the so-called middle dialogues, i.e. those dialogues where the theory of Forms is more largely discussed and constitutes what most interpreters consider to be the standard version. This will allow me to set the stage for the subsequent investigation dealing with parts of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, thereby also showing a significant theoretical continuity between the two phases of Plato's thought.

The second part of the book enquires into the relation between language and becoming, and focuses on the first part of the *Theaetetus*. In this dialogue, the object of research is the nature of knowledge. The first and longest discussion is on the definition that knowledge is the same as αἴσθησις, which can be translated with perception in such a broad sense

as to include beliefs regarding whatever crops up in one's experience. My interpretive proposal is that this definition searches for legitimation in a very peculiar ontology: all there is is the same as whatever appears in the present within one's experience and for as long as it appears. In other words, I claim that the definition, by joining Protagoreanism and Heracliteanism, is meant to explore the view that what there is in the world is dependent or co-dependent on its being perceived and believed about. The main interest of this part is to see why such a view turns out to be untenable and what lesson can be drawn from the failure of the definition. Accordingly, the fourth chapter analyses the proposal that knowledge is perception and provides a detailed analysis of some key passages of the section 151-157 of the dialogue where Protagoras' so-called Secret Doctrine and its refined version are discussed. I argue that Plato is not discussing a theory of perception, nor is he testing the epistemological viability of relativism. He is rather after a more fundamental point: what must reality look like if everything there is and its features are actually nothing but the event of their being object of experience (perception plus belief)? Such an ontological view is motivated by two assumptions that are strictly consistent with what I argued about the theory of Forms in the previous chapters: knowledge is essentially related to its object and must exclude any error. If everything there is, which is also *a fortiori* all there is to know, is generated by the fact of being experienced, then what I experience cannot be wrong.

The fifth chapter offers an interpretation of the argument of the collapse of language. In the section 181-183, Socrates offers an interpretation of the ontology previously discussed and contends that on this view things cannot have a fixed identity, even for the time over which they appear to somebody. Interestingly, this is proven to be unacceptable because it implies that language collapses, which in turn cannot be

accepted by the advocates of the equation between knowledge and perception as they are committed to *stating* the definition itself and to describing in some way what appears to be to them at the moment of its appearance. I propose a detailed interpretation of the fact that the lack of fixed identity or determination on the part of things, which means that nothing is “thus and so” by itself, regardless of how it appears to anybody, which in turn was the first appealing characteristic of Theaetetus’ first definition, also implies the impossibility of speaking. The main point of this chapter is to show that without minimal mind-independence there also cannot be minimal reference or describability. However, such a minimal mind-independence is possible only if one *rules out* that what things are or come to be is perfectly coinciding with their being experienced by somebody.

I conclude this second part by giving my interpretation of the famous passage at 184-187 where Socrates introduces the so-called κοινά, “commons”. Very briefly, Socrates argues that there are some common features or notions that do not belong to any perception in particular and that can only be found by the soul, which in thinking compares past, present and future experiences and finds these commons. Examples of commons are being, sameness, difference, similarity, numbers. This argument is deployed in order to finally refute Theaetetus’ first definition: knowledge requires truth and truth requires being, but being does not come from perception because it is a common, ergo knowledge is not perception. This passage has mostly been interpreted as saying that to have knowledge one needs judgement and that judgements requires a notion of being that is no perceptual intake. I advance a different reading that partially encompasses the received interpretation. I endeavour to show that Plato’s point is that in order to have knowledge one needs being and being, qua common feature, here means that what is is independent of its being perceived.

In other words, there can only be knowledge if there is a fact of the matter as to how things are and *this* idea is structurally beyond perception. The received view is right in saying that propositional structure is also at stake. However, my reading has the advantage of making the κοινά passage fit squarely with the collapse of language as it represents its positive counterpart: the notion of being understood as the fact that things exist and are determined in such a way as to be independent of their being perceived *implies* that one can refer to them and articulate meaningful descriptions of them. Again, being and λόγος are intertwined.

The third and last part of the book concentrates on the *Sophist*. This dialogue has been furiously debated. In addition, the dialogue is a very tight series of arguments which in many cases are significantly interdependent. The intent of my reading is quite plain. Most generally, the dialogue deals with three fundamental philosophical issues: the nature of images, the nature of not-being and the nature of linguistic falsehood. To address these three questions, the Eleatic Stranger introduces two positive doctrines, namely the communion of kinds and the analysis of how λόγος works. By focusing on two sections, namely 251-254 and 259-263, I provide a new interpretation of how these two doctrines are to be connected. Again, the pattern I follow in the entire book is clear: there is an ontological view and then conclusions concerning thought and language are drawn from that view. This move seems to be suggested by Plato himself when he says at 259e4-6 that it is because of the interweaving of Forms with each other that the λόγος has been generated. Thus, in my interpretation, the interweaving of Forms provides the privileged standpoint to understand the philosophical core of the dialogue. Accordingly, my overall objective in this part is to explain the fundamental aspect of Plato's conception that parts of reality are interwoven and how this in turn intertwines with his conception of what the λόγος



is. In doing so, I shall start from the assumption that Plato is not illustrating how concepts such as “being” must be used, but rather he does what he has been doing since the standard theory of Forms, namely providing some ontological ground or explanation as to why things are the way they are. What makes it more difficult to be seen here is that the subject is not Justice or Beauty, but are being and λόγος themselves. In this way, I submit, it is possible to make better sense of Plato’s texts and to acknowledge the specificity and complexity of his semantical view.

Hence, the seventh chapter analyses the section 251-254. Here, the Stranger enquires into the relations between kinds such as motion, rest and being. Notably, the discussion is kicked off by considering whether it is possible to join words to speak of one thing through many names or terms. To address the issue the Stranger sets out to analyse the many options of how kinds can or cannot commune, mix or relate to each other. He considers three options: total absence of communion, total communion, and what I call in the book selective communion, which is considered to be the only viable option. Selective communion is also illustrated by the analogy of letters. Some elements fit together and other do not. Importantly, some elements are responsible for the connection of the entire set of elements with each other. According to the Stranger, kinds work like this: some fit together and some do not; moreover, some kinds are responsible for the mixing and for the separations of all kinds. I provide a detailed interpretation of these arguments. As a result, I argue that being is a kind and is precisely the *one* kind that is responsible for two things: the existence of each kind and the fact that each kind is embedded in a set of selective relations. In other words, to be is to be an existing part of an eidetic web and this is answerable to an element of the web itself, namely the kind being.

I shall also argue that to have the web of the relations between kinds, not only is being (along with sameness and difference) required, but also that being is not sufficient to establish *what* relations actually obtain. This because kinds commune or do not commune thanks to being, but with regard to what they are in themselves. For instance, motion and rest both are, are self-identical and are different from each other. These three facts obtain both in the case motion and rest commune and in the case they do not. Motion and rest do not commune *because* their natures or whatness is incompatible and this comes only from themselves. Thus, I shall argue that being provides kinds with existence along with the capacity to commune with each other, what relations actually subsist are determined by what the involved kinds are in themselves, the kind being actualises these relations. In my interpretation, the result is that the kind being is the nature within the weave of Forms that is the ontological ground for the weave's "structuredness" and relationality. In other words, just like each kind is self-identical because of the nature of sameness or is different from other kinds because of the nature of difference, I argue that each kind is one element of the weave, i.e. it exists as a unity within a web of relations determined by its nature, because of the nature of being. This is central to my argument because I hold in the next chapter that it is precisely this conception of being that makes λόγος possible, asserting again the strict intertwinement of ontology and language. Before that, I briefly consider a recent proposal by Francesco Fronterotta, who connects the communion of kinds to the alleged definition of being as δύναμις, as capacity, to act and to be acted on.

The eighth chapter deals with the issue concerning the nature of discourse and how it is said to be brought forth thanks to the interweaving of Forms. I argue that kinds and Forms are synonymous. My proposal is that the interweaving

of Forms is to be understood as the picture that emerged from the concept of selective communion in the previous chapter. Hence, I argue that the interweaving of Forms only involves non-linguistic entities, contrasted with words; it is the source of meaning and truth of statements in a complex way and that it never involves particulars such as Theaetetus or this stone. The novelty of my interpretation lies in explaining why such an interweaving of Forms is required to ground the truth and provide the meaning, of statements concerning sensible particulars. To this end, I provide an interpretation of the structure of λόγος and what it means that it reveals being through the conjunctions of words. It will emerge that the weave of Forms is the ground for the truth of any statement regarding sensible things or events without providing that statement with a truth-value. Interestingly, when it comes to statements describing kinds, which is arguably a key aspect of dialectic qua typical expertise of philosophers, a rather different scenario emerges.

To conclude, I wish to spend some more words on the Platonic secondary literature. As anyone can imagine, it is excruciatingly enormous. In a sense, it starts with Aristotle and it is so difficult to handle that it becomes a philosophical puzzle in itself. Interpreters are currently facing an unprecedented situation. The diversity of approaches and the accessibility of the sources have broken the national exegetical traditions. Also, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Plato's philosophy is so extended that it can be read through the lens of almost every philosopher or philosophical school coming after him. Given all this, I feel the need to state the criterion I have followed in dealing with the secondary literature. I have prioritised Italian and English sources without neglecting the major studies in German and French (which needless to say are fundamental). I prioritised Italian sources because it is the language which formed my philosophical and exegetical

sensibility. I prioritised English too because it is the language in which this work was conceived and because the English literature on Plato is the most extended and philosophically informed with regard to the intersection between ontology and language. Furthermore, I preferred the most recent studies for two main reasons. First, if the authors are still living they can better defend their reasons (and I believe Plato himself would subscribe to this). Second, more recent studies in theory take into account the older ones when the reverse cannot be. This is the sense I could give to the question of secondary literature, but it is not the whole story. There is a more subterranean way to move through the literature which is intrinsically “rhizomatic”. By following interests and possible connections, one follows inspiring references from article to article ranging on different times and approaches, often coming to a dead end and starting again. This approach is not totally random either. In this case, older studies are preferred because after dealing with works that settled the terms of a debate, if one does not agree with a particular approach, one is naturally not driven to delve into the debate possibly engendered by that approach. Finally, the works I have perused have been referred to in accordance with the following criterion. The crucial studies that have provided some indispensable ideas are often quoted or frequently referred to. The studies which I found insightful are mentioned. The studies that have some different ideas which are nonetheless pertinent to my argument are likewise mentioned and/or discussed.



PART 1

THE FUNCTION AND STRUCTURE  
OF THE ΕΙΔΟΣ



## I. THE PHYSIOLOGY OF ΕΙΔΟΣ

In order to understand the notion of εἶδος, one must analyse what it does, what functions it performs, and how it is structured, what its features are. For this reason, a psychiatric metaphor can be of use: I shall address the Platonic Forms by introducing the Physiology of εἶδος and the Anatomy of εἶδος. These two concepts are presented here separately, keeping in mind that they are complementary and approach the same item from different angles. They entertain a very significant relation highlighted by the organic metaphor. The function is possible thanks to the structure, otherwise there would be nothing able to function, and in the way it does function, but, at the same time, the structure is understood in relation to specific tasks which it makes possible. In other words, what the structure is in itself, is expressed by the functions it is able to perform. In this way, it seems that the structure provides an ontological ground to the function, whereas the function pro-



vides a way to make sense of the structure, so that the former turns out to be the *ratio essendi* of the latter and the latter the *ratio cognoscendi* of the former. In this chapter, the manifold functions played by the εἶδος will be addressed, leaving the enquiry about structure to the following chapter. However, it must be said that this organic analogy is and always will be a metaphor, able to convey heuristically an elaborate depiction of the notion of εἶδος, without ever suggesting that Forms are living organisms or even something close to it. In other words, it is only an exegetical device deployed for the goal of understanding how complex the reality of the εἶδος is.

My major claim in this section is that the εἶδος, or Form, does essentially four things: it provides sensible particulars with some determination, acts as an object of knowledge, acts as an object of definition, and grounds linguistic reference to sensible particulars, where reference should be thought of in its broad sense, namely as a way to pick out sensible particulars within one's linguistic activity or to employ words to describe them. At least two points should be considered here. Firstly, we have the economy of a plurality of functions hinging on only one entity. Forms are required for anything to have a determination, i.e. to be in some way or another, to provide knowledge and definitions with an object, and to make linguistic reference possible. Secondly as we shall see, even though Forms are described as only intelligible and not perceptible entities, Plato does not consider the εἶδος as a concept or linguistic paradigm merely produced by the mind<sup>1</sup>. Interestingly, this fourfold function of the εἶδος mixes

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. *Parm.* 132b-c. Considering Forms as linguistic paradigms able to rule the correct usage of words, as though they were concepts, was famously endorsed, in discussing a passage in the *Sophist*, by J.L. Ackrill, *Symploke Eidon*, in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, Routledge, London and New York 1967, pp. 199-206.

ontology and cognition. The first function deals with the determination and possibly transitory existence of sensible, material or more generally spatio-temporal items without necessarily involving any mental activity, as it strictly speaking involves only Forms and things. The other three functions, by contrast, are essentially related to thought and language. Forms are objects of a specific power of the human soul, namely ἐπιστήμη. They are also objects of a specific linguistic practice (i.e. definition) and are involved in a number of linguistic acts aiming at sensible particulars. As I shall endeavour to show throughout this part, the fact that the εἶδος performs at the same time the first ontological or metaphysical function and the other three, broadly speaking, epistemological and linguistic functions is key to understanding what is at stake with Plato's theory of Forms.

This chapter is tasked with the description of the four fundamental functions of Forms in the priority order of ontological, epistemic and linguistic<sup>2</sup>. I say "priority order"

<sup>2</sup> On Plato's terminology of Forms, see J.-F. Pradeau, *Le forme intellegibili. L'uso platonico del termine EIDOS*, in W. Leszl, F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2005, pp. 75-89; F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche. Dai dialoghi giovanili al Parmenide*, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa 2001, pp. XIII-XV. Cf. also F. Aronadio, *Il Parmenide e la sintassi dell'eidos*, «Elenchos», 6 (1985), p. 350. With regard to the functional aspect of Forms I owe a great deal to F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Parmenide*, BUR, Milano 2004, pp. 34-42, where a brief functional analysis of the standard theory of Forms is introduced and to W. Leszl, *Ragioni per postulare idee*, in W. Leszl, F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, cit., pp. 37-74. Cf. also the very insightful analysis by J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Plato and Platonism*, Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1992, pp. 55-85 and V. Harte, *Plato's Metaphysics*, in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 193-195. Another brief functional analysis that correctly focuses on logico-semantical, ontological and

because, as I shall abundantly argue, the fact that Forms are what determines the being of particulars in space and time is also what is required for the other functions to take place. It needs to be said that the debate on these matters is rather complex and developed. My personal contribution here is to focus on the functional diversity of the εἶδος in order to provide a new framework to broach the complexity of Plato's notion of Form. With regard to the detail of each function, I shall rely on the main acquisitions of the critical literature. Finally, since this part of the work sets the interpretive and theoretical background of the subsequent parts, which deal with the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, and given that the so-called standard theory of Forms has its central testimony in the middle dialogues, I shall be focusing on the latter in order to provide, where possible, a unitary framework.

### 1. *Determination*

The first function performed by Forms is that of determining how things are. The term “determining” must be taken, as generally as possible, as a distinctive qualifying trait, without adopting the concept of property in the specific metaphysical sense<sup>3</sup>. The classic example of this principle are Socrates' words

epistemological functions is the first part of B. Lienemann, *Platonische Ideen als hybride Gegenstände*, «Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie», 65 (2017), pp. 1031-1056. However, Lienemann's functional analysis is developed in order to justify the idea that Forms are hybrid objects, namely Fregean *Begriffe* and paradigms. By contrast, my analysis could be regarded as an alternative to the particular/universal dichotomy in dealing with Forms, as I shall more extensively argue in the third chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 2007, pp. 16-17 and n. 30.

in the *Phaedo*: «This is the safe answer for me or anyone else to give, namely, that it is through Beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful»<sup>4</sup>.

The most problematic aspect of this statement lies in determining what the relation between Beauty and the beautiful things is. What is important to us here is that quite uncontroversially Plato is ascribing this role of determination of sensible particulars to Forms: it is only because of Forms that particulars in space and time are or become some way or another<sup>5</sup>. In other words, regardless of the detail concerning how things partake of Forms, it must only be recognised that things *do* partake of Forms, and this in turn means that the former acquire their determination from the latter. These two ontological types<sup>6</sup>, namely Forms and particulars, as is very often put by the interpreters, may be taken to stand in an asymmetrical relation: Forms determine particulars, whereas particulars do not determine or affect Forms. The peculiar nature of how and why Forms provide things with their determination is also phrased in terms of causation<sup>7</sup>. I

<sup>4</sup> *Phaed.* 100e1-2: «ἄλλ' ἀσφαλὲς εἶναι καὶ ἔμοι καὶ ὄποῦν ἄλλῳ ἀποκρίνασθαι ὅτι τῷ καλῷ τὰ καλὰ γίγνεται καλά». For similar places, see *Hipp. M.* 289d2-8; 292c9-d3; 300a9-b2; *Euthyphr.* 5d1-2; *Phaed.* 100d4-6; 104b6-c1; 104e7-105a5; *Symp.* 211b2-5.

<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that this role is not restricted to sensible things, as Forms can be the source of determination with respect to other Forms. This is clearly stated in *Republic* (476a4-7) and is the main idea behind the communion of kinds introduced in the *Sophist*, which will be extensively treated in Part 3 of this book.

<sup>6</sup> See *Phaed.* 79a6-10.

<sup>7</sup> The view presented here would best fit with an ontological theory of causation as is for example outlined in D. Sedley, *Platonic Causes*, «Phronesis», 43 (1998), pp. 114-132, on which cf. also V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2021, pp. 110-116. In other words, Forms are causes

shall not address this issue here, although I think that a point only hinted at by David Sedley is worth mentioning: one of the main advantages of claiming that Forms are causes is that the way particulars are or come to be does not depend on singular human thoughts<sup>8</sup>. In other words, the idea that things are thus and so, though temporarily and qualifiedly, is independent of what people think about it. In addition, the relation between Forms and particulars has famously been phrased through the concept of imitation: Forms are imitated by things, which are able to reproduce them only temporarily and/or imperfectly<sup>9</sup>. For my purpose it is enough to recognise *that* Forms play a metaphysical role in determining what becoming things or events are, and this thanks to what each Form is, rather than explaining in detail *how* this happens. This principle can be stated as follows:

insofar as they actually determine what particulars are or come to be in opposition to an epistemological reading of causality whose *locus classicus* is G. Vlastos, *Reasons and Causes in the Phaedo*, «Philosophical Review», 78 (1969), pp. 291-325 and according to which Forms are conceptual devices, though metaphysically grounded, that are employed by the mind to recognise and properly ascribe things their determination. A full endorsement of the productive and efficient interpretation of eidetic causality is to be found in F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., pp. 211-222. However, I wish to point out that this chapter is precisely tasked with showing that many functions hinge on the same item with regard to both ontological, epistemological and linguistic matters. In other words, this plurality of readings might be taken to show the functional plurality of Forms, where the correct approach does not lie in preferring one over the other, but rather in recognising them and understanding how they are connected.

<sup>8</sup> See D. Sedley, *Platonic Causes*, cit., p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> To refer to just some representative places, see *Euthyphr.* 6e3-6; *Resp.* 472b6-d2; *Phaedr.* 250a6-b5. For discussion, see Chapter 3.

Eidetic Determination (ED): When things or events have or display<sup>10</sup> a certain determination (e.g. being or becoming beautiful or equal things), this occurs only in virtue of that determination taken in isolation as an existing reality. Accordingly, if  $F$  is that in virtue of which  $x$  is or displays  $F$ , then  $x$  is or displays  $F$  not in virtue of itself.

Thus phrased, ED is minimally committed to the asymmetric conception of the determination relation between Forms and things. According to ED, Forms are required for things to be or become thus and so, whereas Forms are not what they are because of things, and thus a minimal notion of asymmetry is involved<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, there could be a stronger reading of asymmetry according to which if any particular is stripped of all of the relations to Forms it could not exist in space and time<sup>12</sup>. I need not discuss what

<sup>10</sup> I owe the notion of display, in this context, to the insightful work of Michael Frede, who explains the Platonic conception of becoming as follows: «to temporarily take on, or display, or be made to display the outward character or marks of an F, to come to give or to give the appearance of an F. In this way the contrast between being and becoming would be the contrast between what is real F and what just takes on or displays the superficial marks of an F, without being one». Cf. M. Frede, *Being and Becoming in Plato*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», Supplementary Volume (1988), p. 43 and he goes on at p. 48: «for any predicate “F” which we attribute to the objects of experience, these objects only temporarily take on and display the character of an F without ever being an F. A real F, by contrast, is one which displays the marks of an F because of the nature it has, and not because of the circumstances in which it happens to find itself».

<sup>11</sup> As I take it, a very clear statement concerning the asymmetrical relation between Forms and particulars is to be found at *Symp.* 211b, where we are told that particulars share in the Form of the Beautiful, whereas the latter does not undergo any change whatsoever.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2002, p. 144: «Participation between a particular and a

alternative better fits Plato's view. I may limit myself to saying that the first option is necessary but uncontroversial, and that the second is unnecessary but consistent with ED. I wish only to say that the stronger conception of asymmetry, however, should not be confused with another argument. ED claims that what particulars qualifiedly are when they come to be in space and time is determined by Forms, but what about particulars completely unrelated to Forms? They would be totally undetermined, and it is not at all clear if Plato can admit the existence of such items. In other words, particulars cannot exist without being thus and so (i.e. having a certain determination<sup>13</sup>), but this determination is provided by another set of entities, namely Forms; therefore, without Forms no sensible particular could exist. This *does not* imply that what remains of particulars once they are theoretically stripped of any relation to Forms would be nothing at all: for instance one can assume that there are some facts (in a metaphysically neutral sense of the term) related to the history of a particular that are contingent with regard to Forms. The stronger conception of asymmetry only implies that ED is a condition for the existence of particulars.

The second fundamental aspect of this determination function performed by Forms that can be gathered from the middle dialogues is that, for Plato, a Form determines the being or becoming of a sensible thing because it is a what-it-

Form does not "tie" or "add" a property to an *independently existing object*, an object that would or could exist prior to any Participation it might engage in. Rather, Participation is what gives the particular any and all of its properties; it somehow brings about the particular. Participation, therefore, would not be a relation holding between one *object*, the particular, and a second, a Form».

<sup>13</sup> Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, cit., pp. 32-38. The section is emblematically titled «Sein als Bestimmt-Sein».

is or whatness. As is well known, in Plato's standard theory of Forms only Forms count as proper beings or truly existing items<sup>14</sup>. A sensible particular appears, or comes to be, beautiful thanks to the form of Beauty insofar as Beauty is an existing reality and such existing reality constitutes what it is or means to be beautiful. Thus, on the one hand there is a Form understood as a determinate way of being, a whatness or a nature; on the other hand, there are a plurality of things and events coming to be or taking place in space and time which have or display some sort of identity or determination thanks to Forms<sup>15</sup>. However, it must be mentioned here that Forms are thought of by Plato as performing this metaphysical function because they are self-sufficiently existing entities (i.e. not requiring the intervention of any other part of reality) consisting in the determination they provide to anything else taken in isolation from any context<sup>16</sup>. I shall better treat the matter in the Anatomy of εἶδος. However, it is worth considering that Plato expresses this particular connotation of Forms in terms of whatness or identity through a technical phrase: «αὐτὸ τὸ *x*», that can generally be translated with «what is *x*», and more precisely «that which is *x*», «the very thing that is *x*» or «the very thing that *x* is»<sup>17</sup>. If we consider briefly a passage in the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Phaed.* 65d-66a; 78c-d; *Symp.* 210e-211c; *Phaedr.* 247c.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Resp.* 476c-d. On the idea that this includes some relation between Forms already in the middle dialogues, cf. V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., pp. 57-61.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. as this is phrased by V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., p. 133: «That which explains why a particular thing has a certain quality, F, and that which determines *which* quality this is and constitutes the identity of this quality, are one and the same thing».

<sup>17</sup> See *Phaed.* 75d; *Crat.* 389d7; *Resp.* 597a; *Phaedr.* 247e; *Parm.* 134a. For an extensive and careful analysis of the phrase, cf. F. Ademollo, *Plato's conception of Forms: Some Remarks*, in R. Chiaradonna, G. Galluzzo (eds.), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2013, esp. pp.



*Phaedo* (75d6) where the particular equals are contrasted with the Equal itself, regardless of any of the many specific issues regarding that passage, the phrase is again «αὐτὸ τὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἴσον», which stands for «what is Equal itself» or «the very thing that the Equal in itself is». It is also worth remarking the degree of Plato's self-consciousness in this context:

... our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say, about all those things to which we can attach the words "what is" (περὶ πάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγίζομεθα τὸ 'αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι'), both when we are putting questions and answering them<sup>18</sup>.

Plato is perfectly clear about the linguistic device at issue here. This passage makes clear on the one hand that for Plato, for any determination of sensible particulars, one can isolate it and try to conceive of it as an ontologically self-sufficient entity. On the other hand, Plato makes clear that this something that is conceived in isolation is somehow related to linguistic practice. Forms are what *x* is in itself, where *x* is the way particulars are or come to be and possibly a general term<sup>19</sup>. Consider this other passage where the label «ὃ ἔστιν» occurs:

56-65; C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato*, «Phronesis», 26 (1981), pp. 105-134.

<sup>18</sup> *Phaed.* 75c10-d3: «οὐ γὰρ περὶ τοῦ ἴσου νῦν ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν μᾶλλον τι ἢ καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ὀσίου καί, ὅπερ λέγω, περὶ πάντων οἷς ἐπισφραγίζομεθα τὸ 'αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι' καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐρωτήσεσιν ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν ἀποκρινόμενοι».

<sup>19</sup> Notably, D. Sedley points out that the phrase cannot be employed without a general term, see D. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 82 n. 13.

We say that there are many beautiful things and many good things, and so on for each kind, and in this way we distinguish them in words. [...] And beauty itself and good itself and all the things that we thereby set down as many, reversing ourselves, we set down according to a single form of each, believing that there is but one, and call it “the being” (ὁ ἔστιν) of each<sup>20</sup>.

Again, one can see that a variety of particulars that are in a certain way and that are similar in this respect can be sorted into kinds by means of words and what emerges from this is a unique Form to which the expression “what it is” or “the being” can appropriately be applied. This last passage also highlights another important aspect: Forms represent the being or what-it-is of possibly a number of particulars. In other words, Alcibiades and Theaetetus can be beautiful at different times, in different ways and with respect to different things, but if they are beautiful this is only because of the Beautiful itself. This idea is commonly known under the name of “one-over-many principle”, which I shall largely treat in Chapter 2, the Anatomy of εἶδος. What I want to make clear for now is that this conception seems to suggest that there is nothing to the nature of the Beautiful that is intrinsically related to Alcibiades anymore than it is related to Theaetetus. For ED to work:

- (I) Forms must be thought of as capable of characterising many different things regardless of contextually unique features of their occurrence. Plato’s view is that the being of things is not essentially related to them as if

<sup>20</sup> *Resp.* 507b2-7: «πολλὰ καλά, ἧν δ’ ἐγώ, καὶ πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἕκαστα οὕτως εἶναι φαμέν τε καὶ διορίζομεν τῷ λόγῳ. [...] καὶ αὐτὸ δὴ καλὸν καὶ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν, καὶ οὕτω περὶ πάντων ἃ τότε ὡς πολλὰ ἐτίθεμεν, πάλιν αὖ κατ’ ἰδέαν μίαν ἑκάστου ὡς μιᾶς οὐσης τιθέντες, ‘ὁ ἔστιν’ ἕκαστον προσαγορεύομεν».

it were a singular essence understood as the unrepeatable junction of particular characters specific to that particular. In other words, it is not to be conceived as a singular essence that is unique to a particular (something like the Aristotelian idea that Socrates's soul is his and only his essence). On the contrary, what determines how things are and come to be does not belong specifically to any of the things characterised more than any other.

- (II) On the other hand, this conception of Forms as common or generic should not be mistaken for a universal in the Aristotelian sense: according to ED the Form is also the cause of being and existence of what it characterises. In other words, Forms are productive of the being of particulars in a way that excludes they can be associated with Aristotle's universals.

The upshot of what has been argued so far is that for anything to be something or to be the way it is, reference to Forms is required. At the same time, it seems that any Form is in every case an ontologically self-sufficient whiteness causing possibly a number of particulars to take on relevant characters. Hence, since they are not essentially related to any singular empirical thing, Forms are somehow general, and thus abstracted from any context and situation. This is also a way to understand why the being of Forms excludes any reference to any given particular experiential situation. What it is to be *F*, where "*F*" is a general term, cannot be any particular. For if it were, the very fact of being *F* would be related to the thing appearing in its particular context, which for Plato seems to be unacceptable for two main reasons. Firstly, being-*F*, where *F* is a particular, would imply being transitory and hospitable to opposite-predicates, thereby being representative of

being non- $F$  just as much as being- $F$ <sup>21</sup>. Secondly, in a more speculative way, if being- $F$  means being a particular, where  $F$  is, say, being beautiful and the particular is Helen, how could anything other than Helen be Helen or like Helen if they are distinct particulars? In other words, if both Helen and Andromache are beautiful, what they have in common cannot be either of them as this would imply they are the same entity or perfectly alike, which is counterintuitive and inconsistent with what Plato takes to be a fact, namely that each particular has its own context of relations.

## 2. Knowledge

In this section, my only objective is to see in what sense for Plato there can be knowledge only on account of the existence of Forms, or, which is the same, recognising the fact that another function of the εἶδος is to make knowledge possible<sup>22</sup>. My aim is not to analyse what knowledge is for Plato, nor its relation to recollection, nor the method of hypotheses. I use the term “knowledge” as a signpost for the Greek term ἐπιστήμη and its cognates, without suggesting that it means justified true belief. Plato seems to conceive knowledge as a capacity of the soul that i) requires the exercise of thought<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See for instance *Phaed.* 74a-c; *Resp.* 479a. The main discussion concerns whether (i) it is a matter of approximation to a Form or a compresence of opposites under different respects and (ii) what is being both  $F$  and non- $F$  is a token or a type. Cf. V. Harte, *Plato's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 203-204 and p. 211, respectively.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance the statement at *Crat.* 440a-b that knowledge requires stability. Cf. also *Phil.* 58a-59b.

<sup>23</sup> See *Euthyphr.* 6e; *Crat.* 439c-440e; *Phaed.* 65d-66a; 78e-79a; *Resp.* 476d-479d; 529a-e; *Phaedr.* 247c6-e2.

and ii) is essentially related to having an object of a certain sort<sup>24</sup>. The basic idea is that knowledge having some sort of cognitive content is related to the existence of a given item. For instance, to receive an answer to the question “what is virtue?”, Plato claims that Virtue must be an existing reality that is not a product of the mind. What is truly interesting here is that, for Plato, the nature and ontological features of the known object determine the way to cognitively interact with it<sup>25</sup>. The argument here at stake is not to describe what the essential features necessarily characterising any proper object of knowledge are. The Anatomy of εἶδος is tasked with this. What is being highlighted here is that the key factor to understand Plato’s notion of knowledge is the object and its ontological status<sup>26</sup>. More prominently, this view is expounded at *Resp.* 476-480. This passage has drawn the attention of many interpreters and has engendered a very lively debate<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone* (Menone Cratilo Repubblica), Bibliopolis, Napoli 2002, pp. 171-194.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. *Phaed.* 79a-d; *Resp.* 476d-480a; 508d; 511d7-e4; *Crat.* 440a-c; *Tim.* 28a; 51b-e.

<sup>26</sup> The most recent systematic treatment of this object-based conception of knowledge is J. Moss, *Plato’s Epistemology. Being and Seeming*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2021. For an extensive discussion of the issue and the various exegetical approaches, cf. also L. Giovannetti, *The Onto-epistemic Nature of Plato’s Forms*, in Id. (ed.), *The Sustainability of Thought. An Itinerary through the History of Philosophy*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2020, pp. 45-69. See also F. Ferrari, *Conoscenza e opinione: il filosofo e la città*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. IV, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2000, pp. 393-420.

<sup>27</sup> The debate presents a traditional interpretation, i.e. that knowledge is only of Forms and belief of sensibles, see R.C. Cross and A.D. Woodley, *Plato’s Republic*, Macmillan, London 1964; F.J. Gonzalez, *Propositions or Objects? A Critique of Gail Fine on Knowledge and Belief in Republic V*, «Phronesis», 41 (1996), pp. 245-275; F. Fronterotta, *Einai, ousia e on nei libri centrali della Repubblica*, in F. Lisi (ed.), *The Ascent to the Good*, Akademia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2007, pp. 115-160; W. Schwab, *Understanding Epistēmē in*

I do not discuss the passage as I shall embrace the traditional reading that apparently was commonplace from Aristotle's time to the 1960s and that can be summarised as follows:

- (1) An existing object is always required by thought and the difference between sorts of cognition depends on the objects assumed by that sort of cognition as its own content.
- (2) When Plato speaks of degrees of reality he means grades of being knowable. The essential implication of the Platonic sense of "being" is being knowable: asserting that an εἶδος "is more" than a sensible thing means, among other things, that the former belongs to a more knowable rank of reality than the latter<sup>28</sup>.

*Plato's Republic*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 51 (2016), pp. 41-85. Then, there is Fine's interpretation, i.e. that one can have knowledge and belief of both Forms and sensibles as knowledge actually deals with propositions, see G. Fine, *Knowledge and Belief in Republic V*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 40 (1981), pp. 121-139; G. Fine, *Knowledge and Belief in Republic V-VII*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 85-116. Finally, there is a variety of readings that try to reconcile some appealing aspects of the two opposing views, see J. Szaif, *Doxa and Epistêmê as Modes of Acquaintance in Republic V*, «Études platoniciennes», 4 (2007), pp. 253-272; V. Harte, *Knowing and Believing in Republic 5*, in Ead., R. Woolf (eds.), *Rereading Ancient Philosophy. Old Chestnuts and Sacred Cows*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2017; N.D. Smith, *Summoning Knowledge in Plato's Republic*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019. What I present in this section is meant to fit with the traditional reading. It cannot be excluded that some recent reading would also be acceptable. Certainly, Fine's reading is not compatible. For discussion, cf. also D.C. Lee, *Interpreting Plato's Republic: Knowledge and Belief*, «Philosophy Compass», 5 (2010), pp. 854-864.

<sup>28</sup> Obviously, the major knowability is grounded in specific ontological features.

- (3) Given (1) and (2), it follows that degrees of reality are a necessary condition for degrees of knowability, whereas degrees of knowability constitute a sufficient reason for the degrees of reality. By recognising different kinds of knowledge it is necessary, according to this parameter, to consider logically many types of reality<sup>29</sup>.

Knowledge presents, for Plato, two aspects. First, it always is knowledge of or about something that is. In this respect, Plato's conception of knowledge could be compared to the modern notion of knowledge as factive. However, as we have seen, the label "being" for Plato applies to a very specific type of items. It could be said that knowledge is for Plato object-centred. Second, it is ἀναμάρτητος or ἀμευδής: infallibly certain, literally speaking «falseless», not just true but also undeceiving and then indefeasible<sup>30</sup>. In other words, Plato entertains an infallibilist conception of knowledge. Given the object-centered and the infallibilist conceptions, Plato considers the εἶδος as what adequately matches what is required by any proper act of knowledge. For Forms never fail to be and are totally changeless.

<sup>29</sup> The classical version of the argument is in G. Vlastos, *Degrees of Reality in Plato*, in Id., *Platonic Studies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1973, pp. 58-75 and G. Vlastos, *A Metaphysical Paradox*, in Id., *Platonic Studies*, cit., pp. 43-57. However, the idea that Plato's notion of being is essentially related to knowability was already presented by Tugendhat in 1958, see E. Tugendhat, *TI KATA TINOS*, Alber Symposium, München 2003, p. 9. For a fully developed account, see F. Fronterotta, *MEΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., pp. 73-79, from which these three points are broadly inspired.

<sup>30</sup> For the two terms see *Resp.* 477e4 and *Theat.* 152c5-6, respectively. Cf. L.P. Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009, pp. 45-47, who convincingly argues that what he calls the reality criterion and the inerrancy criterion imply one another and that any suitable candidate for knowledge should meet both. Cf. also *Gorg.* 454d.

Hence, any knowledge of them will literally be about something that is and that constantly is the way it is<sup>31</sup>. In any case, recognising that knowledge is grounded in the relation to the known object and its ontological features does not prejudice what the nature of this relation is. For obvious reasons, I cannot address whether for Plato ἐπιστήμη should be thought of as acquaintance, knowledge-what, knowledge-that, or a mix thereof. Nor can I expand upon to what extent ἐπιστήμη is a direct grasp or presents a propositional structure. In any case, what seems to be clear from the middle dialogues is that knowledge is essentially related to its object, which is of a certain sort, or equivalently among the many functions performed by Forms there is making knowledge possible<sup>32</sup>.

Before concluding this section, I wish to point out two more things that seem to emerge from Plato's middle dialogues and that have not been focused on by the critics. To begin with, we have seen that Forms represent the proper object of knowledge. However, they also provide the criteria to identify particulars that partake of them. I am not contending that recognising that a particular partakes of a Form (e.g. Socra-

<sup>31</sup> It could also be noted, that the object-centred and infallibilist conception of knowledge appears to be the epistemic counterbalance of the complementary values of "be", existential and predicative. This because knowledge always being of something that is, is granted by the fact that Forms never fail to exist. In this way, cognition never falls short of an object. Moreover, Forms are changeless and therefore whatever actual grasp of them will be infallible with regard to what they are insofar as they will never be characterised differently on account of some intrinsic change. Accordingly, this fact seems to be an epistemically informed way of dealing with and recognising the two interrelated values of the verb "be".

<sup>32</sup> This does not entail that some relation with perceptible particulars cannot be part of the process of attaining knowledge of Forms or that knowledge of Forms must be conceived as *a priori*. Cf. V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., pp. 69-89.



tes is just) counts as a proper instance of what Plato thinks knowledge is. At the same time, this role of grounding the identifications of the determination taken on by particulars is clearly ascribed to Forms from the *Euthyphro* to the *Republic* and can hardly be denied<sup>33</sup>. Interestingly, metaphysics and epistemology are once again joint: according to ED, Forms ground the determination of particulars and by knowing Forms one is also able to determine what particulars are at the level of cognition. In brief:

- (I) If Socrates is just it is only because of the Form of Justice (as per ED).
- (II) If I know whether Socrates is just, this is only because I know what Justice is.

What I wish to emphasise is that given the generally accepted (I) and (II), one further point seems to follow:

- (III) I can know whether Socrates is just on account of my knowledge of the Form of Justice *because* Justice is what makes Socrates just.

In other words, (III) states that (I) is the reason for (II). The idea is that Forms' being the ground for the determination of particulars is what accounts for why it is precisely by knowing the relevant Form *F* that one can ascertain whether a particular is actually *F*. The Physiology of εἶδος proves to be a good exegetical device insofar as it highlights how strictly related ontological and epistemological grounds are. Plato's line of

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. *Euthyphr.* 6e; *Hipp. M.* 286c-d; *Resp.* 472b-c. For a detailed analysis of the identity/identification distinction especially in the *Meno*, see F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone* (Menone Cratilo Repubblica), cit., pp. 21-30 and pp. 40-44.

thought seems to be that what grounds the determination and possibly the existence of a particular is also what constitutes a proper object of knowledge and what, once known, allows one to recognise whether the particular actually partakes of it or not.

Finally, it looks as if the access to knowledge, understood as the universal attainability of what makes the *object* of knowledge, constitutes a fundamental factor in Plato's view. Clearly, this must not be thought of *a parte subjecti*. Knowledge does not depend on the contingent conceptual resources of the thinker at a given time (as verificationists and Dummett-like antirealists would have it). Thus, this must be understood from a strictly objectivistic point of view: the extent to which something is knowable belongs to the object towards which cognition is directed<sup>34</sup>. If there is knowledge only of being or Forms as appears in this section, and being consists, as appears in the previous section on determination, in some whatnesses qua determinations taken in isolation from any context or reference to particulars, then, by being directed at these whatnesses, knowledge eludes any contextual constraints. To put it more clearly, any cognition dealing with state of affairs in space and time will necessarily include some reference to the latter, which could also represent an obstacle. Compare "who mutilated the herms?" with "what is a triangle?". There is no point in space and time from which to answer the second question with a reasonable degree of certainty as is by contrast required by the former. This is another way to address the well known principle that there is only knowledge of what is

<sup>34</sup> See J. Szaif, *Platons Begriff der Wahrheit*, cit., p. 94: «Vielmehr läuft Platons Position [...] darauf hinaus, daß die erkennbare Welt ein unabhängig vom Denken und Erkennen vorgegebener, ontologisch ausgezeichneter Wirklichkeitsbereich ist, der gerade aufgrund dieser ontologischen Auszeichnungen auch in ausgezeichneter Weise kognitiv erschließbar ist».

common<sup>35</sup>. As we have seen at the end of the previous section, the source of determination of particulars does not belong to any one of them more than to the others. In other words, it is common. If this item, as is clear by now, is thought of by Plato as the object of knowledge, its being common with regard to a plurality of particulars it determines is also the reason why no reference to these particulars is required in order to know it. Very roughly: if to know whether Socrates is just I must be acquainted with Socrates and his conduct, and this also applies to knowing whether Alcibiades is just or not, this is not the case with knowing what Justice is, which does not require any experiential relation to Socrates, Alcibiades or whatever other person may presumably be considered to be just. But if this is true, then the object of knowledge can be accessed without any context-constraint. This could be taken to mean that in principles knowledge implies its attainability. This is also consistent with point (3) above: another way to appreciate the difference in knowability between Forms and particulars could be the very fact that some objects (i.e. Forms) are universally attainable on account of their being common (an extended treatment of the many features relevant, among other things, to this argument is reserved for the Anatomy of εἶδος). That said, if the peculiarity of Forms is its cognitive accessibility, this does not entail that they can be *easily* understood. On the contrary, reality is dramatically complex, but in principle it can be disclosed at any time, in any place and by any soul wise enough to know it<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. for instance Aristot. *Metaph.* Z 1039b27-1040a7.

<sup>36</sup> In my interpretation, I am overtly forestalling any sceptical drift, be it anti-metaphysical or not. An influential instance of the latter scepticism that nonetheless acknowledges that Plato effectively develops a metaphysical view, recently translated in English, is F. Trabattoni, *Essays in Plato's Epistemology*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2016.

### 3. *Definition*

Investigating what something is, requires, at least at some stage, the exercise of language, specifically of some definitional linguistic practice. This assumption is clearly at work in both the early and middle dialogues. Very generally, definitions must capture the nature of the definiendum understood as what necessarily and sufficiently constitutes what is being defined. Since the early dialogues, the quest for definitions moves from a “what is  $x$ ?” question, where  $x$  is a general term. Within the framework of the *Physiology of the εἶδος*, my main claim is that any proper definition, which means any linguistic procedure that aims at individuating a necessary universal nature or set of features of what is signified by a general term, is the same as looking for an εἶδος<sup>37</sup>. In other words, it could be said that the εἶδος is the ground on which the defining activity hinges: it is for the definition the ontological pole that orients the discursive praxis. There has been some debate as to whether one should consider the objects of definition in the early dialogues as metaphysical entities corresponding to Forms as they are overtly framed in the middle dialogues. I think there are good reasons to think this is the case and also to think that one of the reasons for introducing a metaphysically loaded notion of εἶδος could in

Among other things, the author conjugates his anti-dogmatic stance with a resolved assertion of the propositional (as opposed to intuitive) character of knowledge in Plato (Chapters 8 and 9), a topic which cannot be treated in this work.

<sup>37</sup> For the early dialogues, see *Charm.* 159b-160e; 160e-161b; 163d-164c; *Lach.* 190e-192b; 192b-193e; *Hipp. M.* 287b-289d; 289d-291c; 291d-293d; *Euthyphr.* 5d-6e; 6e-11b; *Men.* 72a-b; 74b-77a. For the middle dialogues, see the remainder of this section.

fact be to account for a proper definitional practice<sup>38</sup>. Be that as it may, for my present purpose it is enough to say that as soon as Plato introduced a metaphysical conception of the εἶδος, this is precisely what constitutes the object of definition, or equivalently, among the functions of the εἶδος, we can find making definition possible<sup>39</sup>.

Definition consists in a linguistic formulation of the whatness or identity of a being or Form. This is already suggested by the fact that for any “what is *x*?” question *x* is always substituted by a general term, which is a linguistic item that embodies no reference to particulars, as a proper name would. As the Form of *x* determines whatever happens to be *x*, so the definition of *x* expresses linguistically what is universally present in each such case. In this way the strong relation between the ontological nature of the εἶδος, knowledge and definition stands out. For a definition to be correct in any possible situation it must not be context-relative. For if some

<sup>38</sup> For some classical studies that, despite their differences, do not acknowledge the metaphysical status of the εἶδος in the definitional dialogues, see D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Clarendon, Oxford 1951, pp. 35-46; G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991; W.J. Prior, *Socrates Metaphysician*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 27 (2004), pp. 1-14. For interpretations convincingly claiming that the core of the metaphysical conception of Forms is already present in the early dialogues, see C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 335-350 and F. Fronterotta, *The Development of Plato's Theory of Ideas and the 'Socratic Question'*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 32 (2007), pp. 37-72. For an alternative account which, broadly speaking, conceives Virtue as the explanation of a psychological state rather than a substantial portion of reality, see T. Penner, *The Unity of Virtue*, «Philosophical Review», 80 (1971), pp. 35-68. For an interpretation of Plato's theory of Forms as precisely what is designated by a true answer to a what-is question, see V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. *Phaed.* 75d; 76d.

context-relative description appears in a definition, that “definition” would hold for that particular context, but would not hold for all the contexts that are incompatible with the first one. Accordingly, asking for the definition first means undertaking a systematic rejection of the answers belonging to any particular context. This is in line with what we have seen with regard to the sections on determination and knowledge above: Forms being common to many particulars is also the *ontological basis* for the fact that a proper definition holds for any context in which a Form is present or partaken of by particulars. The point seems to be that any definition applying to a variety of cases derives from the fact that these cases have some common objective nature, but in order to linguistically describe this nature one must meet the condition that no reference to what is specific to one or more cases (but not all of them) should figure in the definition<sup>40</sup>.

It seems that Plato’s main idea behind posing an ontological, i.e. extra-linguistic, entity as what is sought after by a definition is to provide definitional endeavours with an objective solution. Conceiving of the object of definition as an extra-mental, extra-linguistic being implies two important, interrelated facts. Firstly, agreement about the meaning of  $x$  as is commonly used by a community of speakers does not suffice to answer a “what is  $x$ ?” question because the definition of  $x$  is independent and possibly partly external to the linguistic usage of that given community<sup>41</sup>. This has been recognised

<sup>40</sup> Even more, something could always accompany a certain nature without figuring as its essential characterisation. This is the case with the distinction between  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\omicron\varsigma$  and  $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  in the *Euthyphro*, cf. B. Centrone, *Pathos e ousia nei primi dialoghi di Platone*, «Elenchos», 16 (1995), pp. 131-152.

<sup>41</sup> The fact that what is being defined is an objective reality counters the famous critique by P.T. Geach, *Plato’s Euthyphro: An Analysis and Commentary*, «The Monist», 50 (1966), pp. 369-382. Socrates is ascribed to claim

by the literature as what distances Plato's view from the Socratic notion of ὁμολογία<sup>42</sup>. Secondly and consequently, going beyond semantical disagreement in looking for an answer to a "what is  $x$ ?" question better accounts for the view that there is a fact of the matter as to what  $x$  is. In other words, in defining what  $x$  is it is not true that all responses are equally valuable, provided that they receive unanimous consensus by the community of speakers, as some answers might just be wrong. In addition, what people think at the start of a definitional enquiry might prove to be wrong and they can actually discover how things stand exactly while progressing with their research, which suggests that there is a way things

that we must previously know a Form, in order to possess the competence required to use the predicate signifying that Form. The problem is that we should have a general and stable knowledge of a Form or a concept to recognise any example or instance of it. Common sense rejects this premise and considers to be possible the correct attribution of a predicate, say, "beautiful" without knowing what Beauty in itself is. Such a criticism is broadly Wittgensteinian. It is the denial of the opportunity of a substantive enquiry over identity conditions of meaning, by substituting it with the description of the linguistic use that accounts for that meaning. This position obviously has its own philosophical value. But it is not exegetically accurate. With regard to the Platonic text, it must be considered that a Form is not merely a meaning. As we shall see in the remainder of the book, Forms do influence linguistic meaning; however, the latter turns out to be the means to achieve knowledge and not its goal since knowledge never derives from linguistic competence of the speaker, instead it comes from the influence exercised on thought by intelligible entities. For a critique of Geach's paper, see the well known article by G. Vlastos, *Is the "Socratic Fallacy" Socratic?*, in Id., *Socratic Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 67-86.

<sup>42</sup> See G. Giannantoni, *Dal ti estin socratico all'eidos platonico*, in Id., *Dialogo socratico e nascita della dialettica nella filosofia di Platone*, edizione postuma a cura di B. Centrone, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2005, pp. 313-348. For a discussion, cf. F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., pp. 35 ff.

are about the subject of enquiry that is independent of what people think at some point of the investigation<sup>43</sup>.

Once the ontological commitment of definitions has been acknowledged, one could ask if it theoretically further influences how definitions work. Very briefly, it seems that two very general aspects emerge from Plato's early and middle dialogues. To begin with, the very possibility that a "what is  $x$ ?" question is raised lies in the fact that the object  $x$  is such as to possibly be signified by  $x$ . This in turn implies that the reality to be defined is a discrete unit and can be isolated at the level of thought and language. In this sense, it can be stated that Forms determine the formal structure of definitions ("what is  $x$ ?"). Plato's view seems to be that there can be no definitional endeavour without a fundamental condensation of meaning aiming at a unique nature, which works as the object of the definition<sup>44</sup>. Thanks to its peculiar features, as will appear in the next chapter, such a unique nature can only be an εἶδος. In every definition there is a unifying move, performed within language, searching for an underlying extra-linguistic reality. It must be made clear that, according to Plato, the form of definition itself is as it is described here because of the nature of reality, and not the other way around. In other words, it is mainly because unique objects of definition exist that definitions are in turn possible.

Forms also provide content to definitions. When we ask what  $x$  is, where  $x$  is a general term, the answer cannot be a particular sensory experience. If defining Courage, the Beau-

<sup>43</sup> There are many examples of this in the early and middle dialogues as the very structure of definitional investigations takes the form of a continuous testing of common beliefs and answers the interlocutors come up with. See e.g. *Resp.* 339b; 348e-349a.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. F. Ferrari, *Teoria delle idee e ontologia*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. IV, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2000, pp. 385-389.



tiful or Justice does not amount to referring to a particular context-relative example or instance of them, *a fortiori* no perceptual experience of these instances can do the work, either. What is relevant for my survey concerning the manifold function of Forms is that (true, i.e. eidetic) reality seems to be naturally connected to a specific use of language<sup>45</sup>. This does not imply that reality is a productive emanation of discourses. On the contrary, Plato seems to think that discourse is the only place, when contrasted with sense-perception, where reality can actually be grasped. This is important for my entire interpretation as it is key to understanding my reading of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. For now it is worth mentioning some paradigmatic passages where it is said that there are some entities whose being is essentially related to linguistic and definitional practices. For instance, we are told in the *Phaedo* (78d1-2) that the Forms Socrates introduced in the dialogue are that reality about whose being we give a description or an account by raising and answering questions (αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι<sup>46</sup>), or in the *Republic* (532a4-5) that through dialectic one tries to move towards the being of each thing without any perception and only by means of language or account (τῷ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιχειρῆ ἄνευ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐπ' αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον ὁρμᾶν<sup>47</sup>). Even more, one of the essential fea-

<sup>45</sup> A very influential study that is essential to the issue of how Plato opposed a new way of employing language related to definitions, mathematics and the third person of the verb “be” to the paratactic narrative structure of poetic knowledge is E.J. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1963.

<sup>46</sup> See again *Phaed.* 75c10-d3. Cf. also 76b where knowledge is associated with being able to give an account. Cf. also *Polit.* 285d-286a.

<sup>47</sup> I entirely agree with V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., pp. 55-56, when he says that on Plato's view λόγοι do not capture reality as is represented by us in statements and theories but

tures of the dialectician is precisely to take hold of an account or definition of the being of each thing (τὸν λόγον ἐκάστου λαμβάνοντα τῆς οὐσίας). Regardless of the details, what it only needs to be recognised here is that there is a strict relation between Forms and definitions in two ways. Firstly, Forms are the really existing objects of definition to which they provide content. Secondly, Forms are really existing objects that can be accessed by pursuing dialogical and definitional enquiries<sup>48</sup>.

#### 4. *Reference*

One last aspect pertaining to human cognition needs to be connected to a functional aspect of the εἶδος: the capacity of human language to refer to sensible things. The main claim is that this relies on the existence of Forms. In everyday life, linguistic activity is employed instrumentally. Plato's view seems to be this: since things partake of Forms, they display contingently some characters. In virtue of those characters things can be referred to. Accordingly, only thanks to Forms are there acts of linguistic reference. It must be briefly said that the theory of Forms cannot be reduced to a theory regarding the function and structure of words or propositions. As I am

rather the things-that-are (i.e. reality). This will be discussed further in my interpretation of the *Sophist*.

<sup>48</sup> This involves that the unity of Forms is somehow delivered to the composite nature of language. In other words, the εἶδος is, at the same time, simple, as ontological unity, and complex, since it is given in language that is an essentially compound reality. A proper treatment of the relation between the unity of Forms and their complex description at the level of linguistic definitions, as we shall see, is fully expounded in the *Sophist*. This does not mean that there is no hint in the previous dialogues. This has been properly recognised by F. Fronterotta, *MEΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., pp. 54-56.

trying to show by the exegetical device of the *Physiology* of the εἶδος, the functional nature of Forms is manifold and complex as it develops over several domains from causing things to be thus and so to matters regarding knowledge and language. This will also appear in my interpretation of the *Sophist* where semantical arguments are essentially derived from ontological views. This seems to be very clear already in the *Cratylus*, where we are told that things and actions possess a stable being such that how they are or must be performed cannot depend on what seems to be the case to us (386d-e). Among the many actions, we find naming (387b). Accordingly, there must be something like the name itself or the being of name that determines what particular names are and how they work (389d-e)<sup>49</sup>. Thus, if the nature of naming requires an ontological extra-linguistic reality, we must also admit that the nature of naming itself is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic matter since to know what naming or a name is in itself is already looking for an εἶδος, i.e. the εἶδος of name, which is an extra-linguistic nature. This is a first sense in which for Plato employing words require an ontological ground.

However, this is not what I am looking for in this section because this argument, as we have seen, holds for any Form: for any group of *F*-things, one must look for the Form *F* to know what *F* is and to define it. What I want to show here is that in order to refer to any particular *F*-thing or to describe it Forms are somehow involved, or equivalently, Forms make reference possible. It must be said that the notion of reference at stake should be taken very generally as the fact that general terms, nouns and predicates can be applied within

<sup>49</sup> Cf. F. Aronadio (a cura di), *Platone. Cratilo*, Laterza, Bari-Roma 2008, endnotes *ad locum* and F. Aronadio, *I fondamenti della riflessione di Platone sul linguaggio: Il Cratilo*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2011, pp. 1-83.

statements speaking of sensible particulars<sup>50</sup>. In other words, Forms should be the grounds of the fact that one can say “this man” to refer to Alcibiades or state that Alcibiades is a man or is courageous, although these statements are not meant to describe Forms, even in the case the speaker does not acknowledge the existence of Forms<sup>51</sup>.

Plato had to acknowledge that most discourses are about particular entities in space and time, the many things that the layman ordinarily experiences<sup>52</sup>. As said above, if Forms are required by any act of reference, it is not because they are theoretical principles able to account for denotation of sensible things. On the contrary, Plato’s view seems to be that it is possible to speak of perceptible particulars or their features, because they are grounded in a more stable reality. The sensible thing is ontologically dependent on the Form it partakes of and this dependence is also expressed through the impossibility to refer to sensible things without taking Forms into account. But how is it possible that the ontological dependence of the sensible domain also affects its nameability? As we have seen regarding definition, if the question is raised as to what something is, the object and subject of the definitional enquiry is explicitly an εἶδος. The problem here at stake, though, is understanding how Forms play a crucial role in the relation between things and language beyond the

<sup>50</sup> Cf. R.E. Allen, *Participation and predication in Plato’s middle dialogues*, «Philosophical Review», 69 (1960), pp. 147-164 and his use of the concept of designation.

<sup>51</sup> For a very interesting, though perhaps speculative, proposal on how reference works in the Simile of the Cave, see V. Harte, *Language in the Cave*, in M. Burnyeat, D. Scott (eds.), *Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 195-215.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. for example *Resp.* 475-476.

definitional process. To spell it out properly: how is a strict connection between naming a thing and the ontological role of the εἶδος possible, such that the former is determined by the latter? In several places of the *corpus*, throughout different chronological stages of Plato's work, the concept of eponymy occurs: the sensible thing takes on the name of the Form(s) of which it partakes. We can consider two analogous formulations of the eponymy principle:

«It was agreed that each of the Forms existed, and that other things acquired their name by having a share in them»<sup>53</sup>;

«There are certain Forms from which these other things, by getting a share of them, derive their names»<sup>54</sup>.

Any general term names several things by referring to the nature they have in common. The term directly denotes the common nature and eponymously the things that derive their determination from it. Analogously to what we have seen in the case of the other functions of εἶδος, Forms being common to a plurality of perceptible particulars is again the key factor. To give an example, the Beautiful is a Form and “Beautiful” is the name of that Form. When I say “Helen is beautiful” (regardless of the fact that Helen is beautiful only temporarily and qualifiedly), I am signifying with the term “beautiful” a feature of Helen. Plato's view seems to be that in order to refer to traits and characters of particulars the only option is

<sup>53</sup> *Phaed.* 102b2: «ὁμολογεῖτο εἶναι τι ἕκαστον τῶν εἰδῶν καὶ τούτων τᾶλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα αὐτῶν τούτων τὴν ἐπονυμῖαν ἴσκειν».

<sup>54</sup> *Parm.* 130e5-6: «εἶναι εἶδη ἅττα, ὧν τάδε τὰ ἄλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα τὰς ἐπωνυμίας αὐτῶν ἴσκειν» further, strictly similar, occurrences of the eponymy principle are e.g. *Phaed.* 78e1-2; 103b7-c1; *Lys.* 220a7-b3; *Parm.* 133d3. For a general analysis of the notion of eponymy (not only in Plato) and a resolute rejection of the thesis that eponymy entails the sharing of a property between the directly named thing and the named-after thing, see T.W. Bestor, *Common Properties and Eponymy in Plato*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», 28 (1978), pp. 189-207.

to name Forms. However, the fact that a name of a Form can correctly be used to refer to a particular, one of its features or to describe it is grounded in the non-linguistic fact that the Form in question provides determination to that particular<sup>55</sup>. From this, a number of interesting consequences follows:

- (I) The only way to refer and speak of particulars involves Forms.
- (II) The involvement of Forms consists in using terms that are primarily related to and signify Forms.
- (III) Using a term signifying a Form to speak of particulars is grounded in the ontological fact that that Form determines that particular.

<sup>55</sup> See M. Dixsaut, Ousia, Eidos et Idea dans le Phédon, in Ead., *Platon et la Question de la Pensée*, Vrin, Paris 2000, p. 86: «En étant participé, l'eidos est responsable de l'acquisition et de la possession des propriétés, de l'être ou du devenir quelque chose: il justifie ainsi le nom, et est la condition de toute prédication correcte. Car la Forme n'a pas seule droit à nom, elle est la cause de la rectitude du nom donné aux choses qui participent d'elle. [...] La dénomination n'est correcte que si la Forme, en plus de nom, confère à la chose le droit à cette dénomination, lui confère une structure (*morphè*) telle que la dénomination soit justifiée». Cf. also B. Lienemann, *Platonische Ideen als hybride Gegenstände*, cit., p. 1038: «Die Relation zwischen Ideen und ihren Teilhabern begründet auch die semantische Funktion der Ideen: Auf konkrete Gegenstände können die Ausdrücke bzw. Namen, die im eigentlichen Sinne auf die entsprechende Idee zutreffen, deswegen korrekt angewendet werden, weil die konkreten Dinge an dieser Idee teilhaben». Contra cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Philosophy of Language*, in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, cit., pp. 220-222, who seems to have a proclivity for what he calls a «deflationary view» of eponymy. He claims that the view that Forms are standards that allow one to learn how to apply names to things is shaky. It probably is. However, it seems that Plato's point is explaining why some names, and not others, can be used to describe or refer to some given particulars and not how we learn to use them.

- (IV) Forms are common natures and general terms signify such common natures. This is the reason why the same term can be used to refer to many particulars, provided that they partake of the same Form.
- (V) More generally, Plato seems to entertain the assumption that a significant part of human language stands in a privileged relation to Forms because general terms are essentially names, in a very general sense, of Forms.

Now, an issue might be raised: if we virtually have a general term for every nature, (i.e. every εἶδος) are we committed to admitting an εἶδος for every general term we possess? Consider the following passage: «We customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name»<sup>56</sup>.

The quotation seems to suggest that for any general term there is a corresponding unity in reality<sup>57</sup>. If we look at *Polit.* 262b-e we see that Plato recommends dividing kinds of things according to natural and more proper divisions. To put it succinctly, Plato says that we can divide humanity into Greeks and barbarians as we can divide the numbers into ten thousands and all other numbers. But in this case we would not perform a good cut by means of our language. It is far better to divide humanity into males and females as the numbers into even and odd numbers. This should mean that a division in reality does not necessarily correspond to

<sup>56</sup> *Resp.* 596a5-7: «εἶδος γάρ που τι ἕν ἕκαστον εἰώθαμεν τίθεσθαι περὶ ἕκαστα τὰ πολλά, οἷς ταυτὸν ὄνομα ἐπιφέρομεν».

<sup>57</sup> For a clear presentation of the debate concerning the translation of this passage, see R. Sharma, *On Republic 596a*, «Apeiron», 39 (2006), pp. 27-32 and D. Sedley, *Plato and the One-over-Many Principle*, in R. Chiaradonna, G. Galluzzo (eds.), *Universals in Ancient Philosophy*, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2013, pp. 113-138.

any linguistic division. For now, we shall suspend the nature of this correspondence here. It is only worth noting that, for Plato, language is not perfect as it is, or at least there are incorrect uses of it. This should not be taken to mean that some divisions are natural and some other are conventional (this could fit with the Greek-barbarian dichotomy but not with numbers), rather it means only that division must be arrived at through an adequate definitional process, understanding the right concatenation of words. In this way, there might be a deep connection between definition and reference: in a perfectly defined language, where definition requires not just a clear stipulation of the meaning of the term, but also a perfect knowledge of its Form, every general term will have a solid reference<sup>58</sup>. The metaphor of cutting reality at its joints is already famously present in the *Phaedrus* (265d-e), where the philosopher is compared to the skilful butcher who is able to perform a good cut by its capacity to recognise how to sever the limbs of an animal. This however implies that there are bad cuts which do not carve nature at its joints and might give birth to spurious linguistic divisions. Of course, the detail of this view would require much more analysis. I shall give some more arguments when dealing with the *Sophist*. Consider, for instance, when the Stranger clearly says that one is to check whether three genera or two or one correspond to the three names of «sophist», «statesman» and the «philosopher»<sup>59</sup>.

How should we interpret the quotation at *Resp.* 596a? If it is read carefully, the verb «hypothesise» (τιθεσθαι: set, assume) turns out to be crucial. Plato is not saying that for every common term there is *effectively* one Form, he is saying instead that for every common term successfully used to refer

<sup>58</sup> This must remain only a risky supposition, even though *Parm.* 136a-c seems to go in this direction.

<sup>59</sup> See *Soph.* 217a-b and cf. also 218b-d.



there needs to be an εἶδος, and that we have grown accustomed to assuming it (εἰώθαμεν) in every enquiry. Therefore, I think that this controversial passage is at least consistent with what I am arguing here: for any group of things we assume that there is a common nature. The enquiry can show whether this nature exists and what it is. If so, one can name such a nature, thereby also eponymously providing the particulars partaking of it with a name. In this way Plato's view is exposing how reference relies on given ontological assumptions and how reality must have very precise features for reference to be possible.

That is the fourfold function of the εἶδος, every aspect of which is bound to the others and which is properly understood only in connection with them. In this account I have opted to follow a descending order, as a way to highlight the prominence of the ontological pole. But this order may be perfectly reversed: starting from the necessity to refer to and describe the world of experience, and then looking for a definition of the general term found in that way. Once definitions are propounded, the necessity of a way of being certain about them arises, and, finally, one is led to find the unique condition for this in a state of absolute independence characterising a new understanding of being, irreducible and incommensurable to the one started from.

To conclude, it must be said that Determination qua pivotal ontological function enjoys a priority, differently conjugated in the case of each other function of the Physiology. Because of its intentional nature, Knowledge needs its object, and its authenticity is given by the infallibility of the contact with reality itself. Definition, thought of as a linguistic procedure, exists in virtue of the extra-linguistic existence of something that works as its object. This item is defined by providing a complex linguistic description which ultimately amounts to a relation between words. Finally, in the case of Reference the

possibility of getting to something linguistically, though not definitionally, is somehow dependent on the fact that what is spoken of is in a certain relation to Forms, i.e. it partakes of them, and the words spoken are in turn in a relation to Forms, i.e. general terms are primarily names of Forms. In this way, the great theoretical convenience of the notion of εἶδος emerges, since one and the same item is able to account for several tasks through different levels (ontological, epistemic, linguistic), showing great philosophical economy<sup>60</sup>. One last aspect I wish to consider is that in the Physiology of εἶδος the first function is exquisitely ontological, whereas the other three are expressly related to cognition, whether it be knowledge or diverse linguistic procedures. This aspect is essential to my interpretation for two reasons. Firstly, it is a clear sign that for Plato reality and cognition are metaphysically related. Secondly, and very importantly for my interpretation of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, the same item, namely the εἶδος is cross-categorical: it plays a theoretical role with regard to both metaphysical grounding (determining particular to be thus and so) and cognition. Plato's main idea seems to be that the source of determination of what we commonly perceive in our everyday experience is what there is to know and what grounds a variety of linguistic procedures and acts that we can perform.

<sup>60</sup> This phrase is obviously well known, since it has been used by H.F. Cherniss, *The Philosophical Economy of the Theory of Ideas*, in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 1-12. To put it succinctly, he says that Platonic Forms are philosophically economical, in that they provide a solution to both theoretical and ethical problems. It may be worth noting how this philosophical economy might be "backdated" to the primary functional pattern of Forms.



## II. THE ANATOMY OF ΕΙΔΟΣ

After the composite functional nature of the εἶδος, the features that allow such diverse functions must now be considered. The first thing to point out is how these features need to be understood. As we shall see shortly, Plato, very often in the same restricted number of passages, is connoting Forms with a set of features that are presented as if they imply each other. A way to make sense of this is that they are different aspects of the same ontological status or nature. Furthermore, we are not bound to consider these features of Forms as characterisations comparable to the way Forms determine sensible particulars. First, because Plato does not speak of the Forms of such features. Second, because this would be risky in that it could easily fall victim to infinite regress to the extent which the features could be expected to have features themselves. What I aim to show in this chapter is that the Anatomy of εἶδος is a complex structure similar to an arch, where each

part serves to sustain the vault to the same extent. As part of a system, every feature presupposes and grounds the existence of the others. Accordingly, it would seem that being a Form, regardless of *what* Form it is, requires a set of peculiar aspects. This is to say, for example, that the Form of Beauty and the Form of the Equal have the same anatomical features because they are Forms regardless of their specific whatness, i.e. what it means to be beautiful and what it means to be equal. My main claim is that such a manner of being is regarded by Plato as the only ontological status able to perform the fourfold function of the εἶδος<sup>1</sup>. In other words, things can be or become thus and so, there can be an object of knowledge and definition, and a reference or description of things is possible at all *because* there are some entities that are the way it is described in this chapter. Of course, the anatomical features of Forms are very well known and virtually any scholarly treatment of Plato's theory of Forms has presented and commented on them. Hence, it is not possible even to survey the literature. My purpose here is to give a new holistic account of them and to reinterpret single details that are significant to my overall interpretation. By the term "holistic" I mean that the relevance of the interpretation put forward here rests chiefly on the new collocation of the anatomical features within the general frame. Old and solid notions may be framed in a new way by letting them play their traditional roles in a new framework.

The anatomical features of the εἶδος are the following.

<sup>1</sup> Similar surveys have been recently proposed by C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, cit., pp. 329-370; B. Lienemann, *Die Argumente des Dritten Menschen in Platons Dialog »Parmenides«: Rekonstruktion und Kritik aus analytischer Perspektive*, Vandernhoeck&Ruprecht, Göttingen 2010, pp. 34-49. Cf. also A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, cit., pp. 15, who connects the possession of some of those aspects to Form's being an essence.

1. *Being Itself by Itself*: αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό<sup>2</sup>

Forms are said to be by themselves or in virtue of themselves. This statement can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Forms exist in virtue of themselves. They are not ontologically dependent on anything else except themselves<sup>3</sup>. Since they do not come to be because of anything, they do not come to be at all<sup>4</sup>, that is to say they are extraneous to any form of becoming. Secondly, the phrase can also mean that Forms are *what* they are in virtue of themselves. As we have seen, Forms can be understood as whatnesses which express a certain determination, for example what Justice is or what the Beautiful is and this determination is taken in itself, ontologically independent of anything else. For if a Form were what it is in virtue of something else, one could ask whether this something else is what it is in virtue of yet something else, and so on. At some point this must stop, which is another way to say that a level at which there is something that is self-determining and ontologically self-sufficient is required<sup>5</sup>. This is precisely the level of Forms and this, I think, is what Plato is trying to convey with the notion of αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό<sup>6</sup>. This line of thought

<sup>2</sup> See *Phaed.* 78d; *Symp.* 211b-d.

<sup>3</sup> See on this the classic study by G. Vlastos, *Separation in Plato*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 5 (1987), pp. 187-196, who argues that the phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό is to be connected to the concept of separate existence and discusses how it is connected to the conceptual pair of symmetry and asymmetry.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Tim.* 28a.

<sup>5</sup> This argument seems to be explicitly made at *Lys.* 219c-d.

<sup>6</sup> This is reminiscent of Vlastos' Non-identity Assumption: «If anything has a certain character, it cannot be identical with the Form in virtue of which we apprehend that character. If  $x$  is  $F$ ,  $x$  cannot be identical with  $F$ -ness», see G. Vlastos, *The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides*, «Philosophical Review», 63 (1954), pp. 319-349. Although the core of this

suggests another point as well. Plato seems to conceptually connect ontological self-sufficiency and something being able to determine something else. Consequently, Forms can exert ED *because* they are αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό<sup>7</sup>. This already emerged when discussing the first function of the Physiology of εἶδος and this is what being αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό means. Interestingly, Plato appears to take the self-determination of each εἶδος as an unjustifiable and original datum: reality consists of a number of elementary fundamental units, each of which is what it is thanks to itself and consequently is able to determine other things (this suggests that being by itself is a necessary but possibly insufficient condition for determination, as being a unity is also required, which I shall address in the next section). This cannot be further grounded and justified<sup>8</sup>.

Two more things must be said about Plato's notion of ontological independence and self-sufficiency. Firstly, this conception has an important epistemological bearing. Being itself by itself also represents a condition for epistemic reliability. The phrase αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό suggests the idea of being detached from any possible experience or belief of any subject along with any contextual constraints and this translates into

argument is correct, specifically that there is an asymmetry with respect to determination between thing and Form in favour of the latter, I deeply disagree with Vlastos' other two assumptions: that Forms are properties and that if Forms self-predicate this entails posing a further entity grounding it.

<sup>7</sup> I tried to lay out the argument in L. Giovannetti, *Onto-Epistemic Nature of Plato's Forms*, cit., p. 57 ff.

<sup>8</sup> An exception would be idea of the Good of the *Republic*, but the matter cannot be analysed here. For some discussion, see M. Vegetti, *Megiston mathema. L'idea del "buono" e le sue funzioni*, in Id. (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. V, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2003, pp. 253-286 and F. Ferrari, *L'idea del bene: collocazione ontologica e funzione causale*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. V, cit., pp. 287-325.

actual knowability<sup>9</sup>. Secondly, despite some places (e.g. *Phaedr.* 247c) where Plato employs a geographical language, the *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό* should not be taken as a sort of otherworldly sojourn interpreted analogously to the spatiality belonging to particulars. This just means that Plato did not intend to say that there is a whimsical place populated by an odd collection of things. Forms are no particulars extended in space and time and are literally nowhere, which is why, as we shall see in a short while, they are also presented as intelligible.

## 2. *Being One: ἓν*

As we have seen in the Physiology of εἶδος, Forms being unique whatnesses that are common to a plurality of particulars is key to understanding their functions<sup>10</sup>. Coherently, Plato presents being one as a fundamental feature of Forms. How are we to understand this important feature of Forms? The main idea is that Forms are not individuals in the ordinary sense, namely concrete particulars<sup>11</sup>. A passage from the *Republic*, book X, is illuminating in this regard:

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Plato's view is that the more something is *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό*, that is the more something is independent of what people perceive or think, the more it is fit for being known, that is to deliver stable truths to the mind. See *Symp.* 211a1-d1; *Tim.* 28a ff. For an account that also considers the role of the soul, see D. El Murr, *Αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό. La genèse et le sens d'un philosophème platonicien*, in D. Doucet, I. Koch (éds), *Autos: Idipsum: Figures de l'intensité d'Homère à Augustin*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, Aix-en-Provence 2014, pp. 45-50.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance *Symp.* 210b; *Resp.* 507b.

<sup>11</sup> M.M. McCabe, *Plato's Individuals*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994 is worth mentioning here. This monograph is a sustained analysis of how Plato goes about the concept of individuation and how it radically differs from Aristotle's (and from our Aristotelian common sense). This



Now, the god, either because he didn't want to or because it was necessary for him not to do so, didn't make more than one bed in nature, but only one, the very one that is the being of a bed. Two or more of these have not been made by the god and never will be.

Why is that?

Because, if he made only two, then again one would come to light whose form they in turn would both possess, and *that* would be the one that is the being of a bed and not the other two.

That's right.

The god knew this, I think, and wishing to be the real maker of the truly real bed and not just *a* maker of *a* bed, he made it to be one in nature<sup>12</sup>.

This passage has actually raised a complex debate as many peculiar claims appear to be made. The existence of Forms of

because McCabe seems to start from two assumptions I share: firstly, Plato is looking for the basic unities composing reality; secondly, the way Forms are one and the way sensible particulars are one are essentially different. However, as she herself recognises, her approach is quite heterodoxical in that she claims that Plato's main interest is not a theory of Forms, but a theory of individuation. I cannot discuss the many single claims she makes as she explores almost the entire Platonic *corpus*. However, what I claim in this section can be read as a different way in which Forms are "somethings" to be contrasted with the way particulars are "somethings".

<sup>12</sup> *Resp.* 597c1-d1: «Ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, εἴτε οὐκ ἐβούλετο, εἴτε τις ἀνάγκη ἐπῆν μὴ πλέον ἢ μίαν ἐν τῇ φύσει ἀπεργάσασθαι αὐτὸν κλίνην, οὕτως ἐποίησεν μίαν μόνον αὐτὴ ἐκείνην ὃ ἐστὶν κλίνη· δύο δὲ τοιαῦται ἢ πλείους οὔτε ἐφύθησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ οὔτε μὴ φύωσιν. / Πῶς δὴ; ἔφη. / Ὅτι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, εἰ δύο μόνας ποιήσειεν, πάλιν ἂν μία ἀναφανείη ἧς ἐκείναι ἂν αὐτὴ ἀμφοτέραι τὸ εἶδος ἔχοιεν, καὶ εἶη ἂν ὃ ἐστὶν κλίνη ἐκείνη, ἀλλ' οὐχ αἱ δύο. / Ὅρθῶς, ἔφη. / Ταῦτα δὴ, οἶμαι, εἰδὼς ὁ θεός, βουλόμενος εἶναι ὄντως κλίνης ποιητὴς ὄντως οὔσης, ἀλλὰ μὴ κλίνης τινὸς μηδὲ κλινοποιός τις, μίαν φύσει αὐτὴν ἔφυσεν».

artefacts was a contentious claim<sup>13</sup> and suggesting that a god created Forms seems to be irredeemably inconsistent with many other places of the corpus<sup>14</sup>. However, I shall not interpret these issues as I shall concentrate on what is immediately relevant to my argument. Starting from the end, the different senses of individuation are disambiguated. Being the Bed in itself a Form and any bed a sensible thing, we find a contrast between a (certain) bed (κλίνης τινός) and the truly real Bed (ὄντως κλίνης). The adverb ὄντως is employed, indicating the truly real way of being. But, a few lines above, Plato also employs the phrase, ὃ ἔστιν κλίνη, that is: that which is Bed or the very (some)thing that is Bed in itself. Thus, being something for sensible things is being a certain particular, whereas being something for an εἶδος is being a certain whatness. The difference between the two can be understood by focusing on the remainder of the quotation.

Socrates affirms that there cannot be two Forms of Bed, since in that case what they both possess would be the Form itself. This assertion is crucial: there cannot be two Forms<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> To frame the issue, see G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp. 81-88 and F. Ferrari, *Il problema dell'esistenza di idee di artefatti*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. VII, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2007, pp. 151-172. For reasons I cannot expound here, I think my interpretation is consistent with the idea that there are Forms of artefacts. Cf. F. Forcignanò, *Il problema delle idee di artefatto in Platone*, «Méthexis», 27 (2014), pp. 61-93.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion and convincing solution, see F. Fronterotta, *Φυτουργός, δημιουργός, μιμητής: chi fa cosa in Resp. X 596a-597e?*, in M. Vegetti (a cura di), *Platone. La Repubblica*, Vol. VII, cit., pp. 173-198.

<sup>15</sup> See. J. Opsomer, *Drittes Bett, Artefakt-Ideen und die Problematik, die Ideenlehre zu veranschaulichen*, in D. Fonfara (Hrsg.), *Metaphysik als Wissenschaft*, Festschrift für Klaus Düsing zum 65. Geburtstag, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2006, pp. 73-88. For a reading showing how this argument does not fall prey to the Third-Man Regress and how it is even

if they do not differ as to what they are. There are not two Forms of Bed, but there is the Form of Bed and the Form of Shuttle, to use genuinely Platonic examples. In fact, if we take “there” to mean existence in space and time, Forms are not actually there, but just are<sup>16</sup>. However, going back to the being one of the εἶδος, we see that among Forms there are no numeric distinctions, but only differences in species<sup>17</sup>. In other words, Plato seems to be claiming that particular beds can be the same with regard to their being beds, but can also differ numerically as they can have other qualities, be in different regions of space and consist of different material components. This, in contrast, is not possible with Forms as they are individuated by their whatness and any distinction among them should amount to a difference in what they are, which is also the determination they are source of with respect to particular things. Plato seems to regard this difference between Forms and particulars as an ontological difference: the way Forms are is individuated by their whatness, which, as seems to be implicit in the argument, is not the case with particulars. This is also a way to interpret the phrase “one-over-many”: the one

able to cast light on a solution of the regress, see R.D. Parry, *The Uniqueness Proof for Forms in Republic 10*, «Journal of History of Philosophy», 23 (1985), pp. 133-150.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, cit., p. 36: «Was vollkommen erkennbar und vollkommen seiend ist, ist die Bestimmtheit selbst für sich selbst: die Idee. “Sein” bedeutet hier offenbar nicht “Existieren” in dem [...] Sinn raum-zeitlichen Daseins. [...] Sein ist für Platon stets mit Bestimmtheit verbunden».

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Aristot. *Top.* A 7. The term “species” is useful because it has been used to express the sort of distinction here at stake, namely difference in kind, regardless of numerical distinction. It should by no means suggest that Forms are classes or concepts. On the numerical and qualitative difference, cf. A. Marmodoro, *Is Being One Only One? The Uniqueness of Platonic Forms*, «Apeiron», 41 (2008), pp. 211-227.

in question is a truly existing/being entity, i.e. in the manner of the εἶδος (ὄντως). This means that the Form is a determinative whatness with regard to which any distinction would generate a different whatness<sup>18</sup>, whereas the many, although sharing in the same Form, may be distinct numerically with respect to that Form.

The last aim of this section is to recapitulate the role of the Form's being one with respect to the Physiology of εἶδος. The εἶδος must be one-over-many in determination, knowledge, definition and reference. To begin with, in the case of determination, as argued in this section, Forms' being one is thought of as a criterion of individuation. Arguably, we are faced with some of Plato's tacit assumptions: reality is ultimately consisting of fundamental single entities. At the same time, the Form is one as one specific whatness (recall: "that which is *F*"), which is to say that Forms only admit of differences in species. To put it better, Forms are numerically distinct in that they present some differences with regard to what they are<sup>19</sup>. Secondly, Forms' being one is connected to their being not context-relative. As we have seen, a certain whatness is able to work as a source of determination only if it is independent and is what it is by itself (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό). That requires Forms to be regardless of any possible context in which what participates in them occurs. Thus, as appeared in the first function of the Physiology, Plato is contrasting the one ὁ ἔστιν *F* with the many *F*s. Consequently, being one seems to

<sup>18</sup> Cf. F. Finck, *Platons Begründung der Seele im absoluten Denken*, cit., p. 35: «Wenn das Seiende überhaupt erkennbar sein soll, muss es unterscheidbar sein. Damit es unterscheidbar sein kann, muss es irgendeine Bestimmtheit haben». Cf. also W. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, Routledge, London and New York 2014, pp. 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> The pictures becomes more complex in the *Sophist*, where it is argued that kinds are different on account of the kind Difference, cf. *Soph.* 255e.

be essential not only to individuate Forms in distinguishing each one of them from the other. It is also used to contrast Forms with particulars. To schematise, we have what follows:

- (1) Each Form is one with regard to any other Form on account of its whatness (the Beautiful as an entity is different from the Just as an entity because what being beautiful is differs from what being just is).
- (2) Each Form is one-over-many particulars that participate in it. So being one is conceptually employed to keep Forms and particulars separate. This being one contrasting with the many is for Plato strictly consistent with Forms being independent of the particulars they determine<sup>20</sup>.
- (3) As we clearly saw in the Physiology, Forms are one and common to many particulars that are associated by the fact that each of them shares in the same Form. Thus, Forms being one is also used to express the fact that they can appear in different contexts remaining the same unity<sup>21</sup>. This seems to have an important implication for Plato: it is not possible that two particulars are both *F* on account of the participation in two different Forms. Saying that a Form *F* is common amounts to claiming that, whatever the number of particulars, for any group of particulars happening to be *F* they can only be *F* thanks to the same Form *F*.

As far as knowledge is concerned, Plato again relies on the notion of unity. Very briefly, I wish to show that the two

<sup>20</sup> This idea is sometimes expressed by Plato through the vocabulary of purity, see the term εἰλικρινές at *Phaed.* 66a2 and the terms καθαρὸν and ἁμεικτον at *Symp.* 211e1.

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. *Resp.* 476a.

fundamental traits that characterise knowledge, namely being *of* something that is and being infallible, seem to rely on the notion of unity. Firstly, being of something is broadly speaking an intentional structure. This means that one has knowledge if one has knowledge of some *one* object<sup>22</sup>. At a very minimal level, in order to know something, that something must be clearly identifiable as some one entity my knowledge is of or about. Forms' being unities perfectly matches this requirement. Secondly, also the notions of fallibility and infallibility imply some very broad notion of unity. On the one hand, if for instance Justice is one, a unique whatness, what I know and what another person knows will be the very same object. In order to guarantee the intersubjectivity of knowledge, what two or more different people know should be the same reality. This seems to be a fundamental requirement also to contrast who knows with those who do not: one must be right or wrong about the same thing, otherwise it would not make sense that one is right and the other is wrong. On the other hand, in a very general sense, if knowledge is infallible, this means that it cannot turn out to be that what one knows at  $t_1$  is false at  $t_2$ . This, however, under one condition: that what a subject knows at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  must be one and the same reality. Accordingly, the unity of Forms reveals itself to be an ontological necessary condition of knowledge.

Likewise, the one-over-many is crucial in the case of the linguistic dimension. As far as definition is concerned, there is the contrast between describing the whatness of *F* and merely mentioning context-relative examples of something that is *F*. So, for instance, many courageous deeds may be mentioned, without saying what Courage is. That is not to say that such feats are not courageous, but only that they are in virtue of

<sup>22</sup> See *Resp.* 476e-477a and *Parm.* 132b-c.

what Courage is, without being Courage itself. Therefore, defining *F* means finding, at the level of a linguistic description, one factor that accounts for why all the many particulars that are *F* happen to be *F*, thereby reproducing the contrast between one and many<sup>23</sup>. That also casts light on another interesting aspect of the issue since it implicitly involves that the one-over-many does not coincide with the type/token distinction. If we assert that Justice consists in respecting oaths, this is a type, since many single oaths may be respected. And yet this is not a correct definition because it is not aiming at the εἶδος and many other (types of) things are just<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, in the case of reference, the one-over-many becomes fully explicit, as language itself is mainly composed of general terms which apply to a number of particulars. The same term “man” or “wise” can be used to speak of many different people. Importantly, there is no variation in meaning or use with regard to which particular words they are applied to<sup>25</sup>. I can use the word “man” to speak of Callias or of Soc-

<sup>23</sup> Sensible remarks are provided by V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Re-interpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., pp. 49-68, especially the idea that definitions requiring unity also implies that there cannot be conjunctive or disjunctive series of definitions: either the definition of *F* holds for any possible case or it is not a definition.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Euphr.* 6d9-e1; *Men.* 72c6-d1. This was cursorily recognised by C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, cit., p. 336. Within this Platonic framework, it seems that in language there is room for hybrid and incomplete structures such as this last one: it formally has the aspect of a proper definition, as it presents a type, but it is not.

<sup>25</sup> Again, I remain very broad with regard to notions such as reference, meaning, and predication because I do not want to suggest any particular theoretical declinations of these concepts. The only idea I think can be uncontroversially read from Plato's middle dialogues is that words are applied to speak of things on account of Forms and Forms' being-one plays a pivotal role in this.

rates or any other and the term remains one and the same regardless of how many and what particular men it is used to speak about. As we have seen in the section of the *Physiology* of εἶδος devoted to reference, the general term derivatively signifies things (many) and primarily Forms (one). In this way the very notion of eponymy seems to be grounded in the one-over-many structure.

3. *Being Always the Same as Themselves: ὡσαύτως ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἔχειν*<sup>26</sup>

Plato famously describes Forms as always remaining in a state of sameness or self-identity. In other words, they never change. This anatomical feature of Forms is very important with regard to knowledge: any Form will never turn out to be different from the way it has always been. It is not hospitable to any form of alteration and motion in such a way that it does not just happen that Forms do not change, rather it is metaphysically impossible, which brings noticeable epistemic comfort. Effectively, once something so stable is known, certainty is absolute, for it will ever be identical to what it is known to be<sup>27</sup>. For if one has a proper grasp of the Form of Justice, this will also imply that one is perfectly aware that Justice is a Form and that excludes any sort of change. As a consequence, the grasp of the whatness of Justice plus knowing that for its very metaphysical nature Justice cannot change, one could correctly conclude that what she has grasped is indefeasible. Therefore, the physiological function

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. *Phaed.* 78d2; 78d6; 79d2; 79d5; *Crat.* 439e3; *Resp.* 479a2; 479e7; 484b5.

<sup>27</sup> Essential on this is J. Hintikka, *Time, Truth, and Knowledge in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, «American Philosophical Quarterly», 4 (1967), pp. 1-14.



of knowledge in my reconstruction is absolutely certain, and thus indefeasible, just *because* its object is self-identical in the sense stated here. Once again, it is worth noting how the stability of knowledge comes from the stability of its object, or, to put it another way, the stability of the latter's identity: the ontological status of the known object affects the cognitive outcome of the capacity of the subject. Interestingly, this conceptualisation of the εἶδος is often associated with the vocabulary of uniformity or of having the same aspect, for example, μονοειδὲς ὄν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό (*Phaed.* 78d5; 80a10-b8; *Symp.* 211b1)<sup>28</sup>. In few other cases, one can find a reference to simplicity: τι τυγχάνει ὄν ἀσύνητον (*Phaed.* 78c2). The main idea is that what remains constantly the same is such that one can grasp it properly because it does not belie any complexity that would make it equivocal to the knower. For instance, the Form of Justice is only what Justice is. It does not determine things or persons to become something other than being just. Likewise, Plato suggests that knowing the Form of Justice cannot deliver incorrect information in such a way that one thinks that something is just when it is in fact unjust. By contrast, sensible particulars are presented as always including a set of contrasting characters<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> This is obviously also strictly related to the feature of being-one as is correctly recognised by C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, cit., p. 348.

<sup>29</sup> See again *Resp.* 479a where it is said that any of the many beautiful things will also appear to be ugly just as one of the many just things will appear to be unjust.

#### 4. *Being Intelligible: νοητόν*<sup>30</sup>

Forms are said to be intelligible. A way to interpret this is based on two interrelated aspects. Firstly, Forms are not extended in space and time, have no body, and consequently cannot be perceived through bodily senses. Secondly and consequently, they may be grasped only by means of thought<sup>31</sup>. However, in no way does this imply that their existence is merely intellectual<sup>32</sup>. In other words, Forms are presented as existing objects, whose existence is extra-mental, and it does not depend on some mind actually thinking them. At the same time, one can get access to these objects only by exercising thought. This view has a number of interesting implications.

To begin with, if something can be attained by thinking, then there is no particular place and time to do this. Very roughly: in order to perceive Socrates, my sense organs must be able to “connect” with his body in a certain place and a certain time. In order to understand Justice, I can be any-

<sup>30</sup> See *Phaed.* 80b1; 81b7; 83b4 where the term νοητόν is associated with the soul either as what the soul is like or what represents its object of cognition and desire. At *Resp.* 508-511, where we find the famous Simile of the Line, Socrates constantly contrasts what is intelligible with what is visible, clearly stating that Forms belong to the former. The same applies to the passage (517b-c) where Socrates explains to Glaucon the Simile of the Cave.

<sup>31</sup> See *Phaed.* 65d11-66a10, where the term νοητόν does not appear, but where Socrates is very clearly stating that Forms can only be attained by means of thought. Cf. B. Lienemann, *Die Argumente des Dritten Menschen in Platons Dialog »Parmenides«*, cit., pp. 34-35, who speaks of sensory *Nicht-Wahrnehmbarkeit*. Cf. also *Phaed.* 79a1-5 and *Resp.* 529a-c. Also the famous statement by Socrates that he fled into the λόγοι in order to look for the truth of things (τῶν ὄντων τὴν ἀλήθειαν) at *Phaed.* 99e3-4 can quite naturally be read in this way.

<sup>32</sup> Again the reference is *Parm.* 132b-c.

where in space and time. This is something we touched on when introducing the physiological function of knowledge: proper knowledge is universally attainable on account of the nature of its object. Being intelligible is precisely what allows Forms to be “everywhere” in such a way that they can be reached by anyone who is conducting her enquiry properly. By way of comparison, this is the same with mathematics as there is no place where proving a theorem makes it more true or more certain, nor could we think that some mathematical proof can only be found in a specific place just like checking that Socrates is at the front door when we are about to start off with our symposium. Plato connects this aspect to the exercise of thought; the fundamental condition to attain intelligible entities is to be endowed with the rational faculty of thought.

Secondly, intelligible entities have no body. The main idea is that if something has a body, which makes it perceptible, it can be affected by other bodies and this causes it to change. Consequently, being intelligible allows any entity not to be affected by causal processes belonging to the temporal becoming things. It is worth noting that being outside the physical chain of causality, as could be hypothesised from the concept of intelligibility, the εἶδος is able to be genuinely itself by itself, autonomous and independent, since it is determined only by itself (and not by some external cause). Finally, being intelligible, if it implies being outside the world of causally related material or bodily particulars, could be taken to exclude that Form can possess features that make sense only in a material world. For instance, the εἶδος of Fire will be neither hot nor cold, neither shining nor dark in a perceptual sense analogously to sensible things. There is a sense in which the Form of Fire, understood as what it is to be Fire or what it means to be Fire, *is* everything that fire must be in itself. Of course, the nature of Fire is somehow related to being hot,

but not in the sense that the Form of Fire is itself hot just like a particular fire<sup>33</sup>.

### 5. *Being Eternal*: ἀεί ὄν<sup>34</sup>

Forms are described as always-existing or being. The uncontroversial aspect of this claim is that for Plato there is no point in time at which Forms are generated and no point in time at which Forms will cease to exist. They are outside the domain of becoming. Not only does this mean that they do not change, as we have already seen, but also that they are imperishable. This being said, what is the relation between these always-existing items and time? There has been some debate surrounding what notion of eternity Plato has in mind. I would subscribe to the view that the eternity of Forms does not consist in an everlasting duration or longevity, it is rather to be conceived as timelessness<sup>35</sup>. In the first case, namely

<sup>33</sup> This line of reasoning has been deployed with regard to the issue of self-predication. The idea is that Largeness is large but it is not a large thing just like Virtue is virtuous but not in the way a virtuous person would be. Self-predication is far outside the scope of my book, so I do not even frame the issue. The only point I would make is that a rigorous interpretation of the fact that Forms are intelligible entities could provide a good ground to go about the issue of self-predication. I shall say something more on it in the next chapter.

<sup>34</sup> See *Symp.* 211b-d; *Tim.* 37c-38b.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. R. Patterson, *On the Eternality of Platonic Forms*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 65 (1985), pp. 27-46, in which the author recommends a view that agrees with the one presented here against two alternatives: eternity of Forms consists in being changeless for all the time, or it consists in everlasting duration beyond the bounds of cosmic time, but still duration. Cf. also G.E.L. Owen, *Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present*, «The Monist», 50 (1966), pp. 317-340 and B. Lienemann, *Die Argumente des Dritten Menschen in Platons Dialog »Parmenides«*, cit., pp. 37-38.

everlasting duration, Forms would nonetheless be entities which age, though would remain the same. I prefer the reading that Forms are timeless because it seems to better fit with the idea that Forms are intelligible, that they do not belong to the domain of material or bodily entities to which the notion of duration applies. However, I cannot argue for this. Fortunately, for my purpose, it is enough to recognise just the fact that a Form's existence has no beginning and no end in time.

The anatomical sections framed here need to be distinguished during the exposition of the analysis, but they should be thought of as strictly interrelated. These features have been extensively debated by the western philosophical tradition and by the scholarly Platonic literature. The point of the last pages was to highlight their strong internal coherence and to suggest a reading that emerges if one addresses holistically and synoptically the way Plato speaks of Forms. I do not think that the eidetic domain is in any way analogous to the sensible one, which Plato tries to express by characterising Forms through the anatomical features discussed in this chapter. By means of a geometrical metaphor, I would rather express an alternative possibility: Platonic metaphysical duality of Forms and sensible particulars should not be given the picture of two parallel domains facing each other; being and becoming must rather be conceived as two perpendicular planes which are irreducible with regard to their direction.

### III. WHAT IS AN ΕΙΔΟΣ?

#### 1. *The Dominant View*

This chapter has two objectives. Firstly, it aims to briefly illustrate the dominant interpretation of what Platonic Forms are. The dominant interpretation oscillates between the following options: Forms are universals, Forms are paradigmatic particulars or Forms are hybrid items, a sort of metaphysical goat-stag joining universals and paradigmatic particulars. The main reason behind the dominant interpretation is that Forms are meant to account for linguistic predication. Secondly, it aims to show in what way the account I presented in the previous chapters differs from the dominant view and why the former should be preferred. In order to do this, I must at least show that my account is able to explain the points that the dominant view accounts for without running into its problems. Of course, such a complex endeavour can only be

outlined here. However, I think that the following two parts of the book, dealing with the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*, can work as a case study that provides further evidence for the alternative to the dominant view I am proposing.

According to the dominant view, Plato did not resist positing real entities dictated by the structure of language<sup>1</sup>. Immediately connected to this is the assumption that the theory of Forms is mainly a theory accounting for linguistic predication. As we have seen from the *Physiology*, predication (or what I called “reference”), seems to be one of several cognitive processes that have their source in Forms. As we are about to see, many things I have asserted in the *Physiology* and the *Anatomy of εἶδος* will have a role within the traditional accounts, which are of course rooted in textual observations. My contention is not that these exegetical options are entirely alien to Platonic discourse, which would be intolerably unfair; rather, the respective success they had is grounded in the fact that they address some convincing aspects of a broader reflection I am trying to depict through this work. The problem is that they do it in an unsatisfactorily partial way. To this end, I shall concentrate on a well known text from the *Symposium*, luxuriously rich in poetry and theory, which is, among other things, an enquiry into the nature of Love and Beauty. The part I have chosen is the crucial one in the matter of Plato’s ontological view and occupies a prominent place in the dramatic rhythm of the work. References to both views may be easily traced throughout the entire *corpus*<sup>2</sup>, but this passage from the *Symposium* is crucially relevant because within a few

<sup>1</sup> See for instance C.J. Rowe, *Plato*, The Harvester Press, Brighton 1984, p. 59; D. Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1986, pp. 207-213.

<sup>2</sup> See F. Ademollo, *Plato’s conception of Forms: Some Remarks*, cit., pp. 42-45 and pp. 52-56.

lines we have suggestions in favour of both the traditional views and the account presented here. I shall provide my own interpretation of the passage (specifically of the second part) after I have briefly illustrated the main interpretations within the dominant view.

*Forms as universals.* Forms have been interpreted as general entities that are common to many particular things that instantiate them. In this passage from the *Symposium* there are two statements that speak of the idea of common nature:

A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realise that the beauty of any one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he'd be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same<sup>3</sup>.

In this passage there are two statements that taken jointly give us the idea of what we most generally think universals or properties are: firstly, the “beauties” of several bodies are all alike with regard to the bodies’ being beautiful (since they are brothers: τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὀτρωῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι); secondly, it is nonsense (πολλῆ ἄνοια) not to consider as one what is in fact one, namely what is one over many beautiful bodies (τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος).

<sup>3</sup> *Symp.* 210a3-b3: «δεῖ γάρ, ἔφη, τὸν ὀρθῶς ἰόντα ἐπὶ τοῦτο τὸ πρᾶγμα ἄρχεσθαι μὲν νέον ὄντα ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ σώματα, καὶ πρῶτον μὲν, ἕν ὀρθῶς ἡγήται ὁ ἡγούμενος, ἑνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἑρᾶν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γεννᾶν λόγους καλοὺς, ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτὸν κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὀτρωῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ δεῖ διώκειν τὸ ἐπ’ εἶδει καλόν, πολλῆ ἄνοια μὴ οὐχ ἕν τε καὶ ταυτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος». Cf. also *Resp.* 476a.



For instance, Helen and Alcibiades possess the characteristic of beauty, they are beautiful. The Form is being regarded as a unique nature, the Form of Beauty or the Beautiful, that different sensible particulars share. However, Plato is crystal clear that Forms exist by themselves, independently of the sensible particulars participating in them (this is Plato's phrasing to mean instantiation, according to this interpretation). In other words, Forms do not need any other entity in order to exist: they are ontologically self-sufficient (the Form of the Good could be an exception, but this is not relevant here). Consequently, if Forms are universals, they should exist uninstantiated, outside space and time (we suspend the discussion of whether in the Socratic dialogues Plato is actually dealing with non-independent universals). Thus, Forms are transcendent properties, not only with respect to human acts of knowledge, but also ontologically independent of sensible entities that instantiate them.

A reason for such a transcendent conception could be that properties come into sensible experience irretrievably mixed with each other in such a way that they must be taken in isolation, if they are to be known, and this is possible only at the level of intelligibility in contrast with perception. This means, of course, that according to the Platonic discourse, intelligible isolated properties are in no way mental constructions; on the contrary, they are considered the one and only authentic reality. An important implication can be drawn: although sensible particulars deprived of any determination coming from Forms, which are comparable to mere substrata without any property, make no sense and would be, at any rate, miserable ontological entities, they still are conceived of as partially independent of Forms. Finally, this view leans towards the logical side of conceiving of the εἶδος, in that the task of Forms is to provide us with an ontological ground for predicates, accounting for the common nature of the qualities

shared by many particulars as is represented by the fact that the same general term applies to a plurality of particulars. This interpretation has two major advantages: firstly, it corresponds to Plato's view that one Form is common to many sensible particulars; secondly, it seems to better explain Plato's view that things are thus and so because Forms act, commune or are present in them (e.g. *Phaed.* 100e<sup>4</sup>).

*Forms as particulars.* Forms have been interpreted as particulars, as some sort of object, which excludes, according to the dominant view, that they can be shared by other particulars. At the same time, if Forms are particulars they must be special objects whose nature and ontological status has to explain why, for example particulars such as Helen and Alcibiades are beautiful. Therefore, Forms have been interpreted as paradigms in virtue of which a number of sensible particulars can be thus and so. According to this view, Forms are things that enjoy being eternal, itself by itself, etc., representing the perfection of a certain nature that is only approximated within sensibility. The sensible particular is somehow connected to the Form and in so doing acquires an imperfect characterisation. In a nutshell, keeping to the example of Beauty, the words "beauty" or "beautiful" actually name the Form of Beauty. We can also use these words to say that Helen or Alcibiades is beautiful only because there is some sort of resemblance between the Form of Beauty and the two human beings. Using this interpretation, Forms are purely and unqualifiedly what particulars are derivatively and qualifiedly. The advantages

<sup>4</sup> Some interpreters endorsing a variety of views where Forms are considered to be universals are D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, cit., pp. 225-230; D. Bostock, *Plato's Phaedo*, cit.; G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*, cit.; V. Harte, *Plato's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 208-214 and F. Ademollo, *Plato's conception of Forms: Some Remarks*, cit.

of this interpretation is that it directly derives from Plato's language of iconic relation between Forms and particulars.

This passage, from the *Symposium*, immediately subsequent to the one above, speaks of the isolation of Forms. Although it is a bit longer, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change. So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning this very beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *Symp.* 211a1-d1: «ἀεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον, οὔτε αὐξανόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, ἔπειτα οὐ τῆ μὲν καλόν, τῆ δ' αἰσχρόν, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὔ, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν, οὐδ' ἔνθα μὲν καλόν,

This passage is particularly rich in details of the metaphysical status of Forms and their relation to cognition. My interpretation will be given soon; for now it is important to pay attention to the fact that the Form is presented not as a property, but rather that which ought to be taken in total isolation, and is itself by itself and with itself, always being in only one form (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν). In this way Forms are better understood as paradigmatic particulars: the Form represents in its purity and unqualifiedly what is being-*F* is<sup>6</sup>. All the other things that come to be beautiful are somehow related to the Form as an independent reality, which is not affected by that relation. Austerely self-suffi-

ἐνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν, ὡς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν: οὐδ' αὖ φαντασθήσεται αὐτῷ τὸ καλὸν οἷον πρόσωπόν τι οὐδὲ χεῖρες οὐδὲ ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὄν σῶμα μετέχει, οὐδέ τις λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη, οὐδέ που ὄν ἐν ἑτέρῳ τινι, οἷον ἐν ζῳῳ ἢ ἐν γῆ ἢ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἢ ἐν τῷ ἄλλῳ, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα καλὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα τρόπον τινὰ τοιοῦτον, οἷον γιγνομένων τε τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπολλυμένων μηδὲν ἐκείνο μήτε τι πλέον μήτε ἔλαττον γίγνεσθαι μηδὲ πάσχειν μηδέν. ὅταν δὴ τις ἀπὸ τῶνδε διὰ τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδευαστεῖν ἐπανιών ἐκείνο τὸ καλὸν ἄρχηται καθορᾶν, σχεδὸν ἂν τι ἄπτοίτο τοῦ τέλους. τοῦτο γὰρ δὴ ἐστὶ τὸ ὀρθῶς ἐπὶ τὰ ἐρωτικά ἰέναι ἢ ὑπ' ἄλλου ἄγεσθαι, ἀρχόμενον ἀπὸ τῶνδε τῶν καλῶν ἐκείνου ἕνεκα τοῦ καλοῦ αἰεὶ ἐπανιέναι, ὥσπερ ἐπαναβασμοῖς χρώμενον, ἀπὸ ἐνός ἐπὶ δύο καὶ ἀπὸ δυοῖν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ καλὰ σώματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐπιτηδεύματων ἐπὶ τὰ καλὰ μαθήματα, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν μαθημάτων ἐπ' ἐκείνο τὸ μάθημα τελευτήσαι, ὃ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλου ἢ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα, καὶ γινῶ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν ὃ ἔστι καλόν».

<sup>6</sup> Cf. immediately above it is stated: «All of a sudden he [*scil.* The man who has been guided in matters of Love] will catch sight of something wonderfully beautiful in its nature» (ἐξαίφνης κατόψεται τι θαυμαστὸν τῆν φύσιν καλόν). All of this harks back to the visual dimension of the εἶδος. The very notion of paradigm or model naturally relates to something other than the reality measured against it, showing how this second interpretation of the notion of εἶδος amounts to a visual aspect, whereas the previous one appeared to be on the linguistic side.

cient, the Form determines other things to be or become in a certain way.

An influential interpretation by Bluck and Geach, inspired by Wittgenstein<sup>7</sup>, compares Forms to standards. For instance, Forms are to particulars what the standard metre is to any measurable length: one can measure any extension in metres only in relation to a unit of measure that is independent of what one is actually measuring. By contrast, the standard by its own nature represents what is needed to make any measurement. Another influential interpretation, known as the copy-model theory, is by Allen<sup>8</sup>. The main idea is that Forms are models or originals and sensible particulars are copies or resemblances of these models or originals. This notion of resemblance between Forms and things has been interpreted in two ways: it is either symmetrical or asymmetrical. If taken in the first sense, it is a symmetrical relation such that if the particular is similar to the Form, then the Form is similar to the particular. But if this relation is taken as the copy-original relation, then it does not make sense to say that the original resembles its copies. Of course we can think that the original resembles a copy, in a certain sense, but we may think that this metaphor is overtly employed by Plato to state the asymmetry of the grounding relation between Form and thing. In other words, it does not make sense to speak of copies if there is no original. Allen subscribes to this asymmetrical interpretation and on his reading the connection between thing and Form is

<sup>7</sup> See P.T. Geach, *The Third Man Again*, «Philosophical Review», 65 (1956), pp. 72-82; R.S. Bluck, *Forms as Standards*, «Phronesis», 2 (1957), pp. 115-127.

<sup>8</sup> See R.E. Allen, *Participation and predication in Plato's middle dialogues*, cit., pp. 147-164. For similar views, cf. also J.M.E. Moravcsik, *The 'Third Man' Argument and Plato's Theory of Forms*, «Phronesis», 8 (1963), pp. 50-62 and T.W. Bestor, *Common Properties and Eponymy in Plato*, cit.

a matter of mere homonymy: the beautiful things are named after what is beautiful, not because they have something in common with it, but because the former are dependent on the latter. On the symmetrical reading, by contrast, the connection between particular and Form subsists because they do have something in common insofar as they resemble one another<sup>9</sup>. This symmetrical view leads to the view that Forms are hybrid entities, which I am about to introduce.

As already recognised by Ross in *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, these first two views seem to express an inner tension within Plato's theory of Forms. Forms must be at the same time (I) what determines what particulars are by acting on them in some way; and (II) "by themselves", existing independently of and being unaffected by everything else. To this already complex picture, we must add a further aspect of Plato's view, which is now commonly known under the name of self-predication and which has often been used as a privileged means of interpreting Plato's notion of Form<sup>10</sup>. Very generally, self-predication can be defined as a statement where the subject term refers to a Form and the predicate term that is joined with the subject term stands for the same Form. For instance, "the *F* itself is *F*" or "*F*-ness is *F*"<sup>11</sup>. Accordingly, The Form of Beauty is itself beautiful (in some sense of "be" and some

<sup>9</sup> This distinction is already recognised by Plotinus *Enneads* I, 11, 2, 4-10 quoted in V. Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*, Vrin, Paris 2003, p. 49.

<sup>10</sup> *Loci classici* are *Hipp. M.* 291d; *Euthyphr.* 6e; *Protag.* 330c.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. B. Strobel, »Dieses« und »So etwas«. *Zur ontologischen Klassifikation platonischer Formen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2007, p. 22 for any self-predicative proposition «mit seinem Subjekt-Term wird auf eine Form Bezug genommen, und sein Prädikat-Term wird so verwendet, daß er laut der Formkonzeption, die Formen als Designate von Prädikat-Termen konzipiert, für die Form steht, auf die mit dem Subjekt-Term des Satzes Bezug genommen wird».

sense of “beautiful”: we shall consider the main interpretations below). This has brought the interpreters to consider a third option within the dominant framework.

*Forms as hybrid entities (universal plus particular).* A first distinction is due. To conceive of Forms as hybrid entities can mean at least two things. First, in all of his works, Plato treated Forms sometimes as universals and sometimes as particulars<sup>12</sup>. In other words, Plato entertains different conceptions in different places of his work. Second, the very notion of Form, in the same theoretical and textual context, is a sort of metaphysical goat-stag that reunites at the same time traits typically belonging to universals with traits belonging to particulars. I shall focus on this second option here. The main idea is this. Consistently with self-predication, Forms have the very features that they are, in other words they instantiate themselves. For instance, Beauty is beautiful. More precisely, Beauty represents the nature of what it is to be beautiful *because* it is a perfect instance of beauty. In this way, Beauty can be a Form that exists by itself and that instantiates the property of beauty. This Form is imitated by the many sensible particulars such as Helen and Alcibiades. In this way this view looks very similar to the view that Forms are particulars (especially those views that conceive of resemblance symmetrically). At the same time, the resemblance to Beauty on the part of sensible particulars is thought of in terms of participation. For instance, Helen and Alcibiades are beautiful because they receive the property of being beautiful from the Form of Beauty. They participate in that Form because they have something in common with it, namely the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B. Strobel, »Dieses« und »So etwas«. *Zur ontologischen Klassifikation platonischer Formen*, cit., who claims that in the Socratic dialogues and the dialectical dialogues (*Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*) Forms are ultimately very close to universals, in the middle dialogues they are hybrids and in the *Timaeus* they are paradigmatic particulars.

property of being beautiful, which makes it look like the view that Forms are universals. However, Helen and Alcibiades are beautiful only temporarily, they can get old or die, whereas the Form is self-identical and eternal or timeless (depending on the interpretation). Moreover, Helen and Alcibiades are only qualifiedly beautiful. For instance, compared to Aphrodite, Helen is ugly, or Alcibiades has beauty with respect to bodily features, but not with respect to moral features. By contrast, the Form of Beauty is unqualifiedly beautiful<sup>13</sup>.

However, each of these jointly exhaustive interpretations presents some issues:

*Problems with Forms as universals.* To begin with, it is not clear what Plato means when he says of a universal that it is thus and so, a question that one is forced to consider from self-predication. It could be, for example, that if one says that Human Being is Animal, she is not saying that the universal Human Being is a particular animal. Rather, she is saying that any particular human being is also an animal, or that if the universals Human Being and Horse are Animal, then human beings and horses can be associated with regard to their being

<sup>13</sup> Cf. F.J. Gonzalez, *Plato's Dialectic of Forms*, in W.A. Welton (ed.), *Plato's Forms: Varieties of Interpretation*, Lexington Books, Oxford 2008, p. 36: «Plato's language is ambiguous between treating the forms as things possessing properties (or, in other words, as subjects of which a property is predicated) and treating them as identical to these properties». In stating that Forms are neither, the author infers that Plato has never intended to put forward a coherent theory of Forms, whereas I think it only demonstrates the inapplicability of the substance/property dichotomy to the Platonic notion of εἶδος. For the hybrid view, the most recent monograph-long studies are J. Malcolm, *Plato on the Self-predication of Forms*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991; B. Strobel, »Dieses« und »So etwas«. *Zur ontologischen Klassifikation platonischer Formen*, cit.; B. Lienemann, *Die Argumente des Dritten Menschen in Platons Dialog »Parmenides«*, cit. Cf. also B. Lienemann, *Platonische Ideen als hybride Gegenstände*, cit.



animals. However, this way of interpreting Plato, which is very Aristotelian in flavour, fits oddly with self-predications. What is Plato actually conveying with the idea that the *F* itself is *F*? When Plato says that Beauty is beautiful, he is very often understood as saying that Beauty instantiates the characteristic of being beautiful. If this is so, then he is already implying that Forms are entities that are able to instantiate properties, i.e. particulars. Moreover, as we have seen Forms exist independently of other entities, which is why proponents of the view that Forms are universals were compelled to conceive Forms as transcendent universals, as properties that can exist uninstantiated outside space and time. However, this result could more easily be achieved by claiming that Forms are particulars.

*Problems with Forms as particulars.* If one keeps to the interpretation of Forms as paradigmatic particulars, whether it be as standards or as models being copied, the notion of participation seems to be too weak because things would have their determination independently of Forms and Forms are only required to identify them (this idea is also conveyed by a famous paper by Vlastos where the causal role of Forms towards particulars is providing a reason)<sup>14</sup>. This can be easily seen from what follows. If we keep to the comparison between Forms and the standard metre, the length of anything measured with the standard unit of measure will be independent of the standard used to measure it. This also applies to the copy-model version: Helen will possess her beauty, which is temporal and imperfect, by herself. One will need the reference to the paradigm just to *identify* the extent to which Helen is beautiful<sup>15</sup>. To counter this issue, one should be committed

<sup>14</sup> See G. Vlastos, *Reasons and Causes in the Phaedo*, cit.

<sup>15</sup> A very convincing version of this critique is in F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche. Dai dialoghi giovanili al Parmenide*, cit., pp. 199-210.

to the view that paradigms are participated in by sensible particulars, but this suggests that Forms should work as universals insofar as particulars actually receive something from Forms, which makes particulars what they are.

In sum, if Forms are regarded as universals they should also be considered particulars. If they are regarded as particulars they should also be considered universals. Everything leans towards the hybrid view. However, if the hybrid view is untenable, then according to the dominant view, Plato's theory of Forms is doomed.

*Problems with Forms as hybrid entities.* The first critique was formulated by Aristotle himself<sup>16</sup> for whom the view that Forms are hybrid entities is categorically unacceptable: either something is a substance to which some property belongs or something is a property that is instantiated by a substance. Nothing can be both. Regardless of Aristotle, it is not clear, within this picture, what a Form is: is it the perfect entity or the property that is instantiated by this entity? More generally, how can something be both what has *F* and *F* itself? Moreover, when we say that particular things become *F* because of their participation in the Form of *F*, and the Form itself is *F*, this can be interpreted in two ways: the way particulars are *F* and the way the Form is *F* is the same, or the way particulars are *F* perfectly approximates the way the Form is *F*. Either way, we are faced with another problem. Most interpreters consider the self-predicating statement that Beauty is beautiful as an acceptable instance of self-exemplification: for Plato the Form of Beauty is a beautiful entity. However, when it comes to other Forms, this view is baffling to say the least. The Form of Virtue is virtuous? Virtue is a property of agents and their

<sup>16</sup> See for instance *Metaph.* Z 13. 1038b35-1039a3; Z 16. 1040b25-30; M 9. 1086a32-35.

behaviour, certainly not of intelligible entities outside space and time. What about the Form of Motion? According to self-predication, it should be moving, which is incompatible with the status of any Form, clearly described as changeless. Again, the Form of Human Being is no actual specimen of human being<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, one more fundamental problem, presented in Plato's *Parmenides*, emerges. In a very influential paper, Gregory Vlastos individuates two theoretical premises that seem to be crucial to Plato's theory of Forms, although they appear to be ultimately inconsistent<sup>18</sup>. The first assumption is "non-identity", which is the main reason for conceiving of Forms as universals: for any object  $x$  to be  $F$ , that which makes  $x$   $F$  must be non-identical with  $x$ . Accepting this assumption seems to be correct as one of the reasons for positing Forms is that sensible things cannot be what they happen to be by themselves alone. The idea is this: Alcibiades and Helen are beautiful. That in virtue of which they are beautiful coincide with neither of them. In other words, that which makes them beautiful must be non-identical with either of them. The second assumption is self-predication. This is the main reason for conceiving of Forms as particulars qua paradigms: something can act as a model for something else only if it perfectly instantiates what the copy must reproduce. As we have seen, the Form of Beauty is said to be itself beautiful. However, if the Form of Beauty is beautiful, given non-identity, it must be made beautiful from something else. That is to say that the list of the beautiful things will be Helen, Alcibiades and the Form of Beauty, each of which will have a common feature, namely

<sup>17</sup> Cf. G.E.L. Owen, *Dialectic and Eristics in the Treatment of the Forms*, in Id., *Aristotle on Dialectic. The Topics. Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1968, pp. 103-125.

<sup>18</sup> G. Vlastos, *The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides*, cit.

being beautiful. If this is true, one further entity is needed to make the three beautiful. If this other entity is itself beautiful, as it should be to make the three items beautiful, the argument leads to an infinite regress. This is supposed to show that the hybrid view is untenable.

The untenability of the hybrid view has also been connected to Plato not being able to distinguish between denoting and describing. In other words, in claiming that for a predicate to have a meaning one must assume the existence of an entity (the Form of Beauty is the meaning of “beautiful”) Plato was also committed to the idea that the predicate is true of that entity (the Form of Beauty is beautiful). N. White asserts in his work *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* that Plato’s theory of Forms is undermined by, or at least derives from, the problematic indistinction of the modern categories of Sense and Reference.

Plato fails to distinguish naming and describing because the notion of Form is supposed to account for two things:

- (1) The fact that a general term is meaningful entails that it refers to an existing entity as if it were a proper name;
- (2) The fact that a general term is meaningful entails that there must be at least one entity of which it must be true.

The εἶδος of the Beautiful will then be what is picked out by the term “beautiful” and at the same time the term “beautiful” will be true of it, that is, the Form of Beauty possesses the property signified by the general term<sup>19</sup>. This

<sup>19</sup> See N. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1976, p. 141: «It is abundantly clear that Plato thinks that a name may do more than simply direct our attention, as it were, to an object, but may also in some sense contain some information about

is problematic because if the general term is a predicate, that is the term corresponding to properties, the mistake would be that Plato did not recognise how such a term can be meaningful without being compelled to include an entity in his ontology in the same way as proper names do towards named entities. Thus, this ambiguous goat-stag, the metaphysical item εἶδος, is considered, for purely semantic reasons, both a substance and a property since it works like a property, but exists like a substance. In other words, we come up with another version of self-predication: for any general term to be meaningful, the existence of an entity which is named by the term must be admitted and then it must be also admitted that the property which constitutes the meaning of the term must be instantiated by the entity itself. This happens only for semantic reasons, first because what Plato is actually aiming at is to provide an account of the nature and function of predicates, and second because in doing so, under specific epistemological assumptions, he

features which the object possesses [...] he [*scil.* Plato] tends to think that because the expression “large” can, in his view, be used to refer to the Form of the Large, it must therefore also describe that object, so that our referring to the object by means of that expression forces us to say simultaneously that the Form is itself a large object». Another criticism worth considering, which ascribes a conflation between semantical and ontological levels, is spelt out by G.E.L. Owen, *Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present*, cit., p. 336, who claims that Plato tries to lead the distinction between tensed and tenseless statements back to the more familiar distinction between the changeless and the changing. Owen says that this move is wrong, for to be tenseless or tensed is a property of statements and not of things. On this, cf. also the insightful claim by J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Plato and Platonism*, cit., p. 81, who says that knowledge is directed at timeless entities and not timeless truth because in Plato’s mindset the object of knowledge must be self-sufficient and truth must depend on the “being” they describe and thus are not self-sufficient.

fails to recognise the fundamental difference between naming and describing or denoting and connoting<sup>20</sup>.

To conclude, the fundamental result of the dominant interpretation is epitomised by John Malcolm in his detailed work *Plato on Self-Predication of Forms*<sup>21</sup>, according to whom the hybrid view is the best way to make sense of Plato's texts and at the same time cannot be salvaged. This ultimately because Plato was not able to distinguish paradigmatic particulars from universals. In contrast with White, Malcolm claims that Plato did not fail to distinguish how to properly use words for naming and describing, but at a deeper level he failed (at least until the *Parmenides*) to distinguish universals and paradigmatic cases, in such a way that giving answers to questions about the identity of a certain property is the same as providing a thing which perfectly instantiates that property. Therefore, for Malcolm, Plato's theory requires that Forms are both universals and paradigmatic cases, even if they turn out to be inconsistent, strongly relying on the third man regress as a key to deciphering the notion of εἶδος.

This line of interpretation has been challenged throughout the recent history of Plato's scholarship. I shall list the

<sup>20</sup> This kind of objection is seminally opened by G. Ryle, *Plato's Parmenides*, in R.E. Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, cit., p. 117: «The name of a quality or relation cannot significantly occur as the subject of an attributive or relational sentence. Abstract nouns cannot assume the roles of proper names or demonstratives». Cf. also G. Ryle, *Systematically Misleading Expressions*, in Id., *Collected Papers Vol. 2. Collected Essays 1929-1968*, Routledge, London and New York 2009, pp. 41-65.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. Malcolm, *Plato on the Self-predication of Forms*, cit., where he explores throughout the volume the possibility of whether Platonic Forms are either universals (*F*) or things or both. He considers whether: Forms are no things at all; Forms are things that are *F* equivocally with regard to sensible things that are *F*, and Forms are things that are *F* univocally with sensible things being *F*.

main theoretical options, without engaging thoroughly with them. Some of these alternative views conforms more closely with Plato's texts than others. Some others present some very interesting and innovative concepts. However, none of them has entirely challenged the dominant view, although some of the following views seem to fit with my overall exegetical proposal. In order not to fall prey to the third man argument, the main strategies are the following:

*Different senses of "is".* This idea, put forward by Harold Cherniss<sup>22</sup>, is that if a sensible particular is *F*, where "*F*" signifies a Form, it means that the particular possesses a property and that the "is" has a predicative value. By contrast, if the subject of the statement is a Form, as happens in self-predications, one is not actually faced with a predication, rather with a statement of identity. Accordingly, the "Form of *F* is *F*" means that the Form of *F* is identical to *F*. In brief, one is faced with the difference between having a Form or being a Form.

*What it is to be F.* This reading is to be proposed by Alexander Nehamas<sup>23</sup>. The idea is that Plato is not actually distinguishing between being a Form and having a Form. Self-predication stands for the fact that the only thing that is *F* is the Form and that anything else that appears to be *F* is also non-*F*, thereby not qualifying as a proper subject for the predication "is *F*". Thus, according to Nehamas, "the Form of *F* is *F*" is not stating that *F* is identical with *F*. Self-predication is rather stating that, whatever *F* turns out to be, it is what it means for anything to be *F*. Accordingly, any other thing that participates in *F* should in some way be *F* along with other characteristics that makes it non-*F*.

<sup>22</sup> See H.F. Cherniss, *The Relation of the Timaeus to Plato's Later Dialogues*, «The American Journal of Philology», 78 (1957), pp. 225-266.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Nehamas, *Self-Predication and Plato's Theory of Forms*, «American Philosophical Quarterly», 16 (1979), pp. 93-103.

*Primitive possession of F.* This reading is put forward by a number of scholars and from different angles<sup>24</sup>. These interpreters deny that in self-predications one is actually faced with identity statements. At the same time, they claim that the relation between *F*-ness as a particular and *F* as a property is a primitive relation, meaning that it cannot be grounded in something more fundamental, which should be contrasted with the way ordinary things instantiate Forms. The main idea is that to be the Form of *F* means possessing *F* in a perfect way. This must be interpreted formally: the character that is possessed by *F* expresses its essence without implying that the Form of *F* is *F* just like a sensible particular. This interpretation has the advantage that in any self-predication what is predicated of the Form is not inconsistent with the ontological status of that Form. For instance, the Form of Motion is supposed to perfectly instantiate or unqualifiedly possess the feature of motion. As we have seen, this would contrast with Forms being changeless, which is one of the characters belonging to any Form qua Form. This reading avoids the problem because it conceives of self-predication as an essential (Patterson, Silverman) or formal (Fronterotta) way of possessing a nature, which is designed to exclude that the Form of Motion is actually a moving entity, or that the Form of Largeness is an entity actually extended in space and so on<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Patterson, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1985; F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche. Dai dialoghi giovanili al Parmenide*, cit.; A. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, cit.

<sup>25</sup> To this group can perhaps be added R.D. Parry, *Paradigms, Characteristics, and Forms in Plato's Middle Dialogues*, «Apeiron», 34 (2001), pp. 1-35, who distinguishes paradigms from Forms in saying that Forms are maximal characteristics that characterise paradigms and self-predication applies to the paradigm and not to the Form. By contrast, to this group must not be added V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory*



*Different sorts of predication.* Finally, a very interesting proposal should be considered<sup>26</sup>. The main idea is that Plato, at least in the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*, distinguishes two sorts of predication, namely predications πρὸς ἑαυτό (in relation to itself) and πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα (in relation to something else). The distinction is particularly complex and ramified. However, its core can be intuitively grasped. When something is predicated πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα we are faced with attributing a property. “Helen is beautiful” means that the sensible particular Helen has the character of beauty. On the other hand, the predication πρὸς ἑαυτό is meant to describe the nature of the subject. For instance, saying “Human Being is Animal” is to say that there is a relation between two Forms, Human Being and Animal, that expresses at least part of their natures. This view provides an answer to the third man argument insofar as self-predications are conceived of as tautological expression of what the nature of any Form *F* is, without incurring problems of Forms possessing incompatible properties or instantiating themselves in a metaphysically contentious way.

*of Forms*, cit., as he himself points out. This because for Politis Forms are essences and not things that have essences. The notion of essence is to be understood as what is designated by an adequate and true answer to a what-is question. However, although Politis states that Forms as essences have some metaphysical and epistemological implications, and although there are numerous points of his interpretation of how Forms work with which I agree, he claims that this is not the core of Plato’s theory of Forms, which is clearly very different from my account.

<sup>26</sup> This view moves from the seminal M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage. Platons Gebrauch von „...ist...“ und „...nicht ist...“ im Sophistes*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1967 and is developed by C.C. Meinwald, *Plato’s Parmenides*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991 and Id., *Good-bye to the Third Man*, in R. Kraut (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1992, pp. 365-396.

## 2. *The Approach of this Book*

I now wish to discuss the extent to which my account is different from the dominant view, as I very briefly schematised it above. This objective can only be partially achieved here. This because a fully-fledged account of participation would be needed, which is well beyond the scope of this work. However, I can give some facts that emerge from my account in the previous chapters, which can shed new light on Plato's theory of Forms, suggesting an escape route from the flaws in the dominant view. The first thing to acknowledge is that both the view that Forms are universals and the view that they are particulars are meant to account for a basic fact that I have called Eidetic Determination, namely that Forms are what makes things thus and so. In other words, there has been wide recognition of the fact that the fundamental role played by Forms is that they ontologically determine what things (and possibly other Forms) are, which is the first physiological function in my account. The disagreement starts when explaining what sort of entities Forms are and how it happens that they determine things to be thus and so.

The texts from the *Symposium* cited in this chapter, especially the latter at 211a1-d1, are suitable for a plurality of reading, which in turn enables the reader to understand how it happened that two mutually inconsistent interpretations, on a large scale, have been given, and why the correct one cannot be easily found. It is helpful to report the text here:

First, it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second, it is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor beautiful here but ugly there, as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others. Nor will

the beautiful appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body. It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anything else, but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater nor suffer any change. So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, then from beautiful bodies to beautiful customs, and from customs to learning beautiful things, and from these lessons he arrives in the end at this lesson, which is learning this very beauty, so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful<sup>27</sup>.

Speaking of what is beautiful in itself begins with the rejection of generation and corruption: what properly is never comes to be since it has always been. It never passes away, insofar as it never ceases to be. Moreover, it is said that it is not the case that what is beautiful is not beautiful in some way, or under certain aspects, nor that it is beautiful at one time and not at another. Change is excluded also in relation to other things, as it is in the case of many places and people's opinions. We can see that change is excluded in a plurality of cases:

- (a) Substance (generation and corruption, οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον);

<sup>27</sup> *Symp.* 211a1-d1.

- (b) Property (ways of being, aspects, οὐ τῆ μὲν καλόν, τῆ δ' αἰσχρόν);
- (c) Time (different moments with different properties, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὐ);
- (d) Relation (in relation to other things, οὐδὲ πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, πρὸς δὲ τὸ αἰσχρόν);
- (e) Space (being different in different places, ἔνθα μὲν καλόν, ἔνθα δὲ αἰσχρόν);
- (f) Opinion (for some people in one way, other for others, τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν, τισὶ δὲ αἰσχρόν)<sup>28</sup>.

At least partially, Plato seems to be alive to categorical distinctions<sup>29</sup>, which however do not play any role in determining the nature of ὁ ἔστι καλόν, that which is beautiful (by itself) since they are all employed to circumscribe what the Form is not or does not perform. I am not contending that Plato had at his disposal a fully developed theory about ontological categories. My contention is instead that Plato had, at least discursively, awareness of such distinctions, but, at the same time, that they are not what he was aiming at. Furthermore, that which is beautiful does not make an appearance in the guise of particular bodies or parts of them, nor does it in discourses and knowledge (οὐδέ τις λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη). Even in the highest and noblest of human acts in Plato's view, namely knowledge, that which is beautiful does not coincide with that act. It does not appear in minds, just as it does

<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting how (e) and (f) are connected by using the latter to explain the former. It seems that Plato is not simply denying that Forms do not change in different places, as if they were physical things, but rather he seems to be locating the stability of Beauty with regard to spatial extension within people's experience.

<sup>29</sup> Similarly V. Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*, cit., p. 73 n. 3.

not appear in bodies. This does not mean that it is beyond the reach of knowledge, but only that it possesses its own ontological status in such a way that its being the object of knowledge is always independent of the act of knowing it, or, to put it better, of its appearance to the knowing subject<sup>30</sup>. The passage continues by stating that that which is beautiful is never in another thing, whether it be on Earth or in heaven. Contrastingly, it is itself by itself and with itself, always one in form (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν), as already explained in the Anatomy of εἶδος. Sensible things partake of it and they work as signs of this ontologically fully developed nature to which everyone who is able to know is naturally led. Once again bodies, acts and learnings may be beautiful, but the ultimate knowledge is only of that which is beautiful in itself. There is the recurring technical expression “αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι” denoting how the Form at stake here should be thought of as a pure intelligible content or object expressing a determination that can be (at least partially) woven into the texture of words. We are faced with the attempt to think of an absolute objectivity<sup>31</sup> which, as I tried to show in the Anatomy, is the requirement needed by any act of knowledge that is supposed to be absolute and indefeasible in its certainty.

My take on the matter is that the dominant view tries to make sense of the textual evidence we have concerning the notion of Form by relying on some ungrounded assumptions, the most central of which is that Forms *must be* either universals or particulars or some hybrid item. One legitimate question could be: how is it possible for that part of the *Symposium* and

<sup>30</sup> The term in question is φαντάζω, which means “to become visible”, clearly derived from φαίνομαι which in turn means “appear” and “come about”.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. N. White, *Plato's metaphysical epistemology*, in R. Kraut (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, cit., pp. 290-291.

the notion of εἶδος to be meant in another way? The substance/property dichotomy, from which the dominant view moves, should be translated into a more Platonic way of thinking. Forms have at least two aspects to them: first, they must explain how it is possible for anything to be in some way and how cognition, variably intended, can be used to grasp that way, as is shown by the Physiology; second, they must enjoy a very specific ontological status, as is shown by the Anatomy, where ontological self-sufficiency is the key factor. This is a more genuinely Platonic way to understand the rationale behind conceiving of Forms as universals or particulars. The Physiology side could correspond to conceiving of Forms as universals. This because Forms as universals are meant to explain why sensible things possess some qualities and why this accounts for true ascriptions of predicates. The Anatomy side could correspond to conceiving of Forms as particulars. This because Forms as particulars are meant to explain why Forms are perfect and ontologically self-sufficient entities. However, the exegetical payoff of my new interpretation is that Physiology and Anatomy are essentially connected as they capture interrelated functional and structural aspects of the εἶδος, respectively. In this way, I am able to show that the εἶδος is a metaphysically complex entity that cannot be reduced to the substance-property dichotomy.

This interpretation has been missed, because, as hinted above, there has been a relentless tendency to ascribe misunderstandings to Plato<sup>32</sup>, which mainly regard logical and metaphysical subtle distinctions that Plato allegedly failed to recognise, pursuing to the extreme terms the absurdity deriving from that failure. Very generally, also on the basis

<sup>32</sup> Cf. T. Penner, *The Ascent from Nominalism: Some Existence Arguments in Plato's Middle Dialogues*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1987, p. XIII, who uses the sharp phrase: «Age of diagnosticism».

of my reconstruction of the debate above, I believe that the dominant view relies on two points:

- (I) The main task of the theory of Forms is accounting for the meaning of predicates in such a way that a Form is the ontological counterpart of what takes place on the predicate side in any true predication;
- (II) The substance/property dichotomy is exegetically so inescapable that it is preferable to take Forms to be both, even if they are inconsistent.

In the case of (I) it must be stated that the theory of Forms is not tasked merely with accounting for predication. As I endeavoured to show in the *Physiology of εἶδος*, keeping it under the “umbrella term” of reference, predication is only one among the *many* functions of the εἶδος. The whole theory cannot be reduced to a description of the fundamental logical move of predicating something of something else, however crucial it may be. In the next two parts of this book, we shall see how the possibility of speaking of reality is crucial to understanding a great part of Plato’s view, but this in no way implies that the theory of Forms is solely equivalent to a theory describing the basic logical mechanism of predication. However, it must also be recognised that point (I) grasps an aspect that is fundamental to my account: the essential correlation between ontology and cognition. What I think should not be taken for granted, but rather expanded upon as a complex question, is the close association between what goes on in reality (e.g. Helen’s participation in Beauty) and thought/language (e.g. the truth of “Helen is beautiful”)<sup>33</sup>. Far from being an obvious fact, this correlation is

<sup>33</sup> Cf. A. Graeser, *On Language, Thought, and Reality in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, «Dialectica», 31 (1977), p. 368: «What the “Theory of Forms” is meant to do is to answer to some kind of proto-Kantian inquiry into the

object of intense investigations, as the remainder of my books tries to show with regard to the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

In the case of (II), the interpretation presented in this chapter overtly figures as an alternative. As already stated, keeping together functional and structural aspects of the εἶδος is the best way to address the notion of Platonic Form. The only way to get beyond the substance/property conceptual pair is by providing an interpretation that can encompass what the dominant view is meant to account for. Accordingly, Forms are neither universals nor particulars. They are very special entities that have a number of functions (Physiology) and enjoy a particular ontological status (Anatomy), which is a different way to interpret the texts that led to think that Forms are universals or that they are particulars. What is being perceived as a limit, namely the inconsistency underlying the hybrid view, can actually be considered the central characterisation of Forms: they cannot be understood if not in terms of what they do and on account of what ontological features they can do it. What we gain from this approach is a much more complex account, whose depth is lost within the dominant view. By this, I do not mean to state that the hybrid view in its traditional form is correct. I rather claim that it captures some aspects of Plato's theory that are indeed present, but that require a much more complex account that I attempted to depict in this part of my work. However, my account does not limit itself to stating that the hybrid view, if properly interpreted, i.e. respecting functional and structural aspects of Forms, is after all virtuous.

From the vantage point of the Physiology of εἶδος, one crucial fact emerges: Forms' fourfold function keeps together

condition of the possibility of significant discourse in general». In principle, I do not stand against this statement, but one should never forget that the solution cannot but be ontological.



ontological and cognitive functions. The first function is determination: Forms are what is responsible for other entities *being or becoming* thus and so. The other three functions deal with human mind as Forms are object of knowledge and definition, and they are required by linguistic acts of reference and description. This means that Forms' functions are *mixed* between relations involving extra-mental entities and relations involving these entities and the mind. This view may sound peculiar to us. First of all, in Plato's view, ordinary things are not determined by themselves and required some relation to some specific entities (Forms). Moreover, one never knows or does not primarily know ordinary things, but the object of knowledge is precisely that special entity which gives ordinary things their determination. In addition, one does not define linguistic terms, but the object being defined is an existing entity, which again coincides with what determines how ordinary things are. Finally, the very possibility of referring and describing things is again conditioned upon the existence of Forms. As we have seen in detail in Chapter 1, the three cognitive functions of the εἶδος rely on the first ontological function. My main contention is that this relation between ontological function and cognitive functions is so strict that it cannot be ignored in understanding what a Platonic Form is.

From the vantage point of the Anatomy of εἶδος, another crucial factor emerges: Forms are connoted by a series of ontological features that highlight their ontological independence, self-sufficiency, and so on. If we keep to the passage from the *Symposium* commented on above, we are faced with a peculiar circumstance: Forms are conceptualised from the maximum degree of independence. The nature of Beauty is not affected by anything and it is only what it is by itself. At the same time, this ontological condition is typically associated with being νοητόν, which means intelligible, in the double sense of what is perspicuous and what can be grasped by the mind in such a

way as to deliver stable and certain truths. Plato's assumption seems to be that the more something is real and independent of cognition, the more it is fit to be grasped by the mind.

However, if all this is true, what the dominant view fails to appreciate, which is precisely what my reading attempts to highlight is that *one cannot understand what an εἶδος is if one does not take into account the relation between thought, language and reality*. It needs to be said that this does not make Plato an idealist. Intelligibility of Forms is unproblematically associated with absolute independence, and eternity of existence, which are a series of features that exclude any dependency of reality on minds. In fact, we are faced with one Platonic tenet, namely the natural kinship between mind and an independent reality<sup>34</sup>. This can also illuminate what it means to conceive of Forms as whatnesses or through cognate phrases such as “what it is to be *F*” or “what it means to be *F*”. The general idea is that one is faced with really existing (i.e. ontologically mind-independent) *objects* that at the same time are fully graspable *contents*. In addition, as has emerged multiple times in my interpretation, Plato's view can clearly be conceptualised as realism insofar as Forms are considered to be knowable *because* of what they are by themselves and for no other reason. Plato's theoretical

<sup>34</sup> I think this is the nature of the συγγένεια, which is the kinship between the mind/soul and reality, see for example *Phaed.* 79d1-5; *Resp.* 490a8-b7. For a detailed account of this concept and its important role in the overall economy of Plato's thought, including an analysis of the many occurrences of the term in the corpus, see F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone* (Menone Cratilo Repubblica), cit., pp. 221-244, and more recently V. Politis, *Plato's Essentialism. Reinterpreting the Theory of Forms*, cit., pp. 224-229. Cf. also M.F. Burnyeat, *Idealism and Greek Philosophy: what Descartes saw and Berkeley missed*, in Id., *Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 258: «The characteristic worry, from Parmenides onwards, is not how the mind can be in touch with anything at all, but how it can fail to be».

challenge is to think that such entities are also what grounds the existence and determination of what is material or more generally extended in space and time. In the remainder of the book, I shall provide my interpretation of some difficult parts of Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. In doing this, I have a number of objectives. My focus will be finding a *Leitfaden* that goes from the first definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* to the analysis of true and false statements in the *Sophist*. My main point is that Plato is showing that there can be no correct description of the world without a series of complex ontological theories about the nature of the world. Accordingly, I shall highlight the connection between the semantical theory of the *Sophist* and the ontology of kinds and their relations, giving particular importance to the kind Being. Having in the background the functional and structural analysis of Forms that I discussed in this first part of the book, one more positive result of my analysis of the two later dialogues is that they are essentially consistent with the theory of Forms that can be gathered from the middle dialogues.

To conclude, I wish to explain why I shall focus on truth and language in the remainder of my study, and not on the notion of thought or knowledge. This seems to be a good choice for a number of reasons. Firstly, from the Physiology of εἶδος it emerged that Forms are required for two fundamental linguistic tasks, namely definition and reference (in a general sense including description). As far as the act of knowledge is concerned, there has been an intense debate as to whether it should be understood as ultimately propositionally structured or not<sup>35</sup>, but there can be no doubt concerning whether a certain employment of language is an important aspect or condition for it. Second-

<sup>35</sup> Cf. F.J. Gonzalez, *Nonpropositional Knowledge in Plato*, «Apeiron», 31 (1998), pp. 235-284; F. Aronadio, *Plat. Resp. 509d-511e: la chiarezza dei contenuti cognitivi e il sapere diretto*, «Elenchos», 27 (2006), pp. 409-

ly, Plato himself is very clear about conceiving thought and language as two sides of the same coin (see *Theaet.* 189e-190a and *Soph.* 263d-264b). Consequently, an analysis regarding how linguistic truth works is also relevant to thought. Thirdly, the path that I am proposing from the *Theaetetus* to the *Sophist* is particularly interesting as in the former one is faced with the *pars destruens*, where without ontology language ultimately collapses, whereas in the latter one is faced with the *pars costruens*, where linguistic truth and falsehood are conceived as the result of a very complex ontological theory dealing with intelligible kinds and their relations.

424; F. Fronterotta, *ΔΙΑΝΟΙΑΝ... ΑΛΛ'ΟΥΝΟΥΝ*. *Su* resp. VI 511d3-5, «Elenchos», 27 (2006), pp. 441-458; F. Ferrari, *L'infalibilità del Logos: la natura del sapere noetico in Platone (a partire dalla "linea")*, «Elenchos», 27 (2006), pp. 425-440.



PART 2

LANGUAGE AND BECOMING:  
THE FIRST DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE  
IN THE *THEAETETUS*



#### IV. EXPERIENCES AND APPEARANCES

One must always act carefully when dealing with Platonic dialogues given their compositional intricacies and the lack of programmatic clarity concerning their purpose. The *Theaetetus*, however, deserves a special mention because, more frequently than not, appears to be very puzzling as to its correct interpretation, the extent the author considers its arguments to be genuine, and who is meant to be its privileged interlocutor. That is why, more than ever, in my interpretation a very specific angle will be given, from which some parts of the dialogue will be addressed. To put it crudely, the *Theaetetus* represents a crucial point in Plato's works because apparently there is no mention of Forms and because its investigations do not come out with a proper solution to the main question of the dialogue, namely what ἐπιστήμη is. The classic strategy is linking these two things: the dialogue does not answer the question of what knowledge is because there is no discussion



of the sort of entities that can be known (i.e. Forms)<sup>1</sup>. Accordingly, Plato's view is closer to what is argued in earlier and later dialogues than it would at first seem. One important variant of this reading is Sedley's view that the *Theaetetus* is a maieutic dialogue which leads the reader to the edge of the correct solution, without mentioning it, and which represents Plato's autobiographical reflection on his Socratic origin<sup>2</sup>.

The alternative strategy is claiming that Plato abandons the theory of Forms. In turn, this second strategy can be variously conjugated. The main options are that the dialogue only apparently ends in aporia and in fact the third definition

<sup>1</sup> This exegetical stance is epitomised by F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, Routledge, London 1935, p. 28 and pp. 161-163, cf. also N. Cooper, *Plato's Theaetetus Reappraised*, «Apeiron», 33 (2000), pp. 25-52; C. Kahn, *Why is the Sophist a sequel of the Theaetetus?*, «Phronesis», 52 (2007), pp. 39-40; L. Gerson, *Ancient Epistemology*, cit., pp. 44-55, and F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, BUR, Milano 2011, p. 139. Other approaches that take the dialogue to be aporetic as a consequence of its distance from metaphysical and epistemological views expressed in other dialogues (esp. the *Meno* and the *Republic*) are M. Dixsaut, *Du logos qui s'ajoute à l'opinion au logos qui en libère*, in D. El Murr (éd.), *La mesure du savoir. Études sur le Théétète de Platon*, Vrin, Paris 2013, pp. 129-150; Id., *Desmos and logos: de l'opinion vraie à la connaissance (Ménon, 97e-98a et Théétète, 201c-210b)*, in Id. (éd.), *La mesure du savoir. Études sur le Théétète de Platon*, cit., pp. 151-172; F. Teisserenc, *Pourquoi n'y a-t-il pas de définition de la science? Une lecture aporétique du Théétète*, in D. El Murr (éd.), *La mesure du savoir. Études sur le Théétète de Platon*, cit., pp. 189-222. Contra cf. C.J. Rowe, *La fin du Théétète*, in D. El Murr (éd.), *La mesure du savoir. Études sur le Théétète de Platon*, cit., pp. 173-188. Cf. also A. Nehamas, *Episteme and Logos in Plato's Later Thought*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 66 (1984), pp. 11-36, who criticises the «additive model of knowledge», which is the view that adding something to belief yields knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

is Plato's actual view on knowledge<sup>3</sup>, or that it is a genuine record of perplexity by the author<sup>4</sup>. This second strategy has a hard time dealing with the fact that the theory of Forms is undoubtedly present in the *Timaeus* and the *Philebus*, which almost as undoubtedly are later dialogues<sup>5</sup>. I shall not engage with the issue of the overall interpretation of the *Theaetetus*. I would say that my reading of the first definition of ἐπιστήμη best fits with Cornford's traditional reading that there can be no knowledge without Forms. However, my purpose is to provide a new interpretation of the way Plato, in the first definition of knowledge as perception, aims to show a crucial inconsistency: assuming that language works while advancing a view of reality that does not meet language's own ontological requirements. As we shall see, assuming that knowledge is perception leads one to a very specific ontology where what exists is what appears to be the case to a subject. In turn, for Plato

<sup>3</sup> There are a variety of different readings. The main options are (I) regarding the meaning(s) of λόγος provided in the dialogue as the real answer, such as G. Fine, *Knowledge and Logos in the Theaetetus*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 225-251; (II) supposing that Plato does not mention the proper meaning of λόγος, which would turn true judgement into knowledge, such as C. Shields, *The Logos of "Logos": Theaetetus 206c-210b*, «Apeiron», 32 (1999), pp. 107-124; (III) reading the theoretical focus of the *Theaetetus* quite independently of intelligible forms like J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1973 and D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Famously, this happens to be the case with reading B of M.F. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 1990.

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent *status quaestionis* of whether Plato maintains or abandons the theory of Forms in the *Theaetetus*, see T. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis 2005, pp. 16-24. Cf. also L. Brown, *Plato. Theaetetus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. XVII-XXVI.

this leads to the collapse of language, i.e. it turns out it is not possible to refer to or describe anything<sup>6</sup>. I shall explain why.

The main topic of this part of the book is the relation between language and becoming. For this reason, the first definition of knowledge in the dialogue is analysed here, leaving aside the analysis of the rest of the dialogue which would seem to be more overtly devoted to the discussion of the active role of language in characterising knowledge. This is so because what I am specifically interested in is not Plato's theory concerning the role language plays in his account of knowledge. Instead, I attempt to understand to what extent for Plato the possibility of speaking of what is real features as one fundamental requirement of any theory about reality and being. When one's need is to speak about the world, it may be asked: what can I actually perform with words and discourse? And most importantly: what can I learn about the nature of the world by reflecting on the fact that I can speak of it? This part deals with the *pars destruens*, leaving the *pars construens* to the third part of the book, just as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* follow one another<sup>7</sup>. We need first to discuss the initial part of the *Theaetetus*, which will bring the reader, after a rather prolonged and detailed discussion, to the question of why being able to describe and refer to the things of ordinary experience already has a number of ontological

<sup>6</sup> On this I agree with reading B of M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> This option is already contemplated by the Platonic tradition. Cf. D. Sedley, *Three Platonist Interpretations of the Theaetetus*, in C. Gill, M.M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996, pp. 89-93; D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 4; C. Kahn, *Why is the Sophist a sequel of the Theaetetus?*, cit., and F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 134-142.

implications. The first definition of the *Theaetetus* is radical in exploring the nature of becoming through an extreme formulation. The result will be that language collapses and some “common notions” such as being, which are required by any linguistic description of becoming things, cannot be found by perceiving. Developing the intuition of Charles Kahn<sup>8</sup>, in the next part of the book I shall address Plato’s analysis of the structure of statements presented in the *Sophist*. The major claim is that only on the basis of the ontology presented in the *Sophist*, is Plato able to properly explain, not just how to deal with falsehood and not-being, but also how statements in general work and derive from a precise metaphysical view.

For now, I shall present a new reading of the first definition of the *Theaetetus*. As we shall see shortly, the starting point is that perception and thing are linked. Once again, one is faced with Plato’s peculiar metaphysical epistemology. The nature of a portion of reality is to be determined in relation to the kind of cognitive activity it supports and, at the same time, there can be no correct question concerning knowledge which does not take into account a description of what kind of entity one has knowledge of<sup>9</sup>. In this chapter, I shall focus on the increasingly radicalised arguments pertaining to the nature of becoming. I shall suspend, however, the analysis of the dialogical subtleties of the progressive introduction of all the elements of the final

<sup>8</sup> See C. Kahn, *Why is the Sophist a sequel of the Theaetetus?*, cit., p. 44, where the author maintains that the *Sophist* «offers a more fine-grained analysis of the same notion of propositional Being that functioned in the *Theaetetus*».

<sup>9</sup> I agree with J. Moss, *Plato’s Epistemology. Being and Seeming*, cit., pp. 220-227, who claims that Plato is applying the same object-based conception of knowledge he entertains in the middle dialogues, even though there is no mention of Forms in the *Theaetetus*.

vision under scrutiny here<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, I shall assume that the final vision put forward during the analysis of the first definition of knowledge is the main scope of the entire discussion of the first thesis itself<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, this section of the dialogue has drawn considerable attention with regard to the types of change, relational predicates and causal explanations of perception. I shall not focus on these discussions; I have considered the main interpretations which will be extensively referred to during the discussion, but my attempt is to follow a new path by not developing those themes as essential to reading this part of the dialogue. The main result of my investigation is that Plato is not merely after a theory of perception, rather he seems to be posing another question: what would reality be if we consider only what is required by immediate perceptual-doxastic experience of particulars? In this ontology, how is language supposed to work, if at all?

### 1. *The First Definition: Knowledge, Perception, Appearance*

The first definition begins by asserting the perfect coincidence of knowledge and perception<sup>12</sup>. The term in question is

<sup>10</sup> On the necessity of interpreting the series of arguments of the first part of the first definition as a progression, see F. Aronadio, *Il parametreisthai e il trattamento platonico della tesi dell'anthropos-metron*. *Theaet.* 154b1-6, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2016, pp. 131-172.

<sup>11</sup> In this sense I fully embrace the view that Theaetetus' first definition, Protagoras' Measure Doctrine and Heraclitean flux ontology are presented as implying each other or best supporting each other, cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 10-19 and G. Fine, *Conflicting Appearances*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, pp. 160-183.

<sup>12</sup> It is a synallagmatic relation, cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 10: «Now the thesis that knowledge is perception breaks down

αἴσθησις, which is mainly translated as “perception” or “sensation”. I shall adopt the former as it is common among the English-speaking interpreters and is employed by Christopher Rowe whose translation<sup>13</sup> of the dialogue is used throughout this part of the book. Nonetheless, it will be clear in a short while that the term acquires in this context a very specific value which depends on the series of equivalences between the term itself and other relevant concepts put forward in the first part of the dialogue. The literature has extensively recognised the broad semantical status of the term<sup>14</sup>. What will emerge is that to say that knowledge is perception is to say that I am allowed only knowledge of what I can directly

into two propositions: (1) all perceiving is knowledge, (2) all knowing is perceiving».

<sup>13</sup> C.J. Rowe, *Plato. Theaetetus and Sophist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Without any claim of being exhaustive, I refer to two important interpreters particularly apt to clarify this matter. See F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., p. 30, where he says: «in ordinary usage *aisthesis*, translated perception, has a wide range of meanings, including sensation, our awareness of outer objects or facts, feeling, emotions, etc», see also M. Frede, *Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues*, in Id., *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. 3, who notices that in its ordinary sense «It [*scil.* The term “*aisthanesthai*”] can be used in any case in which one perceives something by the senses and even more generally in any case in which one becomes aware of something, notices something, realizes or even comes to understand something, however this may come about». Both quotations grasp a relevant aspect of the notion at stake here: the former its broad status that is not exclusively sensorial, the latter the fact that the αἴσθησις essentially is a becoming-aware process which “settles” (even though, as we shall see, very momentarily) as appearance/opinion (the double nature of this pair is the key thought). Cf. also J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 117-118; J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2001, pp. 48-50; G. Fine, *Conflicting Appearances*, cit., pp. 161-162.

encounter in my experience. That is the reason why I shall also translate the term with “experience”, under the condition that one understands it as the event of directly experiencing something rather than developing cognitive attitudes or habit (as the term ἐμπειρία may mean instead). Right after the statement that knowledge is nothing but αἴσθησις, Socrates’ first move is to conceive the statement as the same as Protagoras’ Man-Measure thesis. Protagoras’ most famous assertion is that «the measure of all things is a human being, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not»<sup>15</sup>. Thus, from the first move the verb “be” is inserted, albeit critically treated throughout the definition.

Suspending the issue as to what this thesis is supposed to mean for the historic Protagoras, one has quite extensive information about what it means for Plato, who, referring to Protagoras, says:

Well, isn't he saying something like this, that as each and every thing appears to me, so it is for me, and again, as they appear to you, so they are for you – you and I both being human beings?<sup>16</sup>

Each thing (ἕκαστα) is as it is only as long as and thanks to the fact that it appears (φαίνεται). Right at the beginning of the definition one finds the verb φαίνεσθαι, which in general means that something is appearing, manifesting itself. This appearance is not objectively sensorial or spatial, but rather it

<sup>15</sup> See *Theaet.* 152a3-4. I suspend here the discussion concerning the value of the verb “be” in the Man-Measure principle. L. Brown interprets it as predicative, cf. L. Brown, *Plato. Theaetetus*, cit., p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> *Theaet.* 152a6-7: «οὐκοῦν οὕτω πως λέγει, ὡς οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὖ σοί; ἄνθρωπος δὲ σύ τε κἀγώ;».

designates how anything appears inasmuch as it seems to one to be “thus and so”<sup>17</sup>. It seems to be a perfectly common-sense standpoint, yet it is also the first step towards epistemic conflicts between people since the world of experience is marked from the very first moment by the diverging ways it appears to different subjects.

Theaetetus’ first definition is immediately compared to Protagoras’ thesis, which is paraphrased as above. To explain this statement, an example is given: it is a commonplace experience that the same wind feels both cold and warm to different people<sup>18</sup>. The answer is that everything is, for someone, in the way, and (for) as long as, it appears to her to be so. As stated above, an appearance of something suffices for it to be considered

<sup>17</sup> As is well known, the verb φαίνεσθαι presents two constructions: either with the participle or with the infinitive. In the first case, it means “being manifestly *F*”, in the second case “seeming to be *F*”. In the context at hand, Plato seems to be conflating both uses of the verb: the only thing objectively manifest is that which seems to be. Cf. also G. Fine, *Protagorean Relativism*, in Ead., *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected essays*, cit., pp. 133-134 n. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Theaet.* 152b7-8. This line has been broadly debated. I think that the argument demonstrates that there is no difference between saying that something is entirely *F* to one person and non-*F* to some other person and saying that there is no such thing as «something in itself» (we find the phrase αὐτὸ ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ at 152b6, which bears some resemblance to the usual technical phrase αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό; the goal of the different preposition, if any, may be to aim at adumbrating the “intentionality” relation which will play a central role throughout the discussion of the first definition. However, it must not be forgotten that the standard phrase will be present in the exposition of the Secret Doctrine below). Therefore, I do not believe that Plato is speaking of a wind as a substratum neither cold nor hot. On the same lines, cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 119. Cf. also A.M. Ioppolo, *Platone. Teeteto*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2006, p. 226 n. 30 and J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato’s Theaetetus 152-183*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 15 (1997), pp. 71-72. Contra cf. D. Bostock, *Plato’s Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 43-44.



real. Appearance is philosophically interesting because it keeps together phenomena, i.e. the appearance of something other from the mind, and belief, which is a mental state, in such a way as to make them indistinguishable. This is a hint of why, for Plato, this view is worth both examining and rejecting in that it is a radically alternative answer to a question Plato himself tries to answer: the correlation of world and cognitive means that emerged in our analysis of the notion of Form. This could be an interpretation of Plato's statement that φαίνεται is the same as αἰσθάνεσθαι<sup>19</sup>. Consider the following lines:

A thing's appearing to someone, then, is the same as his perceiving it, in the case of hot things and of everything like that. For how each of us perceives a thing is likely also to be how it is for each of us<sup>20</sup>.

The equivalence of appearing and perception means both that for any perceived thing it has been manifesting itself in one's experience and that there can only be manifestation within one person's experience. Consequently, αἴσθησις and φαντασία are the same (ταὐτὸν). The latter term shares the stem φαν-, expressing manifestation, and strictly means the external appearance contrasting with the modern term, which means either the mental production of images or the fictional mental activity. In the present context it simply means appearance, apparition<sup>21</sup>. Socrates seems to be removing any difference between

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Theaet.* 152b12.

<sup>20</sup> *Theaet.* 152c1-3: «φαντασία ἄρα καὶ αἴσθησις ταῦτὸν ἔν τε θερμοῖς καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις. οἷα γ' ἄρ' αἰσθάνεται ἕκαστος, τοιαῦτα ἐκάστῳ καὶ κινδυνεύει εἶναι».

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, not having the negative significance of terms like φάντασμα and φάσμα both sharing the same stem and both present in the text. Cf. *Theaet.* 155a2.

the appearing external object and any present perception of it. Ultimately, the possibility that one perceives something and at the same time entertains an incorrect belief about it is thereby erased. In fact, there is no distinction between the two moments: one always perceives that which is manifest (in the way it is) and the only appearing entities are that which presently takes place in one's experience. It must be added that the reference to «that which is hot and that sort of thing» does not mean that Socrates is restricting the current discourse to perceptual properties. At most, he is employing perceptual properties as intuitive instances of what he wants to apply to everything else as well. The equivalence in the second line then is the key to the preceding one<sup>22</sup>. The final inference, which has been already touched on in the first chapter, as we introduced the function of knowledge in the Physiology of εἶδος<sup>23</sup>, is the last step of the preliminary equivalence of perception and knowledge: «As befits knowledge, then, perception is always of what is, and never plays us false»<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> I find the use of the verb κινδυνεύειν in the last part of the sentence very interesting, which, to be true, is not really considered by the critics, and is difficult to handle. It is commonly used to express danger and risk. It also has an impersonal construction expressing chance, which mainly means “may possibly/probably happen”. So far *LSJ*. However, if we keep to what has been said in the dialogue, such an impersonal use of κινδυνεύειν *cannot* express probability or possibility. If one perceives something it surely is as it seems as long as it does. What is the point of using this term then? I think it expresses some degree of contingency, which is present in the English translation above through the term “happen”. Everything that is perceived is a happening; in this context it is used to make the meaning of the verb “be” weaker.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Chapter 1, pp. 51-58.

<sup>24</sup> *Theaet.* 152c5-6: «αἴσθησις ἄρα τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ ἐστὶν καὶ ἀψευδὲς ὡς ἐπιστήμη οὐσα».

I embrace the view that this statement ought to be taken as bearing witness to Plato's own view about knowledge<sup>25</sup>. It is enough to say that for Plato for anything to be knowledge it must be intentionally directed at something that is and it needs to be unerring. It is important to discuss here how this statement contributes to spelling out the ontological features of becoming through the lens of the sort of cognition reserved to it, namely αἴσθησις. The ambiguity deriving from mistaking the real knowledge which has to be infallible and indefeasible, a condition warranted by knowledge's necessary relation to something that is, with the absolute certainty seemingly surrounding perception makes this clause suitable for Theaetetus' proposition. Then the main idea is that the world consists of φαντασίαι, which should be thought of as phenomenal happenings in which external apparitions and cognitive activity of the mind grasping them are indistinguishable or at least essentially tied. However, the requirement of being of something that is, if applied to φαντασίαι, seems to imply that any act of knowledge based on the existence of something lasts as long as the latter takes place<sup>26</sup>. In other words, the argument

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed and embraceable analysis of the statement and a commented survey of the many views of the critics, see. F. Aronadio, *Hos episteme ousa*, in Id., *L'aisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, cit., pp. 107-130.

<sup>26</sup> How this view should be labelled remains a problem. I shall consider two very influential interpretations, namely Relativism and Infallibilism. The first view is held by M.F. Burnyeat in *Conflicting appearances*, in Id., *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy: Vol. 1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, p. 284, where he says: «we may gather that no sentence of the form “*x* is white” is true as it stands, without a qualifying clause specifying a perceiver for whom it is true» and *Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's Theaetetus*, «The Philosophical Review», 85 (1976), pp. 172-195. Cf. also M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 15. Relativism is the view that any property of any object is only in a

seems to be that knowledge must always be of something that is, the entities admitted by the equivalence of knowledge and αἴσθησις are the φαντασῖαι, which exist only insofar as they are manifest to somebody who perceives them and entertains

private relation to some perceiver. Although Burnyeat recognises that the definition does not aim at a mechanical interpretation of perception (p. 284), he still thinks the theory mainly to be a gnoseological survey on perceptual properties, which in fact it is only in part. As Burnyeat is right both in not acknowledging any objective fact of the matter to perceptions and in recognising that some sort of acquaintance essentially characterises them, I think he is wrong about one important point: all of this is not a matter of pure sense-data. It is true that Plato will eventually distinguish the perceptual intake from the sphere of judgement, but here they are irretrievably tied. The case for Infallibilism has been made by G. Fine in both *Protagorean Relativism*, cit., and especially in Ead., *Conflicting Appearances*, cit. She interprets Relativism as the view that beliefs do not conflict because none of them claims to be absolutely true (Ead., *Protagorean Relativism*, cit., p. 141), but if this is so she maintains that it would make no sense appealing to Heraclitean ontology as Plato is about to do in the dialogue (ivi, p. 142). The contrast is then between public constantly changing objects and private objects. Hence, Infallibilism is the view that the object really is, and really changes, as it every time seems to be the case, where “really” means absolutely-objectively (Ead., *Conflicting Appearances*, cit., pp. 180-181), and even if those changes are always in relation to some perceiver they are nonetheless objective. It is named Infallibilism because Protagoras’s outcome is a theory in which the experiencing subject can but be absolutely certain about what he perceives, and according to Fine this can be granted only by a “classically” objective ontology, albeit a flux ontology. I find Fine’s argument quite convincing if one is to consistently include Heracliteanism in Plato’s argument. But I do not think it is completely right. For if she is right in feeling the need of getting involved in ontology, the alleged objective status of phenomena is not at all acceptable. On these grounds I suggest a different view because I deem both interpreters to have missed the pivot of Plato’s argument: the temporality-phenomenality of appearing things. Everything that is perceived is absolutely objective *as long as* it is perceived and manifests itself. This is the scandal: objectivity can be relative (and maybe this last sentence keeps together what is acceptable in

some belief about them, and hence one can have knowledge of them only insofar as they are manifest to her. To use the words of Myles Burnyeat: «it is true to say that the perceiving subject is dependent on there being something for it to perceive as it is to say that the thing perceived is dependent on a subject perceiving it»<sup>27</sup>. In my view, the result is that something is thus and so, thereby also including non-perceptual beliefs, objectively and unmistakably, *only for as long as* it appears to be so. This view is inconsistent with a minimal form of metaphysical realism: for the latter it does not make sense to say that something is the case insofar as it is being perceived and believed by somebody. My contention is that Plato is precisely aiming to show why this is so and how this is connected with the capacity to refer to and describe what is the case.

Relativism and Infallibilism). This is also what has been missed by M. Lee, *The Secret Doctrine: Plato's Defence of Protagoras in the Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 19 (2000), pp. 47-86, where she claims (p. 52) that there is a fact of the matter for the wind being cold at a moment of constantly changing. Given that the objective stability of phenomena as well as the diachronic unity of the subject will be eroded later in the dialogue, this makes impossible to retrieve an object that is no longer manifest. This kind of "objectivity" makes it immediately clear that the fundamental Platonic opposition underlying the discourse is that between what comes to manifestation and what is stable but external to manifestation.

<sup>27</sup> M.F. Burnyeat, *Idealism and Greek Philosophy: what Descartes saw and Berkeley missed*, cit., p. 251. At p. 254, Burnyeat adds that in the *Theaetetus* «mind and matter are tied together by necessity, but they remain two, not one». As we shall see in the remnant of the chapter and in the next one, this statement is true insofar as within each experience the components (perception, perceived things) are distinguished, but at the same time they are said to come into being in virtue of their encounter, which makes them, in a sense, the components of the *same* experiential event or process.

## 2. *The Secret Doctrine*

Now the time has come to directly address the first presentation of the ontology deriving from the equivalence proposed by Theaetetus:

I'll tell you a theory that certainly ought not to be written off. It's to the effect that actually nothing is just one thing, itself by itself, and that you cannot refer to a thing correctly by any description whatever. If you call something big, it will appear as small as well, and if you call it heavy, it will appear as light too; and similarly with everything, just because – so the theory says – nothing is one, whether a one something or a one any sort of thing. If we say, of anything, that it is, we're wrong, because in fact all things are in a process of coming to be through motion, and change in general, and mixture with each other; nothing ever is, it's always coming to be<sup>28</sup>.

This view, commonly called Secret Doctrine<sup>29</sup>, figures as a clear description of the ontological underpinnings of what has been said thus far. The first remark is that nothing is one just by itself (ἐν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν). Having in the background the Anatomy of εἶδος, this assertion is most

<sup>28</sup> *Theaet.* 152d2-e1: «ἐγὼ ἐρῶ καὶ μάλ' οὐ φαῦλον λόγον, ὡς ἄρα ἐν μὲν αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐδέν ἐστιν, οὐδ' ἄν τι προσείποις ὀρθῶς οὐδ' ὅποιονοῦν τι, ἀλλ' ἐὰν ὡς μέγα προσαγορεύῃς, καὶ σμικρὸν φανεῖται, καὶ ἐὰν βαρὺ, κοῦφον, σύμπαντά τε οὕτως, ὡς μηδενὸς ὄντος ἐνὸς μήτε τινὸς μήτε ὅποιουοῦν: ἐκ δὲ δὴ φορᾶς τε καὶ κινήσεως καὶ κράσεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίγνεται πάντα ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι, οὐκ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύοντες: ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε' οὐδέν, αἰεὶ δὲ γίγνεται».

<sup>29</sup> See F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 36-39; J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 122-129; D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 44-47; M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 12-13; T. Chappell, *Reading Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 62-64.

significant. This means that things lack the independence that characterises anything that is by itself. A way to understand this is that for anything to be thus and so the contribution of a subject to whom it *appears* to be thus and so is required. In other words, what things are is essentially related to the event or process of people forming a belief about them as they appear in their experience. This I think should be understood as implying that *there is no fact of the matter as to whether something is thus and so*<sup>30</sup>. Outside of what people believe about something they are presently perceiving within their experience there is no way things are. Consequently, if there is no fact of the matter as to whether  $x$  is  $F$ , the experience of it being  $F$  is a sufficient ground for it to be  $F$ . This is phrased in terms of being determined by opposites and of constant change. The former could be associated with the idea that the (apparently) same thing  $x$  appears now to be  $F$  and to somebody else or at a different time it appears to be non- $F$ . And thus, if one keeps to the assumption that they are the same thing, they would be no more  $F$  than non- $F$  and therefore there would be no true description of it. In this context it is worth noting that this is translated into the impossibility of speaking of a thing as something or saying something further of it (προσειποις). It is also significant here that speaking of something and qualifying it in some way are kept together<sup>31</sup>. It is also worth noting that if one disposes of the notion of

<sup>30</sup> In this I agree with what M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 49 says about a later passage in the dialogue that I shall comment on in what follows and that I take in strict continuity with what Socrates is arguing here.

<sup>31</sup> This could be read in at least two ways: either Plato means that nothing can exist without having qualities or he means by τι what something is, and by ὁποιοῦν qualities understood as non-essential features. Cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 122.

a thing that is one by itself in such a way as to be thus and so independently of what people perceive or believe, the way one has to distinguish the thing that is  $F$  from the thing that is non- $F$  is by pointing out that the two things belong to different experiences. On this view, the two appearing things are, as it were, ontologically justified by the fact that they appear to be  $F$  and non- $F$ , respectively, to different people or at different times<sup>32</sup>. My objective, throughout this part of

<sup>32</sup> This deserves some discussion. If it is true that the “same thing” such as the wind is  $F$  and non- $F$  only in different experiences, which excludes that one has the appearance of something that is both  $F$  and non- $F$  within the same experience, this does not apply to all cases. Cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 125, who refers to the *Republic* and raises the objection that in some cases one experiences something that is simultaneously  $F$  and non- $F$ , e.g.  $x$  is big with regard to  $y$  and small with regard to  $z$ , and they make the content of the same experience. On this, cf. D. Bostock *Plato’s Theaetetus*, cit., p. 45, who remarks that Plato may suggest that 6 dice are more than 4 and less than 12, but that we put the other dice beside 6 dice one after the other, but this, as he recognises, does not solve the issue in principle. On the issue, cf. also T. Chappell, *Reading Plato’s Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 69-71. However, I think, there are two reasonable enough ways to deal with the problem. Firstly, one can assume that  $x$  being  $F$  qualifies as one experience and therefore  $x$  being non- $F$  makes another experience. In this case,  $x$  being big (with regard to  $y$ ) will be differentiated from  $x$  being small (with regard to  $z$ ) and the fact that  $x$  is no more one than the other will perfectly fit the Secret Doctrine (and perhaps the reference to mixture: the appearance of a single dice being both big and small will amount to a mixture of appearances). Accordingly, if one sees that 6 dice are more than 4 and less than 12 this will amount to two distinct perceptions and there will be nothing to the being of the 6 dice than what is being perceived and believed at some point. In other words, *contra* McDowell, there can be no simultaneous experience of opposite qualities. This can make sense insofar as the difference between the standard account of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, where it is said that sensible things are hospitable to opposite qualifications, is not precisely



the book, will be to show that for Plato if something is not  $F$  independently of whether one believes it to be  $F$ , then it cannot be  $F$  at all.

As far as constant change is concerned, the idea is that if nothing is actually one and the same thing as itself, *this* is conceptualised in terms of constant change in such a way

the same as what is going on here in the *Theaetetus*. This because in the former contexts sensible things are and are not  $F$ , but there is no reason to conclude that they are the *same* as the experience one has of them or, as we shall see, that they are generated from the encounter with a subject. Another way to deal with the issue is by keeping the relations within the scope of what is being experienced and say that a particular set of relations does not constitute what the relata are in themselves, they are only being experienced at a certain time. For instance, one can say that  $x$  is bigger than  $y$  and smaller than  $z$ . But at some later time  $y$  appears to be bigger and  $x$  smaller than both  $y$  and  $z$ . What relation belongs to  $x$  in itself more than the others? None. This would be a way to restate the Secret Doctrine in the case of relations. I think two reasons to accept this are the following. Firstly, there is no conflict *between* subjects so as to raise the question concerning who is right (which the Man-Measure Doctrine cannot admit). Secondly, the relations between  $x$ ,  $y$  and  $z$  are only relations between things that appear in the same experience (because this is what looked problematic) and not between what is being experienced and a subject. These two points come down to the idea that for the Secret Doctrine to say that  $x$  is  $F$  and non- $F$  with regard to two people (or at different times to the same person) is completely different from saying that it is  $F$  and non- $F$  with regard to other appearing things. If this is true, what the Secret Doctrine talks about above in saying that what appears as big will also appear as small is the former. It would seem that the two possible answers I discussed in this footnote are connected to the two cases considered at *Theaet.* 154b-155d (number of dice and Socrates becoming smaller than Theaetetus), which I cannot analyse in detail, for discussion and reference to the critics, cf. F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 259-263. Be that as it may, these arguments are what prompts the introduction of the more radical version of the Secret Doctrine, which I shall analyse in the next section.

that it is not correct to say that something is, but rather that it becomes<sup>33</sup>. The mention of correctness ( $\delta\rho\theta\tilde{\omega}\zeta$ ) is quite peculiar within a view where, as everything appears to be to someone, so it is for him. This remark, which gives a hint of the contradiction underlying the view being presented, could be taken as a light touch of irony: there is correctness if and only if one can be wrong about something, a condition denied by the definition itself<sup>34</sup>. According to this view, there is no room for a stable identity which claims to be independent of the series of experiences-manifestations following one another. Whatever appears leaves its place to anything else providing that the latter takes place. In this way, manifestation understood as appearance in one's experience becomes the criterion of what is real: one knows what is the case when it is present in front of her. This entails that nothing can get beyond the time of its manifestation not leaving any room whatsoever to certainty in cognition which is not in the present<sup>35</sup>. Since nothing is one or qualified in some way, continues the text, if you speak of something as  $F$ , it will also be non- $F$ .

<sup>33</sup> Cf. what D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 48-50 calls «solution by private objects». His main worry is that on this view for experiences to be distinguished they only need to be numerically different, in which case it would not matter at all whether or not they are also qualitatively different, which in turn, he claims, is inconsistent with the reference to constant change in the passage. However, I do not think this is fatal to my account because the reference to change, I think, is meant to explain that there is no fact of the matter as to what things are and that is why they are thought of as changing “in themselves”, which is another way to say that there is no such thing as an “in itself” so as to accommodate whatever perception or belief people may have. I shall expand upon this in Chapter 5.

<sup>34</sup> This is recognised in passing by M. Lee, *The Secret Doctrine: Plato's Defence of Protagoras in the Theaetetus*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. also *Theaet.* 164a5-7.

The interpretation of this passage is crucial, and a major ambiguity needs to be disposed of. I think there is no objective and actual change in the sense that for any individual person there is a private world which consists of objective states of affairs on which it is possible to formulate true judgements. Socrates seems to claim that there is only, and with total certainty, what appears to be *now*. What matters to Protagoras' Secret Doctrine is the immediate awareness one has about a state of affairs in the world in the very moment it seems to be the case to her. To provide an example: the wind exists for as long as I experience it, and it also is *F* (e.g. cold) for as long as I feel it as cold. There is nothing to the being of the wind other than this experiential process of mine. This point will be better comprehended throughout the discussion of Theaetetus' definition.

For now, the Secret Doctrine states that people have been speaking wrongly because the things they say that are actually are not. That is not the right way to speak because things become. Once again it is an exercise in irony: the view that states that man is the measure of everything that is – because as things appear to be to him, so they are for him – states at the same time that one can actually be wrong. But there is also a deeper point. To use the verb “be” is a mistake because nothing is (and everything always comes to be or comes into being)<sup>36</sup>, as a consequence it is only within language that this error takes place. The allegedly mistaken presumption of stability resides within language thanks to the linguistic use involving the term “being”. This is «the things which we say are» (πάντα ἃ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι). However, this assertion might even be a sign of the final confutation of the first definition which will significantly hinge on the ontological commitment of language. In any case,

<sup>36</sup> On the complete/incomplete use of the phrase cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 123.

according to the Secret Doctrine, those things are a result of movement, change and mixture. Before understanding what these last terms mean, it needs to be pointed out that the last argument presents some implications of interest.

The Secret Doctrine states that the world has a certain nature and that people commonly think it is in some other way (becoming vs being). My point is that two different concepts of appearance are somehow conflated here:

- (1) Secret Doctrine ontological notion of appearance: all things seem to be stable, but in fact they never are by themselves. Their true nature is that there is nothing to them apart from how they come to be as appearances.
- (2) Common-sense notion of appearance: things at first appear to be in some way, then it must be discovered whether they really are as they appear to be.

The problem is that the Secret Doctrine also tries to encompass point (2). As a result, which sounds rather paradoxical, there is a way things appear, which is “things are minimally stable”, and a way things truly are, which is “everything becomes and is nothing by itself”. In a certain sense, Theaetetus’s definition denies point (2). There is no way things are in themselves apart from how they at first appear because they only are as they appear to be to somebody: the immediate appearance of something is also all there is to it. At the same time, point (1) is stating that *there is* a way things truly are, i.e. that they always become. The paradoxical side is then that point (1) is presented as an explanation of the Man-measure doctrine, that the Man-measure doctrine implies that (2) is false, and that (1) entails (2)<sup>37</sup>. On the other hand, a partial way out of

<sup>37</sup> To tell the truth, it should be added that (1) in a sense is not contra-

this paradox is that (2) envisages two steps: things appear to be thus and so and then they possibly reveal themselves to be in some other way. Point (1) could be interpreted as stating that all there is in the world is only what appears in the first step of (2): things always appear immediately in some way and whatever reveals itself to be different is in fact *another* new thing. This is a way to understand the notion of becoming: whatever appears to be different is another incommensurable thing that has come to appearance and there is no intrinsic way things are.

Consequently, Theaetetus' first definition is appealing because it affirms that what seems to be in the first place is also what actually is. Its appeal derives in turn from the fact that Theaetetus' definition seems to be gaining an *epistemic relief* on the basis of an *ontological commitment*<sup>38</sup>. In other words, there is no epistemic anxiety insofar as nobody can be wrong, and this because the world consists of only the present appearance of things being presently perceived or experienced. One

dictory. If the Secret Doctrine is not what most people believe, then what they believe, namely the commonplace stability of things, needs to be accounted for, given the assumption that whatever people believe is also for them, as will become clear during the discussion of *Theaet.* 156c-e below. If possible, this makes the whole thing even more tortuous because this need to account for the unthematized opinions that autonomously emerge within experience, and which very often experience consists of, is the main reason for (2). To convert a view which pledged to stand at the immediate layer of experiences to a view which instead undertakes to account for this first layer through a deeper one is not only a confutational strategy, but also a mind-set Plato seems to be unavoidably bound to.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., p. 49, who seems to go the same direction: «Protagoras suspendiert einen objektiven Wahrheitsbegriff und mithin die Wahrheitsdifferenz als Kriterium von Urteilen. Und der ontologische Grund besteht darin, daß Überzeugungen nicht in der Weise auf eine objektive Wirklichkeit bezogen sind, daß sie auf diese entweder zutreffen oder sie verfehlen können».

cannot be wrong because what appears to her also is the case, and this way of being is a temporal event of manifestation of an entity other than the subject (and yet systematically related to it). The specificity of Socrates' development of Theaetetus' definition is that the event of manifestation of something in the world, which is the immediate worldly actualisation of one's belief, is also everything that exists. In this context, the value of the technical phrase *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό* becomes clearer. If only the experience annexed to belief exists, then there is no space left for the independent existence of the object those beliefs are about. In other words, there is no room for an object that by itself, i.e. independently, works as external to the present series of experiences concerning it<sup>39</sup>.

The last statement of the Secret Doctrine asserts that nothing ever is, but things are always becoming (*ἔστι μὲν γὰρ οὐδέποτε οὐδέν, ἀεὶ δὲ γίγνεται*<sup>40</sup>). Becoming is then associated with whatever happens, takes place and appears to structure itself temporally and temporarily. I firmly believe that Plato is keeping together temporality and temporariness. One reason is the specific form of the verb *γίγνεσθαι* which has two fundamental semantic cores: birth and change. In this context, the usual concept of change seems to be misleading<sup>41</sup>. This

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Theaet.* 153d10-e2 and 153e4-154a3 commented on below.

<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting the use of the continuous form plus "always" to translate the present of *γίγνεσθαι* since the present aspect mainly expresses a continuative action, whereas the aorist would better express the momentary coming (in)to be(ing) and being born which the verb also means.

<sup>41</sup> For a fully developed analysis of Plato's conception of change, see F. Ademollo, *On Plato's Conception of Change*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 55 (2018), pp. 35-83. This paper has a wider range than what I am analysing here. Its main idea is that for any change a particular may undergo it becomes a numerically distinct entity and this is what lies behind Plato's claim that perceptible things always change. As we shall see, the idea that each experience-perception is numerically distinct and that

is something like the transition from a state A to a state B of something which in a certain respect has to remain the same. On the other hand, the idea of birth implies an abrupt appearance. The verb γίγνεσθαι keeps together two conceptual movements: to be born and to become.

Most notably, the verb γίγνεσθαι translates the verb “be”, when it means happenings, events and in general something that takes place. The relative noun is γένεσις and it means the spontaneous self-generation and the change of form or qualities on a par. I have the impression that in this context this concept is to be understood without keeping the two senses apart. Becoming things are by definition subject to mutation and every alteration is the birth of a new determination; thus, becoming here can be made sense of as a process of self-generation and, in perfect coincidence, of temporal unfolding. This lets us better understand why the Secret Doctrine asserts that everything that is small will also appear big and so on. It does not look like a matter of a necessary compulsion to objective change. If anything appears to be in some way only within somebody’s phenomenal-experiential context, it will be in some other way in another

this makes it peculiar, private and incomparable to the others is definitely a key aspect of what is going on in this part of the dialogue. However, Ademollo admittedly does not focus on the details of the passages in the *Theaetetus*. This, I submit, would require an extensive treatment of the correlation between cognition and its ontological underpinnings, which is what I am attempting here. In this way one different point is being made: I shall endeavour to show that Plato’s point is that the only way αἴσθησις can be knowledge is that there is no fact of the matter as to how things are in such a way that each perception-belief is true. As will appear in what follows, Plato’s refutational strategy is that if there is no fact of the matter independent of what people think, *then* things cannot be as they appear to somebody either, and *this* is phrased in terms of things constantly changing.

context<sup>42</sup>. The different contexts can be so synchronically and diachronically<sup>43</sup>. The same wind is now cold to me and warm to someone else, or it is cold to me now and warm tomorrow. In any case, according to the Secret Doctrine this is not the same wind. Since the Secret Doctrine states that nothing is by itself, it makes no sense to say that the thing appearing in the two contexts *is* the same thing<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, that thing will only be as it appears in a singular context and precisely *this* way of being actually is the γίγνεσθαι. Thus, the αἴσθησις is presented as the name for a human being's connection to this temporal, self-manifest and volatile conception of the world.

Here follow some probably captious arguments that are not immediately relevant to my interpretation. Right after that, in two long remarks<sup>45</sup> Socrates draws some implications from the Secret Doctrine which can be summarised as follows:

- (a) If we consider, say, the colour white, it is not itself (αὐτὸ) either as something outside the eyes or in them. No fixed location (χώραν) can be assigned (ἀποτάξις) to it since otherwise it would not occur within becoming (ἐν γενέσει γίγνοιτο).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 44, who interprets this point in terms of relativity of properties and relativity of change.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. F. Ademollo, *On Plato's Conception of Change*, cit., p. 77, and also Irwin's concepts of self-change and aspect-change cf. T. Irwin, *Plato's Heracliteanism*, in Id. (ed.), *Plato's Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Garland Publishing, New York 1995, pp. 26-27.

<sup>44</sup> Contra cf. M. Matthen, *Perception, Relativism and Truth: Reflections on Plato's Theaetetus 152-160*, «Dialogue», 24 (1985), pp. 33-58, whose main contention is that objects objectively exist and that their properties arise relationally.

<sup>45</sup> *Theaet.* 153d10-e2 and 153e4-154a3.



- (b) In the case of colours, it will appear (φανεῖται) that they have been begotten (γεγενημένον) from the coming across (ἐκ τῆς προσβολῆς<sup>46</sup>) of the eyes with the appropriate motion. Hence, colours are neither what comes across nor what have been come across (οὔτε τὸ προσβάλλον οὔτε τὸ προσβαλλόμενον ἔσται), rather something that has occurred (γεγονός) in between (μεταξύ) and are peculiar to each case (ἐκάστῳ ἴδιον).

These two complex remarks help clarify Socrates' concept of becoming. Before discussing them, it needs to be said that I do not believe this passage to be a theory concerning colour or vision in general. I do not think it is an anticipation of modern optical theory<sup>47</sup>. Starting with (a), the colour is not in itself; this means that it is not something external to the eyes. The explanation of this is worth the entire reference to this passage. It is said that it has no location, i.e. an external extension such that it objectively stands somewhere regardless

<sup>46</sup> The translation of this term is quite problematic. Cf. C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, «Phronesis», 61 (2016), p. 250 n. 16, where the author discusses the other options and convincingly puts forward the calque “thrown toward”. It is, however, worth considering the occurrence of the term in *Soph.* 246a11 and *Tim.* 46b6, even though I think the meaning of the term is quite plastic and therefore specific to the context. I make my attempt with the verb “come across” because it gives the idea of contingency of bumping into something, and last but not least of coming across as to give an impression or to be perceived. Moreover, if one considers the pair of terms not as a phrasal verb, it can still express the idea of movement, of crossing (from one side to the other). I believe that the Greek term gets enriched by the series of arguments in such a way that encompass all these senses. Cf. also J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., p. 61, who translates the term with “Zusammentreffen”.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. what McDowell says about *Theaet.* 156e1-2, J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 139.

of its manifestation to someone. Of course, during the manifestation process things appear to be located, but exactly like any other characteristic it does not, so to say, outlive its present appearance. This is expressed by the phrase «not coming to be within becoming»<sup>48</sup>. If a colour had a fixed location it would not occur as entirely coincident with its temporally structured manifestation to some observer.

The second remark is the consequent clause of the first argument. Socrates argues that phenomena are generated in the process of thing and perceiver coming across one another. The complex description of this movement will be analysed in the next section, dealing with the doctrine of the *κομψότεροι*. For now it is only important that the two come across each other. The text reads: the colour appears as begotten, in other words they come to manifestation (*φανεῖται*) as generated. It is crucial to recognise the perfect form of this begetting (*γεγενημένον*) since it gives the idea that in any perception phenomena have always already been generated as we see them. This coheres with the term *φανεῖται*, that is a future; their conjunction then expresses the posteriority of the apparition based on an already concluded generation process.

However, this perfect form is of use here because there is no moment in which colours have been generated, but they are already becoming. The manifestation of the colour is neither the object nor the perceiver. It is rather something that has occurred (*γεγονός*) in between and is peculiar to each case. These last two remarks are worth discussing. Appearances are said to take place “in between”. This “in between” stands for the encounter between perceiver and object which, as we shall see, should be understood as constituting experience itself. Finally, the event of perception is said to be

<sup>48</sup> Cf. D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 60.

ἴδιον. Interestingly, this term can mean both “peculiar” and “private”. The difference lies in the fact that being peculiar should relate to some characteristic belonging to the object of experience, whereas being private alludes to a perceiving subject<sup>49</sup>. Once more, there is no gap between cognition and cognised reality, thereby rendering each experience or appearance incommensurable with any other because the only way of knowing something is directly experiencing it, i.e. the event of perceiving it<sup>50</sup>.

### 3. An “Ontology” of Events

One last passage from the first definition is left in order to fully present the complexity of Plato’s discourse on becoming and perception. Of course, I need to leave aside a number of interesting parts of the dialogue, for instance, the one that divides the Secret Doctrine from the doctrine of the κομψότεροι, the more refined thinkers, I am about to introduce. What is

<sup>49</sup> Cf. J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., p. 66, who asserts that the privacy emerges from the co-dependence of the poles which meet one another. Interesting remarks by J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 143, who claims that the notion of privacy here should be understood as «no other man could have my children», rather than in post-Cartesian terms of being mental states.

<sup>50</sup> Experience is so private as to be considered unrepeatable, even for the same subject (which will actually never be considered strictly the same), cf. *Theaet.* 154a6-8. Cf. L. Brown, *Plato. Theaetetus*, cit., p. 118, who expresses some perplexity about the view that two perceptions can never be the same. This perplexity arises because one forgets that for Plato the connection between cognition and reality occurs most naturally prior to any specific account of what objects are, even if he is discussing another’s view. In this case this view is «nearer to truth», as McDowell translates μᾶλλον μοι δοκεῖ (which I would translate “seemingly more so”), within the Secret Doctrine.

gained through this selection is a more succinct view concerning Plato's discussion concerning the nature of appearances. The passages I am about to report and comment on present a more radical form of the Secret Doctrine such that the poles involved in the cognitive process, namely subject and object, are overtly reduced to their encounter. In other words, their existence depends upon the occurrence of their coming across each other. This makes even stronger the idea that there is no gap at all between the act of knowledge and its object in such a way that, strictly speaking, something happening and knowledge of it are exactly the same. It should be clear by now that the last statement is not to be interpreted as a declaration of empiricism, which is that there can only be knowledge based on what has been experienced. Rather, it means that (I) one is able to know what is happening only in the moment it occurs *and* its occurrence is the same as one developing an opinion about it<sup>51</sup>; (II) subject and object are generated in the process.

Consider the following passage:

Their starting point, on which hangs every thing we were talking about just now, was that everything was change and that there was nothing besides change; and of change there were two forms, each unlimited in plurality but with different powers, one to act, the other to be acted upon. From the coming together of these two motions, and the friction of one against the other, offspring come into being – unlimited numbers of them, but twins in every case, one twin being what is perceived, the other a perception, emerging

<sup>51</sup> It is also clear from the fact that later in the dialogue, *Theaet.* 161c2-3, a switch of the verb φαίνεσθαι will occur with δοκεῖν, cf. F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., p. 295 n. 119.

simultaneously with what is perceived and being generated along with it<sup>52</sup>.

Everything in the world is<sup>53</sup> change which divides into two species (εἶδη). They are distinguished by the kind of power (δύναμιν) they have. The concept of δύναμις is crucial. It will be pivotal in the *Sophist* and my overall reading will most significantly hinge on it. For the time being, it is presented as the power or capacity of movements to connect with each other giving rise to phenomena. Such a connection sees two roles: active and passive or of acting (ποιεῖν) and being acted on (πάσχειν). It characterises movement as such and is taken as primitive. It is worth remembering that a general fact about ancient Greek mentality is that they consider the objective pole to be the active one, not much like the modern age in which activity is seen as the creativity and spontaneity of the subject<sup>54</sup>. In this context, objects effectively exert power, so much that they are considered active. According to our text, an unlimited number of perceptions are always twinned by

<sup>52</sup> *Theaet.* 156a4-b3: «ὡς τὸ πᾶν κίνησις ἦν καὶ ἄλλο παρὰ τοῦτο οὐδέν, τῆς δὲ κινήσεως δύο εἶδη, πλῆθει μὲν ἄπειρον ἐκάτερον, δύναμιν δὲ τὸ μὲν ποιεῖν ἔχον, τὸ δὲ πάσχειν. ἐκ δὲ τῆς τούτων ὁμιλίας τε καὶ τρίψεως πρὸς ἄλληλα γίγνεται ἕκγονα πλῆθει μὲν ἄπειρα, δίδυμα δέ, τὸ μὲν αἰσθητόν, τὸ δὲ αἰσθησις, αἰεὶ συνεκπίπτουσα καὶ γεννωμένη μετὰ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ».

<sup>53</sup> In the text Plato employs the imperfect of the verb, which is reminiscent of the Aristotelian τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, cf. Aristot. *Metaph.* Z 4; P. Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, Puf, Paris 1962, pp. 460-472; J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in Aristotelian Metaphysics*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1951, pp. 180-188; G. Giannantoni, *Problemi di traduzione del linguaggio filosofico: il τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι aristotelico*, in S. Nicosia (a cura di), *La traduzione dei testi classici: Teoria Prassi Storia*, Atti del convegno di Palermo 6-9 Aprile 1988, D'Auria, Napoli 1991.

<sup>54</sup> This was already recognised in 1938 by M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes*, in Id., *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 5, *Holzwege*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 1977, pp. 102-106.

correlating the perceived thing (αἰσθητόν) and the act of perception (αἴσθησις). Thus far, I have been arguing that such a distinction was to say the least blurred, but now the theory of the more refined thinkers seems to be dealing with the need for this common-sense distinction between perceptions and their objects by radicalising the account. Therefore, I think that the two items, namely perceived things and act of perception, fall into place *within* what Socrates meant by αἴσθησις above, i.e. the whole event of a subject having an experience perceptually and doxastically connoted. Plato is here relying on the remarkable plasticity of the term which can mean (a) the whole of experience, i.e. including both act and object of experience; (b) only the *act* directed at an object; or (c) as we shall see shortly, the connection between the conventional poles of subject and object. Clearly, there is no contradiction between the last passage and what was argued above. To say that perception/experience and their object are co-dependent in the event of experiencing something, and to say now that perceptions and objects are twinned, emerging simultaneously, are definitely consistent, in such a way that the latter is a more refined version of the former.

Once again, we have serious reasons to think that the notion of αἴσθησις presented here is not merely sensorial<sup>55</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> In the immediately following text, *Theaet.* 156b2-c3, this is clearly asserted in that along with seeings, hearings and the like, Socrates includes pleasures, pains, desires, and fears, which are overtly related to things and sensations but also have to include beliefs, cf. again the notions of Broad/Narrow Protagoreanism in G. Fine, *Conflicting Appearances*, cit., pp. 161-162, and D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 49-53. It is also said that among them there are «ἀπέραντοι μὲν αἱ ἀνόνημοι», that is numberless which are nameless. I believe this addition to be rather subtle. It should be remembered that this view is indeed an uncommon theory about reality, but it relies so much on immediate appearance that it has to encompass common experience as well.

Furthermore, in this first passage the verb γίγνεσθαι and many other words related to generation are luxuriously present<sup>56</sup>. The semantic field of generation is coupled with that of temporal becoming, making them indistinguishable. On this point, a further passage must be considered in extension:

All those things are involved in change, as we were saying; but there's quickness or slowness in their changing. Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place, and in relation to things which approach it, and that's how it generates. But the things which are generated are quicker because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion. So when something commensurate with an eye has come into the neighbourhood of an eye, together the eye and it generate both whiteness and a perception twinned

Thus, there are many appearing things which we ignore. If we cannot name them, it does not mean that we are not directly experiencing them. It is enough that they somehow affect us perceptually. This betrays a conception of knowledge that is very different from a conscious account of what has been experienced. That is so because to experience something is not to be fully aware of it, at least, it does not commit the subject to a widespread naming activity. Furthermore, this reference to names is meaningful since it is connected to the view that the unique linguistic items are the names and the main linguistic act is naming. Cf. *Crat.* 383a; 390e. Nevertheless, this reference to names is problematic because the absolute degree of certainty expected of the view of the refined thinkers may not be consistent with these remarks, since to experience something may in turn require naming it, given the equivalence or strict mutual entailment of manifestation and cognitive framing of phenomena. However, the point is not developed, and although the rejection of the first definition is based on another problem arising from the definition's impossibility to account for language (the impossibility to refer and describe vs the problem of giving a name to everything that appears), the linguistic dimension has already become troublesome.

<sup>56</sup> In particular γίγνεται; ἔκγονα; γεννωμένη in the quotation and γένος; ὁμόγονον; συγγενῆ in the following lines. Cf. *Theaet.* 156b7-c3.

with whiteness – two things that would never have come to be if either the eye or the other thing had approached anything else. Sight then moves between them from the eyes, whiteness from the co-producer of the colour, and now – hey presto! – the eye is full of sight; now it sees, having become, certainly not sight, rather a seeing eye, and what has co-generated the colour has been filled full of whiteness, having become for its part not whiteness but white, whether a white piece of wood or a white stone or whatever thing happened to have become coloured with this sort of colour. And so with everything – hard, hot, or anything else, we're to understand it in the same way: nothing is, itself by itself, as we were saying before; rather, it is in coming together with each other that all things and all sorts of things come to be, from their changing. In fact it's not possible, they say, to get a stable fix, in the one case, even on which of them is doing the acting and which is being acted upon, for neither is there anything acting before it comes together with what is acted on, nor anything being acted on before it comes together with what is acting; and what does the acting when together with one thing turns out to be what is acted on when together with something else<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> *Theaet.* 156c8-157a7: «ταῦτα πάντα μὲν ὡσπερ λέγομεν κινεῖται, τάχος δὲ καὶ βραδυτῆς ἐνὶ τῇ κινήσει αὐτῶν. ὅσον μὲν οὖν βραδύ, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ πρὸς τὰ πλησιάζοντα τὴν κίνησιν ἴσχει καὶ οὕτω δὴ γεννᾷ, τὰ δὲ γεννώμενα οὕτω δὴ θάπτω ἐστίν. φέρεται γὰρ καὶ ἐν φορᾷ αὐτῶν ἡ κίνησις πέφυκεν ἐπειδὴν οὖν ὄμμα καὶ ἄλλο τι τῶν τούτῳ συμμέτρων πλησιάσαν γεννήσῃ τὴν λευκότητά τε καὶ αἴσθησιν αὐτῇ σύμφυτον, ἃ οὐκ ἂν ποτε ἐγένετο ἐκατέρου ἐκείνων πρὸς ἄλλο ἐλθόντος, τότε δὴ μεταξὺ φερομένων τῆς μὲν ὄψεως πρὸς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν, τῆς δὲ λευκότητος πρὸς τοῦ συναποτίκτοντος τὸ χρῶμα, ὃ μὲν ὀφθαλμὸς ἄρα ὄψεως ἐμπλεως ἐγένετο καὶ ὄρᾳ δὴ τότε καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ τι ὄψις ἀλλ' ὀφθαλμὸς ὄρῶν, τὸ δὲ συγγενήσαν τὸ χρῶμα λευκότητος περιεπλήσθη καὶ ἐγένετο οὐ λευκότης αὐτῷ ἀλλὰ λευκόν, εἴτε ξύλον εἴτε λίθος εἴτε ὄψου συνέβη χρήμα χρωσθῆναι τῷ τοιούτῳ χρώματι. καὶ τᾶλλα δὴ οὕτω, σκληρῶν



The text states that there are two modalities of change: slow and quick. Before giving my own interpretation, I want to consider two main exegetical options: Phenomenalist Interpretation (PI) and Causal Theory Interpretation (CTI)<sup>58</sup>. The two views differ in that CTI claims that slow motions are comparable to physical objects and that they generate quick motions (perceptions and perceived qualities), which in turn constitute perceptual objects such as men or sticks. By contrast, PI does not accept this difference between fundamental physical objects and compound perceptual objects, which is not easy to find in the text, and holds that quick motions are the basic items which compose the slow motions only thought of as aggregates. The opposition is then «whether the theory in the *Theaetetus* makes perceptions depend on subject and object as a causal theory does, or whether it makes subject and object themselves arise from perceptions, as does phenomenalism»<sup>59</sup>. Day maintains that neither of them squares with everything in the text, for a different reason in each case, but PI seems so better<sup>60</sup>. In a nutshell, the main charge against CTI is that slow motions cannot be physical non-perceptual objects as this would imply that they exist in themselves, thereby resulting inconsistent with the doctrine put forward here. Against PI,

και θερμὸν καὶ πάντα, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ὑποληπτέον, αὐτὸ μὲν καθ' αὐτὸ μηδὲν εἶναι, ὃ δὴ καὶ τότε ἐλέγομεν, ἐν δὲ τῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα ὁμιλία πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ παντοῖα ἀπὸ τῆς κινήσεως, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ποιοῦν εἶναι τι καὶ τὸ πάσχον αὐτῶν ἐπὶ ἑνὸς νοῆσαι, ὡς φασιν, οὐκ εἶναι παγίως. οὔτε γὰρ ποιοῦν ἐστὶ τι πρὶν ἢ τῷ πάσχοντι συνέλθῃ, οὔτε πάσχον πρὶν ἢ τῷ ποιοῦντι: τὸ τέ τινα συνελθὸν καὶ ποιοῦν ἄλλω αὐ̄ προσπεσόν πάσχον ἀνεφάνη».

<sup>58</sup> I take up these labels from C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 244, who follows Day, who in turn follows Crombie. Cf. J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato's Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>59</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 65-70.

she claims that it does not make sense to consider all this talk of movements and motions as metaphorical, which is implied by the idea that perceptions make up the perceiving subject and the perceived qualities make up the perceiving object. In other words, it seems to treat purely logical relations as they are involved in phenomenalism as though they were spatial. In addition, it is not clear how to reverse the causal or explanatory dependency from slow to fast motion that *prima facie* is asserted in the text above.

By contrast, Buckels argues in favour of a particular version of CTI by maintaining that slow motions are the same as the powers of acting and the power of being acted on but are *not* physical objects. Accordingly, powers are slow motions which generate quick motions which in turn compose (what we call) sensible objects, thereby showing that CTI is not bound to include stable, i.e. independent of perception, physical objects<sup>61</sup>. Buckels recognises that this view compels us to consider the original powers to act and be acted upon as, at least minimally, independent of any perception, even though those powers fully rely on these perceptions in order to be actualised. This is because if those powers are to be commensurable with each other in order to give rise to perceptions, then they must have an objective status which human being can be no measure of. Thus, Buckels proposes a view symmetrical to Day's view: both CTI and PI are inconsistent with the text, but the former is better.

As far as my interpretation is concerned, I do not think that Theaetetus' definition is meant to be a theory of perception<sup>62</sup>. I think the view depicted by Socrates is best understood as a

<sup>61</sup> See C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 256.

<sup>62</sup> For a comparison with the theory of perception presented in the *Timaean*, cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 17.

dialectical survey on the ontological status of the event of perceiving or experiencing something meant to test their epistemic “affordance”, of which the doctrine of the refined thinkers tries to give a finer-grained account. As we have seen, the main idea underlying my account is that what there is in the world, such as to be the object of knowledge qua perception (broadly understood), is ontologically related to the actual occurrence of somebody’s experience. Accordingly, I need to point out what follows.

Firstly, Day’s final verdict is that

subject, object, the perceiving, and what is perceived are *all* mutually interdependent; on the one hand “the offspring” are determined by both “parents”, while on the other hand perceiver and object are to be regarded as mere “aggregates”, the outcome of the actual perceptions which take place<sup>63</sup>.

And this is regarded as incoherent by Day because there is no fixed explanatory relations between these interdependent terms. Secondly, Buckels offers a reading that actually retrieves an explanatory hierarchy starting from the notion of power: commensurable powers exist and when they encounter each other they generate perceptions and perceived qualities that make up ordinary items such as people and stones. However, he is forced to admit the existence of such powers that remain independent of their being perceived, experienced and thought about, which makes it clearly incompatible with the very purpose of the doctrine of the refined thinkers. In addition to this, Buckels at some point recognises that every entity (objects and perceivers) involved in a given experience exists

<sup>63</sup> See J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato’s Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., p. 70.

only for the moment in which they are being perceived and they are replaced immediately when a new experience occurs<sup>64</sup>.

My interpretation then goes as follows. The idea of finding fixed, really existing powers that do not depend on their encounter cannot be what Socrates is maintaining here, as this contradicts the very nature of the theory. Thus, I agree with Day in saying that there is a mutual interdependence between slow and fast motions: they all take place together. Accordingly, there is no slow motion without the corresponding fast motion and vice versa. To provide an example, there is no stone without some perceptual quality, such as its appearing white, but there is no whiteness of the stone without this whiteness being perceived by somebody, and there is no perception of whiteness without a perceiver. We must only resist the temptation to establish whether the whiteness or the stone comes first. At the same time, I agree with Buckels when he says that the process of mutual generation of perceiver and perceived thing (slow motions) along with the act of perception and the perceived quality (fast motions) are generated *anew* at each new experience. This, however, entails that if *every time* both slow and fast motions are generated together and anew, they are simultaneous. I need to make my point clear. What I think this theory *cannot* mean by “slow motions” is that they exist *longer* than the correlative fast motions. Correspondingly, the fast motion should not be understood as taking place for a shorter time. This mistake is, I think, a common trait to both PI and CTI. In the case of PI, the aggregates are continuously projected by the perceptions and the perceived qualities giving the impression of some stability. In the case of CTI, also in the more refined version by Buckels, there is something fixed, a power, that generates less

<sup>64</sup> See C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 255.

durable motions. Once this framework is accepted, it remains to be decided what grounds what.

I reject this assumption on the basis of the two points that the two interpreters themselves introduce: interdependence and momentariness. According to the interdependence between the different sorts of motion, there is no need to find anything fixed beyond appearance (Buckels' mistake). According to the momentariness of the mutual generations of the four motions (two slow and two fast), there is no need to find a priority in a grounding or explanation, whether it be the continuous causal production of slow motions or their being apparently fixed aggregates consisting of fast motions (Day's mistake) because the four motions are generated all together at the same time and have the same longevity. This, I submit, is the best reading of the argument that slow motions only exist upon coming across each other: there is only one process, let us call it experience, where slow motions are connected and at the same time fast motions arise and this provides the momentary "structure" of experience or perception (in a broad sense). If this is true, however, encounter, generation of slow motions, and generation of fast motions take place together *at the same time* and are *interdependent*.

In my view, the difference between fast and slow motions is designed to accommodate the apparent stability of a physical object with regard to its being perceived and its perceived qualities within the view of the refined thinkers. This because they need to respect the common place view that there are ordinary perceivers and things, and that is why they put forward a very sophisticated view to *explain it away*, which is counter-intuitive to common sense. By saying that there are two motions (slower and faster), Socrates is claiming that even apparently stable objects are in fact motions, i.e. their existence is essentially related to the perceptual/experiential event and therefore is not stable at all. By saying that these two motions differ in speed, Socrates

is explaining *why* one can have the impression that the things being perceived are stable, *without* them being stable. Now I can comment the text closely.

To substantiate my interpretation, at 156d, it is said that the eye and the seen thing share a symmetry (συμμέτρων), that is they make a mutual fit. This generates a quality and a perception which are cognate (σύμφυτον), born together in nature. At any rate, one is not compelled to think of this symmetry as coming before the manifest perception. Since Socrates' point is to emphasise above all the dimension of present manifestation, one could think that the fitness of the terms put into relation comes from, and is not the basis of, the event of relation itself<sup>65</sup>. Likewise, perception and quality move in between (μεταξὺ φερομένων) and this movement is not physical<sup>66</sup>. The symmetric components of experience are, for instance in the case of sight, the eye which involves its faculty, that is sight, then sight is always the sight of something and this always has some qualities "of the same nature" as the perception. However, Socrates' claim is that these components cannot come to be in isolation: the experience would have never come to be (ἐγένετο) without their encounter. As the

<sup>65</sup> Pace C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. J. van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 36 (2009), p. 218, who interprets the phrase to express a process going on between observer and object. Moreover, he smartly points out that Socrates' discourse must count for touch as well (p. 217), which makes a literal reading of this phrase problematic. Contra cf. J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato's Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., p. 68, who considers the μεταξὺ φερομένων an insurmountable obstacle to the phenomenalist interpretation. But if one considers the broad account of experience that includes non-immediately sensorial sorts of experience, how would they be reduced to mechanical locomotion of things?

example goes, the eye never is mere seeing, it is rather an eye that sees (ὀφθαλμὸς ὄρων). In the same way, that which has been generated together (συγγεννησαν) with the eye in generating the experience of colour, namely the perceived thing, comes to be something coloured and not mere colour.

It should be noted that Socrates' focus in his explanations are the perception ("the eye that sees"), which is a fast motion with regard to its slow motion, i.e. the subject, and the perceived thing ("the white stone"), which is a slow motion with regard to its fast motion, i.e. the quality. This asymmetry of referring primarily to a fast motion and a slow motion instead of two slow motions or two fast motions is in itself worth considering and may prove two things: firstly, it provides evidence for my claim that one of the main objectives of this theory is to account for everyday experience, where ordinary objects appear to be minimally stable. To be more precise, ordinary experience illusorily settles on perceptions on the part of the subject and on objects and not their qualities. In other words, the subject (slow) is resolved into the fragmentary series of its particular perceptions (fast), whereas the qualities of objects (fast) are always incorporated into the objects that have them (slow) without ever floating in the air. This could count as common sense to the ancient Greeks, insofar as subjects (slow) and qualities (fast) are more "abstract" notions than perceptions (fast) and things (slow). This is the way I have to interpret the statement at 156e that in the process there is not sight but a seeing eye and there is something white and not just whiteness. Secondly and accordingly, even in discussing an ontology such as this, Greek thought remains object-centered: qualities are each time ascribed to things. That is so for every object (χρῆμα) that happens (συνέβη) to be coloured.

According to this theory, the final result is that the world of both subjects and objects does not pre-exist to the presence of their reciprocal relation. Stressing the Heraclitean character

of the doctrine, one could say that the differentiation of all the slow and fast motions is also the moment of their maximal cohesion<sup>67</sup>: so-called reality is nothing but a matter of differences of differently moving motions which are given and do not need to be accounted for by anything else. The encounter is prior to the terms which come into contact through it and *the latter receive their power to act and to be acted on thanks to the former*, which excludes that this power exists before the encounter. This is nothing but a more radical formulation of what Socrates, following Theaetetus' proposal, has been arguing all along: what there is in the world is the same as what is commonly regarded as the experiential relation between a perceiver and the world, where these two latter entities or set of entities cannot exist without the other and the occurrence of their actual relation.

Furthermore, we are told that whatever is active can turn out to be passive and vice versa. Hence, any perceptual event or experience (in a broad sense) proves to be the simultaneous spreading out of subject, perception, quality and object. This is presented as the last step. For it to make sense, I claim, the refined thinkers must be committed to the view that any present experience, *for the very fact that it occurs, grounds itself*. Which is in clear contrast to what we have seen in the Physiology of εἶδος about Plato's conception of knowledge as something essentially related to an object. This is an inevitable implication of the Secret Doctrine and its refined version: insofar as there is nothing that exist outside the experiential relation, this cannot be further grounded or justified. Finally, Protagoras's view as it has been developed so far leads to a linguistic reformation such that any term that implies what-

<sup>67</sup> By this I mean the well known Heraclitean view of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, i.e. the view that there is a fundamental unity in the opposition of parts or aspects of reality.



ever stability should be set aside<sup>68</sup>. Whatever reference is also excluded since nothing is stable enough to be something that stands outside becoming. Among those banished terms there is the verb “be”, but also demonstrative adjectives “this” and “that”, pronouns like the indefinite  $\tau\iota$  (some thing/some one) and terms expressing possession<sup>69</sup>. According to the nature of things, one must only say<sup>70</sup> that they become.

There is one further remark of interest in the text. Right after the banishing of the language of being, Socrates states:

The rule applies to talk both about the individual case and about many collected together – the sort of collection for which people posit entities like human being, and rock, and so on with each living creature and form<sup>71</sup>.

As Brown notes, in referring to the main interpreters<sup>72</sup>, these aggregates can either be individuals or kinds. In the

<sup>68</sup> See *Theaet.* 157a7-c1.

<sup>69</sup> For an analysis of this prohibition, which is consistent with my account of the collapse of language in the next chapter, see J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 142.

<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, the Greek term φθέγγεσθαι, which means “to utter”, is employed to stress the happening-side of discourse, which is in contrast with the content of what one says. Cf. *Crat.* 429e8-9, where the term refers to the emission of meaningless sounds produced by barbarians.

<sup>71</sup> *Theaet.* 157b8-c1: «δεῖ δὲ καὶ κατὰ μέρος οὕτω λέγειν καὶ περὶ πολλῶν ἀθροισθέντων, ᾧ δὴ ἀθροίσματι ἄνθρωπὸν τε τίθενται καὶ λίθον καὶ ἕκαστον ζῷον τε καὶ εἶδος».

<sup>72</sup> See L. Brown, *Plato. Theaetetus*, cit., p. 120 and cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 143. The most representative of the two contrasting standpoints are for the aggregates as individuals view, J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato's Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., pp. 60-61, and for the aggregates as kinds view, L. Brown, *Understanding the Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 11 (1993), pp. 206-209. Cf. also R.M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge. A Commentary of*

one case, the aggregated parts would be singular perceptions, qualities or temporal stages making up particulars, whereas in the second case the aggregated parts would be fully-fledged individuals making up kinds. The point of the argument is that whatever one considers as unitary is nothing but the product of the mere composition of parts. In other words, just like a mosaic, one thinks that there is a figure when there is only a group of tiles arranged in a certain way. Now, if I were to choose either, I would opt for the aggregate as individual view. Yet I believe that this exegetical opposition should be maintained as problematic. I think that this substantial individual/species opposition makes no sense with regard to the refined thinker's account. I wish to make two points:

- (I) Firstly, the unity of the common-sense concrete particular through time is none of its singular manifestations or temporal stages, but rather that which keeps them together as belonging to the *same* thing without ever appearing. Roughly put, a stone is none of its singular appearances to subjects. This means that the unity of the individual is never perceived and never comes to be as a perception because it is ex hypothesis what ties *many* perceptions or qualities together, and cannot be any of the perceptions or qualities it ties together<sup>73</sup>.
- (II) Secondly, any class or kind of concrete particulars is no singular perception. In other words, it is plain to assume that what constitutes the unity of the species (man or stone) is none of its members, conceived of as

*Plato's Theaetetus*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg 1992, pp. 99-100, who keeps together both interpretations.

<sup>73</sup> This might sound reminiscent of what is being argued in the section on the common notions. However, it will emerge that this is not the non-perceivable being Socrates is introducing later on. Cf. Chapter 6.

unified individuals as in (I), and *a fortiori* none of the latter's perceived qualities or temporal stages. This last statement implies that what makes two particulars be of the same sort or belong to the same kind is by definition no singular perceiver-related experience.

The last quoted passage thus reveals to be remarkably complex. I say that the opposition between the two interpretations should be focused on because it helps elucidate a fact that Plato's ambiguous formulation might be hinting at: there is a fundamental connection between things having some substantial unity able to keep their qualities together as belonging to the *same* thing and kinds having some substantial unity able to ground similarity across a number of distinct particulars belonging to the *same* kind. My contention is that this passage might be suggesting *via negativa* what follows: that which makes a number of perceptions belong to the same thing is conceptually related to that which makes distinct individuals belong to the same kind. To provide an example, what reunites different perceptions of one stone is also what keeps together many stones as belonging to the kind stone. The philosophical message that can possibly be drawn from this conceptual ambiguity is that to think of an entity as an extra-phenomenal unit, i.e. independent of being perceived or being an object of belief, requires minimally thinking of *what* (kind of thing) it is. Interestingly, here Plato does not use the term ὅλον, that is "whole", which indeed indicates a collection but also includes a precise nature bounding its parts<sup>74</sup>,

<sup>74</sup> Cf. B. Centrone, *Il concetto di holon nella confutazione della dottrina del sogno (Theaet. 201d8-206e12) e i suoi riflessi nella dottrina aristotelica della definizione*, in G. Casertano (a cura di), *Il Teeteto di Platone. Struttura e problematiche*, Loffredo, Napoli 2002, pp. 139-155; V. Harte, *Plato on Parts and Wholes: The Metaphysics of Structure*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002.

and uses instead the term ἄθροισμα, which means “aggregation/assemblage”<sup>75</sup>. Obviously, this is only a way to highlight

<sup>75</sup> To this, another famous argument should be added, namely the rejection of the diachronical persistence of subjects. The doctrine imposes peculiarity to every phenomenon, which entails that for every difference any two phenomena display they are considered to be two distinct and incommensurable things. See *Theaet.* 158e7-159a8. Cf. J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato's Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., p. 61. For an interpretation that tries to preserve the diachronic unity of things involved in different relations, see J. van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 222-230. Cf. also J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 148-150; J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., pp. 69-70 and F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 283-291. The argument is complex and rather tortuous. It goes from 158e-160c. An example of this is the case of healthy Socrates and ill Socrates, since they differ in one qualification, they are two incommensurably different “realities”. Thus, altered states of consciousness are in no way less true than the ordinary states in that the two sets are not comparable. In this way, each of Socrates' states is ontologically constituting a whole (ὅλον, cf. *Theaet.* 159b6-7). At the same time, what Socrates is at each time is determined by its relation to another active pole, which in turn is dependent upon its encounter with Socrates at that time. Consequently, each pole, active or passive, takes part in making each relation unrepeatable and incomparable with the other, insofar as each new encounter makes the experience numerically different and therefore also incommensurable to the others. I call this view “erosion of the self” because any substantial conception of the self falls into a countless number of experiential pieces. This is significant for at least two reasons: firstly, it is problematic when it comes to memory and forecast; secondly, it makes second-order perceptions like one's reflection on one's own past experience impossible. Once the experience is departed it is as if that experience has never been. This is also a reason for not ascribing objective existence to experiences, otherwise the fact of having experienced something would be objective and it would have a stable existence beyond its present occurrence. This view does not allow any “aboutness” of any doxastic act which is not about the present (cf. *Theaet.* 163e1-164a2). As we shall see in the last chapter of this part, a

the theoretical range of the ambiguity between aggregates as individuals and aggregates as kinds, and there is no way to develop these ideas apart from speculation. What is very clear instead is that the ontology of the refined thinkers cannot accommodate either of the two theoretical options.

more complex view where the soul performs a comparison of its many experiences will be key to Plato's rejection of the definition of knowledge as perception.

## V. THE COLLAPSE OF LANGUAGE

### 1. *The Significance of the Collapse of Language*

The *Theaetetus* is a masterpiece of tightly tied stringency and provocation, thereby admirably representing the Platonic art of composition. In this work the dialogue cannot be approached face-on, given the extended ramifications of its arguments. The parts commented on in my work fall within the attempts the work is making to follow the *Leitfaden* as to how being and language are intertwined in Plato's thought. This is the reason why I shall not systematically give my own interpretation of all the many interesting arguments put forward by Plato. Even so, this chapter plays the pivotal role of examining why, for Plato, the domain of becoming as it has been thought of so far does not suffice to ground fundamental linguistic acts. This assumption casts light on the nature of Plato's commitment to the conclusions concerning appear-

ances/experiences arrived at in the last chapter. I do not think that Plato himself regards the sensible world as the series of singular experiences deriving from Theaetetus' definition, Protagoras' doctrine and Heracliteanism taken jointly and yet I believe *Theaetetus's* definition to be a sort of mental experiment as to what would happen if the world only consisted of appearances. The result is total collapse. This emerges partly during the refutation of Protagoras, which I shall not address, but then it is clearly achieved in the subsequent part of the dialogue I am about to introduce.

The development of the dialogue could be considered the progressive thematisation of the scope of judgement and the peculiar kind of stability it requires: the stability allowing for minimal linguistic description and reference. According to my interpretation of the Secret Doctrine, perceptions are essentially tied to perceived things in such a way that the only measure for determining what there is is given by fact that one is perceiving. Likewise, the event of believing is the only reason for why one's belief is true<sup>1</sup>. As emerged above, the

<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the term ἀληθής (true) is introduced in *Theaet.* 160c7 right after the discussion of the final version of the doctrine. These few lines work as a recap of Protagoras' thesis and as a turning point in the development of the definition. In these lines the reader is presented with the term οὐσία. This suggests the tight connection between truth and being. Significantly, the term ἀληθής recurs in *Theaet.* 163b1-7 where Socrates, in the case of spoken and written words of a foreign language, contrasts knowledge of sounds and marks, which are perceptible items, with knowledge of their meaning. Cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 160. I think that the refutation of Protagoras is part of the progressive thematisation of judgements. Opinions are said to be true throughout the central arguments both resuming and rejecting Protagoras' view, see *Theaet.* 167a6-8; 170c3-5; 170d4-8; 171a6-b2. Without this new setting which includes the cognitive notion of content, which in turn also allows reference to be spoken of, most of the refutation would make no sense. In

view is that any belief is related to something that appears so as to be indistinguishable from, or essentially connected to it, and the event of their junction constitutes experience and this is everything there is in the world<sup>2</sup>. My interpretation of why the Secret Doctrine is proven to be untenable lies in thematising language. At some significant points of his exposition, Socrates offered some reforms of ordinary language, the recommendation is avoiding some common expressions that suggest stability such as “being”, “something”, demonstratives. At the same time, he proposes to substitute these terms with the jargon of becoming, production and interrelation. The fundamental implication is that, reformed though it might be, there is a language that enables one to express the way things appear the moment in which they appear<sup>3</sup>. If the entire

this section devoted to the collapse of language, the strategy is more radical: it shows that the Secret Doctrine requires the distinction which makes its impracticability explicit.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Silverman, *Flux and Language in the Theaetetus*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 18 (2000), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 93-95. However, Sedley claims that the sense of the argument is aimed at showing the impossibility of dialectic. Cf. D. Sedley, *The collapse of language?: Theaetetus 179c-183c*, «Plato Journal», 3 (2003), p. 6 where he says: «Hence the upshot of Socrates' refutation of the flux thesis is that, if as the perceptual theory requires there is literally nothing stable, there is nothing about which one's dialectical answer could hold true, and hence in particular there are no definitions. The Heracliteans are expected to insist that discourse of their own favoured kind can continue. The indeterminacy of its referring terms, and even (as they must now agree) of its truth values, accurately captures the flux of the actual world. If, that is, this now means that their assertions are, taken as a whole, no more true than false, there is no reason to assume that they will not welcome the consequence». My claim is that for Plato this is precisely the issue: if there is no determination in how things stand independently of subjects, then there is no description and reference. I think that the Heracliteans



Secret Doctrine is intended to justify Protagoras' *Homo-Mensura*, then it must be possible for each human being to state, perhaps only in its reformed version, what is going on in her experience. What I shall endeavour to show in this section is that only on this assumption can Plato's refutation do the work and how this takes place. The argument, I think, is this:

- (I) If something is part of reality, whatever the ontology, then it is cognitively accessible (this is clear because the Secret Doctrine is an ontology put forward to prove that *knowledge* is perception) and can minimally be expressed by some form of language. This premise is *shared* by Plato and the Secret Doctrine.
- (II) Secret Doctrine: what is real is such that its being thus and so is dependent or co-dependent on somebody having cognition of it (perception or belief).
- (III) Plato: if something is dependent or co-dependent on somebody having cognition of it (perception or belief), it cannot be thus and so. In other words, something can only be thus and so if it is thus and so by itself, i.e. independently of its being cognised<sup>4</sup>.
- (IV) Given (I) and (III), the way Plato refutes (II) is by showing that in (II) language and minimal cognitive apprehension of what appears are not possible.

are minimally committed to saying that things come to be thus and so at the moment they do to some person experiencing it. If one accepts Sedley's view that this is not the case, as Heracliteians would accept indeterminate truth-claims as to what comes to be for them while it comes to be, this is definitely inconsistent with Theaetetus' original definition, which makes it part of Socrates' refutational strategy.

<sup>4</sup>This does not imply that sensible things are by themselves in the same sense as Forms are. As we shall see in the next part, language can work on the basis of the relations between things and Forms. However, at this stage, Plato does not thematise the issue.

Generally, the argument is something like this: if reality only consists of perceptual-experiential events, it is not even possible to describe what takes place when it does. What is truly interesting for us, if the argument schematised above is correct, as I shall show in the remainder of the chapter, is that everything hinges on premise (I), which is what I am most interested in as it clearly expresses the relation between what is real and what can be cognised and expressed by (at least some) linguistic acts. The philosophical message of Plato's version of (I) is that the very fact that something is thus and so, independently of being perceived or believed to be thus and so, implies its possible description. At this point, it remains to be understood in what way Plato shows that the complex ontological views he has introduced thus far imply that language is not possible.

## 2. *The Analysis of the Argument of the Collapse of Language*

To begin with, when re-engaging with the advocates of the view that everything must always move or change, Plato introduces the distinction between two kinds of change: local movement (φορά) and alteration (ἀλλοίωσις). The former is local movement in space: the latter is qualitative alteration, of colour or compactness for example<sup>5</sup>. Interestingly, Socrates states that everything must undergo *both* kinds of change

<sup>5</sup> See *Theaet.* 181b8-182a2. These types of change might be paralleled with the twins of *Theaet.* 156d-e. In favour of this parallel, cf. F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., p. 49; D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 92; contra cf. A.M. Ioppolo, *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., p. 242 n. 123; Cf. J. Day, *The Theory of Perception in Plato's Theaetetus 152-183*, cit., p. 64 and J. van Eck, *Moving like a Stream: Protagoras Heracliteanism in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 242-244.

since if something only moved locally then it would remain the same through that movement<sup>6</sup>. By contrast, he does not consider the reversed situation in which something changes qualitatively but remains stationary in space; an object can hardly be said to remain the same just because it lingers in the same spot while altering. This hint helps uncover what the argument is aiming at: the connection between qualities, stability and language. At *Theaet.* 182a4-b7, this analysis of the kinds of motion is overtly connected to the previous exposition of the theory of the refined thinkers. One common interpretation argues that the total flux view does not hold because if one is to say how things are, they have already changed<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, it might appear that this way of paraphrasing Theaetetus' definition is inconsistent with, or at least not entirely analogous to, the earlier formulation referred to in the the passage, especially with regard to two central assumptions of the doctrines: the privacy/peculiarity and the fact that each experience is singularly generated by the encounter of powers and motions. Here, I think, one is faced with four theses:

- (1) Being, appearance and experience coincide.
- (2) Everything is in universal flux, i.e. at any time everything differs from how it was.
- (3) There is actual qualitative change (quality: what something is like).
- (4) Actual reference to appearances and ascription of qualities are possible (at the moment they become for a subject).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Theaet.* 182c8-11.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for instance D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 95.

The first two are argued in the first part of the exposition (treated in the last chapter). The last two are put forward in the part of the dialogue discussed here. It is worth noting that the addition of (3) and (4) transforms the meaning of (2). Early in the dialogue “to become” meant the theoretically primitive change that made every experience diverse, unrepeatable and private insofar as it takes place as the encounter each time generating new powers and motions. Conversely, it now means qualitative alteration. What is the difference between the two?

The Secret Doctrine in its refined version clearly states that whatever is part of the world is, roughly put, the event of the encounter between a perceiver and a perceived thing, which only come to be insofar as they are connected. This was presented as implying that any two experiences are two distinct experiences because in them numerically different powers and motions are joined. This made any two numerically distinct experiences incommensurable in such a way that in neither can one get something wrong. As I take it, to recapitulate, the appeal of this view is twofold: (i) nobody can be wrong as Protagoras would have it; (ii) this is signalled in that for any two conflicting appearances/experiences, both must take place. As we have seen, the main thrust of this long argument is that (ii) gives the ontological reason for (i): there is nothing *beyond* the perceptions and whatever appears in my experience is also all there is in the world.

If it is clear that the criterion to judge whether two experiences are numerically different is provided by the many powers and motions that come across each other within any new experience, it is not at all clear how and at what rate a new experience emerges. As far as I can tell, two main options are possible, although they are both quite speculative. Firstly, a new perception comes into being when there is a difference in what is being perceived. For instance, the perception of

a cold wind is the same perception as long as the wind is perceived as cold; when the wind ceases or gets warmer, a new experience occurs<sup>8</sup>. This view is problematic insofar as the wind *remaining* cold suggests some stability that sounds incompatible with the Secret Doctrine. At the same time, the idea that the wind is cold *because* it is perceived to be so by one and there is no fact of the matter as to what the wind is in itself can possibly vindicate this reading. What is more, according to this first interpretation, it is hardly the case that there is *just* a cold wind: it would change under many respects, for instance it is perceived by different parts of the body, it moves other appearing objects (leaves, for example) and for each alteration a new experience would be given birth to. What is relevant for us here is that the reason why two experiences are distinct is that something happens in one that does not happen in the other. Contingently, it could well be the case that no perception takes place for more than an instant because there is always something that changes, but this cannot be excluded in principle.

A second reading of how new experiences come into being instead takes time as a criterion. At each moment, i.e. an unspecified minimal timespan, a new and thus numerically distinct perception takes place, irrespective of what is being perceived, which entails that two perceptions can be identical, but nonetheless can be distinct and therefore incommensurable<sup>9</sup>. Of course, to say that two experiences are identical can only be done from outside the Secret Doctrine because when the new experience takes place, the previous one is no longer present and thus, according to the Doctrine, it is as if it never existed (because only what is presently being per-

<sup>8</sup> A reading of 158e-160c could suggest something like this.

<sup>9</sup> This is the reading by C. Buckels, *The Ontology of the Secret Doctrine in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 255.

ceived is real). Contingently, it could well be the case that no two distinct perceptions are perfectly identical because there is always something that changes at the minimal timespan, but this could not be excluded in principle (from outside the Doctrine).

I believe that the latter reading better fits with the text as it tends to exclude stability in a more thorough way: even in the case that two experiences are identical (I) the new one entirely replaces the previous one thereby excluding stability; (II) each new experience, for the fact that it is new and then numerically distinct from the others and given that in the Secret Doctrine any numerically distinct experience is peculiar and incommensurable to the others, is peculiar and incommensurable. More generally, the two readings present a very interesting symmetry, the first assumes that an experience remains identical for more than an instant, the second assumes that there are two experiences that are identical at two different instants. At the same time, both views seem to empirically assume that at each time there is some variation as to what is being presently perceived, which makes them practically indistinguishable. This also suggests that Plato need not specify the Secret Doctrine in this level of detail.

Why am I discussing this now? My objective is understanding what has changed, if anything, between the Secret Doctrine and its reformulation in terms of constant qualitative change. Socrates started by saying that something is real insofar as it is part of somebody's experience and that each experience has something peculiar to it. This in turn has been conceptualised in terms of motion, which was meant to convey two ideas: first, that when there are conflicting appearances what is usually regarded as a physical object has no fixed properties and that it constantly becomes different with regard to the perceivers who perceive it; second, that the whole of experience is a complex by-product of a pro-

cess where the items put in relation are generated by their momentary connection. In this later passage of the dialogue, Socrates introduces some conceptual variations. This seems to be stated in the text at 182c1-2, where Socrates says that they should leave to one side whether other aspects of the theory of the refined thinkers were correct, and should focus on the point at hand, i.e. whether everything moves.

Reference to becoming was important in both the first formulation of the Secret Doctrine (152d2-e1) and the view of the refined thinkers (157a8-b1) and in particular it was meant to be the alternative to being, being one and being by itself. Accordingly, when Socrates now says that they must focus on the key assertion that everything moves, this must be interpreted in terms of radical opposition to being, unity and itselfness. Before turning to the way Socrates addressed this task, it is worth noting that there is no mention of experiences being peculiar or private. Perceived things are said to be different from one perception to another, not just because the two perceptions are numerically different, but rather on account of some qualitative change for which the new way something is is not as it was. This looks like a further radicalisation of the ontology of becoming. And this is where the distinction I have drawn above concerning how to distinguish numerically distinct experiences can prove useful. Here Socrates seems to keep the two criteria above together, namely difference and time; he is claiming that there are no things that remain the same for more than a moment, and that there is no moment at which things are not changing.

Why is he doing this? My way of understanding is that Plato thinks that claiming that everything is motion as opposed to being one and by itself is incompatible with perceiving, even for one minimal temporal unit, that things come to be or become in a certain way. This is why Socrates is pushing the idea of qualitative change to its extreme consequences. Accord-

ingly, my interpretation of why the Secret Doctrine, including its refined version, is connected to the current formulation in terms of qualitative change is the following. To maintain the peculiarity of each experience, the refined thinkers had to say that everything is motion. In its original version, the world consists of a series of numerically distinct perceptions that are incommensurable to each other *whatever* the content of perception. For instance, this perception of the whiteness of this stone is different from that perception of the whiteness of that stone. This because, as we saw, for each perception whiteness and stone are generated anew.

By contrast, what I think Socrates is implicitly doing here is showing that the appeal to motion as a way to justify the incommensurability of numerically distinct perceptions *must* also affect *what* the thing being perceived is like (and, as we are about to see, also the faculties of perception themselves). In other words, in its previous formulation the Doctrine asserted the absolute certainty of my perceiving this white stone at a precise moment. Motion was meant to justify the idea that my certainty in perceiving the white stone is provided by the fact that there is nothing to the existence of the white stone than the event of my own perception. In contrast, in the current reformulation of the Doctrine the reference to motion cannot be just generative in correlating perceivers and perceived things (along with their acts of perception and perceived qualities), but it needs also to affect what these appear to be<sup>10</sup>. This is very important because it moves the focus from the event of experience to the determination of *what* appears in that experience. If this is so, the result is that perceptions cannot even come to be as they are perceived to be, as is shown by the following passage:

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., p. 51.



Socrates: But this does not stay as it is, either, the fluxing thing fluxing white; it changes too, so that this very thing, whiteness, will be itself in flux, and changing into another colour, or else it will be caught staying as it is. Given that, will it ever be possible to refer to a particular colour and get its name right?

Theodorus: How could it be, Socrates? Or indeed to anything else like that, if even as one is speaking of anything it is always quietly slinking off, as it must if it's in flux?<sup>11</sup>

The compulsion for change is such that everything does not remain the same as itself not even for a moment since everything must be in flow (ῥεῖν<sup>12</sup>). The Secret Doctrine claimed that everything was motion in order to justify the view that the white stone I see now is nothing but my seeing it in such a way that I cannot ever be mistaken about it. Now, Socrates shows that even the whiteness of the stone as is being perceived by me now within my experience should not be determined as white. Even more significantly, what has to change is not just that the stone I perceive comes to be white in my experience, but also the very whiteness of the stone is not allowed to appear as white. Importantly, it is said that if there is no stability whatsoever, then no one can refer to things (προσειπεῖν) nor properly call them (προσαγορεύειν<sup>13</sup>). If motion is meant to ground the idea that what there is in the world is dependent or

<sup>11</sup> *Theaet.* 182d1-7: «ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο μένει, τὸ λευκὸν ῥεῖν τὸ ῥέον, ἀλλὰ μεταβάλλει, ὥστε καὶ αὐτοῦ τούτου εἶναι ῥοήν, τῆς λευκότητος, καὶ μεταβολὴν εἰς ἄλλην χροάν, ἵνα μὴ ἀλῶ ταύτη μένον, ἄρα ποτε οἶόν τέ τι προσειπεῖν χρώμα, ὥστε καὶ ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύειν; / αἱ τίς μηχανή, ὃ Σώκρατες; ἢ ἄλλο γέ τι τῶν τοιούτων, εἴπερ αἰεὶ λέγοντος ὑπεξέρχεται ἅτε δὴ ῥέον;».

<sup>12</sup> This term appears now, perhaps signaling a turning-point.

<sup>13</sup> Both terms have the preposition προσ- as suffix thereby meaning some kind of towardness and relationality.

co-dependent on its being experienced by somebody, by now clear from my analysis, then stability as negation of motion must imply that what there is in the world is *not* dependent or co-dependent on its being experienced. The reason for this, as is clear from the quotation, is that motion makes minimal linguistic acts such as applying names to what is experienced impossible. In addition, Theodorus' answer is more complex than it seems at first. He rhetorically asks how it is possible to say something of it if every object constantly escapes from one's reference into flux. As far as perceptions are concerned, they go through the same fate. If everything is to flow, any perception could not be the same as itself for more than a moment<sup>14</sup>. As is stated at *Theaet.* 182d8-e2, hearing and sight must move themselves and therefore neither will be hearing or sight more than any other sense. By contrast, in the previous account, one was wrong to say that the wind is cold as she should have said that the wind becomes cold for her, but it was possible to cognise and say how things are the moment at which they appear to be or become to one.

Accordingly, the idea that it is not possible to express the way things are or become *when* they are perceived or experienced conflicts with the original doctrine, which employed the actual presence of the perceived object as precisely what meets requirements of knowledge. As already said above, the point I want to make is that the text could be best interpreted as follows: that the presence of something that appears within one's experience does not provide a sufficient basis to be described is now being connected with the fact that what appears within one's experience *must* alter at every moment. To this purpose, it is very important to focus on Theodorus' reply. What kind of movement is it to slip away even before the for-

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p. 182.

mulation of a judgement? Plato is speaking of a change which has already taken place every time one utters something<sup>15</sup>. I think this should be connected to the fact that throughout the definition the reader was told that according to Protagoras nothing is one by itself. This means that nothing is *F* more than non-*F* in itself every time it appears to be so. My view is that the untenability of this ontologically deficient view is stated by saying that objects are characterised in themselves as changing. In other words, I think this latter point is now being phrased in terms of change being located within appearances themselves, thereby preventing them from having any determination at all, even *within* experience<sup>16</sup>.

The most important thing to highlight is that my argument is not resolved in an unfortunate delay of knowledge or linguistic acts with respect to faster change in reality. On the contrary, things themselves, since they are purely made of the events of encounter with subjects, which the original doctrine claims excludes any stability, i.e. subject-independence, as to what they are, are now conceptualised as constantly changing. That is so because the Secret Doctrine thinks of the world as ontologically dependent or co-dependent on its being perceived: not thinking of the itself-dimension, conceives that instability as a perpetual and incalculably fast change. This is, I think, the correct way to interpret the meaning of having already changed before any reference to them. Plato's goal is to show that whatever appears within the encounter with the world, it cannot only be qualified thanks to that

<sup>15</sup> This also excludes that the argument in the last quotation speaks of an objectively retraceable motion or change that at any time can be correctly stated. Otherwise this could conflict with Theodorus' reply. Whatever one says, the thing has *already* changed, not allowing anyone to state something correctly.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. Silverman, *Flux and Language in the Theaetetus*, cit., p. 137.

encounter. In other words, there is nothing in the event of experiencing or believing something that can supply things with their determination. As a consequence, what is being perceived and its qualities must always change as a result of the fact that there is nothing there to grasp allowing it to be one way than any other.

Thus, the total flux is above all the collapse of the identity or determination of appearances. Although the refined version of the Secret Doctrine prescribed that both object and subject arise from the event of their encounter, it used to consider any appearance as the determined and manifest qualification of something, for instance a white stone. In my interpretation, when Plato says that whiteness changes into other colours, this does not mean that it *actually* changes into other determinate colours, and so on, perpetually and subliminally. In fact, he is saying that nothing is white since white, or black or *any* other colours are themselves nothing<sup>17</sup>. That is so insofar as there is no determinate nature in reality on the grounds that it is nothing but change, which in turn derives from the fact that it is generated by the encounter with a perceiver. In this way, whiteness is no more white than anything else, without running into the embarrassing problem of thinking whether whiteness turns into just other colours or also other kinds of things like a sacred goat or a throwing discus<sup>18</sup>. That is the same for the statement at *Theaet.* 182d8-e2 that even acts of perception such as hearing and sight must constantly change. For perceptions too would change if there were no stability. Does this mean that seeing *actually* turns into hearing, to use the examples in the text? Plato is not speaking of synaesthe-

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 183-184.

<sup>18</sup> For this interpretation, see for example R.M. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge. A Commentary of Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 158.

sia here, he is not making Heracliteanism lysergic, however alluring it might be. The text goes: for any perception, one should not *call* (προσητέον) it seeing more than not-seeing<sup>19</sup>. Since nothing has its own nature it is not qualified and thereby it does not deserve any name more than the name of the opposite thing. This also affects the definition of knowledge as perception itself. If perception is nothing in itself because it constantly changes, just like anything else, then by saying that knowledge is perception one has not said what knowledge is anymore than what it is not. If the equation of knowledge and perception required that everything changes, this in turn is ruinous for that specific definition and for every definitional endeavour. This is clearly stated at *Theaet.* 182e11-12. This, I submit, supplies further evidence for my interpreting constant qualitative change as lack of intrinsic determination. The text goes on:

A fine way this will turn out to be of getting that answer right, when we were so eager to show that everything is changing just so it would come out right! What has actually emerged, it seems, is that if everything is changing, any answer to any question whatever will be equally correct. It won't matter whether one says "This is so", or "This is not so" – or if you prefer we can substitute 'coming to be' for 'is', so as not to say things that bring our friends the fluxers to a standstill<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See *Theaet.* 182e4-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Theaet.* 183a1-8: «καλὸν ἂν ἡμῖν συμβαίνοι τὸ ἐπανάρθωμα τῆς ἀποκρίσεως, προθυμηθεῖσιν ἀποδεῖξαι ὅτι πάντα κινεῖται, ἵνα δὴ ἐκείνη ἡ ἀπόκρισις ὀρθῆ φανῆ. τὸ δ' ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐφάνη, εἰ πάντα κινεῖται, πᾶσα ἀπόκρισις, περὶ ὅτου ἂν τις ἀποκρίνηται, ὁμοίως ὀρθῆ εἶναι, οὕτω τ' ἔχειν φάναι καὶ μὴ οὕτω, εἰ δὲ βούλει, γίγνεσθαι, ἵνα μὴ στήσωμεν αὐτοὺς τῷ λόγῳ».

The unfortunate result is that for any question any answer is equally correct. This is fatal to Theaetetus' definition as well as any other. Nothing can be said to be determined, whether it be a perceptual state of affairs or a definition concerning the nature of knowledge. In addition, the aim of the passage above is to state the inconsistency between the theory that the world is made up of (perceptual) events and the possibility of linguistic functions in that world. So, it is not only to recognise that whatever definition, including "knowledge is perception", does not receive an answer, but also that whatever thing the Secret Doctrine claims that appears in one's experience such as the white stone could not be determined thanks only to the event that it is manifest to someone. What needs to be recognised to support my interpretation is that in this last passage one finds precisely the idea that we can substitute "be" with "come to be" as the Secret Doctrine would prescribe, but the real problem is that the Doctrine still assumes that things are determined, which cannot be the case because of its commitment to motion and its denial of being. Interestingly, appearing things having no determination is signalled by the impossibility of describing them as being more one way than another<sup>21</sup>. The

<sup>21</sup> Cf. N. Thaler, *Plato on the Importance of 'This' and 'That'*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 45 (2013), pp. 1-42. Apart from many secondary correct arguments, Thaler's main contention is that phenomenalism does not in any way forbid general statements, viz. statements concerning general notions, but only statements about particulars. The collapse would amount to the fact that there can be no statement about abstract concepts in a world if it is not possible to produce determinate assertions about particulars in that world. Unfortunately, Plato is not Rudolf Carnap. If the first definition of knowledge can work for a while it is not because it allows statements about concepts. It is so focused on the peculiarity of experience that it does not even thematise language as such (which is the same as seeing that language requires a level which is strictly speaking ontological,

main conclusion of Plato's argument seems to be that for anything to be capable of being referred to and described linguistically it must be independent of its being an object of experience<sup>22</sup>. As far as something is to be thought and spoken of, it must relate to being. As I take it, one is faced with the introduction of the two tenets of Plato's thought:

- (I) Whatever is, or is real, is independent of belief/experience/perception;
- (II) The essential connection between being and the capability of being referred to and described linguistically.

As I shall argue with regard to the *Sophist* in the next part, to be and to be referentially accessible will amount to the same profound ontological structure. For this reason the collapse of language sounds terminal and the Secret Doctrine is doomed

i.e. relating to being) because if it had done so, it would have immediately realised its own untenability.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., pp. 121-124. Quite speculatively, the argument might have a further consequence: it shows that neither the privacy of perceptions as is formulated by the Secret Doctrine in its first version is a reliable source for the identity of appearances. For the present argument of the collapse of language seems to imply that if things have determinate conditions of identity and therefore are temporarily “thus and so”, they are so determined *despite* being accessed privately and not because they are. If minimal determination (this stone is white) entails some sort of experience-independence, then the source of a thing's identity is in no way peculiar to some private experience of it. As a consequence, what remains private in one's experience, namely the absolute singularity of making experience of something, does not contribute to what things are and what can be said of them. This is clear from the fact that for two experiences to be distinct they must differ in one character or other, but then it leads one to regard as relevant only *what* takes place within experience and not the fact that it occurred and which is each time peculiar.

to failure. To the previous claim from Socrates, Theodorus replies that Socrates speaks correctly, who in turn says:

Yes, Theodorus, except that I said “so” and “not so”. We mustn’t use this “so”, even, because the “so” wouldn’t itself be changing, nor again can we say “not so”, because this isn’t a change either; instead those who support this theory need to establish some other way of talking, since as things are they have no terms that fit their own hypothesis – unless perhaps “not like that either” would suit them best, applied without limit<sup>23</sup>.

As a result of the Secret Doctrine, declarative sentences are forbidden whether they are definitional or they concern experienced things and events. The double ban of the word “so” and the locution “not so” is highly significant and supports the present interpretation. The ban is open to two interpretations: first, nothing is either one way or the opposite way. Second, no one is allowed to state both how things stand and how they do not stand. Both ways work. For the first says that nothing is determined in itself and therefore neither *F* nor non-*F*. The second focuses on the types of declarations, both positive and negative, and, by banishing both, it still implies that reality is so undetermined that it cannot be approached in either linguistic way, i.e. it cannot be said of it that it is *F* or non-*F*. If one wishes to linguistically interact with such a changing reality, she

<sup>23</sup> *Theaet.* 183a10-b5: «πλήν γε, ὦ Θεόδωρε, ὅτι ‘οὕτω’ τε εἶπον καὶ ‘οὐχ οὕτω.’ δεῖ δὲ οὐδὲ τοῦτο τὸ ‘οὕτω’ λέγειν – οὐδὲ γὰρ ἂν ἔτι κινοῖτο τὸ ‘οὕτω’ – οὐδ’ αὖ ‘μὴ οὕτω’ – οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦτο κίνησις – ἀλλὰ τιν’ ἄλλην φωνὴν θετέον τοῖς τὸν λόγον τοῦτον λέγουσιν, ὡς νῦν γε πρὸς τὴν αὐτῶν ὑπόθεσιν οὐκ ἔχουσι ῥήματα, εἰ μὴ ἄρα τὸ ‘οὐδ’ οὕτως’ μάλιστα δ’ οὕτως ἂν αὐτοῖς ἀρμόττοι, ἄπειρον λεγόμενον».



would have to set up some other language. Significantly, the term for “language” here is φωνήν, literally “voice”<sup>24</sup>. This is significant in that there remains nothing of the utterer’s voice in the content of the voiced thing. Voice is necessarily a part of the event of an utterance and it gives no contribution to the truth of what is being said. Surreptitiously, Plato is suggesting that whatever language fits with flux, it can only be a *flatus vocis*. This voice could only be saying that what appears is not even how it seems and this needs to be understood indefinitely since it is an ἄπειρον λεγόμενον.

<sup>24</sup> According to the *LSJ*, it means both sound and speech, but when it refers to linguistic sounds it always deals with articulating sounds and pertains to the communication of a message.

## VI. BEING, TRUTH AND THE KOINA

### 1. *The Structure of the Passage on the koiná*

To conclude my analysis of the *Theaetetus*, one last part of the dialogue needs to be taken into account, namely the one devoted to the exposition of the κοινά, i.e. common notions or features, at *Theaet.* 184b3-187b3. This portion of the text is one of the most intriguing of the entire corpus. Given its tied structure, I would like to introduce the passage, then discuss the main interpretative issues emerging from it and finally give my contribution to the debate. The passage can be divided into three sections. The first section is 184c1-185a3, where the argument starts by putting forward two assumptions. The first is the distinction between that-with-which ( $\tilde{\omega}$ ) and that by-means-of-which ( $\delta\iota' \omicron\upsilon$ ) one perceives, a point that is made

in relation to sight and hearing<sup>1</sup>. This distinction is not easy to interpret; however, it is clear that the major point that Plato wants to make is that what is being perceived by the sensory organs converge towards a determinate form (εἰς μίαν τιὰν ἰδέαν), which works as a unifying centre and is overtly associated with the soul. The second assumption is sometimes known as *Proper Object Doctrine*<sup>2</sup> (POD) or *Inaccessibility Assumption*<sup>3</sup> and it states that what is perceived by a certain sensory faculty cannot be perceived by another. The idea is that every (type) of perception has its own peculiar (type of) objects, for instance sight cannot see what is perceived through hearing and hearing cannot hear what is perceived through sight<sup>4</sup>. These two assumptions underlie the remainder of the argument.

The second section is 185a4-186c6, where the core argument is presented. According to POD, if one thinks (διανοῆ) about two different perceptions such as sight and hearing that they both have some feature, this cannot be found by simply exercising either faculty. The introduction of thought is crucial because it is not a sensory organ and therefore POD does not apply. What is this something (τι) that is thought about two perceptual items such as a sound and a colour? The first answer Socrates comes up with is that they both are (ὅτι ἀμφοτέρω ἐστόν). To this, a series of further features are added: sound and colour are different from each other (ἕτερον), the same as themselves (ταυτόν), if taken together are two (δύο), each is one (ἓν). Moreover, one can also investigate whether

<sup>1</sup> See *Theaet.* 184c6-7 on which see the by now classical study M. Burnyeat, *Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving*, «The Classical Quarterly», 26 (1976), pp. 29-51.

<sup>2</sup> Label by L. Brown, *Understanding the Theaetetus*, cit.

<sup>3</sup> Label by A. Silverman, *Plato on Perception and 'Commons'*, «Classical Quarterly», 40 (1990).

<sup>4</sup> See *Theaet.* 184e8-185a2.

they are dissimilar (ἀνομοίω) or similar (ὁμοίω), and also the “is” (τὸ ἔστιν) and “is not” (τὸ οὐκ ἔστι) are used to name (ἐπνομάζεις) some of these features. With regard to these features, Socrates, *apertis verbis*, says that they are common to every perception (τὸ τ’ ἐπὶ πᾶσι κοινόν). Interestingly, at 185c7-d2, Theaetetus feels the need to summarise these common features and in doing so introduces other terms as well, which are accepted by Socrates. He speaks of being (οὐσία<sup>5</sup>), not-being (τὸ μὴ εἶναι), all other numbers (τὸν ἄλλον ἀριθμὸν περὶ αὐτῶν), even and odd (ἄρτιόν τε καὶ περιττόν) along with unspecified things that follow from them (καὶ τᾶλλα ὅσα τούτοις ἔπεται). Finally, below the text at 186a6, to these terms the following ones are added: beautiful (καλόν), ugly (αισχρόν), good (ἀγαθόν) and bad (κακόν).

The question remains: what is able to grasp such “commons”? The answer is that there is no organ that is proper to them and that they are investigated by means of the psyche by itself (αὐτὴ δι’ αὐτῆς ἢ ψυχῆ τὰ κοινὰ μοι φαίνεται περὶ πάντων ἐπισκοπεῖν). How does this take place? The soul compares within itself past and present perceptions and anticipations of the future (ἀναλογιζομένη ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὰ γεγονότα καὶ τὰ παρόντα πρὸς τὰ μέλλοντα). Arguably, this is why Socrates started out with pointing out, as his first assumption, the role played by soul as the unifying centre of a number of perceptions. This is because only if one assumes that there is a unifying centre of perception such a systematic comparison can take place<sup>6</sup>.

At this point, Socrates feels the need to highlight again the difference between what is perceived by the senses and what is

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, at *Theaet.* 186a2-3, οὐσία is said to be what, among all other things, accompanies everything.

<sup>6</sup> I shall not focus on how this conception excludes that the subject is fragmented into its perceptions, which was entailed by the Secret Doctrine. Cf. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 54-56.

investigated by the mind. In doing so, something interesting emerges. Socrates claims that hardness and softness are perceived by means of touch, but their being and that they are (τὴν δέ γε οὐσίαν καὶ ὅτι ἐστὸν<sup>7</sup>), their opposition and the being of their opposition as well (καὶ τὴν ἐναντιότητα πρὸς ἀλλήλω καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς ἐναντιότητος) is judged by the soul itself, which tries to judge for us as it collects and goes back to each of the perceptions in relation to one another (αὐτὴ ἢ ψυχὴ ἐπανιοῦσα καὶ συμβάλλουσα πρὸς ἀλλήλα κρίνειν πειρᾶται ἡμῖν). This passage is particularly interesting and far from clear. The point that needs particular discussion is understanding what the being of softness or hardness is. It cannot be their being perceived as it is clearly stated that softness and hardness are perceived by means of touch, whereas their being can only be found by the soul and its comparing activity. What is the being of softness and hardness then? Before addressing this question, I need to discuss the state of the art.

The third and last section of the passage is 186c7-e10. The final argument is presented by means of two questions. The first question is this: is it possible to hit upon truth, for those who do not hit upon being? (οἷόν τε οὖν ἀληθείας τυχεῖν, ὃ μὴδὲ οὐσίας; ἀδύνατον). This can be paraphrased as follows: if something (faculty) does not hit upon being, then it does not hit upon truth. The second question is this: in the case of something whose truth one fails to get, would he have

<sup>7</sup> This endyadis is not entirely clear. One can take the καὶ as exegetical and translate with McDowell «their being, i.e. what they both are» or with Ferrari «l'essere, ossia il fatto che essi sono» and Rowe «their being, namely, that they are». Alternatively, one can think that the καὶ is not exegetical and the pair stands for «their being» (determinate) and «the fact that they are» (as they are being perceived?), as translated in his commentary by D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 123. Cf. also C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato*, cit., p. 103.

knowledge of it? (οὐδὲ ἀληθείας τις ἀτυγήσει, ποτὲ τούτου ἐπιστήμων ἔσται;). Again, this can be paraphrased as follows: if some thing (or faculty) fails to get truth, it cannot have knowledge. Now the rejection of the definition of knowledge as perception goes as follows: perception does not touch being (because being is common), then it does not touch truth, but knowledge grasps truth, and therefore perception is not knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly, Socrates closes the section with the following remark: thus knowledge is not to be found among the perceptual affections (ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν); rather, it is in the reasoning concerning them (ἐν τῷ περὶ ἐκείνων συλλογισμῷ): for here one grasps being and truth, as it seems, whereas there this is not possible.

## 2. *The Main Issues with this Passage*

To begin with, it must be noted that the concept of αἴσθησις at stake in this passage is not conceived so broadly as to include beliefs as during the discussion of the Secret Doctrine<sup>9</sup>. The predominant interpretation in the literature claims that the passage is concerned with how non-propositional perceptual intake is to be connected to the faculty, activity or part of the soul that formulates judgements. Accordingly, recent scholarship has been discussing whether there is room in Plato for a conceptual or propositional structure of perception<sup>10</sup>. Most commentators interpret the connection between

<sup>8</sup> On the structure of this final argument, see D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M. Frede, *Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> Two competing models have been proposed: (I) Perceptions are sense-data, κοινά make statements about them possible insofar as they provide the propositional structure required to think about them. Proponents

being, knowledge and language as the idea that only propositionally structured thoughts or judgements can constitute knowledge. This is because reference to being is involved in every judgement and because only judgements can be true, given that only what is true can be known<sup>11</sup>.

By contrast, my interpretation is that Plato is actually interested in another order of problems. Plato's objective is not just to show that knowledge is conceptual or propositional in opposition to non-rational bodily perception<sup>12</sup>. His objective, I take it, is much more radical: in order to articulate conceptually and propositionally what is being experienced,

of this classical interpretation are J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 185-193; M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 52-61; A. Silverman, *Plato on Perception and 'Commons'*, cit.; M. Frede, *Observations on Perception in Plato's Later Dialogues*, cit.; D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 105-117; F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 81-90. (II) Perceptions already have the form "x is red", i.e. already include some concepts, κοινά are the object of a higher-order reflection, where the mind elaborates upon what it has gathered from experience, e.g. is what appears to me to be red now *really* red? Proponent of this approach is J.M. Cooper, *Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (Theaetetus 184-186)*, in G. Fine (ed.), *Plato, Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 355-376. This opposition is also prompted by a passage at *Theaet.* 186b11-e5, where it is said that human beings and animals naturally perceive. By contrast, the capacity to make comparisons about these perceptions in relation to being and profit requires a longstanding education. On the first reading, the capacity to speak is contrasted with mere perception. On the second reading, the capacity to evaluate by means of complex judgement is contrasted with simple perceptual judgements that already take place at the level of perception. As I shall endeavour to show, the point of the entire passage is not "just" recognising the fact that knowledge requires predicative statements. However, on the issue I find the traditional reading definitely more convincing.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. Bostock, *Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> For the reference to irrationality, cf. A. Silverman, *Plato on Perception and 'Commons'*, cit., p. 162.

one needs to develop the idea that what is being experienced and described “is”, which means that it is independent of that very experience and description. Recognising this, Plato argues, implies a mental activity of comparison of a plurality of experiences and only through this comparison can the idea arise that what is being experienced exists and is determined. The fundamental move, strictly consistent with my interpretation of the collapse of language, is that recognising the *being* of what is experienced is the basis of any possible description of it. In other words, the very idea that what is being perceived is thus and so implies that there is something that can be thought of conceptually and described propositionally. Before arguing for this, however, I need to address some issues discussed by the critics.

The first question is: what are the *κοινά*? They have been interpreted as Forms<sup>13</sup>, objective reality<sup>14</sup>, essences<sup>15</sup>. The

<sup>13</sup> E.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 102-109. According to D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 106-107, the *κοινά* are not Forms as they are only to be conceived as predicates independent of perception. However, he claims that a more metaphysically robust picture where Forms correspond to these notions is continuously hinted at in the dialogue. It must be specified that one can accept Cornford's overall interpretation that the *Theaetetus* is aporetic because there is no mention of Forms and at the same time maintain that the *κοινά* are not Forms. This last statement, in turn, does not imply that there is *no* connection between *κοινά* and Forms at all. One can easily contend that Forms correspond to these common features at a more fundamental level, but finding them requires a different sort of investigation, to the effect that in this context they do not need to be conceptualised as Forms.

<sup>14</sup> J.M. Cooper, *Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (Theaetetus 184-186)*, cit.

<sup>15</sup> D.K. Modrak, *Perception and Judgement in the 'Theaetetus'*, «Phronesis», 26 (1981), pp. 35-54.



most common interpretation is that they are predicates<sup>16</sup>. The idea that the *κοινά* are predicates oscillates between conceiving them as features of what is being perceived that are found by comparing perceptions or as notions that arise in the mind right after or during this comparing activity. On these grounds, the specification provided by Aronadio that the *κοινά* are not concepts but are resemblances that are found characterising what is being perceived, which is meant to avoid a nominalistic, transcendental-like account, sounds very convincing<sup>17</sup>. In other words, being, not-being, being one, etc. of a perception belong to that perception as features that are discovered by the soul and they are not mere concepts that only exist in the mind. The question concerning what the *κοινά* are is connected to another question, namely what *κοινά* there are. Here, we find two main options. Firstly, one can think that *κοινά* are *only* those features that characterise perceptions and that are common to them (e.g. being, sameness, difference). For instance, what is being seen and what is being heard both are, are the same as themselves and are different. These features have no proper organ with which to perceive them<sup>18</sup>. This is clearly the safest reading as it sticks to

<sup>16</sup> J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 185-193; M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 52-61; D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., pp. 105-117; J. Hardy, *Platons Theorie des Wissens im „Theaitet“*, cit., p. 148 and F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 81-90.

<sup>17</sup> See F. Aronadio, *Il tema dei koina nel contesto prospettico del Teeteto*, in Id., *L'áisthesis e le strategie argomentative di Platone nel Teeteto*, cit., pp. 173-206, who maintains two points: first, that the *κοινά* are the last step *before* the elaboration of judgement, and second, that only the soul can get access to those “common features” thanks to its indefatigable activity of comparing memory and prevision.

<sup>18</sup> See F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., p. 106, who claims that there are only *κοινά* of what is not private and can *only* be found

the examples of commons that are overtly mentioned in the text. Secondly, one can think that by comparing perceptions, not only can one find features that have no corresponding sense-organ such as being, but also recurring empirical content that can be thought to exist and consequently signified by predicates within the statement thanks to the common features mentioned in the text<sup>19</sup>. The passage on hardness and softness could be interpreted in this way. The idea is that the soul compares experiences and tracks down recurrence or differences that can be signified by words.

One advocate of this view is Ferrari, who claims that in the text the κοινόν of being is to be prioritised<sup>20</sup>. Its function is that of isolating the content of a perception such as “red”

by thought, e.g. there is the Form of being or similarity etc. but no κοινά of perceptual features such as red. J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., pp. 185-193, remains vague on the issue. M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, cit., pp. 56-58 seems to exclude that perceptual predicates be commons.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, a third option is not at all convincing and is at odds with most of the passage: are κοινά physical objects? For instance, what is being seen and what is being heard belong to the same entity, which would be common to both. This should be thought of as the idea that saying sight and hearing both are is equivalent to saying that *something* is, say, red and emits a certain sound. This could perhaps only fit with the common “being”, but definitely does not make sense with most of the others such as beautiful, odd and opposition. This is worth pointing out because in the passage there is no talk of substantial unity of particulars behind true ascriptions of qualities. It is worth noting that for Plato being is connected to the stability of the truth of statements such as “*x* is *F*” rather than thinking of an object that remains stable behind a number of such descriptions.

<sup>20</sup> See F. Ferrari, *Verità e Giudizio: il senso, e la funzione dell'essere tra αἴσθησις e δόξα*, in G. Casertano (a cura di), *Il Teeteto di Platone. Struttura e Problematice*, Loffredo, Napoli 2002, pp. 156-174 and again F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Teeteto*, cit., pp. 81-90. In this Ferrari follows J. McDowell, *Plato. Theaetetus: Translated with Notes*, cit., p 191.

or “soft” by recognising that they *are*. This is what makes the formulation of judgement such as “*x* is red” or “*x* is soft” possible. Ferrari provides a strong predicative reading of what “be” means here. The most appealing aspect of Ferrari’s view is that the *κοινόν* of being is meant to convey that what being is applied to is something determinate, which I would interpret as what is being perceived is something determinate, e.g. red and not blue, regardless of how and whether it is being perceived. This is precisely what the Secret Doctrine at the end failed to provide, i.e. that what appears in one’s experience is something determinate (e.g. the stone I am perceiving is white). In contrast, here the idea that what is being experienced has some determination does not derive from the *act* of perception because it can only be found by means of thought and comparing a number of perceptions. Nor does the idea that what is being perceived *is* (something determinate) derive from the *content* of perception because this precisely requires the *κοινόν* being, which in principle cannot be perceived. Hence, this interpretation of the passage clearly squares with my overall interpretation of the Secret Doctrine and the collapse of language.

One further argument in support of this view could be that the talk of similarity and dissimilarity, which are undoubtedly listed among the *κοινά* accepted by the first option, suggests that the soul is comparing within the scope of the *same* type of perceptions. Otherwise, it would not make sense to say that two perceptions resemble (or do not resemble) each other (how can a sound be similar to a colour, for example?). Accordingly, two different perceptions of the *same* type, e.g. sight, can have common features that can reasonably be thought to be grasped by the soul by comparing the two perceptions. If this is true, however, this implies that POD above is only meant to highlight the point Plato is making, but is not necessary to find (at least some) *κοινά*. In other words, if I can compare

two perceptions of the same kind, such as two perceptions of redness, I can still come up with the *κοινά* of, being, difference, similarity, for example, by comparing them. This implies that POD is a sufficient but not necessary condition to find *κοινά*. At the same time, POD can be regarded as paradigmatic of the idea that some common features do not belong to any single perceptual affection; however, for any feature to be common it does not *need* to belong to perceptions of different types, it only needs to belong to two *numerically* different perceptions.

It must also be recognised that a way to preserve the cogency of the argument in the text and its reliance on POD is to say that, although the *κοινά* of similarity and dissimilarity only make sense if what is being considered similar or dissimilar belongs to the same type of perceptions, *this* applies to different types of perception. In other words, only a colour can be similar to a colour, and only a sound can be similar to a sound, but *this* relation, as just shown, applies to both colours and sounds and therefore POD holds for similarity and dissimilarity.

Be that as it may, one question is yet to be answered: do the perceptions of the same type whose being is found by comparison performed by the soul count as *κοινά*? In other words, along with being and difference, should one count softness and redness as well? Ferrari clearly thinks so<sup>21</sup>. I do not think that the appealing aspect of his reading is committed to this. To say that thanks to the common “being” it is possible to formulate judgements, which make the content delivered by senses a content one can think about at the lev-

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also D. Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus*, cit., p. 108, where Sedley is cautious in including within the set of commons features that derive from perceptions. He asserts, however (p. 107), that by the senses, the soul becomes aware of sense-objects such as “red” and then through itself formulates truths involving these properties.

el of statements, does not *eo ipso* imply that such contents should be counted among the *κοινά*. Consequently, I would stick to the safer interpretation and say that the *κοινά* are only the notions that are explicitly mentioned and that have not perceptual content (being and difference are *κοινά*, redness and softness are not, at the same time, thanks to the *κοινά*, one can formulate judgements about redness and softness).

To recapitulate, the interpretation that I embrace drawing on this intricate discussion and that looks more convincing is the following. Everything that is perceived is accompanied by some features, especially the feature of being that can never be absent. This feature cannot, strictly speaking, be perceived and is grasped by thought, which performs a comparison between a number of perceptions also with regard to different temporal dimensions. I think that *κοινά* are not Platonic Forms. The main reason for this is that the soul finds them by comparing perceptions, it is not raising any what-is question, it is not defining an intelligible entity, it is not claiming that perceived things are caused by such entities. In other words, Socrates says that two perceptions are, are different from each other, both are one and possibly they are beautiful. He is not saying, for instance, that this perception is beautiful *because* of the Form of the Beautiful. At the same time, nothing excludes that one can find some intelligible natures corresponding to these notions at a later stage of the enquiry, which is largely recognised by the literature especially in relation to the greatest kinds of the *Sophist* and some examples of Forms discussed in the *Parmenides*. If *κοινά* are not Forms, they are usually considered common notions or features. The equivalence between notions and features can be accepted only if it is not interpreted in a reductive way, namely that *κοινά* are *only* concepts that appear in the soul by thinking.

Following Aronadio, I am persuaded that Plato is thinking of the *κοινά* as something the soul is intentionally directed

at and external to it, belonging to what the soul experiences, and not only notions that the soul produces. Accordingly, I accept Aronadio's claim that the *κοινῶν* passage is talking about the cognitive basis *underlying* judgements and not just about judgement themselves. In the next section, I shall present what is new in my account. Following Ferrari, I maintain that the determination of what is being perceived is a key aspect because of the long preceding discussion of the definition of knowledge as perception, which failed because it was not able to provide experiences with determination. On the other hand, I do not find convincing the idea that through the *κοινῶν* being each perceptual predicate is to be counted among the *κοινῶν*. Finally, I think that the *κοινῶν* being is particularly important, and this is clearly stated in the text on at least two occasions: firstly, when it is said that being accompanies everything; secondly, when discussing the final refutation the key is that knowledge implies contact with truth and truth implies contact with being and perception *does not* attain being. In other words, it is precisely being that does the job of refuting the equivalence between knowledge and perception. Accepting what Ferrari and Aronadio say in following Charles Kahn that in Plato being keeps existence and determination together (although Ferrari emphasises the predicative aspect and Aronadio the existential aspect), I think when Socrates says that both a colour and a sound are he means something like «they both exist as something determinate»<sup>22</sup>. But what does this actually mean? The interpretation I shall propose in the next section is that this passage can best be understood as precisely what the Secret Doctrine wanted to deny, namely that there is a fact of the matter concerning how things are

<sup>22</sup> Cf. C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato*, cit., p. 101: «Existence-with-predication, or being a subject for attributes, is indeed the most common property, which applies to everything there is».

in one's experience that is not reducible to one perceiving them and *this* is conceptualised as what makes linguistic acts possible.

### *3. The Purpose of the κοινά Passage and the Common Feature of Being*

As we have seen, most commentators interpret the connection between being, knowledge and language as the idea that only propositionally structured thoughts or judgement can constitute knowledge, and this is signalled by the reference to being within the statement and by the fact that only what is true can be known. I do not claim that this interpretation does not capture part of what is going on in the κοινά passage. However, I think there is much more at stake. The main reason to accept my reading is that in this way the κοινά passage is read in strict accordance with what comes before in the dialogue. Hence, I contend that the point Socrates is making is not that an abstract notion of knowledge requires judgement. His claim is much more radical: if there is to be knowledge at all, there must be some fact of the matter as to what is being experienced. This interpretation supplies a much more solid ground to the claim in the text that knowledge requires being: it is not just a reference to the "is" in the statement, it is also the idea that the "is" in the statements has some ground in reality. The fact of the matter concerning what is being perceived is independent of the event of perception and it is only to be found by means of thought. That it can only be found by means of thought is in turn proven by the fact that it is common to many perceptions in such a way that it cannot be literally perceived. In other words, one can perceive redness, but she cannot, strictly speaking, perceive that there is a fact of the matter that something is red as this is independent

of her perceiving redness and it is precisely what is required by knowledge. By this, I do not mean that here Socrates is claiming that one can only make true judgements. I only think Socrates claims that for any judgement to be true there must be something in the world that makes it true. This is because the encounter with a subject is not sufficient for things to exist and to be thus and so, as the refutation of the Secret Doctrine has shown. In this way, the *κοινά* passage is tasked with introducing this ontological precondition of judgements along with the essential cognitive activity performed by the soul that is able to find it.

This reading is also consistent with two more things. Firstly, it is consistent with what follows in the dialogue. The definition of knowledge as true belief or opinion immediately switches to false belief: to have knowledge there must be a fact of the matter in the world and this can be captured by statements or judgements, but the latter can also be false and this should be addressed. Secondly and consequently, what I am arguing here squares with the traditional reading that the *Theaetetus* is aporetic because there is no thematisation of Forms. Knowledge must be of something that is (real), but it must also exclude falsity and error and this can never be the case with the sorts of entities the dialogue is taking into consideration.

What is very interesting in the *κοινά* passage for my overall reading of Plato is that this idea of being is essentially related to the capacity to formulate judgements about it<sup>23</sup>. This is

<sup>23</sup> My overall reading is actually meant, among other things, to shed new light on the issue of why Plato quite easily shifts from intentional to objective being-so to use Kahn's phrasing in C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato*, cit., p. 105: «we must recognize that Plato does not always sharply distinguish between οὐσία as reality, or being-so in the world, and οὐσία as content of a description of reality, the being-so in a truth claim». My account in this section owes a lot to Kahn: he claims,



clearly consistent with my account of the collapse of language, which sounded like: if everything there is is determined by its being experienced by somebody, then nothing can be thus and so and therefore it cannot be described. Symmetrically, in the *κοινά* passage it is said that one's soul, by comparing a number of perceptions at the level of thought, which means independently of the single perceptions, is directed at some common features among which being stands out and it is by reference to these features that judgement can first be formulated<sup>24</sup>. This is also consistent with the claim, quite common among the interpreters and I think compelling, that in the *κοινά* passage perception is being conceived narrowly as sensorial, i.e. excluding any doxastic content. For instance, against Protagoras, one does not have immediate perception of the fact that the wind is cold. One perceives coldness and then a complex procedure is carried out by the soul and one comes up with the idea that there is a fact of the matter as to what is going on in the world and the wind, along with its qualities, does not come to be *because* it is being perceived<sup>25</sup>. My claim

e.g. at p. 106, that judging entails concepts such as existence, predication and the truth-claim that things are thus and so. At the same time, the view I countenance in this section is that *because* things are, i.e. exist and are thus and so, judgements are possible. This is not just because we have the notion of being in our mind and in our statements, but because we refer in our statements to a feature of the things we experience that we can only find by comparing and going back and forth between these experiences. Such a feature, namely being, signals that the existence and the way things are is not produced by their encounter with us and *this* is the ontological ground of our capacity to describe them in our statements.

<sup>24</sup> I say "directed at" to emphasise the intentional nuance of such terms as ἐπισκοπεῖν at 185e2 and ἐπορεύεται at 186a4-5, on which cf. F. Aronadio, *Il tema dei koina nel contesto prospettico del Teeteto*, cit., p. 185.

<sup>25</sup> To bring in a distinction that is definitely not Platonic, which could nonetheless help to illustrate my point: on the one hand, we have

is that for Plato acknowledging this mind-independence is the only way one can account for why language works and this is the purpose of the *κοινά* passage<sup>26</sup>.

On these grounds, I think that the notion of being is here precisely what was denied by the Secret Doctrine, namely the idea that there is a way things are that is independent of what people think and that allows for errors: *contra* Protagoras one can be wrong about what appears to be so to her. Thus, one thing is perceiving redness, another thing is thinking that this is red. I add to this that behind the thought that this is red there is a notion of being that emerges from comparing and connecting perceptions, possibly of different sorts, and that stands for the idea that (i) there is a fact of the matter concerning the way what I am perceiving is and (ii) that what I am perceiving is independent of me perceiving it. This notion of being then structurally and systematically eludes perception. Accordingly, Plato was not interested in the extent to which perceptions already have a propositional structure or not. He

the *event* of perceiving something (e.g. *F*-ness), on the other we have the *fact* that *x* is *F*.

<sup>26</sup> A possible objection is that in this way Plato would be committed to the objectivity of perceptual qualities. I do not think that this is a real problem. Plato could well be committed to the idea that the wine is sweet for every standard human being drinking it and when it tastes bitter this is on account of some objective facts about her body, which is precisely what is denied by the theory of the refined thinkers. However, what I argued is also compatible with the idea that *some* qualities are relative to the perceiver. But this does not imply that the wine and the perceiver only exist because they come across each other. On the contrary, my account would make sense of the fact that these qualities relative to the perceiver can be remembered or expected in the future, which was not possible for the Secret Doctrine. Moreover, it is also consistent with the Platonic view that perceptible things are in the province of *δόξα*, i.e. the faculty by means of which one can say true things about some entities, provided that this can only be temporarily, contextually and qualifiedly so.

is making the much more radical claim that the being (i.e. reality) of what appears in perception is not perceived. This, however, is meant to convey the idea that what is going on in the world is a matter of fact, i.e. independent of the event of perceptions. In other words, the statements “*x* is soft” has a truth-value that does not depend upon any specific perception of it<sup>27</sup>. It is after all because of how the thing is that it is soft

<sup>27</sup> This I think is something J.M. Cooper, *Plato on Sense-Perception and Knowledge (Theaetetus 184-186)*, cit., p. 143 gets close to. He is too intent on showing that perceptions are propositionally structured and that consequently the passage is meant to show that one can evaluate by reflection what is being delivered by perception. In contrast, I accept the traditional reading that perceptions are not propositionally structured. At the same time, I claim that being here is not just the formulation of judgement. It is the fact of the matter concerning what I encounter in any perception but that is not in turn perceived. The capacity of getting to this non-perceptual level is the reason why the soul can formulate judgement and the formulated judgement actually fasten onto reality. Thus, my view is radically different from Cooper's as I do not claim that the result of comparison and thinking is to evaluate whether what I perceived is actually the case. I claim that the reference to being means that what is being perceived is conceived as something that exists and is determined independently of me, as a precondition to evaluating judgement and not as the result. We are at the threshold of  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ , which can be either false or true. The point here is that whatever turns out to be true is true because of how things stand. For the same reason, I cannot accept the reading by Y. Kanayama, *Perceiving, Considering, and Attaining Being (Theaetetus 184-186)*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 5 (1987), pp. 29-81, whose main claim is that attaining being means finding how things are in the world. I think this idea of knowledge as considering a subject to attain objectivity regarding what is the case is too advanced for the present context and does not fit with the fact that after the common features we are faced with  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ , so definitely something that has not attained objective truth. My claim by contrast is much more epistemologically elementary and therefore fundamental: a prerequisite of knowledge is that there is a fact of the matter as what things are in the world. Plato's particular take on the matter is that conceiving such

(if it ever is soft). This can only be recognised by exercising thought given that grasping it requires grasping a “common”.

It is worth noting that the idea of common features serves at least two purposes. On the one hand, by being common, these features are not perceptible as they have no dedicated sense-organ, which, as we have plentifully seen, is what brings in the thinking activity of the soul. On the other hand, by being common, these features accompany a great number or, in the case of being, any possible perception. This duplicity is interesting because the *κοινά* imply the exercise of thought versus perception and at the same time are to be found in any perception, especially being, thereby showing that (a) there is no perceptual relation with the world (for a fully developed rational soul) without the unification of perceptions performed by the soul and the consequent comparison of the perceptual intake at the level of thought, and above all (b) there is no such thing as a “Broad Protagoreanism”, i.e. there is no linguistically structured cognitive activity that does not rely on a minimal given ontological framework according to which what I believe about the world assumes that things are thus and so without them being created by me entertaining some belief.

One could ask: why is Plato resorting to the idea that the activity of the soul is a comparison of many perceptions if he is, as I claim, aiming at a notion of being as independence of perception? Firstly, perceptions of different sorts, e.g. a colour and a sound, are. This implies that there is a sense of “are” that remains the same across different perceptions as they are literally said to have something in common, i.e. their being. This suggests that irrespective of the perceptual specificity of

level of how things are in the world is essentially related to the possibility of formulating judgements.

either, when it comes to their being, they “are” in the same way. The best way I have to make sense of this is that if one says “ $x$  is red” and “ $y$  is loud”, whatever the peculiarity of the perceptions involved in both cases the “is” stands for the idea that there is a fact of the matter as to whether  $x$  is red and  $y$  is loud. This could also explain the opposition between ἴδιον (i.e. peculiar/private), which we saw characterise perception during the discussion of the Secret Doctrine and κοινόν (i.e. common), introduced here. Secondly and consequently, this is also what allows one to formulate judgements about perceptions without perceiving the perception she is talking about, i.e. one can say that  $x$  is soft without simultaneously perceiving its softness, which is another possibility the Secret Doctrine did not envisage.

To summarise, my interpretation is:

- (I) There is no knowledge if there is not anything to be known that exists and is determinate independently of the knower.
- (II) This being can be accessed by means of language, i.e. by entertaining propositionally structured thoughts (where being or possibly other commons are referred to).
- (III) Points (I) and (II) imply one another.

From the vantage-point of my interpretation, the connection between being and truth that is taken as an assumption in the final refutation of whether knowledge is perception, is very clear. Plato’s view is that the only way one can have (linguistic) truth is by connecting it to being. As we have seen, the notion of being in this part of the dialogue seems to be principally connoted by stability in terms of being something independently of its being perceived. To conclude, this complex connection between ontological features of a variety of perceptions, their being cognised by thought and their

being essentially related to the formulation of judgements or statements, with particular regard to the “common” being, go towards the depiction of a minimal realism about truth. This minimal realism about truth is expressed in terms of what is in the world that I perceive is not produced by my perception and *this* can only be discovered outside perceptions, specifically by connecting and comparing them by means of thought. At the same time, this ontological independence is *essentially* related to the ability to formulate judgements. In other words, it is precisely because something is that I can cognise it and describe it, which is clearly consistent with the account I gave of Platonic metaphysics in the first part of this book. Now, I aim to address how the two things are connected in the *Sophist* where the most thorough treatment of truth and falsehood of statements are connected to a very complex ontology, namely the greatest kinds and their communion, and a very specific conception of being as capacity to commune.



PART 3

LANGUAGE AND BEING:  
THE INTERWEAVING OF FORMS  
IN THE *SOPHIST*





## VII. THE KIND BEING AND THE COMMUNION OF KINDS

### 1. *Purpose and Structure of this Part*

As is well known, the main objective of the *Sophist* is seizing the elusive figure of the sophist and distinguishing him from the philosopher and the statesman. In doing this, three fundamental philosophical issues emerge, which allow the sophist to hide until they are properly addressed and solved. These are the ontological status of images, the question concerning not-being and the possibility of linguistic falsehood. To address these questions an extensive reflection on the nature of being and not-being is required. To this purpose, a magnificent battle is engaged by the Eleatic Stranger not only with the sophists but also with the predecessors who treated the notion of being. There are two major positive theses introduced in the dialogue. Firstly, there are some very important and extended kinds, motion, rest, being, sameness

and difference, whose specific relations can be traced. In doing so, it is possible above all to understand what being and not-being are. Secondly, linguistic falsehood is possible, and this is shown by providing an account of how statements are structured, how they work and what it means for them to be true or false. Understandably, these two major pieces of doctrine have drawn much attention from the interpreters. What I aim to do in this last part of the book is to connect these two philosophical innovations and present a precise account of how the connection between kinds is regarded as the necessary ontological basis of declarative statements. The legitimacy of this move can hardly be questioned: at 259e4-6 Plato himself is openly making the case for it when the Eleatic Stranger says that it is through the interweaving of Forms with each other that the λόγος has come about. What I aim to accomplish in this part is an interpretation of this claim.

In so doing, I hope this last part of the book will provide a persuasive conclusion that is able to connect the previous two parts. In the first part, I analysed the notion of Form, with particular regard to its functions and its relations to cognition as can be gathered from the middle dialogues. In the second part, I analysed a radical alternative to the metaphysics of Forms, i.e. a theory where the world is only populated by what is experienced by subjects in the present moment. This radical view proves to be untenable and the main conclusion to be drawn is that minimal linguistic acts such as reference or predication are committed to the conception that the world is thus and so independently of what people experience. In this last part, by showing how the communion of kinds is the ontological ground of simple statements regarding particulars such as Theaetetus and his whereabouts, I aim to connect the philosophical morale of the two previous parts. In other words, if what I argue is true, for Plato the very employment of language, even in simple declarative statements, requires a

very complex metaphysical machinery where being and λόγος are irretrievably and essentially intertwined.

Accordingly, in this chapter, I shall provide my interpretation of the way kinds essentially possess a capacity to commune with each other and why such a view is compulsory as is outlined in a few Stephanus pages (251-254). However, I shall not interpret the complex way the very general kinds and their relations are described (254-259), which has received many interpretations and would require a book on its own. I can do this because my account is only committed to a very general understanding of three kinds, namely being, sameness and difference, i.e. these three kinds are what makes anything else be, be self-identical and be different from other things. After interpreting 251-254, I shall briefly consider how my interpretation fits with the main readings of what is commonly regarded as a definition or mark of being at 247d8-e4. In the next chapter, I shall give my interpretation of the section 259-263 of the dialogue<sup>1</sup>. My main claim is that Plato is introducing a very complex theory of meaning and truth that is the direct consequence of his ontology of kinds and their relations. This has some very important implications in the case one is describing kinds or sensible particulars that participate in those kinds.

Before turning to the texts I aim to interpret, I need to make explicit two main assumptions on which my entire exegetical plan hinges. To begin with, a significant part of the exegetical efforts dealing with the *Sophist* have been devoted to understanding the meaning or sense of the verb “be”. The classical interpretation of being as existence is by Cornford<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The core ideas of the next chapter have already been presented in L. Giovannetti, *Between Truth and Meaning. A Novel Interpretation of the Symplekē in Plato's Sophist*, «Elenchos», 42 (2021), pp. 261-290.

<sup>2</sup> F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit.

Famously, Cornford's view has been criticised by Owen<sup>3</sup>, who basically claims that Plato was not able to isolate an existential use of "is". A similar approach is by Frede, who makes the distinction between the uses and senses of "be", but who nonetheless denies the existential value. Fatally, I submit, the thesis that there is no existential meaning or use of "be" has been refuted by O'Brien<sup>4</sup>. Ackrill claimed that Plato successfully distinguishes existence, copula and identity<sup>5</sup>. A comprehensive view, as we already saw in the chapter on the common features in the *Theaetetus*, is provided by Kahn<sup>6</sup>. Kahn has changed his mind and readjusted his view many times over the decades, however, very crudely, his view is this. The uses of "is" are overdetermined or are at least conceptually related and everything hinges on predication: for something to exist it must also be determined in some way and this is in turn connected to the idea that if *F* characterises *x*, then the statement "*x* is *F*" is true. Another influential view is by Brown, according to whom there is no strong distinction between predication and existence in Plato's use of "is", though he is

<sup>3</sup> G.E.L. Owen, *Plato on not-being*, in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Doubleday, Garden City 1970, pp. 223-267. Cf. also W.G. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1962, pp. 84-88.

<sup>4</sup> D. O'Brien, *A form that 'is' of what 'is not': existential einai in Plato's Sophist*, in G. Boys-Stones, D. El Murr, C. Gill (eds.), *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 221-248. Cf. also D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, in G. Vlastos (ed.), *Plato. A Collection of Critical Essays. Vol. I*, Palgrave Macmillan, London and Basingstoke 1971, p. 271 n. 3.

<sup>5</sup> J.L. Ackrill, *Plato and the Copula: Sophist 251-9*, in R.E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, cit., pp. 207-218.

<sup>6</sup> C. Kahn, *Some Philosophical Uses of "To Be" in Plato*, cit.; C. Kahn, *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 2003.

able to distinguish different sorts of sentences<sup>7</sup>. The debate is much more ramified, many other interpreters have elaborated upon the issue, and the opinionated surveys are many<sup>8</sup>.

My work starts from a very different assumption. We should first distinguish how Plato uses words from what particular theory he is conveying by means of these words. This is no easy matter in a metaphysics where at the fundamental level reality consists of intelligible entities that are related to the meaning of words in a complex manner. It is particularly difficult when Plato is discussing entities that are signified by terms such as “be” and “not-being”. However, I think the central part of the *Sophist* is *not an illustration* of how some concepts such as the meaning of “is” should be used or disambiguated. It is rather the ontologically loaded *explanation* of how some fundamental linguistic acts are *grounded* in non-linguistic facts, namely the communion between kinds. As we have plentifully seen, to provide a ground to what is thus and so, Plato is committed to some extra-mental existing entity that determines how things stand. This person is beautiful and this is on account of the Form of Beauty. My point here is that Plato is not abdicating to this principle in the *Sophist*. This time what these existing entities are meant

<sup>7</sup> L. Brown, *Being in the Sophist. A syntactical enquiry*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 4 (1986), pp. 49-70; Ead., *The verb “To Be” in Greek philosophy: some remarks*, in S. Everson (ed.), *Companion to Ancient thought*, III: *Language*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 212-236.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, Einaudi, Torino 2008, pp. LIX-LXVIII; F. Fronterotta, *Some Remarks on the Senses of Being in the Sophist*, in A. Havlíček, F. Karfik (eds.), *Plato’s Sophist. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, OIKOYMENH, Prague 2011, pp. 35-62; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, pp. 136-139. Cf. also M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans les dialogues de Platon*, Vrin, Paris 2001, pp. 171-175.

to explain, among other things, is how language works. One interesting aspect that emerges from my account is that, just like the Form of Beauty is what is required to determine what happens to be beautiful, here, to determine how statements and their truth work the relevant Form is the kind being. My interpretation is also able to explain why the mistake of thinking that Plato is illustrating the uses of “be” is comprehensible. His notion of being is so intertwined with true or false statements that one could be misled into thinking that he is actually describing how the latter work independently of ontology and metaphysics, especially if one is significantly biased (e.g. Plato needs to abandon the theory of Forms because it does not fit our philosophical palate<sup>9</sup>).

In the next section I shall present the following interpretation not of what “be” means but of what the kind being is. The kind being is what causes the existence of other kinds, where “existence” should be understood as being a kind. As one and the same thing, participation in or communion with the kind being entails selectively establishing further connections to other kinds. In other words, I am attempting to keep together the existence and the predication of each kind as deriving from one single nature, namely the kind being. Thus, according to my ontological framework, what has been extensively conceptualised as the indistinction between copulative and existential meaning of the verb “be” is actually a much more complex

<sup>9</sup> Cf. F. Fronterotta, *Some Remarks on the Senses of Being in the Sophist*, cit., p. 53: «In short, we need to recognize the close dependence of the logical on the ontological, in negative and positive terms: in negative terms, because the ontological dilemma of not-being immediately reflects on the logical problem of the false; in positive terms, because solving the ontological dilemma allows us to also solve the corresponding logical difficulty». Cf. also F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., p. 340.

ontological claim that whatever communes with being is also delivered to a set of relations with other entities and *these* relations are what allows one to say that it is *F*. These are two sides of the same coin: no kind can exist without establishing fixed and precise relations of compatibility or incompatibility with other kinds *and* no kind can establish such relations without existing as one among these kinds<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, the second assumption I rely on follows from the first one: not-being is to be regarded as grounded in a really existing kind that is difference and this is crucial to avoid falling into a paradoxical absolute notion of not-being. This

<sup>10</sup> This clearly eludes the problem of the connection between being determined without existing. If one remains at the logical level and existence is prioritised, this means that one cannot ascribe predicates to a non-existing entity, e.g. Pegasus is winged. However, Pegasus does not exist and yet it makes sense to say that it is winged. Cf. J. Malcolm, *Some Cautionary Remarks on the "is"/"reaches" Analogy*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 31 (2006), pp. 281-296. If one does not think that Plato is describing the meaning of "be", but rather the nature of the existing kind whose nature is responsible for what we do when we successfully use "be", there is no contradiction: for anything that communes with being there is no communion with other kinds without existence and there is no existence without communion with other kinds. As I shall also consider in the next chapter, Plato does not seem to take into account fictional entities in such a way that speaking of something that does not exist is not perceived as a pressing issue in this context (surely not as much as speaking *falsely* of what exists). A very interesting analysis of the existential commitment of the Stranger's conception of the propositional bond is M. Mignucci, *Esistenza e verità nel 'Sofista' di Platone*, «Atti dell'Acc. di Scienze Morali e Politiche di Napoli», 100 (1989), pp. 267-281. The upshot of his interpretation is that to speak of something one must describe it by means of predicates, and in order to do that, the thing must exist. Cf. also F. Leigh, *The copula and semantic continuity in Plato's Sophist*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 34 (2008), pp. 105-121; R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist*, G.C. Neal (ed.), Manchester University Press, Manchester 1975, p. 119 and F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, BUR, Milano 2007, p. 97.



has received a number of analyses<sup>11</sup>. Much debate has been centred on negative identity, i.e. “*F* is not *G*” meaning “*F* is other than *G*”, and negative predication, i.e. “Theaetetus is not flying” meaning not just that Theaetetus and the kind flying are different but that flying does not characterise Theaetetus<sup>12</sup>. I shall not provide an interpretation of this issue as it would require an extensive investigation on the nature of difference and not-being. However, in the next chapter I shall show how non-identity between kinds and the absence of participation between a particular and a kind are connected to explain how false statements work.

## 2. *Selective Communion*

The aim of this section is twofold: firstly, to understand Plato’s argument that if there is no connection between parts of reality, i.e. kinds, then any discourse becomes altogether impossible; secondly, to understand how this connection be-

<sup>11</sup> See F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 289-294; M. Dixsaut, *La négation, le non-être et l’autre dans le Sophiste*, in P. Aubenque (éd.), *Etudes sur le Sophiste de Platon*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 1991, pp. 165-214; D. O’Brien, *Le non-être dans la philosophie grecque: Parménide, Platon, Plotin*, in P. Aubenque (éd.), *Etudes sur le Sophiste de Platon*, cit., pp. 317-364; D. O’Brien, *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, in W. Leszl, F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Eidos-Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, cit., pp. 115-160; F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 97-112; B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. XLV-L.

<sup>12</sup> See D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato’s Problem of Non-Being*, cit.; M. Frede, *The Sophist on false statements*, in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, cit., pp. 398-424; J. van Eck, *Falsity without Negative Predication: On Sophistes 255e-263d*, «Phronesis», 40 (1995), pp. 20-47; P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, pp. 249-259.

tween kinds works and what the role of the kind being is. The argument is opened right after a short pause in the enquiry concerning two views facing each other, which privileged motion or rest as fundamental ontological dimensions. At 250-251, the Eleatic Stranger recognises that being is a third item because if it were motion, given the latter's incompatibility with rest, this would result in rest not being. Likewise, if being were rest, given its incompatibility with motion, this would result in motion not being. At the same time, the Stranger has Theaetetus recognise that being, posited as a third thing beside motion and rest, is neither moving nor at rest. This is felt as paradoxical because it would seem that anything either moves or is at rest. Interestingly, it is remarked that to this level of puzzlement, where being appears to be as elusive as not-being proved to be, they should keep and further pursue the investigation.

This launches a new investigation concerning being. I take this to be a partially new beginning. I shall discuss in the next section why I say it is partially new. However, the investigation starting here seems to be new enough to focus on it in relative autonomy<sup>13</sup>. Notably, this investigation starts by asking in which way one can say the same thing through many names. I say notably because the new examination of the nature of being is immediately linked to naming: any thing can be spoken about through a plurality of linguistic elements for example in attributing to a certain man such qualities as colours, shapes, magnitudes and moral attributes. The gullible people who claim that one can only call the man "man" and the good "good" without mixing different words in constructing discourses are only to be ridiculed. Those

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 102, who says: «Plato signals that the turning point has been reached: henceforth he will endeavour to offer solutions».

people are called “the late-learners”, mainly because the one who holds this view is either young and naïve or has come to this pseudo-knowledge belatedly. This passage has received a number of interpretations, and it is not relevant to understand why they say it for the present investigation<sup>14</sup>. Here it must only be kept in mind that the problem of being is addressed through the question concerning the possibility of speaking of one item by means of a variety of words. Then, when it comes to settling the question, the Eleatic Stranger envisages three jointly exhaustive options (*Soph.* 251d5-e2):

- (I) Nothing is attached to anything else, and everything is put in the discourse as unmixed (ἄμεικτα) since it is impossible (ἀδύνατον) for all things to partake of one another.
- (II) Everything is drawn together as the same since it is able (δυνατά) to commune (ἐπικοινωνεῖν) with everything else<sup>15</sup>.
- (III) Something can mix with something else, other things cannot.

My goal in this section is to understand how the impracticability of (I) and (II) depends on reasons whose nature conjugates semantic and ontological views in a complex manner, and how Plato’s notion of being here is the ground for (III). At this preliminary stage, it is worth noting that the question concerning being is at the beginning put in terms

<sup>14</sup> For an exhaustive discussion of the late-learners’ passage, see P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., pp. 102-109.

<sup>15</sup> The reference to the sameness of everything is interesting. Given the subsequent developments of the dialogue, does it mean that it participates in the kind sameness with respect to everything else or that each kind combines with every other in such a way that they are perfectly interchangeable?

of speaking of one thing through many words, which is also what arouses the ludicrous criticism of the late-learners, and then it switches back quite naturally to the connections between extra-linguistic entities. The young Theaetetus opts to examine the consequences of each possibility, starting from (I). Interestingly, the Eleatic Stranger rephrases (I) as the scenario where nothing has any capacity (*δύναμιν*) of communication (*κοινωνίας*) with anything else. Throughout these passages the term *δύναμις*, verbal and adjectival forms included, is pivotal. Again, the examples are motion and rest, and the Eleatic Stranger asks whether either of them is (or can be) if it does not commune in relation to (*προσκοινωνοῦν*) being (*οὐσίας*). The key point here is that if there is no communion between kinds, then kinds such as motion and rest will not commune with being, and therefore motion and rest could not be<sup>16</sup>. I take this assertion to mean that if motion and rest did not commune with being, they would not be existing kinds. This, I think, is sufficient grounds to consider all this talk of communing or not-communing as dealing with kinds, which will also be made explicit when discussing (III), as we shall see shortly<sup>17</sup>.

The Stranger refers to two factions, namely the Offspring of the Earth and the Friends of Forms who think that reality is only what our hands impact or some forms that stand beyond the sensory sphere, respectively (I shall briefly touch on these two groups of thinkers in the next section). To recall, these two are the most opposed mind-sets which equated being with motion or with rest. The Eleatic Stranger also briefly mentions

<sup>16</sup> See *Soph.* 251e10-252a4.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 105, who says that the issue raised by the late-learners arises when speaking of particulars and that kinds are introduced when these particulars are said to be «man» or «good» (p. 108).

monism again as that view that makes everything one. At any rate, all groups of thinkers entertain an assumption:

In a single moment, then, it seems, with this admission [*scil.* that motion and rest are not insofar as they do not commune with being] everything is turned upside down, whether for those who have everything changing, for those who bring it to a rest by making it one, or for those who reduce the things that are to forms that remain forever exactly as they are; for all of these people add in being, some of them saying that things really are changing, the others saying they really are at rest<sup>18</sup>.

The first part of this quotation asserts that everything is turned upside down thanks to the non-communion with being in the most diverse cases, whether mobilism or monism or the Friends of Forms. The reason is that all options add in being *because* it is *said* (λέγοντες) that things *really* or *truly* (ὄντως) move or rest, respectively. Why should it sound like a great innovation? The explanation presents at least two aspects. First, the reference to language. This new treatment of being is introduced because in all options those who support them state the option in question, e.g. everything that is is in motion or at rest. Secondly, the way the supporters have to state it is that things *really* or *actually* move or are at rest. I think that the argument is the following: motion communes with being, which means that motion really exists as a kind, i.e. there is an existing mind-independent whatness

<sup>18</sup> *Soph.* 252a5-10: «ταχὺ δὴ ταύτη γε τῇ συνομολογίᾳ πάντα ἀνάστατα γέγονεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἅμα τε τῶν τὸ πᾶν κινούντων καὶ τῶν ὡς ἐν ἰσπάντων καὶ ὅσοι κατ' εἶδη τὰ ὄντα κατὰ ταυτὰ ὡσαύτως ἔχοντα εἶναι φασιν ἀεὶ: πάντες γὰρ οὗτοι τό γε εἶναι προσάπτουσιν, οἱ μὲν ὄντως κινεῖσθαι λέγοντες, οἱ δὲ ὄντως ἐστηκότ' εἶναι».

determining what being in motion is or means, and *therefore* whenever one says that everything is motion or is in motion she is assuming that what she says is how reality is or that things really are as said to be.

Thus, some one kind's communion with being is presented as a presupposition entertained by those who state that things really are in the way represented by that kind (e.g. one says things really move on the basis that motion communes with being). It would seem that the ontologically more fundamental issue is not when one is to decide whether things move or are at rest, in other words, whether there exists only that which moves or rests; rather, the authentic ontological issue lies in explaining how the communion with being is at the basis of things really being as they are said to be, which is signalled by the use of that "ὄντως". Thus, if there were no communion, motion or rest would not commune with being, which means that they would not be. This is regarded as unacceptable because the advocates of both "everything is in motion" and "only what is at rest is real" assume that what they say is real. The simple inference I am proposing here, which seems quite compelling, is just that the communion with being is the ontological basis of why one can say that things stand in a certain way, *whatever the theory*. To recapitulate, firstly, the possibility that what is being said is really or truly the case *depends* on a relation between two kinds, e.g. being and motion or being and rest, or to put it better, on the relation between whatever kind one is talking about and the kind being. Secondly, saying that everything is in motion or at rest in the way of the predecessors sounds less fundamental than the discourse at hand: despite being adverse factions, they both assume a fundamental point, namely that what they say is actually the case and this, as we have just seen, is the result of entertaining a communion with being. The last excerpt from the text is followed right away by another which

looks symmetrical and whose conclusion is even more overtly linked to language:

And what about those too who put all things together at one time and divide them at another, whether it's an unlimited number of elements being united into one and then derived from one, or whether it's a limited number they're dividing into and putting things together from – no matter whether they posit the two processes as occurring alternately or going on all the time? All of this would be nonsense if nothing is actually capable of mixing with anything else<sup>19</sup>.

Plato seems to be listing all the different thinkers who before him addressed the question concerning being and whose reflections and views he exposed and criticised earlier in the dialogue. They are likely to be identified with Empedocles and Anaxagoras. The key thought is that these thinkers do not escape the fate of the other thinkers mentioned above. These thinkers have various theories about reality. And yet all of them can articulate those theories through the same faculty, which is language. In addition, they assume that what they say really is (as they say). The conclusion of the quotation is complementary to the conclusion of the previous passage: if there were no mixing together, then those thinkers would not say anything or they would speak of nothing. The phrase renders λέγοιεν ἄν οὐδέν and can be taken to mean “to be nonsense” in the sense of “they would not say anything meaningful” or “they

<sup>19</sup> *Soph.* 252b1-6: «καὶ μὴν καὶ ὅσοι τοτὲ μὲν συντιθέασιν τὰ πάντα, τοτὲ δὲ διαιροῦσιν, εἴτε εἰς ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς ἄπειρα εἴτε εἰς πέρασ ἔχοντα στοιχεῖα διαιρούμενοι καὶ ἐκ τούτων συντιθέντες, ὁμοίως μὲν ἂν ἐν μέρει τοῦτο τιθῶσι γιγνόμενον, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐὰν ἀεὶ, κατὰ πάντα ταῦτα λέγοιεν ἄν οὐδέν, εἴπερ μηδεμία ἔστι σύμμιξις».

would not say anything true"<sup>20</sup>. The force of this argument relies on the assumption that one cannot have statements in the absence of ontic communion, i.e. non-linguistic entities entertaining some sort of relation. It is worth making explicit that the scenario where words can be joint to produce meaningful utterances *and* there is no communion in reality is not even considered. By contrast, the refutation is hinging precisely on the implication between a certain ontological theory and a certain outcome at the linguistic level<sup>21</sup>.

Here the Strangers says that the late-learners' view is committed to the same argument of total absence of communion and that in their case the argument is pursued in the most ridiculous way, namely by claiming that something cannot be spoken of through the communion with something else's affection<sup>22</sup>, which is to say through the name of something a given thing is in communion with. It is not entirely clear

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, «Acta Philosophica Fennica», 14 (1962), p. 24 n. 3; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 112 n. 26. As I shall show in the next chapter, Plato is working out a very peculiar theory concerning the connection between truth and meaning.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 59, where the author recognises that semantical atomism is a necessary condition for ontological atomism, «for if some words which designate can be combined meaningfully, then some parts of reality are related, and ontological atomism cannot hold». In other words, ontological atomism (i.e. total isolation) implies semantic atomism, but the latter is false, and therefore the former is not the case. This is directly connected to the interweaving of Forms at 259e because discourse is said to come to be for us (against semantic atomism) and also because this happens through the interweaving of Forms (against ontological atomism). In the next chapter I shall provide a detailed analysis of the interweaving of Forms.

<sup>22</sup> See *Soph.* 252b8-10.



in what way the late-learners are committed to (I)<sup>23</sup>. What is clear is that if we have  $x$  and  $F$ , and  $x$  communes with  $F$ , their view excludes that  $x$  can be said to be  $F$  or called under the name of  $F$ . The connection with (I) lies in the fact that the only reason why such a linguistic prescription should hold is that in reality there is no connection that is able to ground the connection between  $x$  and  $F$ . This, however, states again the point I am actually interested in here: the viability of a linguistic act such as “ $x$  is  $F$ ” is actually determined by ontological facts involving  $x$  and  $F$  qua non-linguistic items.

It remains to be understood why the late-learners’ claim is so ridiculous. The first reason is that it is self-refuting. For the late-learners are powerless to not use some connective terms or phrases like “be”, “separate”, “of others” or “by itself”, and not join them together (συνάπτειν) in discourses<sup>24</sup>. Since Plato’s assumption, as we have seen, seems to be that any linguistic connection needs to be ontologically grounded in some communion, it is self-refuting to employ such linguistic acts to state that there is no communion or to put forward some view that implies there is no communion<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 112. It also depends on how their thesis should be interpreted. Crivelli favours the essentialist predication reading.

<sup>24</sup> See *Soph.* 252c2-9. The use of the verb συνάπτειν recalls *Soph.* 252a9 where Plato used the verb προσάπτειν to say that the previous thinkers add in being when they claim that things really move. The act of combining together parts of the discourse in order to create meaning is analogous to the real connection between realities (and, remarkably, this is first exhibited through linguistic consonance).

<sup>25</sup> P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 113 offers a variety of options concerning why the late-learners’ view is self refuting. He favours the view that to state “Every kind is separately from the others on its own” one is employing some expressions such as “is”, “separately from”, “others” and “on its own”, which are kinds and therefore

The second reason why the late-learners are ludicrous is because they do not understand that one can say something *only if* what he talks about is put in a plurality of relations. Thus, the main result of the argument seems to be that one can say something *precisely* thanks to, and not despite, calling something in virtue of something else's affection, hence the charge of great ridicule against the late-learners. This will be clearly stated at 262a ff., where a number of different linguistic items must be conjoined to accomplish a proper statement, as I shall extensively analyse in the next chapter. The Stranger's final point is that if there were no communion, then no one would be entitled to say anything at all. But if that communion obtains, by necessity a plurality of words can be meaningfully joint together. This is enough to exclude (I), which is the total absence of communion.

As far as (II) is concerned, which is the option that everything is connected with everything else, the matter is rapidly dealt with. Again, this is spelt out by asking whether every-

the statement where they figure is actually stating the communion of every kind with the ones denoted by the expressions. I definitely think that the passage can be taken to imply that some non-linguistic items are needed to ground the other linguistic expressions such as those just mentioned. This is consistent with what follows in the dialogue where specific kinds such as sameness and difference are used to explain expressions such as "to be the same as" or "to be other than" in virtue of the connections the establish with other kinds. I can also accept that in order to substantiate their view the late-learners might at some point utter something like "Every kind is separately from the others on its own", which is inconsistent with their view. However, I think that the main thrust of the argument is that *any* linguistic act that aims to be true is actually assuming some communion involving non-linguistic items, especially being. This is what is behind the assertion at *Soph.* 252b8-10. If, however, these stubborn silly fellows stick to their view and refuse to say that "a man is good" is perfectly acceptable, they cannot even say that man is man or good is good as expressions like "is", "separately from", etc., are always required.

thing has the capacity (δύναμιν) to intercommunicate (ἐπικοινωνία) with everything else<sup>26</sup>. This time Theaetetus gathers up enough courage to answer. If everything had communed with everything else, then motion would rest and rest would move. This formulation is not entirely clear and might suggest that the communion between these two kinds is to be understood in the same way as the predicates “move” and “stay at rest” apply to sensible things. However, kinds are no particulars in space and time. There is no straightforward, i.e. physical, way in which kinds can be characterised as moving or staying at rest<sup>27</sup>. What is more, this is not discussed further in the text.

Theaetetus relies on the intuitive point that motion and rest are opposites and thus incompatible. The argument could be taken to mean that the nature of motion itself will contemplate being at rest and vice versa or, alternatively, that things which move are also resting and vice versa<sup>28</sup>. In my view, the statement should be interpreted in relation to the first introduction of total communion at 251d8-9, where to

<sup>26</sup> See *Soph.* 252d2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Some options, related to questions I shall introduce in the next section, are that kinds move and are at rest because of the capacity to interact with other kinds and the stability to act as object of knowledge, respectively. The issue is that these latter interpretations of the way kinds can be said to move or to stay at rest cannot be meant here because, if true, they would in fact apply to both motion and rest, whereas the argument is clearly *excluding* that motion stays at rest and that rest moves.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., pp. 120-127. The author in general discusses the possible difference in speaking about kinds between attributing some properties to those kinds or considering whatever instantiates one kind also instantiates some other kind (pp. 120-122). It is also worth highlighting the distinction Crivelli proposes with regard to the nature of sentences that he calls «ordinary» and «definitional» readings of sentences (pp. 123-127). Cf. also F. Leigh, *Restless Forms and Changeless Causes*, «Proceedings of Aristotelian Society», 112 (2012), pp. 239-261.

explain the indiscriminate relation of every kind with each other the Stranger talks of drawing everything together or joining all things in one and the same thing (πάντα εἰς ταὐτὸν συναγάγωμεν). This may suggest that the Stranger's point is the following: each kind would be able to commune with each other in such a way that each kind results indistinguishable from all the other insofar as they are characterised (in a non-specified sense) by the same set of kinds (i.e. all of them) and *this* implies that opposite natures such as motion and rest would also be characterised by their opposites, which is by the greatest necessity impossible, as stated at 252d9-10. As a further consequence, we can also assume, if there is total intercommunion nothing can be *said* to be *F* more than non-*F*<sup>29</sup>. For there is no distinctive trait that enables one to distinguish one kind from another given their total communication.

Hence, (II) is disposed of, and from the untenability of (I) and (II), the third option stands out. I shall label this view "selective communion". This is first explained by means of two analogies. With regard to its combination, reality bears some resemblance to grammar and music<sup>30</sup>. For instance, letters cannot be associated indiscriminately. Some fit well with others, whereas others do not (καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνων

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. G. Ryle, *Letters and Syllables in Plato*, «Philosophical Review», 69 (1960), pp. 431-451; J.R. Trevaskis, *The megista gene and the vowel analogy of Plato*, *Sophist 253*, «Phronesis», 11 (1966), pp. 99-116; S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, St. Augustine's Press, South Bend 1983, pp. 245-268. Arguably, the point of the comparison is not that reality is like the actual musical performance or the single grammatically correct utterance. In contrast, reality is like the fixed rules which constitute the nature of the disciplines and which are given before any single play or utterance. For a detailed analysis of the analogy of letters, see A. Oberhammer, *Buchstaben als paradeigma in Platons Spätdialogen*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 155-181.

τὰ μὲν ἀναρμοστεῖ που πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὰ δὲ συναρμόττει<sup>31</sup>). It is noteworthy what the Eleatic Stranger adds to the alphabet analogy: some among the letters, the vowels, run through them all in such a way that without one of them it would be impossible for any other letter to fit together with any other (ὥστε ἄνευ τινὸς αὐτῶν ἀδύνατον ἀρμόττειν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἕτερον ἐτέρῳ<sup>32</sup>). Vowels are those special letters which are needed to join consonants. Likewise, there are some vowel-like kinds that are responsible for the communion and separation between consonant-like kinds<sup>33</sup>. This pair of analogies, letters and musical sounds, should not be pushed too far because it is introduced and treated very quickly, like an obvious matter, and also because grammar and music are employed here to convey the same idea, even though the two do not entirely overlap as to the way they combine a number of elements<sup>34</sup>. Hence, I think that the analogy is meant to illustrate the following points:

- (a) There is a plurality of entities that are put in connection (against absence of communion) in a non-indiscriminate way (against total communion), i.e. some fit together with others and others do not.

<sup>31</sup> *Soph.* 253a1-2.

<sup>32</sup> *Soph.* 253a4-5.

<sup>33</sup> See *Soph.* 253b9-c3. Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., pp. 49-56; S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, cit., pp. 245-68; F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 410-413; F. Teisserenc, *Consonnes et voyelles: le fonctions de l'Être et de l'Autre dans le Sophiste de Platon (251a-259e)*, «Dialogue», 46 (2007), pp. 231-264; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, p. 116; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., pp. 144-153.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 171-173.

- (b) Among these entities, there are some special ones that are able to connect with all entities and that are needed for the latter to fit together at all.
- (c) Therefore, after recognising that there needs to be selective communion, this communion is based on the action and nature of *some entities* that are themselves involved in the communion. If the letters represent kinds<sup>35</sup>, then some kinds are what brings about the selective fitting together of all kinds.

Consider what the Strangers says few lines below:

So then given that we've agreed that kinds too mix in such ways as these, must a person not have some sort of expertise to progress in his arguments if he is going to show correctly which sorts of kinds are in harmony with which and which are not receptive to each other, and further, whether there are some that hold them together, running through them in such a way as to make them capable of mixing; and again, in cases where they divide off, whether there are others similarly running through them all that cause the division?<sup>36</sup>

The Stranger openly refers to kinds: kinds mix with one another in the same way as letters or sounds (τὰ γένη πρὸς ἄλληλα κατὰ ταυτὰ μείξεως ἔχειν) and one has to recognise both their relations of consonance and which of them are not receptive to

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Soph.* 253a7, where it is asked which letters «δυνατὰ κοινωνεῖν».

<sup>36</sup> *Soph.* 253b10-c3: «ἐπειδὴ καὶ τὰ γένη πρὸς ἄλληλα κατὰ ταυτὰ μείξεως ἔχειν ὁμολογήκαμεν, ἄρ' οὐ μετ' ἐπιστήμης τινὸς ἀναγκαῖον διὰ τῶν λόγων πορευέσθαι τὸν ὀρθῶς μέλλοντα δεῖξεν ποῖα ποίοις συμφωνεῖ τῶν γενῶν καὶ ποῖα ἄλληλα οὐ δέχεται; καὶ δὴ καὶ διὰ πάντων εἰ συνέχοντ' ἅπτ' αὐτ' ἔστιν, ὥστε συμμείγνυσθαι δυνατὰ εἶναι, καὶ πάλιν ἐν ταῖς διαίρεσεσιν, εἰ δι' ὄλων ἕτερα τῆς διαίρεσεως αἴτια;» Rowe reads κατὰ τὰ τοιαυτὰ instead of κατὰ ταυτὰ.

some others (ποῖα ποίοις συμφωνεῖ τῶν γενῶν καὶ ποῖα ἄλληλα οὐ δέχεται). Furthermore, it needs to be understood whether some kinds hold the others, so that it is possible for them to mix together (διὰ πάντων εἰ συνέχοντ' ἅττ' αὐτ' ἐστίν, ὥστε συμμείγνυσθαι δυνατὰ εἶναι). It is worth mentioning that the technique that in this respect resembles grammar and music is the ἐπιστήμη that accompanies the one who advances through the discourses (μετ' ἐπιστήμης τινὸς ἀναγκαῖον διὰ τῶν λόγων πορεύεσθαι). This metaphor is a Platonic *topos*<sup>37</sup>. It is worth highlighting here because in the next chapter I shall endeavour to show that declarative statements are made possible by the metaphysical view that I am calling selective communion, and therefore, a certain use of language that is able to skilfully describe the way kinds commune such as the one introduced here can be shown to have important consequences<sup>38</sup>. As is well known, this science or knowledge is called διαλεκτική, dialectic, the science of those who are free, and it divides according to kinds without mistaking the same Form for a different one and vice versa (τὸ κατὰ γένη διαιρεῖσθαι καὶ μῆτε ταυτὸν εἶδος ἕτερον ἠγήσασθαι μῆτε ἕτερον ὄν ταυτὸν)<sup>39</sup>. The text goes on with a final statement:

The person who can do this [*scil.* divide by kinds] is then surely well enough equipped to see when one form is spread

<sup>37</sup> See for instance *Resp.* 510b; 511b; 533c; 534c.

<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, it has been argued that to be the “technician” of being and to be that of language amounts to the same theoretical figure, see F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 410–411 n. 218. Naturally, the technician in question is the one who *uses* language. In the language of the *Cratylus* then it would be the dialectician and not the νομοθέτης/lawgiver, cf. *Crat.* 388e–391b.

<sup>39</sup> For a brilliant analysis of the task of the dialectician and the nature of dialectics, see M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans le dialogue de Platon*, cit., pp. 151–207.

all through many, each of them standing separately, or when many forms that are different from one another are embraced from the outside by one; or again when one is connected as one through many forms, themselves wholes, or when many forms are completely divided off and separate. This is all a matter of knowing how to determine, kind by kind, how things can or cannot combine<sup>40</sup>.

This quotation presents a description of how kinds work where a variety of significant cases are considered. There is the one Forms spreading through many. The many kinds through which one given Form is spread are said to stand separately, probably meaning “independently”. It is also said that many differing Forms are embraced from the outside by one Form<sup>41</sup>, and that one Form goes through many wholes. Finally, some Forms are divided off since they do not combine. To know which relations obtain between kinds, the dialectician needs to determine for every kind its capacity to commune with the other kinds. The final statement in the cited passage is terminologically revealing: the gist of the argument is that one has to know the many ways in which kinds are able to commune (κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται) or not (ὅπη μή). This passage is ambiguous and the interpreters have connected it either to the kinds that are dealt with in the method of collection and

<sup>40</sup> *Soph.* 253d5-e2: «οὐκοῦν ὁ γε τοῦτο δυνατὸς δρᾶν μίαν ιδέαν διὰ πολλῶν, ἐνὸς ἐκάστου κειμένου χωρὶς, πάντη διατεταμένην ἰκανῶς διαισθάνεται, καὶ πολλὰς ἐτέρας ἀλλήλων ὑπὸ μιᾶς ἔξωθεν περιεχομένης, καὶ μίαν αὖ δι’ ὅλων πολλῶν ἐν ἐνὶ συνημμένην, καὶ πολλὰς χωρὶς πάντη διωρισμένας: τοῦτο δ’ ἔστιν, ἢ τε κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται καὶ ὅπη μή, διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθα».

<sup>41</sup> With regard to the metaphor of weaving, this language is noticeably precise. In the weaving of a web, the threads are connected in constructing the entire net without damaging the integrity of each thread. The whole of the web is built on the joints which fan out. In communing with many Forms, any given Form remains a unity, a whole, as do the Forms communed with.



division or to the way the greatest kinds combine in the section immediately following in the text<sup>42</sup>. Both have a way to make sense of the many assertions in the passage above and both readings are sensible as descriptions of what the scope of dialectic is within the overall structure of the dialogue. After all, most of it deals with the divisions concerning the sophist and at its core the communion of kinds is discussed. From my point of view, the problem with the first option (dialectic as method of collection and division) is that the vowel-like kinds play no role. The problem with the second option (dialectic is determining the way the five greatest kinds combine) is too restrictive.

I would deal with this issue as follows. At 253b10-c3 we have seen a clear statement where both kinds that should be investigated with regard to the way they combine or not

<sup>42</sup> The traditional interpretation by for instance F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., is that we are faced with the relations between genera and species as they are found by the method of collection and division. A variant of this traditional interpretation is by R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist*, cit., who thinks that particulars are involved as well. An alternative view by A. Gómez-Lobo, *Plato's Description of Dialectic in the "Sophist" 253 d 1-e2*, «Phronesis», 22 (1977), pp. 29-47, is that here the Stranger is not describing the method of division, but the way at least some of the greatest kinds commune, most likely being and difference, which does not fall within a genus-species structure. Contra N. Zaks, *Science de l'entrelacement des formes, science suprême, science des hommes libres: la dialectique dans le Sophiste 253b-254b*, «Elenchos», 38 (2017), pp. 61-81, who claims that when it comes to separating kinds, this starts from taking two mutually exclusive kinds as happens with the method of divisions. For a version of the traditional view, i.e. this passage deals with kinds to be defined and not the way the greatest kinds commune, that at the same time is not committed to the idea of conceiving kinds in terms of inclusion and divisions, see F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 414-417. The formulation remains quite vague so as to suggest that Plato is doing it on purpose, cf. B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., p. 175.

(consonant-like kinds) and kinds that are responsible for the connection and separation are mentioned (vowel-like kinds<sup>43</sup>). Hence, the basic idea is that kinds establish relations selectively and this is because of some kinds among them that effect the connection and the separation. The most natural way to understand the source of separation is by referring to the kind difference, which is about to be introduced in the dialogue<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, later in the text at 254b8-d2, the Stranger feels the need to restrict to the greatest ones the number of kinds whose relations are to be investigated. This suggests that his previous talk of the way unspecified kinds are connected was more general and probably more extended than the restriction he is proposing now. I would employ these two references to address the passage under investigation, keeping in mind that this is a tentative solution and that probably the question remains underdetermined. The problem with the two main interpretations is that they focus on either the consonant-like kinds and the way they combine, as is disclosed by the method of collection and division, or on the vowel-like kinds and the way they commune, as is described later in the dialogue. By contrast the Stranger might be describing a variety of cases of how vowel-like kinds affect all kinds, i.e. other vowel-like and consonant-like kinds. In this third option I am proposing, the

<sup>43</sup> It must be kept in mind that vowel-like kinds are responsible for the communion of consonant-like kinds, but they *also* affect the other vowel-like kinds. For instance, difference is responsible for the separation between the kind human being and the kind horse, but it is also responsible for the separation between the kind human being and the kind being, see G. Movia, *Apparenza essere e verità. Commentario storico-filosofico al "Sofista" di Platone*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1991, p. 301.

<sup>44</sup> It must also be noted here that separation is not the opposite of connection. If we have two kinds *F* and *G*, they are separate, i.e. non-identical, because of some specific kind (i.e. difference) and this is compatible with both *F* and *G* communing and *F* and *G* *not*-communing.

main idea behind the interpretation of this passage as describing collection and division is also respected: describing the way vowel-like kinds commune with all kinds also includes the relation of communion and non-communion the latter entertain. In other words, dialectic would be regarded as the technique or science that is able to divide by kinds in following the way they commune or not *in relation to* those special kinds that effect the communion. So, in following the kind being one will be able to see the kinds it spreads through and also to see what relations they entertain, which includes the relations found by the method of collection and division.

This reading, however, will have two implications. Firstly, even though the relations between consonant-like kinds as are described by collection and division are implied in taking the passage as describing the way vowel-like kinds work, the letter of the text cannot be speaking of both at the same time. To put it roughly, the form “is spread all through many”, should be, e.g. the kind being and not the unity of a given genus that contains or surrounds a species. Accordingly, in the third option I am considering, a possible reconstruction could be:

- (1) “one form is spread all through many” is the kind being;
- (2) “each of them standing separately” is consistent with what I shall argue shortly, namely that the kinds that really exist (not only the other vowel-like kinds) thanks to their communion with being also have their own nature that is irreducible to being;
- (3) “when many forms that are different from one another are embraced from the outside by one” should again be the kind being, seen from the things that commune with it as could be derived from 250b8-11, where there is the same phrasing that motion and rest are embraced by being, which means that they are. It also suggests a point that crops up often in this part of the dialogue,

namely that if a kind communes with being, this does not make that identical with being;

- (4) “when one is connected as one through many forms, themselves wholes” this sentence is decidedly mysterious; however, the phrase δι’ ὄλων πολλῶν is clearly reminiscent of δι’ ὄλων at 253c3 where the phrase is associated with the causes of separation. This could suggest that we are faced with the kind difference. Why this way of putting it? A reason could be that the Stranger needed to highlight the unity of what causes the separation between many things. For instance, *G* being different from *F* and *C* being different from *P* could intuitively be regarded as different because of what they respectively are. By contrast, the Stranger is here stressing that what makes *F* non-identical with *G* and *P* non-identical with *C* is the same entity, i.e. the kind difference, and is none of the four kinds (which is asserted at 255e3-5);
- (5) “when many forms are completely divided off and separate” this would be the case of distinct kinds that do not commune with each other.

If this reading is consistent, in what sense does the Stranger say, at the end of the cited passage, «τοῦτο δ’ ἔστιν, ἧ̃ τε κοινωνεῖν ἕκαστα δύναται καὶ ὅπη μὴ, διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι»<sup>45</sup>? I wish to make a very important point: dividing by kind, as is understood on my reading of the passage,

<sup>45</sup> Rowe renders that τοῦτο δ’ ἔστιν by «It’s all a matter...», which suggests that the Stranger means that if one knows how to divide kind by kind then she will be able to see what happens in (1)-(5). By contrast, Fronterotta and Centrone translate «in questo consiste...» (it consists in...) and «ciò significa...» (this means...), which suggests that the Stranger is using (1)-(5) to explain what dividing by kinds means.

does not limit itself to explaining the way vowel-like kinds such as being and difference structure the rest of the kinds. It rather suggests that all the kinds according to which divisions or distinctions can be made can actually be divided and so described thanks to the “structuring” that they receive from the vowel-like kinds. This does not equate to describing *just* the vowel-like kinds. In other words, saying that the dialectician who divides by kinds is able to see (1) and (4) does not imply that dividing by kinds is only describing being and difference. It could be taken to mean that by seeing (1) the dialectician is aware of what kinds genuinely exist and how they commune with others or by seeing (4) how they differ from others. On this reading the point of the passage is that knowing how to divide by kinds is essentially being able to see that, firstly, being goes through all of them, which means that kinds exist and that they establish further relations; secondly, in doing so they are not so mixed as to lose their whatness; thirdly, they are divided by a unique nature; finally, some of them never commune. In other words, dividing by kind is not uniquely devoted to describing the nature of being and difference. Dividing by kinds deals with *any* really existing sets of kinds *insofar as they are elements of the structure that is brought about the vowel-like kinds*, which very generally at this stage of the dialogue are conceptualised as kinds that perform the connection and the separation of all kinds. To put it crudely, to divide by kind presupposes that kinds are divided in a certain way and that the dividing is carried out properly, i.e. without thinking either that the same Form is different or, when it is different, that it is the same, as stated at 253d1-3.

The second implication of this reading is that in the quoted passage the Stranger is not describing a *procedure*. In other words, the various stages described in the text are not steps to discover how things stand. They should rather be a descrip-

tion of the *result* of the dialectical enquiry which captures the metaphysical structure of the world that consists in the specific way the really existing kinds are connected. A way to substantiate this could be again the remark at 253d1-3, where it is said that dialectic knowledge consists in (I) dividing by kind and (II) not thinking either that the same form is different or, when it is different, that it is the same. This is so because (I) is dividing by kind *by means of language* and, despite its peculiar phrasing, (II) can easily be taken to mean at least that in dividing one must get things right<sup>46</sup>.

Be that as it may, I wish to stress that the *overall* objective of my interpretation consists in recognising that the Stranger's point is that kinds commune selectively. This is definitely compatible with the two received interpretations of this passage. The view that dialectic coincides with the method of collection and division has it that consonant-like kinds establish some relations that are described in the passage, but are nonetheless grounded in the vowel-like kinds. The view that this description of dialectic is anticipating the communion of the greatest kinds is also compatible because it is not meant to deny what the Stranger has just said, namely

<sup>46</sup> This second implication makes my interpretation of the passage inconsistent with the reading that this description of dialectic is laying out the method of collection and division because in the case of the latter the passage would be illustrating the many steps of that particular method and not the metaphysical structure involving consonant-like and vowel-like kinds. By contrast, the passage is at least partially underdetermined with regard to the reading that the description of dialectic is anticipating the relations between the greatest kinds because the greatest kinds, at least being and difference, do what they do to every kind, including themselves and the other greatest ones. In other words, saying that there is a Form spread through many one can interpret that "many" as all the greatest kinds or all kinds in general. Accordingly, one should choose with regard to the context and I think it makes sense not to restrict the many only to the very great kinds.

that both sorts of kinds, i.e. consonant-like and vowel-like, establish relations and that the latter are responsible for it. The interpretation I proposed has its main thrust in that the Stranger has just said that kinds commune and some of them operate conjunctions and separations and he will shortly say that to go on with the enquiry the number of kinds should be reduced. Accordingly, my interpretation has the passage illustrate the way kinds are conjoined and separated and involves both consonant- and vowel-like kinds. However, what is shared by most interpreters is that the picture I claim the text is *illustrating*, namely the structuring that vowel-like kinds perform, is at least *presupposed* also in the alternative interpretations of the text.

As has already been pointed out, the *Sophist* goes on to discuss the so-called greatest kinds, that is those kinds which connect and run through every other kind. They are selected because analysing all kinds together is unbearably demanding. Once the range of kinds under investigation is restricted, the method is first to consider what each of them is like, then what power of mutual communion they entertain (πρῶτον μὲν ποῖα ἕκαστά ἐστιν, ἔπειτα κοινωνίας ἀλλήλων πῶς ἔχει δυνάμεως<sup>47</sup>). It is paramount to the present analysis that the relation of dependence goes from the natures to the relations to other kinds. I shall not analyse the complex way the greatest kinds commune with each other and where to locate non-being. However, it is exegetically quite safe, as a result of the section 254-259, to assume that being, sameness and difference are considered as genuinely existing kinds which are responsible for the other kinds being, being the same as themselves or self-identical and different from the others. To conclude this

<sup>47</sup> *Soph.* 254c3-4.

section, I wish to focus on the ontological picture we have seen thus far.

The theory that seems to be endorsed by the Stranger can reasonably be summarised as follows:

- (1) Some form of communion is required, otherwise nobody could say anything (meaningfully or truly);
- (2) every kind communes with being insofar as it exists<sup>48</sup>;
- (3) kinds are also thought of as communing with kinds other than being;
- (4) this communion is selective, i.e. some kinds commune with others, whereas some do not;
- (5) the selective fitting together of kinds is carried out by some of them, especially the kind being<sup>49</sup> (the analogy of vowels and consonants).
- (6) Therefore, communion with the kind being is at the same time a necessary ontological ground for the existence of each kind along with the relations they are able to establish.

Very generally, these vowel-like kinds are *at least* being, sameness and difference, which are also three among the greatest kinds<sup>50</sup>. It is worth concentrating on the Stranger's argument that any given kind also establishes further relations with kinds other than the greatest ones. This I think is the implication of the very notion of selective communion and

<sup>48</sup> See *Soph.* 250a-c; 256a1-2; 256d8-9; 256e3-4.

<sup>49</sup> See *Soph.* 253c. Cf. F. Fronterotta, *L'être et la participation de l'autre: une nouvelle ontologie dans le Sophiste*, «Les Études philosophiques», 3 (1995), p. 334, and P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 203.

<sup>50</sup> I say "at least" because the status of motion and rest is more problematic and it there is no room nor the need to address this issue here. As



how the kind being has been presented thus far. To say that some kinds fit together and some other do not *cannot* mean that some commune with being (or the other kinds universally communed with, for that matter) and some do not. This because one of the reasons why the total absence of communion did not work is precisely because without communion kinds such as motion and rest would not commune with being, which implies that they would not be. Consequently, one needs to assume that each kind communes with being insofar as it is a really existing kind. Thus, the selective communion (some kinds fit together, some other do not) must hold between kinds other than being (and the same applies to sameness and difference). From this vantage point, the vowel-analogy comes in: some vowel-like kinds are such that the selective fitting together of all kinds comes about thanks to the bond they are able to produce.

The key idea is that the Stranger is claiming that kinds are actual existing entities, that these kinds entertain a set

is well known, the expression “greatest kinds” can mean either extension or importance. Motion and rest are *apertis verbis* called greatest kinds at 254d4-5, but they do not commune with all kinds (e.g. they do not commune with each other). At the same time, being, sameness and difference are counted among the greatest kinds and at least being and difference are referred to by the notion of vowel-like kinds, which however are said to commune with everything (e.g. 253a5 and 253c1-2). The picture I am presenting of the communion of kind is clearly hinging on the second group of kinds and the fact that they are all-communing. To include motion and rest I should need to discuss in what way communion relations are associated with motion (cf. next section) and when it comes to the relations between motion and rest, which are opposite, whether there are different sorts of predication, cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato’s Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., pp. 149 ff. However, this would require a much more extensive analysis, which is not needed to make my point. According to M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans les dialogues de Platon*, cit., p. 175, the kind sameness is not a vowel-like kind.

of selective relations or connections, and that such relations are effected by a small number of very general kinds, namely being, sameness and difference. The vowel-like kinds actualise the communion of the entire number of kinds<sup>51</sup>. Now, the very important question is: does this mean that the greatest kinds are a sufficient condition for establishing the entire set of the selective communion? The answer is no, because the actual communions between kinds are also determined by *what* the involved kinds are by themselves<sup>52</sup>. For instance, motion and rest both are, are the same as themselves, and are different from each other. This is on account of three very general kinds (i.e. being, sameness and difference). At the same time, as we have seen, they do not commune or partake of each other because they are opposite. This lack of communion was employed to rule out the scenario where everything communes with everything. It seems to me that the best way to make sense of this fundamental ontological fact, namely that motion and rest do not commune with each other, does not derive from any of the other kinds, but is rather due to what motion and rest are in themselves. Therefore, two factors are required for having the entire set of relations between kinds: (a) the vowel-like kinds; (b) the whatness of each kind, where (a) is what actualises or brings about the relations or connections and (b) is what determines what relations and connections actually subsist<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 56; A. Gómez-Lobo, *Plato's Description of Dialectic in the "Sophist" 253 d 1-e2*, cit., p. 42; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist*, cit., pp. 121-122 and M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans les dialogues de Platon*, cit., p. 166.

<sup>53</sup> The core of my view is not essentially different from F. Teisserenc, *Consonnes et voyelles: le fonctions de l'Être et de l'Autre dans le Sophiste de*

By way of conclusion, I wish to point out some implications of the present interpretation. Any existing kind (via communion with being) could not be thought to exist and at the same time its communion with other kinds to remain undetermined. If a kind exists, it is a specific kind with its determination or whatness and this entails that that kind communes with or is not receptive towards any other given kind in a precise and fixed way<sup>54</sup>. This account looks sensible because kinds and their relations are being presented as the objects of dialectic, and therefore on my account dialectic will be provided with a clear and stable object to carry out its distinctions. Thus, to be is the same as to exist as one among many kinds put in selective communion. As we have seen, this way of putting the matter makes sense only if the kind being is distinguished from the whatness of each other kind. For being bestows upon every kind the *capacity* to commune, but the actual combinations are not determined by it.

An objection could now be raised: since the nature that makes communion possible is one among the natures put in communion by it, one difficulty could lie in the first communion with the kind being itself. What would that first communion be, if any capacity of combining issues from that first communion? This objection, however, misses the point, and in fact, I submit, sheds light on Plato's most profound conception of reality. There

*Platon (251a-259e)*, cit., pp. 233-234, my main point being that the whatness of the consonant-like kinds involved is what determines the actual set of relations of each kind. The difference lies in that Teisserenc seems to be claiming that the capacity to commune is somehow intrinsic to the kinds, whereas I think this is precisely what the kind being provides to the other kinds. Cf. also P. Clarke, *The Interweaving of Forms with one another: Sophist 259e*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 12 (1994), p. 41 and the next section.

<sup>54</sup> To use the jargon of a modern debate, we could say that for Plato there is no vagueness in reality when it comes to kinds.

is no time, not even logical priority, in which kinds or Forms commune with being and then selectively combine with each other. This is clearly consistent with the idea that kinds are not generated in time and that the kind being is not responsible for *what* each kind is. All the kinds and their relations are given together, as a structured whole in such a way that being comes to mean the *relationality* intrinsic to the web of Forms<sup>55</sup>. Those Forms establish relations according to their nature which structurally demands combination<sup>56</sup>. In this sense, the kind being is that very special kind which is responsible for the ontological “structuredness” of reality. This also respects the fact that Forms or kinds are perfectly determinate: if all I argued is true, then every possible relation between kinds is already given once and for all, thereby also acting as a properly stable object of dialectical knowledge. As I shall maintain in the next chapter, this metaphysical view has a very complex and precise bearing on Plato’s theory concerning linguistic truth and falsehood.

### 3. *A Definition of Being?*

In this section, I want to very briefly consider how my interpretation of the selective communion fits with a debate concerning a famous passage at *Soph.* 247d8-e4, according to which being is nothing but δύναιμι:

I say, then, that a thing genuinely is if it has some capacity, of whatever sort, either to act on another thing, of whatever

<sup>55</sup> See J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 56, who says that the «vowel-Forms are aspects of reality with regard to which any intelligible plurality must be ordered».

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Soph.* 257a8-9, where it is said that it is the nature of kinds to be in communion with each other.

nature, or to be acted on, even to the slightest degree and by the most trivial of things, and even if it is just the once. That is, what marks off the things that are as being, I propose, is nothing other than *capacity*<sup>57</sup>.

The first issue concerning this passage is whether it is meant to provide a mark of being, i.e. a trait that allows one to recognise that something is or exists, or a proper definition of what being is. This distinction can already be found in Cornford, who opts for the conception of δύναμις as a mark of being, and is followed by Bluck. By contrast, as I shall say below, an entire branch of scholarship has actually proposed that one is faced with a proper definition of being<sup>58</sup>.

This thesis concerning being and δύναμις is introduced when dealing with two groups of thinkers, commonly known as the Offspring of the Earth and the Friends of Forms. To put it very crudely, the former claim that everything that exists is corporeal, the latter claim that what is corporeal belongs the domain of becoming, and that in contrast being belongs to

<sup>57</sup> *Soph.* 247d8-e4: «λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὁποιανοῦν τινα κεκτημένον δύναμιν εἶτ' εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτιοῦν πεφυκὸς εἶτ' εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἄν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι: τίθεμαι γὰρ ὄρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναμις».

<sup>58</sup> F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 238-239; R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist*, cit., p. 93. Cf. also L.M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam 1984, p. 101; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 109 n. 9 and B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 147-149; L. Brisson, *La définition de l'être par puissance un commentaire de Sophiste 247B-249D*, in M. Crubellier, A. Jaulin, D. Lefebvre, P.M. Morel (éds.), *DUNAMIS. Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*, Editions Peeters, Louvain-la-Neuve 2008, pp. 173-185; F. Leigh, *Being and Power in Plato's Sophist*, «Apeiron», 43 (2010), pp. 64-85. Cf. also M. Dixsaut, *Plato-Nietzsche. L'autre manière de philosopher*, Fayard, Paris 2015, pp. 87-111.

some incorporeal and intelligible Forms that can be accessed by thought alone. The concept of δύναμις is variously employed to refute both factions. In the case of the Offspring they are forced to admit that justice, intelligence and any other virtue is something that is present in the soul but at the same time is not corporeal. Thus, the passage above is used to establish that things that are have a capacity to act and be acted on, and this applies to both bodily and non-bodily things. In the case of the Friends, the refutation is more complex. They deny that the passage above can be applied to the Forms they regard as being and it only holds of becoming things. At the same time, they are committed to the idea that properly existing Forms can be known. The Stranger claims that knowing and being-known involve acting and being acted on and therefore some sort of motion is to be ascribed to the domain of being as well, otherwise motion, life, soul and intelligence would not be present in what is in its entirety (παντελῶς ὄν). This παντελῶς ὄν has prompted a very vibrant debate as to whether it means the totality of beings or what completely is, i.e. Forms. Be that as it may, the ecumenic, though quite enigmatic, conclusion drawn by the Stranger is that if everything moves or is immobile then knowledge is impossible and therefore being and the all (τὸ ὄν τε καὶ τὸ πᾶν) must consist of both motion and rest.

The conception of being as δύναμις proves to be very plastic. It is employed against the Offspring to force them into accepting the being of incorporeal things because of their interaction with corporeal things. This is because virtues, which are incorporeal, come to be in the soul that they think is corporeal. The concept of δύναμις is then used to refute the Friends, who are presented as not being able to account for something they are necessarily committed to, namely knowledge of being. In this case, two incorporeal things, soul and intelligence, should commune (κοινωνεῖν) to give rise to knowledge, but

this communion is associated with some form of motion: being is moved insofar as it is known because being known implies being acted on. The term *κοινωνεῖν* occurs and it is specifically employed to designate both the relation between senses and becoming and the one between the soul, carrying out some rational thinking, and being, which is always as it is. This communing is overtly connected to a reformulation of the *δύναμις* passage (248b2-6).

Regardless of the interpretation of this very difficult passage, especially the meaning of the *παντελῶς ὄν* in which life and soul are present and the inclusion of motion in being and the all, some general facts emerge<sup>59</sup>. Firstly, the notion of *δύναμις* as interactive power is key to understanding both refutations of the opposing factions. Secondly, the notion of *δύναμις* of

<sup>59</sup> The main interpretations are the following. F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 247-248, provides a cosmological reading inspired by the *Timeaus*, according to which being is ensouled. Then, there are two factions: the Stranger is talking about Cambridge Change (see e.g. R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist*, cit., pp. 97-99, and M.L. Gill, *Philosophos: Plato's Missing Dialogue*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, pp. 237-238); and the Stranger is talking about extending the notion of being so as to include particulars other than Forms (see e.g. L. Brown, *Innovation and Continuity: The Battle of Gods and Giants*, *Sophist 245-249*, in J.Y.L. Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, pp. 201-213. For a very detailed *status quaestionis* limited to the English-speaking literature, see M. Wiitala, *The Argument against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: Sophist 248a4-249d5*, in «Apeiron», 51 (2018), pp. 171-179. Cf. also B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 125, whose view is that Plato is claiming that knowledge involves both motion and rest insofar as its object is fixed, but that it takes place within time (something similar is already in J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit.). Finally, M. Wiitala, *The Argument against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: Sophist 248a4-249d5*, cit., claims that motion and rest here mean the relations of participation between Forms. Accordingly, Wiitala interprets the reference to intelligence and life as meaning

interaction is used diversely. In the case of the Offspring, justice and virtues are because they are generated in the soul so as to *make* the soul just<sup>60</sup>. Despite being incorporeal the Stranger point seems to be that virtues cause souls to be in a certain way. In fact, an entire line of interpretations emphasising the causal power has been proposed<sup>61</sup>. In the case of the Friend, the interaction is purely cognitive and connects the rational part of the soul with a really existing object. This passage could also

that Forms by communing with one another provide the structure that is required by knowledge to have a proper object and that this structure is effected by the nature of Forms themselves, which in this sense are “alive” qua self-moving, i.e. establishing relations by themselves. This view is clearly reminiscent of Fronterotta’s view that I am about to introduce. As far as the meaning of παντελῶς ὄν is concerned, there are at least three options: first, it has an extensive meaning, something like “the totality of reality”, and it is meant to include both sensible corporeal things and intelligible Forms. Against the Friends, this would imply that the label “being” should be applied to both categories of entities, cf. F. Karfik, Pantelôs on *and megista genê*. (*Plato*, *Soph.* 242c-259b), in A. Havlíček, F. Karfik (eds.), *Plato’s Sophist. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, cit., pp. 120-145. Second, it has an intensive meaning, something like “that which is completely”. Against the Friends, this would imply that some sort of acting and being acted on comes to characterise the very nature of Forms qua entities that are completely, see again M. Wiitala, *The Argument against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: Sophist 248a4-249d5*, cit. Third, there is a reading that restricts the παντελῶς ὄν to Forms, but takes them collectively. Thus, the phrase παντελῶς ὄν has an extensive meaning but only applies to Forms and therefore motion is conceived of along the lines of the intensive interpretation, namely as the capacity Forms have to act on each other, see F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 379-382.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. F. Leigh, *Being and Power in Plato’s Sophist*, cit., p. 75.

<sup>61</sup> See A. Macé, *Platon, philosophie de l’agir et du pâtir*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2006, pp. 134-139. F. Fronterotta, *La notion de δύναμις dans le Sophiste de Platon: κοινωνία entre les forms et μέθεξις du sensible à l’intelligible*, in M. Crubellier, A. Jaulin, D. Lefebvre, P.M. Morel (éds.), *DUNAMIS. Autour de la puissance chez Aristote*, cit., pp. 213-223. Cf. also F.



mark, as it were, a rarefaction of the bodily status of the items involved in the interaction: in the former case a corporeal item (the soul according to the Offspring) and an incorporeal one are joined, in the latter case rational soul (presumably incorporeal for the Friends) and incorporeal being are said to commune.

Now, a proposal by Francesco Fronterotta, who takes the passage on δύναμις to express a fully-fledged definition, having in the background the communion of kinds I treated in the previous section, can be introduced. Fronterotta claims what follows:

- (1) Being is defined as a δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ τοῦ πάσχειν, i.e. whatever has the capacity to act and be acted on “is”.
- (2) The communion of kinds derives from a δύναμις τοῦ κοινωνεῖν, i.e. kinds commune insofar as they have the capacity to commune.

Leigh, *Being and Power in Plato's Sophist*, cit.: «If being is understood as *defined* as the power to act and be affected, and if Plato is read as treating Forms and their participants as falling within the scope of the definition, as I have argued, then any case of participation is thereby also a case of participation in Being. A thing that possesses the characteristic of being beautiful, e.g. is a being because it participates in Being. It is just that one way to participate in Being is to participate in Beauty» (p. 82). This interpretation by Leigh is very convincingly argued and focuses on the “being as capacity” proposal as a way to account for the causal action of Forms, where Forms are understood as properties by themselves in contrast to what has that property. However, to make sense of being as capacity, Leigh is forced to say that in any participation in a Form also participating in being is required. This, I take it, comes from the fact that she does not recognise the Stranger's main point, namely that being represents the relationality of the weave of kinds as the capacity they have to commune, and the capacity is due to the fact that the actual communing also requires the contribution of what the communing kinds are by themselves. The causal interpretation has had good fortune among the Stoics, see *S. V. F.*, III 203 and II 1047, and in the modern debate as well, see D.M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism*, Vol. II, *A Theory of Universals*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1978, pp. 45-47.

- (3) Communing is conceived of as a form of acting and being acted on determined by the entities standing in a communion relation.
- (4) Therefore, the capacity to act and be acted on defines the very structure of the communion of kinds of which it constitutes the essential condition<sup>62</sup>.

This complex and intriguing exegetical proposal has been proposed multiple times over the years by Fronterotta<sup>63</sup>. Some

<sup>62</sup> Cf. F. Fronterotta, *La notion de δύναμις dans le Sophiste de Platon: κοινωνία entre les forms et μέθεξις du sensible à l'intelligible*, cit., p. 203: «Etant donné que (1) l'être est défini suivant une δύναμις τοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ τοῦ πάσκειν ("est" tout ce qui est doué de la capacité d'agir et de pâtir), que (2) la communication des genres est établie à partir d'une δύναμις τοῦ κοινωνεῖν (les genres communiquent entre eux dans la mesure où ils possèdent une δύναμις de communiquer), et que (3) la communication elle-même est conçue comme une forme d'action et d'affection déterminées par une capacité lors de la rencontre entre des termes différents ("communiquer", "être communiqué" ou "subir la communication" sont des formes d'agir et de pâtir), il faut alors conclure que la capacité d'agir et de pâtir qui définit l'être de ce qui est, définit aussi la structure de la communication, dont elle constitue la condition essentielle et détermine le développement (c'est ce qui est doué d'une capacité de communiquer et de subir la communication, c'est-à-dire une capacité d'agir et de pâtir, qui communique ou qui subit la communication; mais tout ce qui possède une capacité d'agir et de pâtir est réellement; donc, tout ce qui peut communiquer est réellement). De ce point de vue, l'être de ce qui est coïncide avec le fondement ontologique de la κοινωνία».

<sup>63</sup> See Fronterotta, *L'être et la participation de l'autre: une nouvelle ontologie dans le Sophiste*, cit., pp. 311-353; F. Fronterotta, *ΜΕΘΕΞΙΣ La teoria platonica delle idee e la partecipazione delle cose empiriche*, cit., pp. 341-368; F. Fronterotta, *Pensare la differenza. Statuto dell'essere e definizione del diverso nel Sofista di Platone*, in M. Bianchetti, E. Storace (a cura di), *Platone e l'ontologia. Il Parmenide e il Sofista*, Albo Versorio, Milano 2004, pp. 39-64; F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 81-97.

interpreters have embraced it<sup>64</sup>. Some other has criticised it<sup>65</sup>. Now the communing items are only Forms or kinds, which are outside becoming and change. Accordingly, the notion of change results in a sublimation: the affections, i.e. relations of communion or participations between kinds, are theorised in terms of acting and being acted on. The appealing aspect of the proposal by Fronterotta is, as we have seen, that throughout the section 251-254 there is constant talk of capacities, communing and mixing and the definition of being as capacity could provide a unified framework to it. On the other hand, the very introduction of motion within being raised in the form of a criticism against the Friends of Forms, which should be the juncture between the definition and what I called the selective communion is of very difficult interpretation. Not

<sup>64</sup> Cf. D. Lefebvre, *Dynamis. Sense et genèse de la notion aristotélicienne de puissance*, Vrin, Paris 2018, pp. 320-325, who maintains that “being as capacity” is an actual definition: being means establishing relations, whether it be physical or mental, so regardless of the types of entities, bodies or intelligibles, they are insofar as they possess a capacity to interact. Cf. B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., pp. 139-143, who develops this view, without any reference to Fronterotta though, by saying that «being as capacity» is only a *partial* definition insofar as «being as combination», specifically understood as the result of being as capacity, is required to understand being. This distinction by Hestir clearly fits my account of selective communion: being is what brings about the communion, but the selection of communing relations are determined by what the involved kinds are.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. F. Karfik, Pantelós on *and megista genè*. (*Plato*, *Soph.* 242c-259b), cit., p. 141, who against Fronterotta’s reading asserts: «The capacity to act and to be acted upon is not, in the *Sophist*, a generic term encompassing both the communion among intelligible forms on the one hand and the communion among things which move and are moved on the other. It is, instead, the concept of communion which is assigned this generic function covering both acting and being acted upon in the realm of things which move and that other type of communion by which the intelligible genera or forms are interweaved one with another».

only is communing presented as an intentional relation between a subject and an object of knowledge to be contrasted with a non-cognitive relation between two entities such as kinds<sup>66</sup>, but also the inclusion of life, soul and intelligence does not *prima facie* fit squarely with the communion of Forms.

I shall not provide my own interpretation of the refutation of the Offspring of the Earth and the Friend of Forms and consequently of how the “being is capacity” thesis is to be connected to selective communion. There are two reasons for this. The first is that my interpretation of the selective communion has not made any use of the jargon of acting and being acted on in a way that assimilates it to motion. In other words, should the Fronterotta proposal be regarded as unconvincing, my account can nonetheless be accepted. The second reason is that I *do* find Fronterotta’s proposal convincing<sup>67</sup>. I overtly argued that in the section 251-254 the relation to the kind being amounts to being one really existing kind which for the fact of being one among many other existing kinds is also capable of establishing relations with them in a way that is not determined by the kind being but rather by the whatness or nature of the kind in question. If being is the ontological ground of existence-cum-capacity to establish communion relations, then the being as capacity to act

<sup>66</sup> Cf. B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 110 n. 15. For a reading that concentrates on the intentional relation so much as to maintain that the sense of the argument is acknowledging the communion between the soul of the knower and a transcendent Form that must possess the capacity to be cognised which constitutes its being according to the “being is capacity” thesis, cf. F. Gonzalez, *Being as Power in Plato’s Sophist and Beyond*, in A. Havlíček, F. Karfík (eds.), *Plato’s Sophist. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Platonicum Pragense*, cit., pp. 63-95.

<sup>67</sup> To which I would add M. Wiitala, *The Argument against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: Sophist 248a4-249d5*, cit. account of how to deal with the refutation of the Friends of Forms.

and be acted upon looks promising provided that one is able to “turn” an ordinary conception of acting and being acted on into a more abstract notion of communion, which, following Fronterotta’s proposal, should be found in the refutation of the Friends of Forms. Be that as it may, it is unlikely that Plato, just from the choice of its terminology itself, is not suggesting at least a connection between the being as capacity thesis and the communion of kinds. In these terms, I entirely agree with Delcominette, whose remarks are worth quoting in full:

Later on, the concept of *κοινωνία* reappears to designate the combination of the Forms. Does this use of *κοινωνεῖν* really have ‘no connection’ with its aforementioned use, as Cornford boldly asserts? I find it hard to believe, especially in view of the fact that in this whole passage, *κοινωνία*, *κοινωνεῖν*, and related terms are both frequently used in connection with words from the family of *δύναμις* (see 251d9, e9, 252d2-3, 253c2, e1, 254c5-6; cf. 253a8) and also interpreted in terms of acting and being acted upon (see 252b9, e9, 259d2; cf. 253a1 and a9). There is therefore every reason to believe that the definition of being as *δύναμις* to act and to be acted upon is still valid at this point of the dialogue, but has been reinterpreted in such a way as to lose its earthy scent and not to imply motion in any physical sense any more: for a Form, to be acted upon by another Form does certainly not mean to be altered by it but rather to be determined by it in an eternal way. The operator of this interweaving is being, which plays an analogous role to that of vowels among the letters of the alphabet (see 253a4-6, and compare c1-2) and may now be defined as a *δύναμις κοινωνίας* (‘power to combine’<sup>68</sup>).

<sup>68</sup> S. Delcominette, *Odysseus and Home of the Stranger from Elea*, «The Classical Quarterly», 64 (2014), p. 539.

I wish to finish this chapter with some remarks. To begin with, even though I find Fronterotta's interpretation very convincing, there is an aspect that I would not subscribe to. He contends that Plato ultimately conceives of being as the domain encompassing all really existing entities and that consequently partaking of being means being comprehended within the set of really existing entities<sup>69</sup>. This characterisation, despite making sense of some "geographical" metaphorical formulation present in the context, does not recognise that being is *one* kind among the others. It is not even the most participated: everything that is also communes with sameness and difference. This is not just a minor point because consistently with what I argued in the last section I would regard being as the whatness or nature that causes or is responsible for all the other kinds to exist and establish relations in a way that constitutes a weave, web or net. To have the weave of all kinds one needs being, sameness and difference plus the whatness and nature of all the kinds. This because each kind needs to exist, to be self-identical and to be different from anything else in order to be a unity, a fundamental element of the weave. The point, if all of this is true, is this: what is the specific role of the kind being? We have seen that this is providing the other kinds with the capacity to establish relations or communions. But what does it actually mean? In the next and last chapter of the book, I shall try to make sense of this by focusing on the *συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν* as what generates the *λόγος*. For this reason, I cannot accept the view that being is the set of things that are capable of interacting

<sup>69</sup> Cf. F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., p. 99: «l'essere, nel *Sofista*, viene concepito come l'ambito complessivo che raccoglie tutte le cose che sono, con la conseguenza che *partecipare* dell'essere significa effettivamente *essere compreso* nella totalità dell'essere ossia nell'insieme delle realtà esistenti».

insofar as they are. To respect the metaphor of weaving, I claim that the kind being is one element in the weave with which every other element communes and thereby establishes further relations. Thanks to the interweaving of Forms, it will emerge that the kind being, if conceived in this way, namely as that part of the weave that causes or is responsible for *the entire structure* of the weave itself, is at the same time what grounds the existence-cum-communion of all kinds and what allows language to reveal reality.

VIII. THE NATURE OF ΛΟΓΟΣ  
AND THE INTERWEAVING OF FORMS

1. *The Interweaving of Forms*

This chapter is devoted to Plato's treatment of the structure and function of λόγος as is generated by the interweaving of Forms (259e-263d). The key assertion is the following:

If one separates each thing off from everything, that completely and utterly obliterates any discourse, since it is the interweaving of forms that gives us the possibility of talking to each other in the first place<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Soph.* 259e4-6: «τελεωτάτη πάντων λόγων ἐστὶν ἀφάνισις τὸ διαλύειν ἕκαστον ἀπὸ πάντων: διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν».



Many interpreters link it to what the Stranger discusses at 251a5-252e7, analysed in the last chapter, which, in my interpretation, is meant to provide the ontology underlying the analysis of true and false discourse or statements<sup>2</sup>. In what

<sup>2</sup> See M. Frede, *Prädikation und Existenzaussage. Platons Gebrauch von „...ist...“ und „...nicht ist...“ im Sophistes*, cit., pp. 41-44; P. Clarke, *The Interweaving of Forms with one another: Sophist 259e*, cit., p. 36; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 237; S. Noriega-Olmos, *Plato's Sophist 259E4-6*, «Journal of Ancient Philosophy», 4 (2012), p. 10 n. 13. The occurrence of γέγονεν could be considered as further evidence for the connection to 251 ff. in that the grammatical perfect could indicate that the interlocutors have come to an agreement earlier in the discussion, cf. B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., p. 213. It can also refer to *what* they have agreed upon, which is *that* statements are actually grounded in the ontological fact that there is selective communion. This is also shown by the fact that at 260b2 it is said that there would be no λόγος if there was no mixing of anything with anything (μηδεμίαν εἶναι μεῖζιν μηδενὶ πρὸς μηδέν). Interestingly, in the preceding lines the Stranger speaks of λόγος as one kind among the things that are (πρὸς τὸ τὸν λόγον ἡμῖν τῶν ὄντων ἔν τι γενῶν εἶναι). This could suggest that λόγος is regarded as a single nature that determines the way empirical λόγοι are. Evidence for this could be that the Stranger says that they have to investigate what λόγος is (ἔτι δ' ἐν τῷ παρόντι δεῖ λόγον ἡμᾶς διομολογήσασθαι τί ποτ' ἔστιν), which is what is about to happen when they analyse the structure of λόγος (i.e. minimally composed of a name/noun and a verb) and the way it works (i.e. it reveals being by conjoining elements). The passage at 260a5-b2 also says that without discourse we would be deprived of philosophy. Philosophy entertains a special relationship with discourse; to say that without discourse philosophy would cease to be amounts to saying that language is the specific instrument or, more neutrally, the specific medium of philosophy, which also came up in the last chapter. This is relatively clear. But the second argument in the quotation is also interesting. In order to test λόγοις' claim that it is part of reality we should ask what it is and try to grasp its being. However, this can be done only by means of λόγοις itself. To ask what something is can only be performed through λόγοις, also in the case that the object of enquiry is λόγοις itself. On these grounds, Plato can say that the one who wishes to enquire into the nature of λόγοις must

follows, I put forward a new reading of the interweaving of Forms<sup>3</sup> which, once joined with the interpretation of the Stranger's theory of meaning as revelation of being (section 2), will be able to disclose a more thorough and consistent reading of the truth and falsehood of statements (section 3). The first question to answer is what is meant here by "Forms". I think these should be considered as synonymous with kinds. See again, for instance, 253d1-3 where the two notions seems to be used perfectly interchangeably. This claim deserves some comment. As has been recognised by Bruno Centrone<sup>4</sup>, an inner tension appears within Plato's doctrine: semantics and the ontology of kinds are connected, but this leads one to admit the existence of many kinds that are at odds with middle-period Forms (e.g. sorts of τέχνηαι or physical stances such as sitting or movements such as flying). Arguably, the so-called issue of the extension of the "eidetic cosmos" is one of the most problematic and highly discussed by interpreters, both ancient and modern. The most important hint of this ques-

minimally assume its reality. In the case of λόγος one can divide the λόγος whose nature is under examination from the λόγος employed to perform that examination only to discover that the λόγος used to examine owes its effectiveness to the reality of the λόγος object of the investigation. Cf. also P. Seligman, *Being and Not-being. An Introduction to Plato's Sophist*, Nijhof, The Hague 1974, p. 89, who interprets the interweaving of Forms as saying that the kind being and the kind discourse commune. Although I am not against the idea that λόγος is a kind, my interpretation is that the interweaving of Forms actually consists of all existing kinds and *this* is what makes λόγος possible. However, consider also some persuasive criticism by F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 463-464, who says that the λόγος is a reality which mediates between what is sensible and what is intelligible also referring to *Tim.* 29b4-5; cf. also S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, cit., pp. 294-295.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion of the *status quaestionis*, see S. Noriega-Olmos, *Plato's Sophist 259E4-6*, cit., pp. 2-15.

<sup>4</sup> See B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. V-VIX.

tion in Plato is the famous assertion at *Parm.* 130b-e, which is commonly interpreted as suggesting a quite comprehensive set of Forms (logical, moral, natural subjects, as well as apparently inglorious ones such as filth and mud). Obviously, I cannot touch on the issue here. I limit myself to making explicit that my interpretation falls within an interpretative strategy that endorses a strict connection between ontological and semantical matters. Quite schematically, the interpreters can be divided into three categories. Firstly, some argue that both the greatest kinds and other predicates, whether they result from divisions or are used as examples of true and false statements, amount to ontological natures<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, others acknowledge that the greatest kinds possess a metaphysical status, but exclude that more common predicates, such as “sitting” or “hunting”, can be regarded as metaphysically loaded Forms<sup>6</sup>. Thirdly, some others claim that neither the greatest kinds nor the more common predicates have anything to do with Platonic Forms<sup>7</sup>. Regardless of the specific interpretation

<sup>5</sup> For instance, see F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit.; F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit.; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit.; B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, see N. Zaks, *À quel logos correspond la ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΔΩΝ du Sophiste?*, «Revue de philosophie ancienne», 34 (2016), p. 52; see also J.R. Trevaskis, *Division and Its Relation to Dialectic and Ontology in Plato*, «Phronesis», 12 (1967), pp. 118-129, who denies that collection and division deals with Platonic Forms.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, see A.L. Peck, *Plato and the ΜΕΤΙΣΤΑ ΓΕΝΗ of the Sophist: A Reinterpretation*, «The Classical Quarterly», 2 (1952), pp. 32-56 and Id., *Plato's "Sophist": The συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν*, «Phronesis», 7 (1962), pp. 46-66. For a survey, cf. also L. Palumbo, *Il non essere e l'apparenza. Sul Sofista di Platone*, Loffredo, Napoli 1994, pp. 19-21. It needs to be said that this way of dividing the interpretations of the central part of the dialogue is not equivalent to the perhaps more famous controversy regarding whether Plato abandons the theory of Forms in favour of a “deflated” view

of the complex parts of the dialogue dealing with the method of divisions or the communion of kinds, I shall briefly take a stance among these exegetical options. I generally agree with the first group of interpreters: I shall try to show in what follows that the weave of extra-linguistic entities structured by the greatest kinds is the ontological basis for language. Further evidence for this is possibly found in the *Parmenides*. At 135b5-c2, Parmenides states that without a fixed Form there could be nothing to fix one's thought upon, thereby destroying the possibility of discourse or the capacity to talk to each other (τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν). This reference to the *Parmenides* is fertile because the δύναμις τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι

of dialectic, which only deals with concepts, cf. G. Ryle, *Plato's Parmenides*, cit., and J.L. Ackrill, *Symploke Eidon*, cit. The matter is particularly convoluted. It is true that Ackrill suggests that Plato has jettisoned his previous metaphysical conception of Forms, turning them into concepts as meanings of general term, but at the same time he considers the kinds appearing in the *Sophist* as true instances of Plato's alleged new theory. By contrast, Peck, who is variously committed to a metaphysical conception of Forms as really existing natures, see A.L. Peck, *Plato and the ΜΕΓΙΣΤΑ ΓΕΝΗ of the Sophist: A Reinterpretation*, cit., pp. 46-55, asserts in Id., *Plato's "Sophist": The συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν*, cit., p. 63, that Ackrill thinks that the greatest kinds are Platonic Forms while also assuming that there is a Form corresponding to every predicate. The only apparently paradoxical situation is that the interpreter accepting the middle dialogues' notion of Form is led to deny that the greatest kinds are Forms, whereas the interpreter rejecting the metaphysical notion of Form considers the greatest kinds to be genuine Forms. The conclusion to be drawn is that there is a conceptual distinction between what counts as a genuine Form and what the metaphysical status of such Forms is, without excluding that the two things can affect one another. For instance, the more one considers Forms as ontologically neutral, the more one can maintain an abundantist view as to what Forms there are. It is not possible here to elaborate upon the issue. The only thing I need to point out is that in my view (I) Forms are not concepts; (II) the greatest kinds are Forms; (III) there are Forms corresponding to at least some general terms or predicates (but not necessarily one Form for each predicate).

is conditioned on the existence of Forms just as the *λόγος* is conditioned on the interweaving of Forms in the *Sophist*. In the former context, it looks as if Parmenides is overtly stating that the existence of Forms is required for any talk, whereas in the latter context, this could be taken for granted, so that the Stranger is understood as describing how this happens, i.e. discourse arises from the way existing Forms commune<sup>8</sup>.

Does this mean, however, that for each term appearing within any linguistic communication one needs to admit a kind and thus a Form? I believe not. Again, the matter is very complex. The sketch of a solution, to keep to the *Sophist*, lies in considering a proper enquiry as determining which terms actually have a meaning. The *Sophist* itself provides evidence for this, at least twice: (I) programmatically, at *Soph.* 217a Socrates asks if the three names “sophist”, “statesman” and “philosopher” actually correspond to three kinds (or two or one), which does not depend on what the interlocutors believe, but is rather a matter of fact (218c<sup>9</sup>); (II) the meaning of “not-being” turns out to be very different from what the interlocutors thought at the beginning of the enquiry<sup>10</sup>. If this is true, though, the meaning of “meaning” must be something other than what people think or understand when they speak, which is what I think

<sup>8</sup> Cf. F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Parmenide*, cit., p. 100. This is not decisive because the point in the *Parmenides* could be that one needs a Form intended as the subject, broadly speaking, of enquiry. However, I think my reading should be preferred insofar as both dialogues sound quite radical in speaking of destruction or complete disappearance of speech, which suggests a stricter connection between language and Forms. Moreover, I shall argue below that in some specific cases what one talks about and what makes a statement meaningful are the same.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also *Crat.* 438d-e.

<sup>10</sup> More examples could be provided, see M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans les dialogues de Platon*, cit., pp. 199-200.

Plato claims shortly after introducing the interweaving of Forms and which I analyse in section two. For the moment, I need to point out that in my view Plato is not aiming at a description of what happens in people's minds when they speak (which, if anywhere, Plato does in *Theaetetus*, particularly in discussing the second definition), but rather of the conditions under which statements are true, and of where these conditions are revealed within language thanks to the connection it *can* establish with Forms and how Forms are related to each other<sup>11</sup>. This is consistent with the fact that the Stranger famously never addresses statements lacking reference or concerning fictional entities<sup>12</sup>, which he should have done were his goal to account for what happens within a community of speakers. Accordingly, my view essentially belongs to the first category of interpreters keeping in mind the fundamental specification that what words mean does not belong in the surface of language, i.e. on the side of the community of speakers, but in fact belong in the depth of the reality that language purports to latch on to<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> This appears to be consistent with the Stranger's treatment of false statements: falsehood is saying things that are not as if they were. From this account, broached in section three, it emerges that the "things that are not" rest on objective, i.e. extra-mental, and multi-layered relations of difference, whereas the psychological contribution of the speaker is solely represented by that "as if", which means committing oneself to a description proving to be false.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *infra* p. 276, n. 28.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, I entirely agree with the words of G. Giannantoni, *Dal ti estin socratico all'eidos platonico*, cit., p. 331, which are written apropos of an earlier stage of Plato's thought, but which I think are most pertinent here as well, thus worth quoting in full: «Platone comincia a intuire che chiedere conto a qualcuno di un suo uso linguistico significa, nello stesso tempo, chiedergli anche conto della sua conoscenza della realtà espressa da quell'uso linguistico».

Hence, my first proposition is that the *συμπλοκή* involves extra-linguistic entities<sup>14</sup>. One could now ask: what is the relation between the *συμπλοκή* thus conceived and the *κοινωνία τῶν γενῶν* described above?<sup>15</sup> In my presentation of the *κοινωνία* I emphasise that the greatest kinds, focusing on being, sameness and difference, are the ontological basis for the other kinds to establish further relations. Accordingly, I shall deal with the following concept of *συμπλοκή*. If the communion of kinds indicates all the kinds that commune with each other or that are universally shared in, then the interweaving of Forms indicates the totality of kinds including those that are separate from, or incompatible with, some other kinds<sup>16</sup>. This is somehow entailed by the notion of selective communion:

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., pp. 123-124. *Contra* R.S. Bluck, *False Statement in the Sophist*, «Journal of Hellenic Studies», 77 (1957), pp. 181-186, who maintains that the weave in question is the conjunction of linguistic terms. As I shall show below, the ambiguity concerning the weaving together as either linguistic or extra-linguistic is by itself revealing of how the two dimensions bear some similarity to each other.

<sup>15</sup> For the *status quaestionis*, see B. Centrone (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 213-215 n. 144.

<sup>16</sup> That the kinds communing with each other are only a subset of all the kinds is clearly stated at 254b8-c2. The point is that Plato is entirely legitimate in terminologically distinguishing the subset of communing kinds from the set of all the kinds. As a result, the greatest kinds are only a part of all the kinds, but at the same time they are very important because the interweaving of all the kinds is answerable to their nature. It needs to be said that even the most opposite kinds stand in a relation of difference (e.g. 255e11-12). Therefore, at least through difference, the entire net of kinds is connected. Pushing this point to its extreme consequences, M. Dixsaut, *La négation, le non-être et l'autre dans le Sophiste*, cit., p. 190, claims that difference is the kind responsible for the existence of relations between all other kinds. See also M. Dixsaut, *Métamorphoses de la dialectique dans les dialogues de Platon*, cit., p. 168.

some kinds commune, but this communion cannot be of every kind with each other. In other words, for my account of meaning and truth to work the entities composing the συμπλοκή should be interwoven according to the κοινωνία τῶν γενῶν as is effected by the μέγιστα γένη, but they should also include all the kinds other than the greatest ones.

The second question concerning the συμπλοκή is to assess in what way such an interweaving is the condition of discourse or statement. Roughly put, the two main options are that kinds need to be interwoven either for statements to be meaningful or for them to be true<sup>17</sup>. I shall show that what has actually eluded most interpreters is that the συμπλοκή acts as a condition for both the meaningfulness and the truth of statements<sup>18</sup>. In a nutshell, my view is that kinds are required for sensible particulars to be thus and so and therefore, *a fortiori*, for the statements describing them as being thus and so to be true. At the same time, the kind(s) signified in the statement specify what the thing must be like for the statement to be true *irrespective of* whether the statement is actually true or false. In this precise sense, kinds provide the meaning of statements, including false ones. This is decisive because as is well known

<sup>17</sup> Cf. by J.L. Ackrill, *Symploke Eidon*, cit., who claims that the weave of Forms determines conditions of meaningfulness in terms of incompatibility. He is correct in saying that the συμπλοκή is a set of relations between Forms irrespective of whether they appear within the many singular statements. However, he tends to think of Forms as concepts, thereby not acknowledging them any ontological weight. I reject this de-ontologisation of kinds and I think that it is not only a matter of meaningfulness insofar as the interweaving is also related to truth. *Contra* J.M.E. Moravcsik, *ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ and the genesis of ΛΟΓΟΣ*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 42 (1960), pp. 117-129 and R.E. Heinaman, *Communion of Forms*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», 83 (1983), pp. 175-190.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the issue, see P. Clarke, *The Interweaving of Forms with one another: Sophist 259e*, cit., pp. 39-40.



one of the objectives of the *Sophist* is to account for linguistic falsehood and the solution is that false statements say something meaningful that is different from what is actually the case. We shall see how this is argued in what follows. Finally, the third point is that the συμπλοκή never directly involves sensible particulars<sup>19</sup>. This is to say that the items that are interwoven in such a way as to make statements possible by no means are particular things or events in space and time. Finally, in my interpretation, the συμπλοκή at the basis of any statements should not be understood as only providing extra-linguistic entities to each or some term appearing in a statement. As I am going to show, some kinds composing the weave, which are not mentioned in a statement, are nonetheless required to ground its truth and meaning<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Contra* F.M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 300-301. If a statement has the form “ $x$  is  $F$ ”, where  $x$  is the name of a particular and  $F$  the name of a Form or kind, two strategies have been deployed by the interpreters to find a plurality of kinds in a statement that apparently only mentions one. R.S. Bluck, *False Statement in the Sophist*, cit., argues that particulars can be “unpacked” into the Forms they participate in; cf. also D.W. Hamlyn, *The Communion of Forms and the Development of Plato's Logic*, «The Philosophical Quarterly», 5 (1955), pp. 294-295. J.M.E. Moravcsik, *ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΕΙΔΩΝ and the genesis of ΛΟΓΟΣ*, cit., maintains that a plurality of Forms is always involved insofar as in each predication the kind signified by the predicate and the kind being are.

<sup>20</sup> A point also recognised by S. Noriega-Olmos, *Plato's Sophist 259E4-6*, cit., p. 25. As far as meaning is concerned, I agree with C. Shields, *The Grounds of Logos: The Interweaving of Forms*, in G. Anagnostopoulos, F.D. Miller (eds.), *Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Essays in Honor of David Keyt*, Philosophical Studies Series 120, Springer, Dordrecht 2013, pp. 221-230, who claims that the interweaving of Forms should be thought of as a set of non-logical relations between existing entities.

## 2. *The Structure of λόγοι*

The Stranger turns to analysing the nature and structure of discourse. At its core the Stranger's view is this: statements involve a number of elements. By once again deploying the metaphor of the letters of the alphabet, according to which only certain sequences or combinations are acceptable, the Stranger argues that some words fit together and others do not. This is explained by saying that words spoken in succession that mean something (δηλοῦντά τι) also fit together, whereas the words spoken in succession that do not signify anything (μηδέν σημαίνοντα) do not fit together<sup>21</sup>. It is worth noting that the explanatory relation goes from revealing or signifying to fitting together. I entirely agree with Hoekstra and Scheppers when they say that something qualifies as a λόγος on the basis of a semantic criterion (i.e. it reveals or signifies something in reality). I would contrast this view with a syntactic criterion, which is the view that words fit together in accordance with certain rules independently of what they signify. This is why the fitting together is presented as a *result* of signification or revelation. However, I disagree with them when they claim that the signified reality is the content of discourse and not the extra-linguistic reality. I do not think such a distinction is entirely legitimate in this context<sup>22</sup>. They feel the need to

<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. Hoekstra, F. Scheppers, 'Όνομα, ῥῆμα, et λόγος dans le *Cratyle* et le *Sophiste* de Platon. *Analyse du lexique et analyse du discours*, «L'Antiquité Classique», 72 (2003), p. 64; F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., pp. 472-473; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., pp. 222-223; F. Ademollo, *Names, Verbs, and Sentences in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, in M. Cameron, R. Stainton (eds.), *Linguistic Content. New Essays on the History of Philosophy of Language*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> I fully embrace the view that kinds qua extra-mentally existing entities act as the meaning of predicates, see F. Fronterotta, *Theaetetus sits* –

introduce it because otherwise, they argue, falsehood would be impossible. As I shall try to show in this section and the next, the Stranger's theory of statements and the role of the *συμπλοκή* are precisely what provides false statements as well as true ones with content, while maintaining the semantic criterion of *λόγοι*<sup>23</sup>.

Fitting together requires a plurality of elements. These are of two sorts (*γένος*), namely names/nouns (*ὀνόματα*) and verbs (*ῥήματα*). They differ because the latter reveal actions and the former reveal who or what performs these actions. Very importantly, they are described as vocal ostensions<sup>24</sup> about being (*τῆ φωνῆ περι τὴν οὐσίαν δηλωμάτων*): having a meaning is strictly associated with revealing being. The interpretation I present in this section is that the Stranger has in mind a sort of direct relation between what reveals being, i.e. names/nouns and verbs, and being itself<sup>25</sup>. A mere succession of some

*Theaetetus flies. Ontology, predication and truth in Plato's Sophist (263a-d)*, in B. Bossi, T.M. Robinson (eds.), *Plato's 'Sophist' Revisited*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2013, p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. M. Hoekstra, F. Scheppers, *Ὄνομα, ῥῆμα, et λόγος dans le Cratyle et le Sophiste de Platon. Analyse du lexique et analyse du discours*, cit., pp. 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> I adopt this translation following the Italian translation put forward in F. Aronadio (a cura di), *Platone. Cratilo*, cit., pp. XL-XLI. Cf. L.M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, cit., p. 197. See also J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 62 n. 1, who translates the term as «that which makes known» and M. Hoekstra, F. Scheppers, *Ὄνομα, ῥῆμα, et λόγος dans le Cratyle et le Sophiste de Platon. Analyse du lexique et analyse du discours*, cit., p. 66, who render it as objects «qui servent à montrer par le moyen de la voix».

<sup>25</sup> This is consistent with the ordinary, extra-philosophical conception of the time, see *ibid.*, p. 56. Also, this suggests that there is no medium between words and reality such as thoughts and propositions in the technical sense of entities intrinsically true or false expressed by statements. Cf. F. Fronterotta, *Platon sur ONOMA, PHMA et ΛΟΓΟΣ: théories du*

number of them from either sort is not enough to produce any revelation of being. Thus, if one utters “lion stag horse” there is no statement and *a fortiori* no revelation. The Stranger explains it as follows:

... no more in this case than in the other does what has been voiced indicate action, or lack of action, or the being of something that is, or of something that is not, nor will it until someone starts blending the verbs with the names. Then they fit together, and the first interweaving is at once statement, almost its most elementary and smallest manifestation<sup>26</sup>.

To begin with, there seems to be an internal tension concerning what the Stranger has argued thus far and what he argues in the first part of the quotation:

- (1) σημαίνειν and δηλοῦν, i.e. meaning and revealing, are considered synonymous<sup>27</sup>;

*ΣΗΜΑΙΝΕΙΝ en Sophiste 261d-262e*, «Methodos», 19 (2019), p. 3; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., pp. 2-3; D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, cit., p. 272. Furthermore, I do not think that the text makes any distinction between the way verbs reveal actions and the way names/nouns reveal who performs those actions, cf. W. Cavini, *L'ordito e la trama: il Sofista platonico e la tessitura del λόγος*, «Dianoia», 14 (2009), pp. 9-25.

<sup>26</sup> *Soph.* 262c2-7: «οὐδεμίαν γὰρ οὔτε οὕτως οὔτ' ἐκείνως πρᾶξιν οὐδ' ἀπραξίαν οὐδὲ οὐσίαν ὄντος οὐδὲ μὴ ὄντος δηλοῖ τὰ φωνηθέντα, πρὶν ἂν τις τοῖς ὀνόμασι τὰ ῥήματα κεράσῃ. τότε δ' ἤρμοσέν τε καὶ λόγος ἐγένετο εὐθὺς ἢ πρώτη συμπλοκή, σχεδὸν τῶν λόγων ὁ πρῶτός τε καὶ συμκρότατος». Translation slightly modified.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. Ademollo, *Names, Verbs, and Sentences in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, cit., p. 41 n. 24; F. Fronterotta, *Platon sur ONOMA, PHMA et ΛΟΓΟΣ: théories du ΣΗΜΑΙΝΕΙΝ en Sophiste 261d-262e*, cit., p. 4. Cf.

- (2) Nouns/names and verbs are defined as δηλώματα περι τὴν οὐσίαν, i.e. revelatory items concerning being;
- (3) Nouns/names and verbs do not reveal being unless they are woven together;
- (4) Following (1), nouns and names do not have meaning if taken in isolation.

According to the structure of the argument, it would seem that it has the unpalatable consequence that terms do not signify anything if taken in isolation because signification is equivalent to revelation and revelation only occurs through a blending. There are two strategies to deal with this issue. The first strategy is to claim that Plato is putting forward something close to the Fregean context-principle, i.e. the fact that terms acquire their meaning only within a statement. This would imply that if one takes the term “stag” to have a meaning, this only happens because one is considering the contribution that the term can give to any statement in which it might occur. This first strategy is then committed to the view that names/nouns and verbs strictly speaking do not have any meaning by themselves. The second strategy is to specify what notion of signification is at stake. The first option is to take meaning as what people understand when they hear a word. This, however, implies also including names that lack any reference such as “goat-stag”. It can hardly be the case that by “revelation of being” the Stranger means fictional entities such as the goat-stag<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, at 262e6-7 he

also what D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, cit., pp. 278-280, calls «display view».

<sup>28</sup> The question concerning whether Plato's account accommodates fictional entities is particularly complex, see C. Thomas, *Speaking of Something: Plato's "Sophist" and Plato's Beard*, «Canadian Journal of Philosophy», 38 (2008), pp. 631-667 and E. Di Iulio, *À Rebours: dal Sofista a Parmenide*.

asserts that any statement needs to be «of something», which can be interpreted as having a reference<sup>29</sup>. The second option is to consider as the criterion of meaning whether or not a term picks out something that exists. For instance, consider the difference between “stag” and “goat-stag”. The former has a meaning insofar as it is used to name existing entities, whereas the latter does not<sup>30</sup>. However, being is clearly said to be revealed thanks to the conjunction of elements (of different sorts), which is something that cannot be performed by any one term in isolation, such as “stag”. Therefore, the being in question cannot be a single term merely picking out existing items<sup>31</sup>.

The third option is to consider meaning as the result of a blending or weaving, that is, one has linguistic access to the being of what is or what is not only when names/nouns and verbs mingle, thereby producing meaningful λόγοι. If one is to accept this without subscribing to the first Fregean-like interpretive strategy, which denies any form of meaning to terms outside of the propositional bond, then one needs to *reconsider* what δηλοῦν and σημαίνειν mean here. To fully evaluate the consequences of this third option, I need to discuss the Stranger’s treatment of truth and falsehood in section three. However, I think this second strategy fits much better with the text. I do not think that the Stranger is denying that competent speakers understand isolated words or that

*Platone tra «corrispondenza» e «identità», «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica», 112 (2020), pp. 111-125.*

<sup>29</sup> Cf. F. Fronterotta (a cura di), *Platone. Sofista*, cit., p. 479 n. 279.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Id., *Platon sur ONOMA, PHMA et ΛΟΓΟΣ: théories du ΣΗΜΑΙΝΕΙΝ en Sophiste 261d-262e*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> However, as *ibid.*, pp. 8-9 correctly maintains, names/nouns and verbs having a reference qua signifying terms is a necessary condition for the revelation of being brought about by their conjunction.

they are able to distinguish referring terms from non-referring ones. As foreshadowed above, Plato's point seems to be that revelation/meaning is a direct relation to reality<sup>32</sup>. My claim is that the Stranger is introducing a meaning of "meaning" that indicates a revelation of extra-linguistic entities and that necessarily involves the propositional weave. In what follows, I shall focus exclusively on this specific notion of meaning or signification as a revelation implying some complexity.

Let us now turn to the second point of interest in the Stranger's explanation reported above: two terms fitting together in a statement result at once in a statement becoming the first weave (πρώτη συμπλοκή). The expression «first weave» calls for some analysis. The Stranger's claim is that a statement becomes a first weave. One is thus led to think that this weave is very much the same as two linguistic terms revealing being by their conjunction. The first and simplest weave is the minimal conjunction of one name/noun and one verb. At the same time, I believe that the employment of the term συμπλοκή, which is also used to designate the particular mutual relation of Forms at 259e, renders the matter more convoluted. As argued above, the συμπλοκή at 259e is the interweaving of non-linguistic entities; therefore, I think this line of the text is to be read as implying the following:

- (I) In a certain sense, the fitting together of linguistic items is a weave: elements of different sorts are joined and give birth to a new complex item in exactly the same way as a warp and a weft constitute a texture. Regardless of what the meaning of πρώτη συμπλοκή is, the structure of

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of a similar view with regard to another context, see F. Aronadio, *Procedure e verità in Platone* (Menone Cratilo Repubblica), cit., pp. 125-170.

a statement matches what is conveyed by the metaphor of weaving<sup>33</sup>.

- (II) However, given that the first occurrence of the term *συμπλοκή* is applied to non-linguistic entities, the Stranger's assertion can be interpreted in at least two ways: at some point (τότε) the terms fit together (ἤρμωσεν) and immediately (εὐθὺς) (a) a statement becomes the first weave or (b) the first weave comes into being as a statement. Thus, (a) means that the first weave is interpreted linguistically and is the result of the conjunction of linguistic terms; (b) means that the first weave is interpreted ontologically, which means that a minimal conjunction of non-linguistic Forms or kinds takes place in the form of a statement thanks to the bond between linguistic elements, i.e. it is revealed by the statement (which in turn is a weave of linguistic terms). The latter option, though perhaps less natural, squares with the fact that the Stranger uses general terms as examples of the two sorts of linguistic terms at this stage (e.g. "lion" and "run").
- (III) More importantly, the ambiguity between (a) and (b) is *in itself revealing*: either way the statement and the ontological interweaving of Forms with each other display some common structural features – namely, that they consist of more than one element and that these elements are in a specific relation (as is also shown by the fact that the metaphor of letters is employed when speaking of both kinds and words).

What has emerged thus far is this: firstly, the signifying or revealing relation performed by statements has a direct

<sup>33</sup> Cf. P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 230.



nature; secondly, some fundamental features of what reveals and what is revealed are similar. Consider also this next passage in the text:

[*scil.* the smallest discourse] is now giving an indication of things that are or are coming into being, or have come into being or are going to; they are not merely naming but accomplishing something, by weaving together verbs with nouns. That is why we described them as saying, not just as naming, and why we used the name ‘statement’ for this combination<sup>34</sup>.

The first thing to highlight is that λόγοι are said to possibly indicate either things that are or things that become in space and time in the present, past and future. There is no mention of propositions or thoughts in the technical sense of abstract objective entities involved in the relation between linguistic items and reality. Furthermore, the λόγος is overtly described as weaving together verbs and names/nouns, which makes clear that statements qualify as weaves of a linguistic sort. It is worth noting that the weaving is presented as a peculiar accomplishment performed by the λόγος and is contrasted with naming. This remark is worth analysing. Firstly, the indication of things that are or come to be is said to depend on the weaving together which is different from naming something, thereby providing further evidence for what I argued above about linguistic terms being revealing only when fitting together. Secondly, the occurrence of the term *περαίνει* looks

<sup>34</sup> *Soph.* 262d2-6: «δηλοῖ γὰρ ἤδη πού τότε περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἢ γιγνομένων ἢ γεγονότων ἢ μελλόντων, καὶ οὐκ ὀνομάζει μόνον ἀλλὰ τι περαίνει, συμπλέκων τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς ὀνόμασι. διὸ λέγειν τε αὐτὸν ἀλλ’ οὐ μόνον ὀνομάζειν εἶπομεν, καὶ δὴ καὶ τῷ πλέγματι τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἐφθεγξάμεθα λόγον». Translation slightly modified.

very interesting. What is accomplished is the indication/revelation<sup>35</sup>. Since this revelation is brought about by the weaving together of terms, it seems legitimate to conclude that *the Stranger is associating the indication of being with statements being possibly true*. This because only statements qua weaves can be true<sup>36</sup>.

The more general point I want to make is that the revelation of something can only take place by linguistically weaving together a plurality of elements, and in turn matches with the fact that the reality of kinds is at various times presented as a weave. That could provide the reason why the συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν is thought of as the cause of the existence and effectiveness of λόγοι. Reality and language are both described as consisting of a plurality of elements entertaining a set of relations. However, assuming that the interwoven entities are kinds or Forms, it remains to be explained why the weaving together performed by λόγοι, which is caused by a weave consisting only of Forms and never of particulars, is also required when talking about sensible particulars such as Theaetetus. In other words, I need to justify why the interweaving of Forms is at the basis of any sort of statement whether it be about kinds or about particulars (granted that no statement can speak of particulars *alone*).

<sup>35</sup> A different translation that does not, however, affect the philosophical sense of the passage, is given by M. Hoekstra, F. Scheppers, Ὄνομα, ῥῆμα, et λόγος dans le Cratyle et le Sophiste de Platon. Analyse du lexique et analyse du discours, cit., p. 65, who render περαινει with «asserter» or «make a point».

<sup>36</sup> This interpretation could substantiate the view that the Stranger's theory of meaning is aiming at some sort of realism about truth. What is being revealed is a being that coincides with what is being asserted by a sentence, i.e. something that is asserted to be true.

### 3. *The Statements about Theaetetus*

It is now time to consider the case of the two famous statements concerning Theaetetus:

- (a) Theaetetus is sitting.
- (b) Theaetetus, with whom I hold conversation, is flying.

The truth and falsehood of these statements are explained as follows: «The true one says the things that are, as they are, about you [...] whereas the false one says things that are different from those that are [...] in which case it says the things that are not as if they are»<sup>37</sup>. I start from what appears to be the more common interpretation concerning false statements, namely the Oxford interpretation. In a nutshell, this view holds that «the false statement says, speaks of, something other than *any* of the things that are, that is, something other than any of the things that are in relation to the given subject»<sup>38</sup>. Thus, assuming that sitting and flying are kinds, i.e. existing items, the falsehood of statements where one term signifies one of these kinds consists in the fact that one says things that are (kinds), but which are not in relation to the subject named in the statement insofar as that subject does not partake of those kinds; so, for instance, since Theaetetus does not partake of the kind flying he is not actually flying and consequently the kind flying is *not* in relation to the particular man named

<sup>37</sup> *Soph.* 263b4: «λέγει δὲ αὐτῶν ὁ μὲν ἀληθῆς τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν περὶ σοῦ»; b7 «ὁ δὲ δὴ ψευδῆς ἕτερα τῶν ὄντων»; 263b9 «τὰ μὴ ὄντ' ἄρα ὡς ὄντα λέγει».

<sup>38</sup> M. Frede, *The Sophist on false statements*, cit., p. 420; cf. also J. McDowell, *Falsehood and not-being in Plato's Sophist*, in M. Schofield, M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 115-134.

Theaetetus<sup>39</sup>. Therefore, if one claims that the things that are not in relation to something actually are in relation to it, i.e. that something partakes of them when in fact it does not, then one commits a mistake and speaks falsely.

The things that *are* are the Forms partaken of by Theaetetus; conversely the things that *are not* are the Forms not partaken of by Theaetetus<sup>40</sup>. For this reason, the conjunction of name/noun and verb is vital: only the linguistic connection is able to specify which subject and which beings need to be considered as being or not-being about that subject<sup>41</sup>. One implication of this view is that both the subject named by the ὄνομα and the action or state signified by the ῥῆμα exist, even in the case where their alleged relation does not. Accordingly, as Moravcsik states, «Plato's examination of falsehood involves showing that statements, and the reality which underlies them, are complexes and that what distinguishes falsehood is not the lack of reference, but the misinterpretation of the connection

<sup>39</sup> The view I shall put forward in what follows fits as well with what P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 239, calls the «extensional interpretation». This view is somehow the reverse of the Oxford interpretation: a statement is false if Theaetetus is not among the things the kind flying holds of.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. D. O'Brien, *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, cit., pp. 137-140.

<sup>41</sup> This is how I would interpret the distinction between statements being *of something* and *about something* (263a5). The former individuates what is named within the statement (e.g. Theaetetus) the latter specifies that the being of the kinds signified by the verb should be considered in relation to the subject named. For instance, sitting always is as a kind, whereas with regard to Theaetetus it sometimes is and sometimes is not. Statements are able to do such a thing, i.e. give the coordinates to judge what is and what is not, limited to a given subject. Cf. M. Frede, *The Sophist on false statements*, cit., p. 419, and F. Fronterotta, *Platon sur ONOMA, PHMA et ΛΟΓΟΣ: théories du ΣΗΜΑΙΝΕΙΝ en Sophiste 261d-262e*, cit., pp. 12-13.

between parts of reality»<sup>42</sup>. In this way, the match between terms and parts of reality is guaranteed, and consequently, false statements are meaningful because the conjoined terms occurring in them signify something, even though the connection between the two entities does not obtain as is stated. Also, the mistaken connection between these parts rests exclusively on the part of the speaker<sup>43</sup>.

From the vantage-point of the Oxford interpretation, my objective is to better understand how the συμπλοκή τῶν εἰδῶν is required for statements such as (a) and (b) to be true or false. The first issue arising for my interpretation is how to justify that the συμπλοκή, which I think excludes particulars, is at the basis of these statements where a particular (Theaetetus) is involved. To this purpose, I first need to highlight two points. Firstly, truths concerning sensible particulars are contingent<sup>44</sup>. In other words, truths concerning particulars change<sup>45</sup>. The-

<sup>42</sup> See J.M.E. Moravcsik, *Being and Meaning in the Sophist*, cit., p. 41. Cf. also D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, cit., p. 284. However, as I tried to show in section two, one should bear in mind that not only is falsehood accountable in terms of composition of linguistic items, but also signification and revelation come about only thanks to such a conjunction.

<sup>43</sup> See S. Rosen, *Plato's Sophist. The Drama of Original and Image*, cit., p. 297; P. Crivelli, *Plato's Account of Falsehood. A Study of the Sophist*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. D. O'Brien, *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, cit., pp. 142-143. D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, cit., p. 296 partially recognises this point.

<sup>45</sup> This seems to be a legitimate way to interpret why the Stranger at 262e9 and 263b2-3 asserts that statements must have either of two qualities, which, as Theaetetus recognises at 263b4, are truth or falsehood. In the *Meno*, ποῖον is used to indicate a non-essential trait of the characterised entity. Several times in the dialogue, Socrates contrasts ὁποῖον τι ἐστί with ὅτι ἐστί (*Men.* 71b3-4; 86d8-e1; 87b3-4) in order to highlight the difference between what something is and what something is like, cf. F. Aronadio, *Procedure e Verità in Platone (Menone Cratilo Repubblica)*, cit., pp. 34-37.

aetetus was sitting and now stands up, and this amounts to a variation of what is or is not about him. This means that the example of flying could be misleading insofar as it cannot possibly be the case (unless there are portentous divine interventions). With regard to this, Fronterotta considers two options. In the first option, (1) the statement “Theaetetus is sitting” indicates “the kind human being partakes of the kind being seated”. Hence, “Theaetetus is flying” will be false because the kind human being does not partake of the capacity of flying conceived as a kind, but in the case of the false statement saying that Theaetetus is standing while he is in fact sitting, the communion of kinds would give no contribution insofar as the kind human being is compatible with both standing and sitting. In the second option, (2) the statements actually regard the individual called Theaetetus and the communion of kinds is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the truth of the statement concerning sensible things or persons. Thus, one could presumably know that Theaetetus is not flying without empirical verification because the kind human being

This opposition has drawn attention for reasons which are not immediately relevant here, for references to the debate see D. Scott, *Plato's Meno*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 20-22, and F. Ferrari (a cura di), *Platone. Menone*, BUR, Milano 2016, pp. 33-41. The only thing I want to point out is that the use of *ποῖον* in the *Sophist* could mark the non-essential relationship between a certain statement and its truth-value: if Theaetetus stands up, the statement “Theaetetus is sitting” is no longer true. Accordingly, if the object of the proposition changes, the connection between the statement and its truth-value needs to be contingent. At the same time, it must be noted that one finds εἶναι δεῖ at 262e9 and φατέον εἶναι at 263b2-3. As I take it, the Stranger is conveying the idea that although the truth-values of statements concerning changing particulars are contingent, if the statement has an object, it *must* have either quality. This last point is consistent with conjunction of terms being the source of both truth and falsehood.

does not communicate with the kind flying, but in the case of sitting or standing, which are both compatible with the kind human being, the only way to ascertain that occasional and transitory truth will be an empirical act of verification<sup>46</sup>. I fully endorse (2). My interpretation as to why the Stranger makes reference to flying, i.e. a kind that cannot possibly be in relation to Theaetetus is the following. As we have seen, the Stranger's objective is showing how falsehood amounts to a conjunction of items that actually exist. The items (Theaetetus and flying) supply the meaning of the statement even if their conjunction does not take place. Giving an example where this conjunction cannot *possibly* take place provides the strongest evidence to the semantic theory of the Stranger. Theaetetus and the kind flying exist and this is enough to make the statement meaningful, and yet the statement joining them is false because there is no conjunction in reality.

However, the view of the Stranger can be addressed in relation to a pair of kinds that can be partaken of by Theaetetus, e.g. sitting and standing. The main point is that if one refers to changing things such as Theaetetus, the set of the things that are and the set of the things that are not with regard to him changes because Theaetetus changes. Furthermore, at least some truths concerning particulars need to be checked and verified perceptually or experientially. One can never know whether

<sup>46</sup> See F. Fronterotta, *Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies. Ontology, predication and truth in Plato's Sophist (263a-d)*, cit. Cf. P. Clarke, *The Interweaving of Forms with one another: Sophist 259e*, cit., pp. 50-56, who claims that there are different sorts of mixing between kinds. For instance, very great kinds always and necessarily commune, whereas human being and sitting do not because it is not the case that the two are always co-instantiated. However, I think the reverse view is better: kinds always entertain the same relation insofar as they do not change and the contingency is always a matter of how sensible particulars change.

Theaetetus is standing or sitting just by investigating and defining the kinds he partakes or does not partake of regardless of what he is doing, i.e. just by defining what sitting is. The same applies to the relations between kinds. As we have seen, it is reasonable to assume that the kind human being communes with sitting and standing both when Theaetetus is sitting and when he is standing, and therefore it is not sufficient to know what Theaetetus is doing at a given time. All this constitutes an obstacle to ascertaining the truths concerning Theaetetus because one can find herself in the situation of not being able to experience how things stand with regard to Theaetetus (for instance if Theaetetus lives in Athens and another person lives in Sparta). This is not the same with truths concerning kinds: the relations between kinds are given once and for all, and moreover, to ascertain these truths one is not subject to contextual constraints such as those required to see whether Theaetetus is actually sitting or standing.

The second fundamental point I want to introduce is the acknowledgment of a certain duality. Consider the case of not-being. A first sense of “not-being” is the absence of identity, which is the distinction of every kind from the others. Being is not sameness, sameness is not rest, and so on. This is the role played by difference in constituting the set of relations of alterity entertained by kinds. I described it in the previous chapter: these relations between kinds are on account of the nature of some specific kinds, i.e. the very great kinds, among which there is the kind difference. A second sense of “not-being” is the absence of participation – for instance, the fact that things or persons do not partake of some existing Form, as in the case of Theaetetus who is not flying or is not standing<sup>47</sup>. My question is: what is

<sup>47</sup> For this distinction, see for instance D. O’Brien, *La forma del non essere nel Sofista di Platone*, cit., p. 141.



the relation between the not-being regarding Theaetetus (at a given time) conceived as the set of all the kinds of which he does not partake (which taken by themselves are all existing kinds) and the not-being conceived as the non-identity that makes each kind different from the other kinds? Likewise, in the case of being, one is faced with two sorts of relations at two different levels: the relations between kinds and the relations between particulars and kinds. Again, my point is understanding how the former grounds the latter. The point I want to make is that *this sort of duality regarding both not-being and being is key to understanding how kinds and their reciprocal interweaving ground propositional truth and falsehood concerning sensible things*. As is clear from contingency, relations between kinds *do not* provide statements concerning sensible particulars with truth-values. Nevertheless, I think there is a sense in which any statement that speaks of sensible particulars owes its truth or falsehood to kinds and their interweaving.

As far as falsehood is concerned, Plato's argument is that a statement is false if it says what is not as if it were. Saying what is not as if it were means that one says that Theaetetus partakes of a kind of which he in fact does not partake. For instance, sitting and standing are and are not insofar as they both exist and differ from each other (first sense of "not-being" qua non-identity). Moreover, one is among the beings with regard to Theaetetus and the other is among the not-beings with regard to Theaetetus, which is to say, for instance, that Theaetetus is sitting and not standing (second sense of "not-being" qua absence of participation). Now, my contention is that this interpretation of what false statements concerning sensible particulars are is to be connected to the interweaving of Forms with each other. The connection is this: to mistake a kind Theaetetus does not partake of for a kind he does partake of in order to generate false statements can only happen *because the two kinds are different regardless*

of *Theaetetus* and the contingent and varying relations of participation he entertains. The only way one can say falsely that Theaetetus is standing while he is in fact sitting is on account of the fact that sitting and standing are different regardless of that particular situation. Of course, sitting and standing remain different when Theaetetus stands up or sits down, but the very condition under which one can be wrong when she mistakes one for the other is that they are different kinds. How could one ever be wrong in saying that *x* is *A-ing* when in fact it is *B-ing* if *A* and *B* were not different ways of being?

My interpretative proposal is that regardless of who is sitting or when, the falsity of the description of an event relies on the more fundamental fact that *what* the thing or person in question is like differs from *what* that thing or person is said to be<sup>48</sup>. In this way, the falsehood of a description of an event depends on the difference<sup>49</sup> between the relevant

<sup>48</sup> This point is recognised by N. White, *Plato. Sophist*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1993, p. XIV. Furthermore, this could be a way to interpret the reference to «different things said as if they were the same and things that are not said as if they were» at *Soph.* 263d1-2. The point would then be: things that are not (e.g. flying) with regard to Theaetetus are said as if they held of Theaetetus, and this amounts to mistaking what is different for what is the same, which means not recognising the distinction between two kinds. Furthermore, if we connect it to 253d1-3 where, as we have seen, it is said that the business of dialectic is dividing by kinds and «not thinking either that the same form is different or, when it is different, that it is the same». The similarity of the phrasing is striking. From the theoretical point of view, the two statements are strictly consistent: the dialectician does not mistake one Form for the other, and on account of this he is able to discern whether something partakes of that Form or not. If this is not difficult in the case of flying, it is difficult in the case of being, for example, a sophist. I shall address this point in a short while.

<sup>49</sup> This is precisely what D. Wiggins, *Sentence Meaning, Negation and Plato's Problem of Non-Being*, cit., p. 298, fails to recognise, although he correctly sees (p. 294) that differences between kinds do not suffice in de-

kinds, which at the same time does not determine whether the statement is actually true or false<sup>50</sup>. Is it possible to understand the truth of linguistic statements along the same lines as falsehood? If so, it would mean that the συμπλοκή of Forms is the ontological ground of any true linguistic weave *in a way that does not include supplying the truth-value of that statement*. I just argued that sitting and standing differ at the level of kinds and thereby make it possible for somebody to say falsely that Theaetetus is standing while he is in fact sitting without determining what is actually the case. Moreover, the falsity of “Theaetetus is standing” is possible because both Theaetetus and the kind standing exist, although there is no actual connection between them because Theaetetus is sitting. The point I want to make is that the interweaving of Forms grounds linguistic truth and falsehood concerning particulars because the woven kinds exist and entertain some relations regardless of the particulars participating in them. Hence, the interweaving of Forms should be understood as an ontological set of entities and their relations that provides what I label the “truth-ground” of any statement, which does not coincide with the truth-value of that statement. The truth-

termining the truth-value of statements regarding Theaetetus (contingency above). This is why he concludes his paper (p. 303) by saying that Plato’s account only prepares the way of an account of under what conditions a sentence is true, which in fact I think is an actual result of Plato’s view. Cf. B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 206, who recognises that the point is the relation of difference between, say, flying and what is the case with regard to Theaetetus. However, I am claiming something more, which is that the difference between flying and *what* Theaetetus is doing is required regardless of whether Theaetetus is doing it.

<sup>50</sup> This could be a way of rescuing Plato from the charge of being confused on the multiple sense of “not-being” as governed by a single nature such as M. Frede, *The Sophist on false statements*, cit., pp. 407-408.

ground has an ontological nature because the constituents of any statement are able to fit together and reveal something (that is or is not) thanks to the *existence* of kinds. It remains to be understood why the interweaving of Forms is required by a simple true statement such as “Theaetetus is sitting”<sup>51</sup>.

My answer is that sitting as a kind is required *at the same time* as an ontological ground for both any particular person to sit and for any statement describing this circumstance to be true. Sitting can perform such a function because it exists and therefore it communes with at least being, sameness and difference. Hence, the minimal core of the συμπλοκή, i.e. the μέγιστα γένη, can well be considered necessary for any true statement because every statement signifies at least one or more kinds. Furthermore, as I said in the last chapter, the communion each kind has with the greatest kinds is clearly thought of as implying *further* relations of the first kind with kinds other than the μέγιστα γένη<sup>52</sup>. Therefore, it seems that the interweaving of Forms, including the consonant-like kinds (continuing with the metaphor of letters), is behind any true statement. One could now ask: if it emerges from the analysis of false statements that the συμπλοκή is required because the relation of difference as to what two kinds are, e.g. sitting and standing, is the ontological ground for mistaking one for the other, what is the role played by relations of communion

<sup>51</sup> For the sake of the argument, I shall consider this statement as simple. I should be noted, however, that Theaetetus participates in a number of Forms, which could imply that “Theaetetus” belies a certain degree of complexity. If this is true, a more proper instance of a simple statement should be «a man learns», which appears in these very same terms at 262c9-10. I thank Professor Federico Petrucci for this remark.

<sup>52</sup> This is what S. Noriega-Olmos, *Plato’s Sophist 259E4-6*, cit., p. 26, fails to recognise in that he seems to be claiming that the interweaving amounts ultimately (whereas I would say minimally) to the greatest kinds.

or participation between consonant-like kinds as they are actualised by the kind being, in the case of true statements? Unfortunately, there is no clear answer to this question in the text. The unintuitive aspect of the συμπλοκή is that a plurality of entities constituting the weave of Forms or kinds, which are not signified by any word in a statement, are nonetheless required for that statement to be true insofar as they entertain some relations with at least the kind signified by the verb. These kinds are all the kinds with which the kind signified by the verb communes. Focusing on Plato's own example, my interpretation runs as follows:

- (a) The event that Theaetetus is sitting takes place *because* the kind sitting is something, i.e. because the kind sitting has a specific whatness, which is what it is for somebody to be sitting. Any individual must qualifiedly display this whatness, and therefore participate in it, otherwise she would not be sitting.
- (b) Analogously, the statement "Theaetetus is sitting" is true only thanks to the whatness of the kind sitting because only if the conditions prescribed by the relevant whatness are respected does the statement say the things that are as they are. The crucial point is that regardless of the truth-value of "Theaetetus is sitting", by signifying the kind sitting, an objective way of being is revealed so as to inform about what Theaetetus must be like for the statement to be true and to give a content or meaning to the statement whether it be true or false.
- (c) The συμπλοκή is precisely what expresses the circumstances that must be met by *both* the particular thing in order to be (in a certain way) *and* the statement in order to correctly describe what happens to that particular. This last statement is meant to convey two things. Firstly, no kind can exist in isolation, as the chapter on

the communion of kinds has shown. Accordingly, for both (a) and (b), the kinds partaken of by particulars or signified within statements need to be considered along with their specific sets of relations. Secondly, kinds are *at the same time* what makes things come to be in a certain way and are revealed by terms signifying them within a linguistic weave.

The core of this reading is that the interweaving of Forms determines *at the same time* the particular and its description. This is clearly consistent with my presentation of the theory of Forms in the middle dialogues in the *Physiology of εἶδος*. This is because the *Physiology* showed that the same entity, namely the Form, is responsible for both something displaying a determination, being thus and so, and being referred to or described linguistically (cf. the functions Determination and Reference). Accordingly, in the statement “Theaetetus is sitting”, by signifying the kind sitting, one is revealing the conditions that must be met by Theaetetus for that statement to be true. However, such conditions are not represented by the kind sitting in isolation. On the contrary, it is precisely the unique set of relations belonging to the kind sitting that expresses what that kind is and that determines what Theaetetus must be like and what its state is compatible with, if the statement is to be true. In other words, it is precisely by signifying a kind within a statement that one is able to determine under what conditions the statement is true. The relations of that kind are what enables one to judge whether the statement is true, and the statement is actually true if the subject named in the statement partakes of that kind, i.e. displays a way of being that has that specific set of relations. If the statement is false, both the subject and the kind are beings, but the subject does not partake of that kind, i.e. does not display a way of being that has a specific set of relations

belonging to the signified kind, and accordingly, the signified kind and the kind partaken of by the subject entertain a relation of difference. In this way, I think, the συμπλοκή can act as the source of meaning for statements<sup>53</sup>, i.e. it represents a complex way of being that (I) is independent of what takes place within space and time, (II) is revealed by the linguistic signification of some of its elements thanks to some term(s) in the statement irrespective of the truth-value of the statement, (III) establishes what the particular should be like for the statement to be true.

In my view, Plato's philosophical payoff is that the grounds of the thing's determination, i.e. the συμπλοκή, are also what grants its linguistic describability. The same item, along with its relations, is the ground of both the event of Theaetetus sitting and the truth of the statement describing it, provided that this ground is never thought of as supplying the truth-value of the statement. In other words, kinds are required by any statement regarding events and things because only with respect to them can one know the real features or aspect that the thing needs to display in order that the statement describing it be true, but as is clear by now, one can never know with respect to kinds *whether* it is true. I do not think that for Plato there is a real difference between being the ground for an event and the ground for the truth of the statement describing it: *that which makes something be is precisely that which makes it true to thought and language*. Again, we are faced with what emerged both in the standard theory of Forms and at the end of the first definition of the *Theaetetus*. Being and thought/language are strictly intertwined. Hence, my distinction: on the one hand, the truth-value of the proposition; on the other

<sup>53</sup> Obviously, if a given statement deals with sensible particulars the entire meaning of the statement is not provided by the weave of Forms.

hand, the truth-ground represented by the weave of Forms, which grounds both what the thing is like and the truth of the statement concerning it, where the latter two cannot actually be kept separate<sup>54</sup>.

One could argue that knowing the conditions represented by kinds and their relations as what must be met if the statement is to be true resembles the notion of meaning as what people understand when they speak, which is precisely the notion of meaning I rejected in section two above. On the contrary, the interpretation I am advancing is that kinds are intelligible extra-mental entities, which are directly revealed by correctly employing language. Meaning is precisely being in this relation with kinds, which enables one to objectively judge whether something is thus and so. This, I think, is Plato's way to assert that linguistic truth is objective, but at the same time, this happens because truly existing beings such as kinds are revealed within language. What about statements that only signify kinds such as those of dialectic and possibly the method of divisions? This is one crucial implication of my reading: if one says "being is different from sameness", she is stating something concerning a number of kinds. If my account is correct, statements that speak exclusively of kinds are different from statements concerning particulars, because in the case of the former there is a perfect coincidence of what grounds the truth of the statement, namely the *συμπλοκή*,

<sup>54</sup> B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., p. 208 speaks of «truthmaking emphasis». He is correct in saying that Forms are responsible for the truth of statements concerning sensible particulars in that the latter are unstable, etc. However, speaking of truthmaking gives the incorrect idea that truths concerning particulars can be found only by referring to kinds. Forms are causes of whatever is the case without determining entirely what actually is the case. On this, cf. F. Leigh, *Being and Power in Plato's Sophist*, cit., pp. 78-79.



and what is relevant to determine whether these statements are true, i.e. truth-grounds and truth-values are the same. This for a very simple reason: these statements are actually descriptions of the συμπλοκή itself. This is a very palatable consequence as one can see this point as a semantical way to assess the superiority of dialectics or any method meant to better grasp reality. If my account is correct, the λόγος naturally fits better with the structure of reality, and when it speaks of kinds it keeps together the ontological grounds of linguistic truth and what makes it true. For instance, “motion differs from rest” has its truth-ground in the fact that motion is different from rest, but it is also what the statements states and therefore what provides the truth-value of the statement. To sum up, the rationale behind my reading is that by distinguishing truth-grounds from truth-values, the συμπλοκή (a) accounts for both what things are like and how they can be truly or falsely thought and described; (b) in doing so the interweaving also grants (b1) the strict relation between reality and thought/language and (b2) the contingency and variability of sensible particulars’ determination; and finally (c) it manages to acknowledge language a privileged relation to kinds and their communion.

I must now face an objection that might arise. Since determining the relations between kinds is the task of the dialectician, and given that my reading suggests that these relations are at the basis of the meaning of empirical statements such as “Theaetetus is sitting”, does this imply that one has to be a dialectician in order to arrive at the truth of these empirical, contingent statements? This conclusion needs to be avoided because it appears to be quite clear that for Plato one can have beliefs that are not knowledge (i.e. dialectic), but that at the same time can be true or false. Fortunately, my view is not at all committed to this. To begin with, it can be reasonably argued that the dialectician exerts his knowledge in dividing

by kinds<sup>55</sup>, which from the linguistic point of view equates to a description of the *συμπλοκή* as described just above. In other words, being a dialectician amounts to recognising the truth of “what *F* is”, which includes the set (or possibly a relevant sub-set) of *F*'s relations to other kinds. If the structural correspondence between reality and language is true, as is suggested by the large employment of the metaphor of weaving across the two dimensions, then it could be inferred that the fact that only sentences conjoining a number of items (i.e. nouns and verbs) reveal being is the linguistic mirroring of the relational nature of the kind being, i.e. the fact that the whatness of an existing kind brings in its own relations.

When it comes to statements such as “Theaetetus is *F*”, that is, statements *not* describing the *συμπλοκή*, some legitimate doubts arise, especially if one claims, as I do, that *F*'s relations to other kinds represent what Theaetetus must be like in order for the statement to be true, which is revealed by the statement. To meet this challenge, I put forward a number of arguments. I consider the last argument I propose to be the most persuasive, particularly where I explain that the alternative view, namely the view that statements concerning sensible particulars are entirely independent of the *συμπλοκή*, has much worse implications. Firstly, in the *Sophist* Plato appears to be a realist about truth. One already has a linguistic signal of that to the extent that he describes what is true about Theaetetus as *ὄντα*. Moreover, the entire series of arguments in the dialogue aim at, among other things, a metaphysical account of truth and falsehood. If this is true, the account of meaning I presented in my paper better squares with the context as it represents the objective, i.e. grounded

<sup>55</sup> See again *Soph.* 253b-c.

in kinds, conditions determining what happens in the world as is revealed by a proper use of language.

Secondly, consider again “Theaetetus is *F*”. If *F* stands for “just”, the objection based on the absurdity that one needs to be a dialectician in order to ascertain whether Theaetetus is *F* would lose almost all of its cogency insofar as it is a classical Platonic topos that one must be able to know the Form of Justice to know if somebody acts justly<sup>56</sup>. Of course, in the examples provided in the *Sophist*, Theaetetus is not described as just. However, I do not think that the story is essentially different. One can understand what Theaetetus must be like if he is sitting only if she has a grasp of what sitting objectively is. It is clear that sitting and justice are very different things insofar as it is much more difficult to grasp what justice is than what sitting is. This line of thought, though, does not seem to be alien to Plato: at the opening of the dialogue, he describes the nature of the angler in the same way as he will attempt many times to describe that of the sophist, because the former is much easier and less elusive to describe than the latter. This, however, does not imply that grasping easier natures is essentially different from grasping more difficult ones. At *Soph.* 218e2-5, it is overtly stated that a simpler and better-known subject has a λόγος that has nothing less than that concerning greater things. Furthermore, at 251a-b, all sorts of predicates are kept together, from figures to virtues. Would it be reasonable to assume that they work in the same way for entirely different reasons?

Thirdly and more importantly, my reading does not entail that non-dialecticians, i.e. people who do not grasp natures

<sup>56</sup> Obviously, I cannot address the vexed question whether having reasons to believe that “*x* is *F*”, where *x* does not designate a Form, on the basis of one’s knowledge of *F*, where *F* designates a Form, counts as a genuine instance of knowledge.

and their relations, are unable to speak and understand each other or to occasionally utter true statements. This because, as I argued several times, the concept of meaning at stake is not designed to account for what people think, but rather to reveal a matter of fact (e.g. τὸ πρῶγμα αὐτὸ of the sophist at 218c4), which enables one to understand what *F* is objectively and possibly to recognise when a person is such. Accordingly, if one says that Theaetetus is a sophist without being a dialectician, her statement can be true provided that being a sophist is an actual kind and that Theaetetus behaves as is prescribed from what being a sophist is. If so, the statement only *happens* to be true and the speaker remains unaware of what grounds its truth (i.e. its truth-ground). However, if one wishes to understand whether Theaetetus is *really* a sophist, she needs to investigate what being a sophist means independently of what the case is with regard to Theaetetus, and this requires practicing dialectic<sup>57</sup>. This, I think, sounds like an acceptable solution insofar as it (I) respects the canonical Platonic distinction between ἐπιστήμη and δόξα; (II) assumes that the δόξα *can* be true without any degree of certainty as to why; and (III) squares with the view, crucial to the dialogue, that a question is answered through a discussion where the speakers go from what they think a name means to the actual nature named by that term. To conclude, I think that my reading is correct because the alternative option would consist in saying

<sup>57</sup> Despite remaining a speculative solution, this could be a way to look at the difference between knowledge and belief in the present context. Cf. N. Zaks, *À quel logos correspond la ΣΥΜΠΛΟΚΗ ΤΩΝ ΕΙΔΩΝ du Sophiste?*, cit., pp. 47-52, who speaks of two sorts of discourse, namely dialectical and doxastic, which in my view would correspond to the description of the interweaving of Forms and the description of what happens to particulars in space and time, respectively. However, he fails to answer to the most important Platonic point, namely, how the former bears on the latter.

that the *συμπλοκή* does not play any role in an entire set of statements, namely all empirical statements, which would work independently of Forms/kinds, but this, I reckon, is untenable for two of reasons. Firstly, it would entail that the reality that empirical statements are about is either dependent on Forms for its existence without these Forms playing any role in the statements describing it<sup>58</sup>, or such an empirical reality is entirely independent of Forms, both of which sound quite problematic to any interpretation that is still committed to Platonic Forms in the *Sophist*. Secondly, saying that Forms are required only to ground statements concerning themselves also suggests that statements concerning particulars work perfectly well without being grounded in Forms, which in turn could raise the objection of why the introduction of Forms to explain the origin of language is necessary in the first place<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> This conclusion should be avoided, consider again the eponymy principle (things take on the name of the form they partake of), which is present as late as the *Parmenides* (see again *Lys.* 220a7-b3; *Phaed.* 78e1-2; 103b7-c1; *Parm.* 130e5-6; 133d3).

<sup>59</sup> By this, I do not imply that since statements concerning Forms or particulars are in both cases grounded in Forms they work *exactly* in the same way. An entire reflection on tensed and tenseless uses would be needed, cf. *Tim.* 37e-38b.

## Conclusions

I wish to conclude this book by pointing out two things. Firstly, I shall draw some conclusions concerning Plato's view in the *Sophist* as has been depicted in the last two chapters. Secondly, I shall connect the latter with the overall interpretation of the intertwinement of being and cognition I discussed throughout the book. If I were to phrase Plato's view in the *Sophist* as I have presented it in modern terms, I would say something along the following lines. Kinds are genuinely existing entities. They individuate an extension, i.e. the *varying* set of all the sensible things that participate in them. The participation is determined by meeting some conditions (coming to be in a certain way), i.e. the intension of the kind, which is expressed by the *invariable* set of relations between that kind and all the others deriving from what the involved kinds are in themselves. The relations between kinds are actualised by at least the kinds being, sameness and difference. But more

than this, kinds are literally the cause of why things come to be thus and so. In other words, it is because Theaetetus participates in sitting that he is actually sitting, just as in the middle dialogues it is because of the Form of the Beautiful that something is beautiful. Thus, one is faced with a set of interrelated entities that are responsible for the occurring of an event as well as the truth and the meaning of the statement describing it. Meaning here is intended as the objective way something must be for the statement to be true, as is revealed by the statement itself. If one is to allow for falsehood, the existence of kinds must be independent of what happens in space and time.

For a statement to have a meaning it must reveal being, i.e. its components must pick out some existing items and must connect them in some way, for instance Theaetetus is flying or standing. This connection can be different from what is actually the case, for instance Theaetetus can in fact be sitting. However, the fact that I speak of existing kinds that are not partaken of by Theaetetus and I connect them to a subject grants meaning to my statement regardless of its being true (or false). But this can only work if the existence of kinds is independent of what Theaetetus is doing. It is precisely the separation, i.e. independent existence, of kinds from particulars that allows them to act as the meaning of verbs or predicates. In other words, Plato's metaphysics of kinds is able to ground falsehood while respecting the semantic criterion or direct reference theory of meaning. At the same time, for kinds to exist and consequently work as meanings of terms they must commune with being. As emerged from Chapter 7, this communion with being always comes with establishing further relations that are required to actually determine if something is *really* thus and so. For instance, if I say that Theaetetus is a sophist this can only be the case and consequently its description be true with regard to what being a sophist

is along with all the relevant relations (for instance whether being a sophist is *different* from being a philosopher or not). I add to this that the meaning of a statement is fixed and the conditions under which it can be true are (at least partly, but essentially) provided by the reference to the kind by the verb along with the kind's relation to other kinds. A bit speculatively, the outcome of this view is that the very structure of reality (kinds) is, as it were, ready to make linguistic sense<sup>1</sup>.

I now would like to consider some points. Firstly, I want to make clear the connection between what I argued in sections two and three of the previous chapter. In section two, I argued that the Stranger is claiming that linguistic elements have meaning only if they are put in connection and that having meaning is not just being understandable by a community of speakers or having a reference. Rather, it is a revelation or ostension of being. With section three as a background, this can be interpreted in two ways: (I) the being that is revealed is the kind being. The kind being is one of at least three parts of reality that establish the relations within the *συμπλοκή* and, specifically, being is precisely that which carries out the relations of participation or communion of the kinds with each other. Then, revealing being is revealing relations, and this requires a plurality of linguistic elements. Or (II) the being that is revealed consists in entities possibly other than the kind being, i.e. other kinds and particulars. As should be clear by now, kinds other than being necessarily commune with the kind being and this results in a set of relations of participation or communion. These relations can be between the kind signified by a noun and that signified by the verb. Alternatively, they can be between the kinds of which the particular signified

<sup>1</sup> This could be seen as a further way to see the strict relation between ontological and logical truth, which should be a recognised fact about Plato's view by now. Cf. Introduction.



by the name/noun partakes and that signified by the verb. Finally, these relations can be between the kind signified by the verb and the kinds not mentioned in the statement with which the kind signified communes. In any case, a plurality is required for a statement to be possible and this plurality is in each case the interweaving of Forms<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Obviously, much more needs to be understood. For instance, one should ask what this communion between kinds is. Does it individuate relations such as that between the kinds human being and animal, which appear to be necessary at the level of particulars? How about relations of compatibility such as that between man and sitting or standing? So, "Theaetetus is a human being" and "Theaetetus is an animal" are always true together. The kinds human being and animal combine, but at the same time are two distinct/different kinds, i.e. each of them is *not* the other. It could be suggested that in order to have positive false statements the non-combination of kinds is required. In other words, one can be wrong about things only if what she says does not combine with what is the case with regard to that thing. So, for example sitting does not combine with standing and then if one says that Theaetetus is sitting while in fact he is standing, one is wrong. However, if we consider "Theaetetus is talking", he could be speaking while sitting or standing. Of course, talking does not combine with being silent just like sitting excludes standing. I see that this is highly speculative, but I think that one can say that Theaetetus is talking *regardless* of whether he is standing or sitting because the kinds talking, sitting and standing are *different* from each other. Therefore, also in the following sense the kinds ground the truth of statements concerning sensible things: if Theaetetus is both talking and standing the difference between the statements "Theaetetus is talking" and "Theaetetus is standing" is grounded in the difference between the kinds talking and standing, also when they combine. This, however, opens a new problem. It is easy to interpret the combination of kinds as that of human being and animal, i.e. essential determination. Though, this is dangerously reminiscent of genus-species relations. Anyway, what about talking, sitting and standing? We know that sitting and standing do not combine and we know that one can talk while sitting or while standing. Does it mean that the kind talking combines both with the kinds sitting and standing? If so, how should we distinguish the communion between the kinds human being and animal, which always come together, and the

A possible objection is that the conjunction of name/noun and verb is required by the revelation brought about by the λόγος, but in the case of the relations between the kind signified by the verb and the kinds not mentioned in the statement, it would seem that one is faced with two different weaves: on the one hand, the weave between the subject of the statement and the kind signified by the verb, and on the other, the weave of kinds among which one can find the kind signified by the verb. One of the concepts behind my interpretation is that the συμπλοκή of Forms is such that no kind can be taken in isolation insofar as it entertains relations with the other kinds. This is to say that the linguistic weave of name/noun

communion between sitting and talking that only can possibly take place together? It is not possible to solve the issue. Speculatively, I have a proclivity for a positive answer for at least two reasons. First, this is consistent with the last chapter's analysis according to which the συμπλοκή of Forms is a condition for truths that obtain contingently. Second, if we consider another example like the relation between human beings and virtue, it is nearly impossible either to admit that every human being is always virtuous just like every human being is an animal or that the kinds human being and virtue do not combine as human beings *can* be virtuous. It seems that with regard to sensible things combination of kinds means possibility and non-combination of kinds means impossibility, whereas with regard to themselves all the relations are necessary insofar as they always remain as they are. However, this interpretation faces the difficulty of being unable to discern the essential traits from the unessential ones: does the kind human being combine with animal as it combines with the kind virtue, given that within experience one man can be virtuous, whereas every human being is an animal? One possible answer could be that human being combines with both virtue and what is opposed to it, whereas human being does not combine with the opposite of animal (whatever it may be). At any rate, all of this remains highly hypothetical. Most likely, the genuine Platonic interest is understanding how the eidetic dimension is structured, partially irrespective of this order of problems. Cf. L.M. De Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: a philosophical commentary*, cit., pp. 348-350.

and verb, insofar as it connects to any subject the being of a kind, necessarily involves the unique set of relations belonging to that kind.

Furthermore, in Plato's account, meaning is conceived as a direct relation between language and reality, which is thought of as a revelation<sup>3</sup>. The result is a revelation of what is real and extra-linguistic, once a fitting together of linguistic elements takes place. If the fitting together of linguistic elements is a false statement, reality is revealed in any case. For Plato, what is revealed by false statements is different from what is, but nevertheless *is*. For instance, Theaetetus is sitting and not standing, so "Theaetetus is standing" is false and therefore reveals what *is* not with regard to Theaetetus. It is precisely for this reason that I think, as stated above, that false statements are meaningful even though meaning is regarded as a revelation of being and not as merely being understood by competent speakers. When I say that Theaetetus is standing, by employing "standing" I am expressing a set of objective existing relations that enables one to judge whether the statement is true or false but that they by themselves are not sufficient to determine whether it is in fact true or false. Moreover, if the statement is false the kind standing and its relations are a genuine part of reality from which the kinds of which Theaetetus does partake must differ, and this *explains*

<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, I think that Plato's view is stronger than a correspondence theory of truth, cf. F. Fronterotta, *Theaetetus sits – Theaetetus flies. Ontology, predication and truth in Plato's Sophist (263a-d)*, cit., p. 210, if by the latter one means that a true statement correctly represents a correspondent part of reality. Plato's view is, I think, that if a statement is true, it reveals "things that are". This could be a reason why Plato warns against focusing on words, as sophists do, instead of looking at the things they speak of. For a discussion on how to ascribe a realist conception of truth without any commitment to correspondence, see B. Hestir, *Plato on the Metaphysical Foundation of Meaning and Truth*, cit., pp. 209-218.

why the statement is false. This is possible because the kind standing in itself exists and entertains a set of relations with other kinds (among which there is difference from sitting) and possibly other particulars.

I also argued that kinds or Forms is what provides language with meaningful content and at the same time is the cause of the determination of particulars. It seems that Plato perceives these two things as two sides of the same coin. If, as I argued, one speaks of temporal particulars that can change and cease to be, this translates into contingency and cognitive uncertainty such that one can never know whether what she says is true simply by looking at the kinds involved. However, my proposal, which is strictly consistent with the *Physiology* of εἶδος, is that language enjoys a direct relation with kinds, and thus provides the conditions that should be met by particulars for the statement about a given particular to be true on account of the many relations entertained by kinds. This is the second point I want to elucidate, namely the strict relation between the ontological foundation of discourse or statements by means of the interweaving of Forms and the doctrine of the κοινῶν τῶν γενῶν. Plato's peculiar view that reality ultimately consists of kinds and their relations relies on the crucial role played by at least being, sameness and difference. One of the objectives was to show that the fact that reality has an eidetic structure by itself warrants that both kinds and what participates in these kinds can be revealed by λόγοι, because the λόγοι have a structure similar to reality, which is expressed by the metaphor of weaving. In addition, the ontological autonomy of kinds as whatnesses representing, as it were, ways of being supplies the meaning of general terms of human language, which establish how named particulars should be in order that the statements in which both figure can be true. This is another way to see the importance of the interweaving of Forms in Plato's account of language and reality. The point is

never merely naming or using terms in minimal συμπλοκαί such as “a man learns”, the true philosophical enquiry instead lies in running through the warp and the weft of reality in order to understand its connections as they are effected by the kind being<sup>4</sup>.

This is a way to understand what dialectic, understood as dividing by kinds and not mixing up the same form with a different one, actually is. If this weave-like metaphysical structure that is investigated by the philosopher is essentially brought about by the kind being and it is also what is essentially required by any statement to have a meaning, then it can be inferred that the kind being is also that kind which makes the linguistic articulation of reality possible. Given the concept of meaning at stake in the *Sophist*, this suggests that the kind being is responsible for the fact that language can actually reveal how things are, i.e. it can be true and therefore say τὰ ὄντα.

In other words, it can be suggested, and I think it should, that the very same kind responsible for the συμπλοκή, i.e. being, is also the kind responsible for the fact that kinds and particulars can be (at least in some fundamental respects) spoken of. Consequently, and coherently with the previous parts of this book, for Plato being seems to be essentially related to supporting cognition, namely knowledge, thought and language. From the first part, it emerged that Forms are complex items that perform a number of functions with regard to both the qualified temporal being of sensible particulars and cognition (Forms make knowledge, definition and reference-description possible). The functional core of the theory of Forms fits very well with these passages from the *Sophist*. As

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Silverman, *The Dialectic of Essence*, cit., pp. 146 and pp. 180-181, who claims that by partaking of being a Form becomes a logical subject.

I hope I managed to demonstrate, one can best make sense of the complex semantical theory of the dialogue and its relation to the ontological view of the communion of kinds by saying that it is the participation in kinds that makes things thus and so, and it is the reference to kinds in the statements that provides them with meaning. When the two levels match, one is actually saying “the things that are”. If this is so, then one of the key ideas of the standard formulation of the theory of Forms is precisely what the *Sophist* is building on; in other words, that Forms are both the cause of what happens in the world and why one can speak about them. The second part of this book claimed that in the first definition of the *Theaetetus* even a minimal sort of cognition collapses, along with language, if one does not assume that for something to be it must be independent of anybody’s experience of it and this is the reason why one can speak about it. This could be regarded as a proto-intuition of a realism about truth: what is the case in the world does not depend on being believed to be the case. I think that the *Sophist*, by addressing the crucial issues of not-being and falsehood, is actually joining, among other things, what I investigated in the first part with what I investigated in the second part. The intricacies of the theory of Forms are developed up from the greatest kinds down to minimally complex and trivial statements such as “Theaetetus is sitting”, which thereby result connected. What keeps together the theory of Forms in the middle dialogues, the diagnosis of the shortcomings of the first definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* and the complex relation between ontology and logic/semantics in the *Sophist* is a tight intertwinement between being, thought and language, which should be regarded as a fundamental aspect of Plato’s thought.



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