

Knowledge, simplicity, and predication: essays on  
Plato's *Theaetetus*

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KNOWLEDGE, SIMPLICITY, AND PREDICATION: ESSAYS ON  
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The end of the *Theaetetus*, including Socrates' "Dream" and his three proposals about *logos*, raises a variety of epistemological and metaphysical problems. These essays attempt to illuminate some of them. In the first essay, I discuss the three *logos*-proposals and argue that Socrates' discussion here is, in a certain sense, epistemological and not metaphysical. In the second essay, I argue that the Platonic notion of uniformity (which appears in the Dream) has not been properly appreciated, and I offer a candidate interpretation. In the third essay, I argue that the distinction between being and becoming in the Dream, and elsewhere in Plato, should be understood as a difference in kinds of predication.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nate Meyvis graduated from Detroit Country Day School in 2001. He attended Yale University, where he majored in mathematics, focusing his studies on abstract algebra. In 2002, he won the Barge and Runk prize examination in 2002 and finished in the top 250 of the William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition. At Yale, he also studied nonfiction writing, ethics, and metaphysics.

In 2007, Nate enrolled at Columbia University, where he completed the free-standing M.A. in philosophy, with Katja Maria Vogt as advisor. While completing his M.A., he also studied Greek at The City University of New York in preparation for sustained study of ancient texts. After graduating from Columbia in 2009, he entered the Sage School of Philosophy at Cornell University.

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# Chapter 1

## Notes on the three *logos*-proposals that end the *Theaetetus*

### 1.1 Introduction

The *Theaetetus* ends with Socrates discussing three proposals for a definition of *logos*. These proposals are parts of a larger treatment of knowledge as true judgment with an account (*logos*). Socrates rejects each of the three proposals, and the dialogue ends aporetically.

Commentators have discussed Socrates' reasons for dismissing each of these proposals, whether these dismissals are justified or not, and what to make of Socrates' or Plato's commitment to the knowledge-as-true-judgment-with-a-*logos* schema in light of Socrates' arguments. Some commentators make much of the fact that the rejections create an *aporia*, and others do not. Both empha-

sizing and de-emphasizing the state of *aporia* have been done with a variety of motivations.

Among de-emphasizers, some seem motivated by a kind of skepticism that the order and progression of Socrates' various arguments is of much significance.<sup>1</sup> Others take Plato to be leading us to the conclusion that, because Socrates has invoked some premise that he (Plato) does not believe and that we do not need to accept, we can retain the true-judgment-with-*logos* schema but with a view of *logoi* other than the three that are explicitly considered.<sup>2</sup>

Among the *aporia* emphasizees, some take the lesson to be that we need to supply a metaphysics of Forms roughly as we find them in the *Republic*.<sup>3</sup> Others take the important effect of the *aporia* to be a sort of tribute to the figure of Socrates and a call to do philosophy in the Socratic style.<sup>4</sup> And others have suggested yet more reasons.

I will hold that a partial explanation of this *aporia* can be supplied in light of careful consideration of the three *logos*-proposals. According to the view I will argue for, Socrates' rejections of each of the three *logos*-proposals get their force not because the *logoi* under consideration fail to accurately reflect the world, but rather because combinations of such *logoi* with true judgment could not be knowledge. Moreover, these deficiencies are not flukes or idiosyncratic features of the three proposals; each of Socrates' arguments against the proposals applies to very many candidate *logoi*, and perhaps all reasonable *logoi*. This motivates

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<sup>1</sup>John McDowell, for example, has suggested that we concern ourselves most with "formal incompatibility" or the lack thereof between adjacent passages rather than worrying too much about whether considerations suggested by one passage are in tension with another. [McDowell, 1973, p. 239] He has also at least occasionally taken a skeptical attitude toward the unity and cohesion of the *Theaetetus*, as when he begins a discussion of the Dream by noting that its "significance, if any ... is not clear." [McDowell, 1973, p. 231]

<sup>2</sup>Gail Fine, for example, has held that the evidence in the dialogue tells in favor of construing knowledge as justified true belief (see [Fine, 1979, p. 369]) and more generally affirms a "interrelation model" of knowledge (see [Fine, 1979], especially pgs. 394-5 for the relationship between the dialogue's *aporia* and its epistemological suggestions).

<sup>3</sup>See [Cornford, 1935].

<sup>4</sup>See [Sedley, 2004, p. 9].

the *aporia* as arising from the existence of a problematic assumption driving the inquiry at the end of the dialogue; as long as the interlocutors hold on to the view of knowledge as true judgment with a *logos*, the candidate knowledge-proposals are bound to fail.

This way of motivating the *aporia* has at least two important consequences. First, it suggests a path to the familiar but disputed conclusion that the end of the *Theaetetus* invites the reader to reject not some theory of *logoi* but rather the whole project of treating knowledge as true judgment with a *logos*. The three accounts of *logos* are in many ways quite respectable: Socrates presents them as such, and if the intended audience of the *Theaetetus* includes sympathetic readers of other late-Platonic dialogues, that audience would likely be inclined to agree with Socrates that the accounts are respectable. Yet they cannot generate an acceptable account of knowledge, if knowledge is true judgment with a *logos*. The reader, therefore, might reasonably be expected to conclude that Socrates' materials are worthy but his blueprint is not, and that it is the blueprint—the view that knowledge is true judgment with a *logos*—that should be discarded.

Second, it suggests a difference between this last section of the dialogue and the immediately preceding section, the mereology of *Theaetetus* 204-5. This previous section is explicitly about the structure of items such as wagons and armies; insofar as it discusses *logoi* of those items, those *logoi* are to be judged in terms of their adequacy at describing the structure of such items. Thus the two adjacent sections have at least this important difference in their aims.

I describe these two consequences in section 5; sections 2 through 4 take up each of Socrates' three proposals in turn.

## 1.2 The stream-of-speech view

Socrates' first proposal is that to give a *logos* of something, and so (perhaps) to provide whatever turns a true belief into knowledge, is to make one's thought clear in speech, as though the judgment were imprinted<sup>5</sup> in a verbal stream the way that it might be imprinted in a mirror or in water.<sup>6</sup> One immediately suspects that this proposal will not be satisfactory, and of Socrates' rejections of the three proposals, this one holds the fewest surprises for the modern reader.

Socrates points out that anyone who has true judgment will be able to perform the described imprinting,<sup>7</sup> so that (on this view) the additional requirement of the *logos* adds nothing to the view, already rejected, that knowledge is true judgment.<sup>8</sup>

This is enough to refute this first *logos*-proposal, but Socrates' remarks contain enough material for other objections. He notes that such *logoi* will be available to anyone who is neither deaf nor dumb.<sup>9</sup> If knowledge is to be a significant achievement, and if *logos*-having is a condition on knowledge, then the stream-of-speech view must fail; Socrates has plausibly suggested that forming a true judgment into speech does not require the right sort of understanding

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<sup>5</sup>*ektupoumenon*, 206d4. We might characterize the first proposal as “simply ‘speech’,” as Lee does ([Lee, 1998, p. 428]; see also “voicing a true judgment” at [Gill, 2012, p. 127]. However, note that the passage and this verb suggest that there is something important not just about performing speech-acts *per se*, but rather about fixing or translating a certain kind of thought in a certain activity or medium.

<sup>6</sup>206d1-5.

<sup>7</sup>One might hold instead that the imprinting is something that one passively receives, so that the characterization I give is infelicitous. I choose the active characterization because it is suggested by the language Socrates uses: the imprinting is an elaboration of “making one's thought clear” (*to tēn autou dianoian emphanē poiein*, 206d1-2). As the latter seems to be something that the knowing agent *does*, so presumably is the imprinting.

<sup>8</sup>Here it might be suggested that while knowledge is not true judgment, anyone who has knowledge also has true judgment. In this way, one could hold that the rejection of the knowledge-is-true-judgment claim does not rule out the stream-of-speech view or some other view according to which anyone who has true judgment has knowledge. It is clear in (e.g.) the example of the jury, (at 201a *ff.*) however, that the rejection of the claim that knowledge is true judgment rests at least in part on the fact that one can have one without the other. As such, they rule out views according to which, although the two states are different, true judgment always puts one in a position to have knowledge.

<sup>9</sup>206d9

beyond what is required to get the true judgment in the first place.

There remains the question why Plato thought to include this theory of *logos*. This cannot be answered with anything we find explicitly in the text, but one might wonder whether it is a brief treatment of popular methods of debate, and more generally of the view that one establishes one's expertise by making speeches. (Recall Meno's surprise at the realization that all his public speeches about virtue might not prove that he really knows his subject.<sup>10</sup>) We might, by contrast, read this first proposal, which is discussed only briefly, as a claim that some widespread standards of knowledge-attribution are badly mistaken.<sup>11</sup>

Note that the content of what is imprinted on the stream of speech does not figure in Socrates' rejection of the view. One might have a quite perfect grasp of an item or be reciting one of the definitions that Socrates applauds in the early and middle dialogues. Even in this case, Socrates' comments will still strongly support the view that imprinting one's thoughts in speech still does not count as giving a *logos* in a way having knowledge requires. Rather than rejecting a view about the sort of thought or state that puts one in a sufficiently strong epistemic position, Socrates has rejected a view that seems to apply no matter what the content of the *logos* is.<sup>12</sup> We will find that this is not unique to the first of the three *logos*-proposals.

### 1.3 The down-to-the-elements view

The second proposal has become known as the "enumeration of elements" view.<sup>13</sup> This label is in some respects unfortunate, as it might encourage mis-

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<sup>10</sup> *Meno* 80a-b.

<sup>11</sup> Tad Brennan notes that the third *logos*-definition can be viewed as a refinement of this one: here we consider a *logos* that is *whatever anyone* would say, whereas later we will consider *what most people* will say.

<sup>12</sup> One might hold that only some sorts of *logoi* put one in a position to put them in speech in the right way. There is no such suggestion at 206d, however.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., [Lee, 1998, p. 428]; [Taylor, 1998, p. 186]; [Bostock, 1988, p. 222]; [Fine, 1977]; [McDowell, 1973, p. 252]; [Thomas, 2002, p. 55]. [Runciman, 1962, p. 40] has "enumeration

taken readings of what elements are and of what Socrates means when he speaks of giving an account by finishing an answer with the elements.

Socrates repeatedly speaks of answering *dia* (“through”) “the elements.”<sup>14</sup> Sometimes he speaks of *perainein* (roughly, “going through”) an answer, sometimes of making a *hodos dia* (“path through”) elements. To claim that to do this is to *enumerate* elements is a leap: Socrates does not use language narrowly tailored to doing such a thing, when Plato might easily have made him do so. (Note that Socrates, at 146e, was happy to correct Theaetetus for “counting up” (*arithmêsai*) instances of knowledge rather than telling Socrates what knowledge itself is; Plato was perfectly happy to use *arithmeô* when appropriate.) The parts being listed are not described as *arithmoi* in this passage, and the process of listing them is not described with any verb related to *arithmos*.<sup>15</sup>

At least two things might be meant by ‘enumeration,’ and they might be described as ‘ordered lists’ and ‘unordered lists’ (to borrow phrases from computer science). An unordered list is, roughly, a collection of items to which are attributed no structure whatsoever other than membership in the collection; an ordered list has whatever structure is required to support the items’ having a defined order. Commentators seem to have the former in mind, especially when they claim that this notion of *logos* has no resources with which to account for structure.<sup>16</sup>

There is strong evidence, by contrast, that the examples suggest that the of all the parts.” Gill avoids the phrase; see [Gill, 2012, p. 128]; Shields ([Shields, 1999]) avoids it also.

<sup>14</sup>206e, 207e, 208a, 208b.

<sup>15</sup>Socrates uses forms of “*arithmeô*” at 146e and 198c, but nowhere else in the dialogue. Another term Socrates might have used for an enumerated list is “*katalogos*.” Indeed, Socrates *does* use this word in the *Theaetetus*, at 175a, where it means something like “list of ancestors.” Thus Plato is withholding from Socrates a vocabulary of enumeration that is very much available to him. (These facts about the text were confirmed with a manual search combined with a search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.)

<sup>16</sup>See, e.g., [Lee, 1998, p. 429]; [Bostock, 1988, p. 225]. Fine considers the structure of the argument in the cases both when the enumerations do are and are not ordered ([Fine, 1979, p. 382]). She argues that the enumerations of elements are not ordered ([Fine, 1979, pgs. 383-4]); I argue against that claim below.

items in the list (or the *logos*-as-list) are importantly ordered. The discussion is animated by the example of letters and words, and neither of the interlocutors suggests that the existence of anagrams<sup>17</sup> defeats the view (as they would if these *logoi* were unordered lists); thus we have some reason to think that these lists (if they are in fact lists) are ordered.

It is surely correct to note, as Fine does, that “neither Socrates nor the dream theorist ever explicitly appeals to order in elucidating the dream theory.”<sup>18</sup> She notes that the letter-examples suggest that order is somehow relevant, but concludes that the examples taken as a whole suggest a picture in which order is not relevant. Fine claims that “axle, yoke, wheels” is as appropriate a *logos* as “wheels, axle, yoke,” and it is clear why one would think this, but it is less clear that a full elemental *logos* would be similarly immune from reordering. The wheels are, after all, connected to the axle in a way that they are not connected to the yoke, and this fact is reflected in the latter *logos* but not the former. Very often, order determines so much about structure that we use the former to track, communicate, and reason about the latter.<sup>19</sup> It is relevant that Socrates’ five-element account—he also mentions the body and the rail—is explicitly marked as deficient and to be dispreferred to a Hesiodic “hundred timbers” account.<sup>20</sup>

The language of the passage might add further support for the view that elemental *logoi* are essentially ordered or structured: again, Socrates speaks of making a *dia tou stoikheiou hodon* (a road or path through the elements)

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<sup>17</sup>By ‘anagram’ I mean ‘a word using the same letters [as another],’ with the notions of ‘using’ and ‘letter’ defined contextually; if ‘letters’ here are fundamentally verbal or spoken, then the definition of an anagram here would slightly differ from the usual (written) definition. On the *grammata* as fundamentally verbalized entities in the late Plato, see [Menn, 1998, p. 292].

<sup>18</sup>[Fine, 1979, p. 383]

<sup>19</sup>I give examples on p. 8 below.

<sup>20</sup>Here I disagree with, among others, Rorty ([Rorty, 1972, p. 12]), who follows Morrow in suggesting that the wagon example should lead us to believe that *stoikheia* are what they are in virtue of their incorporation in the whole (as a bit of wood is not a spoke except insofar as it is a wagon-part). Whether or not that is a correct claim about spokes, it cannot be the case that *to doru* (the splinter) is only *to doru* in wagon-context, and Socrates prefers the Hesiodic *logos*: *hekatō de te dourath’ hamaxes*.



at 208b4-5; paths are directional, and one does not have the same path if one scrambles the order in which it passes by various landmarks.

If elemental *logoi* are indeed ordered, then the oft-repeated comment that *logoi* reflect nothing of an item's structure is not correct, as order reflects at least some nontrivial part of a thing's structure, even if we ultimately would not believe that a well-ordered list of an item's ingredients is a full-blooded *logos*.<sup>21</sup>

Another important and often-overlooked feature of the elemental *logoi* under discussion is that Socrates does not present any bona fide non-linguistic examples of them.<sup>22</sup> When Socrates gives a *logos* of a wagon, for example, he—by his own lights—is not giving a proper *logos* of a wagon at all, only a deficient placeholder-*logos*. When we imagine filling in Socrates' five-element wagon account more fully, the further parts we would add might include small parts involved in the connection of the wheels to the axle, parts that connect the body to the wheels-axle combination, and so on. We do not need to insist that such a *logos* would survive the strictest possible scrutiny to see at least the initial plausibility of such an account. Instructions for assembling furniture occasionally just provide a list of pictures of parts: everything else, including how the parts fit together, is meant to be obvious once you see the pictures in that order. Genes are often characterized by listing certain kinds of parts (exons, introns, promoters, repressors, and so on) in a certain order, or by giving a long list of its nucleotides. The structure and function of a gene is often very complicated, but the complicated aspects are entailed by this order and by virtue of the identities

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<sup>21</sup>Haring ([Haring, 1982]) takes an opposite approach: he denies that elemental *logoi* must be 'inventories' and claims that they can be any sort of expert discourse on an item, and such expert descriptions must involve parts ([Haring, 1982, p. 520]). I do not think this view can be squared with the examples in this section the text, all of which are not just expert descriptions, or gestures toward expert descriptions, but expert descriptions *in terms of lists of parts*.

<sup>22</sup>One might think that the *logoi* of "THEODORUS" and "THEAETETUS" are 'full-blooded' *logoi* or that they are meant merely suggestively. Here I remain agnostic about this. If they are *not* full-blooded *logoi*, the ensuing discussion follows without alteration. If they *are*, this is even more support for the view that order 'counts' in an elemental *logos*; see p. 6 above.

of those ordered parts (that something is a repressor and not any old sequence entails something about the functioning of the gene). In this way, an elemental *logos* of a gene might be thought to have *prima facie* plausibility.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere in the late dialogues, we explicitly encounter the idea that mastering elements so as to be able to give correct accounts of complexes in terms of elements is a high achievement. The parable of Theuth in the *Philebus*<sup>24</sup> is one in which Theuth has a sort of legendary status for having laid the groundwork for such analyses to be possible in the case of language. Moreover, the example of the education in grammar at *Statesman* 277e ff. also suggests that lots of education is required not to be “swept away by everything”<sup>25</sup> in a state of confusion about letters and syllables.<sup>26</sup>

Socrates objects to this second candidate view of *logos* by noting that having a such *logoi* seems, upon reflection, insufficient for knowledge. One could give the correct *logos* of something in terms of its elements and yet be disposed to fail to apply those elements correctly in some other *logos* in which they properly appear.<sup>27</sup> In Socrates’ example, one could correctly give the *logos* of

<sup>23</sup>The function and structure of genes is more complicated than this; a better account might be a Hesiodic “three billion nucleotides.” Moreover, there is disagreement about whether ‘gene’ is a well-defined term as standardly understood. We do not yet fully understand the structure and function of a gene, in the general case. Despite that, genes as they are commonly understood are relatively plausible candidates for elemental *logoi*.

<sup>24</sup>*Philebus* 18b ff.

<sup>25</sup>*peri hapanta ... pheretai*, 278d.

<sup>26</sup>For more on the magnitude of Theuth’s achievement and the difficulty of analyzing language into *stoikheia*, see [Menn, 1998, p. 289-9]; the discussion there is in terms of division and not immediately in terms of *logos*-giving, but it applies to analyses ‘down to the elements’ in the case of language. See also *Phaedrus* 266b.

<sup>27</sup>This way of characterizing Socrates’ objection to the second *logos*-view might surprise us in the following way: One might paraphrase the central claim of this essay as an assertion that Socrates’ objections collectively point us beyond the view that having a certain kind of content in mind is sufficient for knowledge. The move to considering dispositions might seem to be a reasonable *reaction to* this observation, but not *part of* it.

There can be no doubt that some sort of dispositional considerations are part of Socrates’ rejection of the second *logos*-view; he explicitly evokes them in his remarks at 207e7-208a3. This is, however, compatible with my view that Socrates’ objections are in fact unified by the thought that having a certain kind of content in mind does not entail that one has knowledge-attribution. Rather, it appears that Socrates takes some preliminary steps toward identifying what precisely is wrong with a state of mind that we might characterize as one in which one simply has the right *logos*.

We might think that Socrates’ consideration of dispositions is a promising line of thought,

“Theaetetus” but fail to give the “The” correctly in the *logos* of “Theodorus.” In such a case, Socrates plausibly thinks, one does not really know the *logos* of “Theaetetus.”<sup>28</sup>

The fact that Socrates in fact considers himself unable to give examples of elemental *logoi* more difficult than spelling examples, combined with the features of his explicit objection to that view, emphasizes aspects of Socrates’ objection that might surprise us. The objection raises a general problem of *logos*-giving that has almost nothing to do with the adequacy or inadequacy of element-accounts in correctly characterizing an item.

The problem, that is, is not with the relationship between the *logos* and the item but rather with that between the *logos* and the (potential) knower.<sup>29</sup> Someone might give a *logos* of an item’s elements that is true of the item, but the giver’s relationship to the parts of the *logos* might be accidental, in the following sense of ‘accidental:’ the ability to correctly name that part in the

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and thereby wonder why he does not make more of them, perhaps by suggesting that the disposition to apply a *logos* correctly is sufficient for knowledge. (The most he suggests is that knowledge manifests itself with the right kind of dispositional mastery of *elements*.) As contemporary epistemology teaches us, however, it is difficult or impossible for such an appeal to dispositions to secure a satisfying account of knowledge. After considering examples of “blindsighters,” chicken sexers, and those who simply get very lucky, most of us come to think that even if knowledge manifests itself in the disposition to give the right answers, the disposition itself is not all of what is needed. One simple way to summarize this lesson is that it is hard for a bare appeal to a disposition to help us pick out a mental state that is not just another sort of “mere having” of (what we would call) some content. Thus we might be satisfied that Socrates uses the disposition to apply *logos*-parts correctly as a necessary, not a sufficient, condition on knowledge.

<sup>28</sup>There is a small translational issue here. At 208a9 Socrates says about the true judger of “Theaetetus” that he has the path *dia stoikheion*. In Burnyeat/Levetz this is rendered as “through its letters,” but I prefer McDowell’s “element by element”—it is clear that a letter, in the sense of an ultimate grammatical element, is such a thing as *B* or *S* (see *Theaet.* 203b). In the example, though, the *logos*-giver is producing and misapplying elements such as “THE,” which is a multi-letter complex. It is not obvious why Plato chose such an example, but note that this generates an analogy with the wagon example. The five-element account might be thought to stand to the “hundred timbers” account as the syllabic account of “THEAETETUS” stands to an account in terms of letters. Whether or not one thinks this is a significant feature of these examples, I would prefer not to implicitly characterize “THE” as a letter when it is functioning as a more general kind of *stoikheion*; for this reason, I prefer McDowell’s rendering.

<sup>29</sup>This entails, among other things, that Runciman is not correct to characterize Socrates’ objection as turning on the fact that the view of *logos* “assumes a complexity of the object concerned;” see [Runciman, 1962, p. 40].

*logos* at hand might accompany a deficient grasp of that part more generally. The candidate knower might not be disposed to name that part correctly in all and only the *logoi* to which it belongs.

This is a problem for the down-to-the-elements view of *logoi*, but it is also a problem for other *logos*-candidates, all of which involve constituents, and all of which will face the problem that the ability to cite correct constituents in one case might not track the ability to cite those constituents correctly, everywhere and always. Suppose, for example, that justice is psychic harmony, and that I am inclined to produce that definition if it is asked of me. Whatever the justification for this definition, and however we characterize the roles of *psychic* and *harmony* in the definition (that is, whether or not they are elements of justice as elements are characterized in the *Theaetetus*), one could raise the question whether I understand those two items sufficiently well to really know justice (as opposed to merely being able to produce the correct *logos* of it).

The problem generalizes even farther, because the issue of constituents, and of analyzing an item into its constituents, is not essential to at least one aspect of Socrates' objection: The one-time ability, or even the propensity, to give a certain *logos* does not entail a full, correct grasp of that *logos*. The specific problem case Socrates discusses is that of someone's correctly giving "Theaetetus" but mistakenly giving "Teodorus" for "Theodorus," and this mistake does have something to do with these words' having parts. Closely related mistakes, however, do not require that the definitions in question have parts. Suppose that we had some secure argument to the effect that some item's *logos* was some simple, monadic item—call it *X*. It is true that if an item does not have proper parts, one could not manifest an insecure knowledge of its *logos* by being disposed to mis-recognize or fail to recognize one of its proper parts in other circumstances. Even so, one could nonetheless fail properly to understand *X* correctly in other

circumstances, either by not always giving *X* as the *logos* of the item in question or by giving *X* as the *logos* of some other item, but mistakenly.

Perhaps there are no monadic *logoi*, and indeed much of the Dream presupposes that *logoi* are, at least in the general case, complex. Even so, Socrates' objection to the elemental theory of *logoi* is driven by a specifically epistemic sort of concern, which does not entail that *logoi* 'down to the elements' fail at the job of characterizing things in the world; the objection is robust to extreme variations in what such a correct characterization would be.

## 1.4 The distinguishing mark

Socrates introduces the last of the three *logos*-proposals by noting that it is what most people would say about *logoi*. The proposal is that something's *logos* is some sign (*ti sêmeion*) by which it differs from everything else—e.g., something's being the brightest star in the sky, or something's being the answer that most people would give. (So, if this is the correct view of *logos*, Socrates has begun his exposition of it by giving a *logos* of *logos*, because being what most people would say would, as a unique sign, on this view count as a *logos*.) The discussion of this third proposal is like the discussion of the second proposal in that contemporary analytic philosophers are likely to reject the theory along with Socrates, but they are also likely to be surprised by the path by which Socrates chooses to attack it.

We might expect Socrates to reject the view because that sign or difference is a mere feature of the thing, not what it is to be that thing. Socrates, though doubtless able to refute the theory on the grounds that it does not accurately reflect the being of the item, surprises us by raising a different problem: if we are thinking a *logos* and a true judgment, with *logos* construed in accordance with this third view (as giving a distinguishing mark of the item), it is difficult

to maintain the view that we are thinking about the putatively known thing.<sup>30</sup>

In making this claim, Socrates attempts to turn what we might have thought would be a strength of the theory into a deficiency. It is natural to think that if one is giving a distinctive *sêmeion* of an item, then—whatever else might be wrong with one’s epistemic state at that time—one is at least, when one is giving the *sêmeion*, already addressing that item.<sup>31</sup> Socrates, however, makes problems even for this initial conclusion. That thought or description involving the *sêmeion* arguably does *not* suffice to guarantee that one is addressing that item, because it has a component or precondition—the true judgment—that, according to Socrates’ line of reasoning, cannot be said to be about the item.

By so undermining the theory, Socrates refutes before we can even explicitly ask the (supposedly) harder questions of it (e.g.: why is *logos* with a unique *sêmeion* of something sufficient not only for true judgment but for knowledge?).

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<sup>30</sup>Gail Fine reminds me that one might hold that Socrates here retains the structure of the account but also imposes a requirement that the difference “specify the essence” of the item. (For a suggestion along these lines, see [Fine, 1979, p. 392, n. 28].) The way Socrates finishes his discussion of the third *logos*-proposal might be thought to tell against this proposal, however. At 210a, Socrates suggests that any difference-adding proposal amounts to a view according to which knowledge is correct judgment along with knowledge, and that this is ‘foolish’ (*euêthes*, 210a7). There is no suggestion that this foolishness would be mitigated by one’s having a certain *sort* of difference, even a difference that specifies an essence, in mind.

<sup>31</sup>Lee ([Lee, 1998, p. 431]) holds that this argument establishes what Socrates’ examples suggest: that this view of *logos* is confined to “individual objects.” On her view, “if one gives up the assumption that the objects of knowledge are unique individual objects, there is no reason to think that one would be capable of giving a *sêmeion* if one had a true judgment about a kind of thing.” It is not clear, however, why Socrates’ argument should not go through *mutatis mutandis* even in the case of kinds, universals, or other non-“individual” items. If one really is thinking of zebras and not of giraffes or okapis, it is plausible that something specifically about zebras, and not about giraffes or okapis, bears some sort of relationship to your thought.

One might resist this objection for at least two reasons: first, because “some sort of relationship” might not put one in a position to give the zebra-specific *sêmeion*; second, because the reference of “zebra” might be fixed by a community or by appropriate experts within it (see [Burge, 1982]). Note, however, that each of these paths of resistance also applies to the case of “individual objects.” Theaetetus’s unique features might indeed cause my thought to be about Theaetetus instead of about Theodorus without my being able to accurately describe those features; some sort of community- or expert-centric view of naming might be what causes our thoughts about (the historical) Theaetetus to be about Theaetetus instead of Theodorus. While the kind/non-kind distinction might be relevant to the plausibility of such accounts (see, again, [Burge, 1982]), there is certainly no immediate or obvious reason why Socrates’ arguments here should not apply in domains broader than that of items like Theaetetus or the sun.

The problem, again, is that it is not only the *logos* but also the true judgment that must be about the object (or so Socrates plausibly implies). If it is the *logos* that contributes the unique factor, then we should wonder why the true judgment, which supposedly required supplementation by that *logos*, was true judgment of that item in the first place. Either the *logos* and only the *logos* is about the object, in which case the true judgment seems inert with respect to the knower's epistemic success; or it is not, and the true judgment itself already somehow uniquely involves its object, in which case the *logos*, in its role as delineating a unique feature, in fact adds nothing at all.

The example driving this section is that of Theaetetus' snub nose; once readers have confronted the question how features common to all humans could possibly cause one to think of Theaetetus, they must then wonder why thinking of his snub nose would cause one to think of him and not of Socrates.

This example has at least two important consequences on this theory of *logos*. First, it suggests a shift from (what we would think of as) unique descriptions of a thing to unique traces or memories of it, at least as a matter of imagery. Whereas an early example of a unique sign was the sun's being the brightest item in the sky, the current example is that of a snub-nosedness being "impressed upon him" (*par' emoi ensêmênamenê*, 209c8).<sup>32</sup> The former is

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<sup>32</sup>Christine Thomas is one commentator who suggests that the example of the snubness is readily interpreted along the lines of a unique description, not along the line of a trace or memory. She holds that 'this' and 'that' in this account of *logos* function as demonstratives in such phrases as 'this snubness' and 'that cactus.' [Thomas, 2002, p. 66 ff].

Thomas's view is more mysterious than it might first appear, however. Her notion of a demonstrative is neither that of contemporary philosophers nor one that is easily found in Plato. Specifically, it cannot be a close relative of a Russellian view according to which such terms function as 'logically proper names.' This is because Thomas holds that looking at a cactus and thinking 'that,' or saying 'that' while attempting to refer to the cactus, does not establish that the reference of your thought or speech is the cactus, as opposed to the book next to the cactus. To establish such reference, one has to add a sortal such as 'cactus' and say something like 'this cactus' or 'that cactus.' [Thomas, 2002, p. 67]. Perhaps this is a true claim about the prerequisites for successful reference to objects using 'this' and 'that,' but even if it is, it shows that 'that' is not a logically proper name. Suppose that the cactus were named 'Fred;' we would think it strange if someone claimed that thinking or saying 'Fred' is insufficient to establish the cactus, as opposed to the book next to the cactus, as the referent of the thought or speech. If this were a true view of 'Fred'-thoughts and 'Fred'-speech-acts, it would show that names do not function as we think they do, and certainly not as logically

naturally understood as an irreducibly linguistic description of something (the sun), whereas the latter is naturally understood as a non-linguistic mental item to which another item could be compared. Socrates' discussion eventually recalls the wax tablet example<sup>33</sup> and its question of how to compare subsequent thoughts about an item with that item's previous effects on one's soul.

Second, the example suggests that, when a given term appears in one's thought, the referent of that term, or at least what that term evokes, is an extreme or characteristic example of that term. The text suggests explicitly that thinking about a face in general (even in combination with other items such as a leg and an arm) does not fix one's thought on Theaetetus. We may ask: given that this is true, what *does* that thought fix one's mind on? One kind of answer is that one is not thinking about *anything* in having that thought. If that is not plausible, however, there are again two alternatives that fit the spirit of the text's suggestion that the object of the thought cannot be anything that requires us to distinguish between different items that the term correctly describes. On the first alternative, we would be thinking of anything with a face (so some combination or disjunction of Theaetetus, the "remotest Mysian" of 209b8, and all other face-having things).

On the second alternative, however, we would say that what the term 'face' properly applies to is, simply, face-ness or a Form of face. Such a suggestion is arguably found in other Platonic texts. *Republic* 515b2, for example, is naturally taken as a Socratic suggestion that terms do not refer to shadows on the wall

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proper names.

Moreover, Thomas's view faces a textual problem. She suggests that one of the *koina* must be added to 'this' or 'that' in order to secure reference to an item.[Thomas, 2002, p. 67] Yet, in the discussion of perception at 184-186, the *koina* include such items as being and sameness (see [Thomas, 2002, p. 57]), which do not correspond to sortal terms like 'cactus' or 'book.' Thus not all *koina* avoid the problem of being applicable to anything, and it is not one of the *koina*, *qua* being one of the *koina*, that will solve the problem. As the very term *koina* suggests, the function of such terms seems not to be to identify some terms as opposed to all others.

<sup>33</sup>In this I concur with [Gill, 2012, p. 129]; as she notes, the term *sêmeion* is used several times from 191d to 194d.



of the cave but to entities outside the cave (which, again arguably, stand in for Forms). Moreover, the *Phaedo* 78d suggestion that the many beautifuls and many equals are homonymous with things in themselves has often been taken as a suggestion that the ‘realities’—that is, the Forms—bear names *primarily*, while the perceptible particulars bear those names only derivatively and deficiently, hence Plato’s tendency to use the term *epōnumia*, ‘naming after,’ and not just *homonumia*, ‘naming the same.’<sup>34</sup>

The choice of examples may seem to suggest the second of these two alternatives. Socrates’ nose is famous, and famously ugly;<sup>35</sup> Theaetetus’s snubness is identified earlier in the dialogue as, along with his eyes that stick out, a distinctive feature of him.<sup>36</sup> And when we encounter the suggestion that Theaetetus is to be identified by his snub nose, Socrates’ first question is why the thought of snubness is not of his, Socrates’, snubness, which was identified earlier as *more* extreme even than Theaetetus’s.<sup>37</sup> In combination with the description of the sun as the brightest object in the sky, this creates a set of examples that suggest that thoughts tend toward the most extreme or most characteristic referents of the terms appearing in those thoughts. Given that the readers may well have been sensitized by the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, as discussed above, to think of Forms as the proper referents of terms, both the choice of examples and Socrates’ reasons for why certain thoughts do not pick out Theaetetus can be viewed as further support for such a theory of reference.<sup>38</sup>

Once again, we can note that the objection does not presuppose or require

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<sup>34</sup>For an account along these lines, see [Taylor, 1996, p. 73]; for a discussion of *epōnumia* vs. *homonumia*, see [Taylor, 1996, p. 71, n. 6].

<sup>35</sup>See [Brennan, 2007] on this subject.

<sup>36</sup>143e.

<sup>37</sup>Indeed, this remark, at 209b10-c3, is between one and two Stephanus pages from the end of the *Theaetetus*, as the earlier remark is between one and two Stephanus pages from the beginning of the dialogue. If Barney is correct that the *Theaetetus* is ring-composed (see [Barney, 2013]), this is further evidence that we are meant to recall the fact that Socrates’ snub nose is more extreme and uglier than Theaetetus’s.

<sup>38</sup>On such views of reference in Plato, see [Harte, 2007].

a stance about whether *logoi* of uniqueness-descriptions provide correct characterizations of items in the world. For all we (as readers of this section) know, some such metaphysics as the following may be true: what there is in the universe is a set of items; those items are all different from each other, in the sense that each item has some feature that no other item has; and for each item, that item's unique feature provides a suitable *logos* of it in that specifying it suffices for saying what that item is.<sup>39</sup> Even if all that were true, Socrates' objection to this view of *logos* would go through. Whereas the third proposed view of *logos*, and especially the example of the sun, might have caused us to suspect that the problem with the view would be something about the way in which the *logos* fails to "get at" the item in the world correctly, perhaps because uniqueness is relational and thereby accidental, in fact Socrates' objection survives without alteration even if such *logoi* are perfectly good as statements of (what we might call) the essences of items.<sup>40</sup> Whether or not *logoi* specify essences, and whether or not we match up *logoi* with items correctly, Socrates here takes himself to have identified something about the *structure* of the distinguishing-mark proposal that disqualifies it from being a good account of knowledge.

## 1.5 Conclusion

If the preceding analyses of the three *logos*-proposals are correct, each of the three theories' failures is independent of the suitability of the corresponding *logoi* for describing the world. The stream-of-speech view fails even if such

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<sup>39</sup>We may also suppose that one specifies these *logoi* correctly, though the example could be modified to permit slight mistakes in one's specification of the various items.

<sup>40</sup>This conclusion is in some ways continuous with Kahn's remark that in the *Theaetetus*, as opposed to the *Meno*, "we look ... for a less metaphysically loaded notion of *logos*." ([Kahn, 2013, p. 77]) Kahn, however, seems to view the *Theaetetus* discussion as fundamentally epistemological as opposed to metaphysical because the Socrates of the *Theaetetus* is "metaphysically barren" (p. 49 and elsewhere); I find it hard to sustain such a view of the *Theaetetus* in light of such passages as *Theaet.* 204a ff., the mereology of which seems thoroughly metaphysical.

speech connects *logoi* to items in the right way; the down-to-the-elements view fails even if such *logoi* correctly and fully describe things (and Socrates suggests that they might); and the distinguishing-mark view fails even if things can be picked out and described quite well with distinguishing marks.

In this way, the *Theaetetus* departs from earlier dialogues, where a common reason to conclude that a candidate-knower fails to have knowledge is precisely that the *logos* he offers inadequately describes what he is trying to describe. (So, for example, at *Meno* 73d ff., Socrates objects to Meno's proposed definition of virtue as the ability to rule over people in part by noting that at least one sort of ruling over people—ruling over people *unjustly*—is not virtue. There, Meno fails to know at least in part because his *logos* does not correctly describe what he thinks it describes.)

The dialogue does not tell us exactly what to make of this fact. One explanation of it, however, is that there is something wrong with the whole project of treating knowledge as true judgment with a *logos*. If the correct diagnosis of the failure does not involve the metaphysical suitability of the *logos*-description, we need to look elsewhere for it. Here, the schema itself—that is, the project of looking for some conception of *logos* such that knowledge is true judgment with a *logos*—is the obvious candidate.<sup>41</sup>

It is a further question what to make of this feature of the *Theaetetus*. Even if one accepts that the dialogue leads the reader to reject the true-judgment-plus-*logos* schema, it remains to figure out what replacement is suggested.

A first way forward is the claim that the true judgment does not add anything

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<sup>41</sup>This observation also offers a reason why Socrates discusses these three proposals in this way. This explanation for the presence of these three alternatives is an alternative to a view suggested by Shields: that Socrates (or Plato) simply believes these are the only three possible candidates for a theory of *logos*. [Shields, 1999, p. 112] Shields appeals only to 206c7-8 to justify this claim. Socrates does say there that *logos* seems to mean one of three things, but to conclude that Socrates' settled view is that only three views are possible puts a lot of weight on that line, and to conclude (as Shields does) that *Plato asserts* that these are the only three possibilities is more problematic.

to the *logos*; this suggestion is made explicitly in the discussion of the third *logos*-picture at 209d, and one might think that its prominence suggests that readers are supposed to think about how far this suggestion generalizes. On this view, the correct grasp of the essence or definition of an item itself suffices for knowledge.

A second way forward is to retain a two-factor schema and to accept that the metaphysical suitability of the *logos*-factor is not the only necessary component. This might in turn suggest a revision to a lesson many have taken from the *Republic*: there, it might appear that, because there is a strong correspondence between the metaphysical status of a thing and the metaphysical status of the mental state corresponding to the thing, knowledge somehow consists in getting one's soul in a state that mirrors or fits or otherwise corresponds to the thing itself. One might then consider *Theaetetus* to enact or inaugurate a different conception of epistemology from that one, insofar as it more strongly separates theories of *knowledge* from theories of *what things are*. Because evaluating either of these two suggestions would require a much longer inquiry, and because other ways forward than these two are possible, I leave these as questions for future research.

## Chapter 2

# Plato on uniformity

### 2.1 Introduction

In some texts that are central to Platonic metaphysics, we find the claim that certain objects are uniform (*monoeides*).<sup>1</sup> This suggests that we will not have a full understanding of Plato’s metaphysics until we have good answers to the question of what “uniformity” means in this context and of why these objects, some of which seem to represent Forms, should be thought to be uniform.

One might dismiss these questions by claiming that the references to these items’ being *monoeides* are stray remarks or otherwise unimportant.<sup>2</sup> An examination of Plato’s usage of “*monoeides*,” however, removes all temptation to make such a dismissal. First, “*monoeides*” is a rare word. It is rare in the Platonic corpus: its forms occur only eight times. And it is even rarer in fifth- and fourth-century Greek: our evidence suggests that it is actually a Platonic

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this essay, I will use the English “uniform” as a translation of convenience; it is intended to mean whatever *monoeides* means. For a justification of the implicit premise that the term’s meaning is consistent, see below.

<sup>2</sup>Indeed, those commentators who do not pass over these references in silence often apologize for or gloss over them. So, for example, Allan Silverman mentions uniformity but gives no extended treatment of it in [Silverman, 2002] and immediately calls into question the importance of uniformity in [Silverman, 2014, section 4].

coinage, and if it is not, it is rare enough that we have no attested uses of it before Plato.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, the eight Platonic uses of the word are spread across only five passages, and these include some of the texts that are most central to the development of a metaphysics of Forms in the early and middle dialogues. Three of the eight occur around *Phaedo* 78d, when Socrates is leading Cebes to agree that The Equal and The Fine do not change at all. This fact about the immutability of these items is said to follow from their being *monoeides*.

Another two of the eight occur at *Symposium* 211e1-4, in Diotima’s famous description of the “great sea of Beauty.” In the next section, I examine these two passages, which together provide the majority of the Platonic uses of “*monoeides*” and should guide any interpretation of the term in Plato. I argue for a “monopredicational” interpretation of uniformity. On this reading, what it is for an item to be uniform, in this technical sense, is for it to bear a certain strong relationship to exactly one predicate.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*, there are three final uses of “*monoeides*.” In *Republic X*, Socrates argues that we need to look at the soul’s condition when it is doing philosophy in order to determine whether it is *polueides* or *monoeides*,<sup>5</sup> and at *Timaeus* 59b, one kind of water is singled out as a *monoeides genos*. Finally, at *Theaetetus* 205d1, the *stoikheia* (elements), as opposed to the *sullabai* (complexes), are said to be *monoeides*.

I put the *Republic* and *Timaeus* passages to one side<sup>6</sup> and take up the *Theaetetus* passage in section 3. By examining the “Dream” passage that in-

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<sup>3</sup>There are three references for “*monoeides*” connected to pre-Platonic authors: Anaximenes 2-6, Anaxagoras 46-6, and Empedocles 32-5. As Tad Brennan points out, however, these all, however, come from a doxography in Stobaeus, and there are no extant verbatim uses of *monoeides* before Plato.

<sup>4</sup>Here as elsewhere, I conform to the literature by using “predicate” to mean not a linguistic item but rather the feature to which such an item would refer.

<sup>5</sup>Rep. 612a.

<sup>6</sup>This is not to say that they present problems for my view; in notes 20 and 25 below I briefly indicate how these passages fit the framework I lay out.

cludes the use of *monoeides* at 205d1, I sketch a picture of the metaphysics of the Dream according to which the uniformity of the Forms, or of items that seem to stand in for Forms, is metaphorically displayed in the *stoikheia*.

Although the uniform objects of the *Symposium* and *Phaedo* are traditionally taken to represent Forms, much can be said about these texts without making any assumptions about those objects' relationship to a theory of Forms. I conclude by considering how uniformity might figure in a metaphysics of Forms. I will hold that whether or not one holds that uniformity is presented as a characteristic of the Forms (of, say, the *Republic*), there is something of interest—and indeed something of relevance to the metaphysics of Forms—in this thread of Plato's thought.

## 2.2 Monopredicational uniformity

### 2.2.1 Uniformity in the *Phaedo*

Socrates, in the *Phaedo* passage that contains the occurrences of *monoeides*, is discussing the nature of the soul. The argument of *Phaedo* 78 goes as follows: First, Socrates suggests that what is compounded (*suntheton*) is likely to be taken apart, and what is not compounded (*asuntheton*) is *not* likely to be taken apart. Second, Socrates suggests that what is constant is what is uncompounded, and that what is changing and inconstant is what is compounded. Third, Socrates concludes that the “uniform”<sup>7</sup> “realities,”<sup>8</sup> such as beauty itself and equality itself, are immune from change and dispersion, insofar as they are uniform; by contrast, items like humans and cloaks are always changing.

I will use two claims about this famous passage to help determine what *monoeides* means there. One is that an item's susceptibility to change, and its

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<sup>7</sup>*monoeides*, 78d5

<sup>8</sup>Note *ousia* at 78d1.

stability, is here taken to be a matter of *structure*, and specifically a matter of its complexity. If we want to know whether an item is stable, it is important to know whether or not it is a compound.<sup>9</sup> This line of thought might seem obviously problematic. It might seem to conflate an item’s *synchronic* features with its *diachronic* ones, if we are inclined to think that change is fundamentally diachronic and an item’s simplicity or complexity is not. It might also seem to run afoul of our instincts about stability: we might think we can come up with examples of highly stable compounds and highly unstable non-compounds (as in elementary chemistry, where we learn that some elements, like promethium, are so unstable that all known samples of them have only lasted for small fractions of a second, whereas some compounds, like diatomic nitrogen, are very stable).<sup>10</sup>

Despite these apparent difficulties, however, Socrates’ remarks here can be motivated more easily than we might at first think. First, it is at least a possible view that an item with a completely unified internal structure (whatever internal structure turns out to be) is not susceptible to change. Consider, for example, a perdurantist view of change such as David Lewis’s:<sup>11</sup> he says that change over time “is qualitative difference between different stages—different temporal

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<sup>9</sup>There are at least two things we might mean by “compound:” that of having any parts whatsoever, so that (e.g.) a pile of gold dust would count as a compound, and that of simultaneously being of different kinds (for example, by having parts of different kinds, as a water molecule does in virtue of its hydrogen and oxygen). Certainly the first sense must be at issue, at least nearer the beginning of the argument: back at 70a, Cebes has described the general fear of dying and having one’s soul dispersed “like breath or smoke.” These examples are like that of the gold dust in that they involve items of one kind that nonetheless seem to have identifiable parts or at least subregions.

The discussion eventually, however, comes to encompass also the latter sense of “compound” when it turns to each item “that really is, being uniform by itself, remain[ing] the same and never in any way tolerat[ing] any change whatever.” First, the etymology of *monoeides* (“uniform”) suggests that what is at issue is whether a given item is of one kind or of many kinds. Second, the examples of The Equal and The Beautiful seem to be examples of what is, e.g., only equal and nothing else; it is not clear how to make sense of these examples without saying that they are not compounded in the first sense.

<sup>10</sup>This is not to say that we would be *correct* to say that these observations provide even *prima facie* refutations of Socrates’ line of thinking here. Promethium is an element in the sense laid out in chemistry textbooks, but it is obviously complex in the sense that it contains many subatomic particles; when it decays, it *falls apart*. If we think that this makes it a poor rejoinder to Socrates’ claims here, that is some indication that the connection between structure and mutability is a deep one, as Socrates claims it is.

<sup>11</sup>[Lewis, 1976, p. 1]



parts—of some enduring thing, just as a ‘change’ in scenery from east to west is a qualitative difference between the eastern and western spatial parts of the landscape.” If there is something to this Lewisian thought that change simply *is* a difference between parts of something, we might understand why Socrates claims (i) that internal difference is *necessary for* change and (ii) that internal difference makes something susceptible to change.

The first of those two claims is entailed by (and weaker than) Lewis’s; the second is a modal variant of the Lewisian claim, but given the emphasis Socrates places on the tendency of complex things to disperse, there is minimal difference. Of course, there are many differences between what Lewis had in mind when he discussed change, on the one hand, and the sorts of change and dispersion under discussion at *Phaedo* 78, but the comparison might provide some intuitive support for the view that only a compound can change; this in turn supports my reading of *monoeides*. In combination with the further thought that the only way to have a completely unified internal structure is to have a partless internal structure—that is, to be in some sense only one thing—then something like the view of uniformity I propose below might seem desirable, for the case of unchanging items.

The second claim to be established about the *Phaedo* passage is that an aspect of the difference between compounded and uncompounded items is in the way that they are related to *each one* of their constituents, and not just in the way that they are related to the sum or total of those constituents. Socrates says that when a human or a cloak is said to be something or other, it is in that respect “named after”<sup>12</sup> the corresponding “uniform” item. Some particular horse is *called* beautiful and thereby comes to bear a certain name (“beautiful”),<sup>13</sup> whereas the corresponding unchangeable item simply *is* beauty

<sup>12</sup>*tôn ekeinois homônumôn*, 78e2; the “*ekeinois*” (“those”) are the “realities” such as the equal itself.

<sup>13</sup>This is true whether or not the name that is borne is primarily linguistic item or some

itself. The difference between a uniform and a non-uniform item is not only a matter of how many features they bear; it is also a matter of the uniform item's relationship to that one feature, which is not similarly manifested in any of the homonymous items. Even if, *per impossibile*, one could strip away every feature of the horse except for its beauty, what would be left would not be The Beautiful, but rather just a deficient instance of beauty.

These two features of Socrates' argument suggest the following construal of "*monoeides*:" an item's being *monoeides* is its being exactly one thing.<sup>14</sup> For a given uniform item  $U$  that is described as " $F$ -ness itself:"

- $U$  is  $F$
- $U$  is not  $G$ , for all  $G \neq F$
- Non-uniform items exhibiting  $F$ -ness are merely *called*  $F$ ; they are called  $F$  in virtue of their relationship to  $U$ ; and they are thus  $F$  deficiently.<sup>15</sup>

This reading of *monoeides* is supported by two more of the appearances of *monoeides*, which occur at *Symposium* 211e1-4. There, we are asked to consider what it would be like "if someone got to see the Beautiful itself (*auto to kalon*), absolute, pure, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality, but if he could see the divine Beauty itself in its one form (*monoeides*)."<sup>16</sup> Recall that here, The Beautiful, metaphorically evoked as the "great sea of beauty," is said to be something that "always is and neither comes to be nor passes away." It "is not beautiful this way and ugly that way, nor

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non-linguistic item that Socrates nonetheless refers to as an *onoma*. For more discussion of naming, see section 4.2 below.

<sup>14</sup>For these purposes we can take "being" predicatively. I am in fact skeptical that there is a sharply distinguished or distinguishable predicative sense of being in Plato; on this, see "The distinction between being and becoming as a distinction between kinds of predication."

<sup>15</sup>We might think that the uniform items are the Forms of some "theory of Forms" and that the non-uniform items are the participants of such a theory. For now, I only aim to explain the sense of the term *monoeides* in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. I take up the question of its relationship to a theory of Forms in the last section.

<sup>16</sup>Trans. Nehamas and Woodruff.

beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another, nor is it beautiful here and ugly there.”

It is remarkable that the former description, in which (what we might call) the purity of the Beautiful is emphasized, is the culmination of the line of argument containing the latter descriptions. We might not have been surprised that Diotima emphasizes that The Beautiful is not ugly, nor that she expands on the ways in which something can be ugly. We might have expected such considerations, however, to conclude with a general claim about The Beautiful absolutely not being ugly. What we get, however, is rather a general claim about The Beautiful not being “mixed” or “polluted by human flesh or colors.” That is, the Beautiful’s being *absolutely* beautiful seems to entail that it is *only* beautiful.

Unless we are to assume that all mixture, flesh, and color is a form of ugliness, this is a radical expansion of the claim. The understanding of *monoeides* I proposed above accounts for Diotima’s being able to draw conclusions about purity from claims about complete or absolute beauty. On this way of reading the passage, Diotima is saying that what makes The Beautiful not admit of ugliness in any respect—its being beautiful—also entails that there is nothing else that it is. This is so because *really being* beautiful is only possible for a uniform item—for beauty itself.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, one might object to the view of the Beautiful as only beautiful by noting that, according to Diotima, it must also be not ugly. Thus, it might seem that the very text that I adduce for support of my view undermines it by suggesting that The Beautiful’s not being ugly is on a par with its being

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<sup>17</sup>Commentators sometimes pass over The Beautiful’s being *monoeides* in their analyses of the passage; e.g., [Dancy, 2004] glosses “itself by itself with itself” at 211b1 by noting that The Beautiful is not something else (e.g., a speech) that is beautiful: “all it is, is beautiful” (p. 289). Dancy, in my view, is right about this, and understanding *monoeides* properly suggests not only that The Beautiful is not some ordinary thing that is beautiful (or not only that The Beautiful is both beautiful and also some not some ordinary thing), but also that The Beautiful is also not anything else (ordinary thing or not).

beautiful, which in turn would suggest that the monopredicational reading of *monoeides* cannot be appropriate here.

A few considerations mitigate this concern. First, it is not clear that The Beautiful's not being ugly is not a matter of its being not-ugly; that is, one might think that its relationship to ugliness is nothing more than its relationship to beauty. Rather than *being* not-ugly, it simply fails to be ugly. (Presumably, commentators such as Dancy would agree with this.<sup>18</sup>)

According to this reading, this speech elaborates two senses in which The Beautiful does not admit ugliness. First, as an entirely beautiful item, it is beautiful and only beautiful. Because of this (and because ugliness is not identical to beauty), its relationship to ugliness (and even its lack of ugliness) cannot be analogous to its relationship with beauty. Second, mixture or "pollution" *itself* is ugliness or a kind of ugliness, at least when the primary element of the mixture is beauty itself.<sup>19</sup> Human flesh and colors are not, after all, obviously ugly things; it is the mere fact that beauty itself has been mixed, and not what it has been mixed with, that makes mixture pollution or adulteration. As such, The Beautiful's being *monoeides* makes it beautiful in this sense; uniformity *just is* beauty. In this way, we can account for some important sense in which The Beautiful is not-ugly or un-ugly without violating what I have proposed as a uniformity constraint.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>See previous footnote.

<sup>19</sup>Mixture itself might be a sort of pollution more generally: if the primary items are supremely unified and therefore beautiful (perhaps in a sense analogous to that in which the forms are all one), any sort of mixture would then be a sort of uglification, at least as far as the most real items are concerned. The plausibility of this suggestion depends on one's view about the relationship between the items that are said to be uniform and the Forms (especially as they are discussed in the late dialogues). On this issue, see section 4.2 and section 5.

<sup>20</sup>Here there is a connection with *Republic* X, and specifically 612a, where the last appearance of *monoeides* occurs. At 611b, we are told that studying the soul "as it is in truth" requires not seeing it "as it is while it is maimed by its association with the body and other evils." Then, at 611e-612a, we find the following description of the philosophical soul's desire (as translated by Grube/Reeve, but giving the key terms in Greek):

...We must realize what it grasps and longs to have intercourse with, because it is akin to the divine and immortal and what always is, and we must realize what it would become if it followed this longing with its whole being, and if the resulting

If the reading of *monoeides* I have suggested for the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo* is correct, those two dialogues present a consistent picture of the metaphysics of fundamental items. Those items are supremely simple: they have a privileged relationship with exactly one item. Moreover, this simplicity is at least partially the explanation of, and not explained by, other important characteristics of the fundamental items: their *being* what other items are merely *called*, their immutability, their beauty, and so on. Given this central role of uniformity in the metaphysics of fundamental items thus sketched, we might more readily understand why Plato chose to coin a technical term<sup>21</sup> to mark it.

## 2.3 Uniformity and the *stoikheia* of the Dream

The last of the eight instances of *monoeides* in Plato occurs near the end of the *Theaetetus* 205d1. There, Socrates and Theaetetus are discussing the nature of elements (*stoikheia*). They have just agreed that, if letters are not parts of syllables, then a syllable would be “some one partless form” (*mia tis idea ameristos*). If this is true, however, there would be a surprising symmetry between syllables and letters: each letter is *monoeides* (205d1), which would make both the letter and the syllable simple. This symmetry threatens the conclusion that letters are unknowable but the syllables knowable.

Here it is less important why this causes epistemological problems and more

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effort lifted it out of the sea in which it now dwells, and if the many stones and shells (those which have grown all over it in a wild, earthy, and stony profusion because it feasts at those so-called happy feastings on earth) were hammered off it. Then we’d see what its true nature is and be able to determine whether it [is *puloeidês*] or [is *monoeidês*] and whether or in what manner it is put together.

Even putting aside the striking reference to being “lifted out of the sea” (which might be thought to suggest a connection with the *Symposium* passage at hand), it is clear that the uniform soul is uniform as a result of having sloughed off impurities and those items it had been mixed with. While I will not give a complete reading of this *Rep.* X passage here, it is at least *prima facie* plausible that what makes a uniform soul uniform is a purification by means of philosophy that somehow eliminates all contaminants and leaves it in an unmixed state.

<sup>21</sup>Or, perhaps, deploy an existing rare word; see the Introduction.

important why the letters are analogous to the syllables in the first place. In Socrates' speech at 205c4-10, this appears to be because the syllables radically lack features:

Now, my friend, a little while ago, if you remember, we were inclined to accept a certain proposition which we thought put the matter very well—I mean the statement that no account can be given of the primaries of which other things are constituted, because each of them is in itself incomposite; and that it would be incorrect to apply even the term 'being' to it when we spoke of it or the term 'this,' because these terms signify different and alien things; and that is the reason why a primary is an unaccountable and unknowable thing.<sup>22</sup>

For any feature we might want to attribute to an element, if that feature is something "other than" it, that feature cannot properly be attributed to it. This requirement goes so far as to prevent us from attributing even being or "this-ness" to the elements; as "being" and "this" are, for each element under consideration, something other than the element, even those terms get ruled out.

One might think that this requirement is an easily diagnosed mistake. It might seem to arise from a confusion between not being *the same thing* as or not being *identical to* something, on the one hand, and not being that thing in the sense of bearing it or its homonymous property as a feature, on the other. As there is vigorous debate about whether and where Plato distinguishes senses of "is" in the way that we do,<sup>23</sup> it might seem reasonable that this is one passage where Plato or one of his characters is experimenting with the logic of related identifying and predication claims.

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<sup>22</sup>Trans. Burnyeat/Levet. The previous speech to which Socrates refers is given below.

<sup>23</sup>On this issue, see "The distinction between being and becoming as a distinction in kinds of predication."

This cannot explain Socrates' remarks here, however. That *stoikheia* radically lack features is, in this argument, supposed to have something to do with their being *stoikheia*; complexes do not share such a requirement. If the requirement arose from a confusion between predication and identity, or unusual-to-us beliefs about the relationship between predication and identity, it would apply to elements and complexes equally. Thus, whatever motivates this requirement has something to do with the nature of *stoikheia*. These *stoikheia* are introduced as follows, in the speech we have already seen Socrates refer back to:

Listen, then, to a dream in return for a dream. In my dream, too, I thought I was listening to people saying that the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them, in itself, can only be named; it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is or that it is not. That would mean that we were adding being or not-being to it; whereas we must not attach anything, if we are to speak of that thing itself alone. Indeed we ought not to apply to it even such words as "itself" or "that," "each," "alone," or "this," or any other of the many words of this kind; for these go the round and are applied to all things alike, being other than the thing to which they are added, whereas if it were possible to express the element itself and it had its own proprietary account, it would have to be expressed without any other thing. As it is, however, it is impossible that any of the primaries should be expressed in an account; it can only be named, for a name is all that it has...<sup>24</sup>

Here "name" must mean something like "feature" or property. (This might seem implausible; I discuss this further below.) When the example of letters

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<sup>24</sup>201d8-202b3, trans. Burnyeat/Leviet.

arises at 203b, it is supposed to be intuitive that *S*, for example, is “a mere *psophos* (sound), like the hissing of the tongue” (203b4). That particular sound is the only feature it has, in some strong sense of “has.” The example involving letters is explicitly given to elucidate the dream theory, and the letters themselves are the “primaries” of the example. Thus, the fact that, e.g., the letter *S* has or is a certain sound (in the example) is very strong evidence that the elements of the dream “have only a name” not because it is somehow impossible to describe them, or because they support only ostension, but rather because they each have *exactly one* feature or property. Thus, *monoeides*, here in its eighth and final occurrence in the corpus, seems again to indicate that an item bears exactly one feature (in a certain way).<sup>25</sup> The picture of letters and syllables that arises is:

- Any *stoikheion* is *monoeides* in the sense of having exactly one feature (or bearing a special relationship to that one feature).
- For any feature in the relevant domain, there is a corresponding, unique *stoikheion*.
- A syllable can also bear the relevant feature—e.g., the “SOC” in “SOCRATES” has the feature that “S” has. But the syllable bears the feature (i) in a derivative way and (ii) in virtue of its being properly related to the relevant *stoikheion*.

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<sup>25</sup>Note here that there is a striking similarity between the water that is a *monoeides genos* at *Timaeus* 59b and the “mere *psophos*” that is the letter *S* here. Neither can be decomposed; each is fundamental within its domain, though parasitic on something in a physically more fundamental domain (the physics of sound in the *Theaetetus* and the triangular geometry underlying everything in the *Timaeus*); and the items underlying it in that more fundamental domain are undifferentiated (the triangles in the case of the purest kind of water and the pure hissing sound in the *Theaetetus*).

It is worth emphasizing that the fact that the water of the *Timaeus* is in some sense parasitic on or built out of items from a more fundamental domain does not threaten my account of uniformity here. Nothing in my account of the *Theaetetus* requires that uniform items be independent of items in all other domains; indeed, it is all but explicit at *Theaet.* 203 that letters in some sense correspond to physical motions of air. This does not prevent them from being uniform *as letters*. (See also *Theaet.* 163b-c, where we are asked to consider the experience of hearing the sounds of a foreign language.)



In these respects, then, the *stoikheia* of the Dream are analogous to “beauty itself,” “the Fine itself,” and so on, at least as those latter items are discussed in the *Phaedo* and *Symposium*. This suggests one candidate for the identity of the “Dream theorist:” it is Socrates himself, and the dream he shares is a dream about the Forms.<sup>26</sup>

For all I have said, however, it remains possible the objects under discussion in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* are not Forms and not meant to represent Forms, and therefore that no uniformity constraint is intended to be part of a metaphysics of Forms. I discuss this possibility in the Conclusion.

Whatever the uniformity constraint is a constraint *on*, however, one might object to my construal of this constraint in various ways. These are the subject of the next section.

## 2.4 Clarifications and replies to objections.

### 2.4.1 Against an alternative reading of *monoeides*

After considering the evidence above, one might admit that *monoeides* is a rare word used in striking ways, but attempt to account for this evidence differently. One might, for example, hold<sup>27</sup> that, at least in the case of a Form, talk of uniformity emphasizes that a Form is some one property, as opposed to the many participants in the Form. On this view, talk of uniformity would echo remarks according to which a Form is “the one over the many” and is *F* without also being not-*F*.

On this view, *monoeides* would be a sort of contrast term to *ta polla* [*F*] (the many *F*s); more formally, it would indicate not that there is only one *feature* *X*

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<sup>26</sup>Antisthenes is the usual suspect for those who attempt to identify the Dream theorist with one of Plato’s predecessors. On this issue, see [Burnyeat, 1970]. Note that this traditional suggestion is compatible with the proposal that Socrates is dreaming about the Forms if there is an element of Antisthenean thought in the metaphysics of Forms.

<sup>27</sup>Gail Fine raised this suggestion.

such that The *F* is *X* (bears the feature *X*) but rather that there is only one item *X* such that *X* is the same item as The *F*. This would helpfully connect this bit of technical vocabulary to something else frequently affirmed in the dialogues (that is, that a Form is the one over the many). It would also explain the striking recurrence of *monoeides* without attributing views to Plato that one might find unpalatable.

I reject this view, however, because it seems not to fit the contexts in which the term appears. Both in the *Phaedo* and at *Theaet.* 205d1, *monoeides* seems clearly to contrast with some form of *suntheton*. I think this must indicate that *monoeides* has something to do with structure and not with the number of items that are The *F*, especially given the claim in the *Phaedo* connecting *monoeides* with a lack of susceptibility to change. Of many things we might be tempted to say that there is only one *X* such that *X* is that thing, and for many of those there is no particular reason to think that this entails that *X* is immutable. (Take *X* to be some particular human being, for example.)

Moreover, *monoeides* being a contrast term for *ta polla* [*F*] cannot do justice to the fact that Plato in fact *gives* a contrast term for *monoeides*: the term is *polueides* (“multiform”). It appears seven times in the Platonic corpus,<sup>28</sup> and it is clearly a contrast term to *monoeides* (which we would expect from the form of the word).<sup>29</sup> The term consistently indicates something about structure and not something about how many of an item there are. So, for example, at *Republic* 612a, Socrates asks whether the soul in its truest, purified form is uniform or multiform; he is plainly not asking whether it is one item or many instances of a kind. At *Phaedrus* 270d-271a, Socrates asks whether a certain nature is uniform or multiform, and he is asking about the simplicity or complexity of

<sup>28</sup>This includes all cases, as is indicated by the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae and other sources of evidence. It does not, however, include the proper name “*Polueidon*” that appears in the (likely spurious) Second Letter.

<sup>29</sup>It is explicitly used as a contrast term at, for example, *Republic* 612a4 and *Phaedo* 80b4.

*one nature*, not about the cardinality of its instantiations.

Finally, on the view of *monoeides* at hand (but not on the view I suggest), *monoeides* must mean something different in the *Timaeus* and *Republic* X from what it means in the *Theaetetus*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Symposium*. (Marking off one kind of water seems not to fit with the reading at hand, and neither does inquiring about whether the soul is *monoeides* when it is suitably purified.) Of course, words are often used differently in different contexts, but given the rarity and technical import of *monoeides*, I take this to be an undesirable result.

### 2.4.2 The plausibility of monopredicational views

One might think that monopredicational views of any items (to say nothing of the items at issue in the Dream) are obvious non-starters, simply because it is obvious that there are no items such that they only bear one feature.

A first reply here begins with an observation that was available both in the *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus* passages: the relation that a uniform item bears to the feature in virtue of which it is uniform is somehow special; the monopredicational constraint applies only to that special kind of predication. The *Phaedo* discusses the special strength of the relationship between the feature and the “realities” that correspond to those features, whereas the *Theaetetus* emphasizes the relative deficiency of the relationship between the *stoikheion* and the other features (even ones so basic—e.g., being “this”—we might not even think they are features, properly speaking). In both texts, however, there is at least implicitly a distinction between what is merely truly predicated of an item, on the one hand, and what is more strongly related to that item, on the other.

Other replies to this objection depend on other views one might hold about these passages in which uniformity is discussed. To simplify matters, I will consider a coarse distinction in the ways one might take these texts. One might,

on the one hand, hold that all these texts are intended as (perhaps veiled) contributions to a metaphysics of Forms that Plato might have endorsed. Alternatively, one might hold that, although at least the *Phaedo* and *Symposium* passages seem clearly to have some relationship to the metaphysics of Forms (that Plato would have endorsed), this relationship is loose and/or metaphorical, or otherwise not intended to be taken as a contribution to Plato's considered metaphysics. (Nothing I say above rules out such an option.) On this alternative, these texts might be thought to generate a minor thread of metaphysical thought in Plato.

Whichever view one holds about the relationship between uniformity and the metaphysics of Forms, however, there are resources available to make the notion of uniformity intelligible. On the first alternative, where uniformity is a doctrine about Forms, the distinction between being and becoming is one way of making sense of a distinction between kinds of predication.<sup>30</sup> Once that distinction is intelligible, the uniformity constraint passes at least a minimal standard of reasonability, as discussed above.

On the second alternative, the distinction between being and becoming is less obviously connected to the items that are said to be uniform (though it still suggests some Platonic precedent for distinguishing between kinds of predication). Other texts, however, in which views are discussed and explicitly rejected, would become more relevant in this case. Such texts speak to the question whether Plato discusses (even where he would not endorse) views according to which there are several kinds of predication. Here I will consider one such passage, from the *Sophist*, that is of obvious relevance to questions about uniformity and that—I will argue—also necessitates a distinction between kinds of predication. In that passage, the Eleatic Visitor says, about certain people:

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<sup>30</sup>See "The distinction between being and becoming as a distinction in kinds of predication," where I argue that the being/becoming distinction is to be so understood.

Straight away, they get their hands on the objection that it is impossible for the many to be one or the one many, and they clearly delight in not allowing us to call man good, but rather the good good and man man. You have come across people who enthuse about such things often, I suppose, Theaetetus, sometimes elderly men who have marveled at such things through poverty of intellect and think themselves to have discovered something tremendously clever. (Soph. 251b4-c6)<sup>31</sup>

The Late-Learners, as Fine<sup>32</sup> says, “deny that one thing can be predicated of another.” The sense in which this passage supports the ‘monopredicational’ reading of *monoeides*, or at least the possibility that Plato countenanced such a view, is clear: for each item, the Late-Learners say that only one thing can correctly be attributed to it. Less obviously, this passage also provides yet another sketch of a metaphysics, or of a metaphysical argument, in which there are

<sup>31</sup>This translation is Verity Harte’s (see [Harte, 2002, p. 140]), and I have preferred it to other available translations (e.g., Nicholas White’s and Harold Fowler’s), largely because it makes the fewest presuppositions about precisely what the various instances of ‘man’ and ‘good’ refer to. Tad Brennan points out that Harte manages even to suppress the copula in the key sentence (“...the good good and man man”), which—given the difficult questions about the import of verbs of being in Plato—is desirable.

<sup>32</sup>[Fine, 2008, p. 18]. This is a more felicitous characterization of the problem than as a “denial of predication” (see [Brown, 2008, p. 438, *inter alia*]), which entails that calling man “man” and calling good “good” do not count as predications. Such a view was advanced by Ackrill, who held that the Late-Learners’ sentences are identifying and not predicative uses of “is” (see [Ackrill, 1971]). Ackrill’s view has faced much criticism; for a summary of the issue, see [Brown, 2008, section 2.1]. Brown’s own view is that Plato in the *Sophist* distinguishes identity-statements from other statements (rather than distinguishing identifying uses of “is” from other uses of “is”). Brown is clear that what follows “is” can thus be related to the subject of the sentence in different ways, and not because “is” is ambiguous. As her primary focus is the Communion of Kinds, it is not clear whether she would view the Late-Learners as using one of two kinds of predication.

I will not argue explicitly against the view that sentences like “man man,” as produced by the Late-Learners, involve predication. My discussion of the passage below is in part intended as a further argument against Ackrill-type views, which (as will become clear) do not do well at explaining why we find the self-refutation charge we find in the text.

Harte holds that the Late-Learners deny that *composition* occurs ([Harte, 2002, p. 169]). I agree that, insofar as composition entails that the name of one part can be predicated of the whole (or of another involved part), the Late-Learners deny that such composition occurs. I doubt that material composition is Plato’s primary focus in this passage, however, both for reasons that will become clear below, and because of his choice of example (calling man “good” is not a straightforward case of making an assertion that a case of composition has occurred).

several kinds of predication. This is because the Late-Learners require claims involving non-monopredicational predications. First, they marvel at their theories, enthuse about metaphysics, and delight at disagreeing with people, all of which presumably require one to assert things with structures more complex than “man man” and “good good.” More importantly, however, they seem to explicitly assert *logoi* that necessitate other predications. Thus, the Late-Learners need to maintain that there is a weaker sort of predication available to them in such assertions.

Here one might object that the Late-Learners are charged with self-refutation, and that their theories are quickly rejected on such grounds. This might make it seem that they do *not* have a distinction in kinds of predication, because there is no reason given that such a distinction, or anything else, saves them from such immediate refutation. Indeed, we might think that the Late-Learners’ theory is so implausible that a swift rejection is a more appropriate response than the construction of an elaborate metaphysics on their behalf.

This would be too hasty, however; the refutation we find is slightly different from the one we might expect, and it suggests that the Late-Learners *do* rely on a sort of distinction in kinds of predication. Although the Late-Learners are charged with a sort of self-refutation—in the Eleatic Visitor’s ventriloquism metaphor, with having an enemy inside of them<sup>33</sup>—the self-refutation charge is not one of (what we might call) pragmatic contradiction. Rather, they are said to connect, in their *logoi*, “being” and everything (for example). The problem, then, is not that they behave in a way that presupposes that ordinary, intuitive predications of one thing to another are possible; the problem is that their *logoi*, their considered views of a certain sort, presuppose other predications than those of the sort that connect “man” to man and “good” to good. This is suggested by the fact that the damning evidence is not that they implicitly

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<sup>33</sup>252c4-6.

connect “marvelous” to a certain theory, but rather that they cannot produce *logoi* without using, e.g., “being,” “separate” (*khôris*), “by itself” (*kath’auto*), and “from others.”<sup>34</sup>

Given what is—and, equally importantly, what is not—said in criticism of the Late-Learners’ view, it seems that we are to reconstruct the dialectic suggested by the Eleatic Visitor’s remarks as follows. First, the Late-Learners assert that one can only call man “man,” good “good,” and so on. Their interlocutors react not by complaining that their behavior manifests a commitment to other predications, but rather by questioning them as any vigilant interlocutor might (“What is wrong with predicating “good” of a man?”). Here the Late-Learners respond by saying, approximately, that man itself is separate, or is separate from other items. The text does not say this explicitly, but it is suggested in two ways: first, it is as reasonable a justification for their views as one is likely to construct; second, it is what we get if we treat the evidence adduced against them—“being,” “separate”, “by itself,” and “from others”—as pieces of a puzzle to be assembled.

These responses, however, are not offhand comments or implicit beliefs but *philosophical commitments they do or must assert*. Moreover, they necessitate the Late-Learners’ positing a distinction between kinds of predication. They hold that there is a certain sort of attribution according to which only “good good” and the like are possible; they also hold that *logoi* such as “[the] good is separate” are correct *logoi*. The best explanation of this seems to be that the status of those two claims is different; the way in which [the] good is good, which is the way in which [the] good is *not* separate or anything else, is different from the way in which the [the] good is separate. And, barring exotic paraphrases

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<sup>34</sup>Those inclined find a connection between the Late-Learners’ theory and a theory of Forms here might be struck by these examples of unavoidable or irresistible components of *logoi*; they are terms one would use to describe Forms. These also (and, I think, relatedly) include terms that explicitly could not be said of *stoikheia* at 201d8–202b3; see section 3 above.

of either of these two claims, this is just to say that the Late-Learners are committed to there being several kinds of predication.

### 2.4.3 Name-application as predication

Another objection to the view of “*monoeides*” advanced above is that it involves a simple mistake in the linguistics and metaphysics of names. According to this objection, the effect of attributing a name to an item is not to attribute a property to it but simply to refer to it, roughly in the way that a demonstrative allows us to refer to something.<sup>35</sup> So, for example, McCabe holds that, because the Dream’s elements can only be named, they are “indescribable” and “cannot have any properties.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Ryle famously held that the distinction between the elements and complexes could be put in terms of the sorts of speech-acts that elements do and do not support;<sup>37</sup> evidently, he took the talk of “naming” *stoikheia* quite literally and in a familiar modern sense of naming.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>It might be useful to put this point in the way it arises in elementary formal semantics. There, one learns to distinguish the truth-conditions of “John is in the market” from those of “A lawyer is in the market.” To a first approximation, the latter is true if and only if, for some *X*, *X* is in the market and *X* is a lawyer. The truth-conditions of “John is in the market,” though, are importantly disanalogous to those. “John is in the market” is true if and only if *John*—that is, whomever “John” refers to—is in the market. For a discussion of the contemporary semantics of proper names, see [Heim and Kratzer, 1998, section 2.1].

<sup>36</sup>See [McCabe, 1994, p. 158]. In McCabe’s preferred terminology, they are “austere,” “having no properties and standing in no relations that might impair their simplicity.” [McCabe, 1994, p. 4]

<sup>37</sup>See [Ryle, 1990]

<sup>38</sup>Ryle also found, in the Dream passage, a metaphysics of “simple nameables.” Thus his view has a surface similarity to the one I suggested above, even though Ryle held that the Dream’s *stoikheia*, and not its *sullabai*, are those simple nameables. His view differs from that one in other fundamental respects besides:

First, according to the view I suggested, the simplicity of the basic items is metaphysical simplicity: it is a matter of admitting a privileged sort of predication with exactly one item. Ryle takes it to be logical or linguistic simplicity, so that a reference to a Form is unanalyzable, whereas speech-acts corresponding to complex items can be analyzed.

Second, I interpret the nameability in question to concern the predication of an *onoma* to a subject, whereas Ryle takes it to be naming in a modern technical sense; see below.

Third, Ryle “find[s] no internal evidence that Plato was in this dialogue bothering his head at all about that somewhat over-ripe Theory [viz., the theory of Forms].” (p. 44, bracketed note mine). It seems to me plausible that the similarities between the (proto-)theory of letters and syllables, on the one hand, and Forms and participants, on the other, orient this portion of the *Theaetetus* quite directly toward a ‘classic’ theory of Forms in a way that Plato carefully crafted.



A full discussion of *onomata* (names) in Plato cannot be given here. A few considerations, however, weigh in favor of the view that the names of the Dream really are something like properties or features.<sup>39</sup>

First, the picture of naming that would have to be imported into the *Theaetetus* on the contrasting view is itself subject to dispute.<sup>40</sup> Thus, insofar as commentators simply assume such a view as the correct one, thereby to be attributed to Plato other things equal, the motivation for the resulting accounts is somewhat reduced.

Second, the Platonic corpus generally includes a broad sense of naming that involves the attribution of a property to something.<sup>41</sup> Something like this sense seems to be operative in the *Theaetetus* passage. That is, *this* (in this context) doesn't apply to an item insofar as one is ostending it; it applies to an item insofar as it already is *this* (or perhaps *a this*), and thereby has a feature that makes it apt to be named *this*.

Third, even where Plato discusses a notion of naming that seems to correspond to what we have in mind when we think about naming (that is, what Kripke took himself to be discussing in *Naming and Necessity*), he seems not to have held that names function the way that “logically proper names” in Rus-

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Fourth, Ryle imports a picture of knowledge according to which knowledge is propositional, so that “if a Form is a simple object or a logical subject of predication, no matter how sublime, then its verbal expression will be a name and not a sentence; and if so, then it will not be false but nonsense to speak of anyone knowing it (*savoir*) or not knowing it, of his finding it out, being taught it, teaching it, concluding it, forgetting it, believing, supposing, guessing, or entertaining it, asserting it, negating it, or questioning it.” The *Theaetetus* at least apparently, however, countenances knowledge of items such as Theaetetus and the sun, perhaps along with knowledge of propositions (though on this issue see [Fine, 1979]). Thus it is not clear that Ryle's epistemology is fully relevant to the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>39</sup>More precisely, the view defended here is that *onoma* can refer to either a property/feature or the (linguistic) item used to pick it out, and that any latter item corresponds to some property/feature. That names must at least be the latter sort of thing (that is, linguistic items) is clear. That features *themselves* must also be *onomata* is entailed by, for example, the statement that “a name is all that [an element] has.” (I give a reading of that claim and argue against competing readings of it in the previous section.)

<sup>40</sup>For a thorough criticism of the contrasting view and defense of the view that names are predicates, see [Fara, 2015].

<sup>41</sup>On this see [Fine, 1979, II-III].

sell's sense function.<sup>42</sup> Again, in the *Dream*, even the terms corresponding to our “demonstratives” (e.g., *this*) do not function that way.<sup>43</sup> From these considerations I conclude that we are justified in taking names, at least at the end of the *Theaetetus*, as being or attributing properties.

## 2.5 Conclusion

A central aim of this essay has been fairly modest: to catalogue and, as far as possible, explain Plato's remarkable tendency to insert a certain rare term, probably a coinage, into some of the most exciting and important passages in the corpus. I hope to have shown that the term *monoeides* consistently indicates

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<sup>42</sup>In this I agree with commentators including Gail Fine, who has argued against G.E.L. Owen's view that Platonic names are “simple proxies for their nominees;” see [Fine, 1977], especially section 3. For Owen's view, see [Owen, 1999]. For an argument that the truth-conditions of sentences like “John is in the market” are isomorphic to those of “A lawyer is in the market” even in Stoic treatments of language and metaphysics, see [Frede, 1994, c. pg. 22]. (I assume that the Stoics' having such a view is at least weak and possibly strong evidence that no deviation from this view is present in Plato.)

<sup>43</sup>Commentators have held that at the end of the *Theaetetus*, ‘this’ and ‘that’ *do* in fact function as demonstratives in something like the sense that contemporary philosophers would treat demonstratives. Christine Thomas, in [Thomas, 2002], is a notable example of this view. She holds that ‘this’ and ‘that’ in the third definition of *logos* function as demonstratives in such phrases as ‘this snubness’ and ‘that cactus.’ [Thomas, 2002, p. 66 *ff.*]

Thomas's view is more mysterious than it might first appear, however. Her notion of a demonstrative is neither that of contemporary philosophers nor one that is easily found in Plato. Specifically, it cannot be a close relative of a Russellian view according to which such terms function as ‘logically proper names.’ This is because Thomas holds that looking at a cactus and thinking ‘that,’ or saying ‘that’ while attempting to refer to the cactus, does not establish that the reference of your thought or speech is the cactus, as opposed to the book next to the cactus. To establish such reference, one has to add a sortal such as ‘cactus’ and say something like ‘this cactus’ or ‘that cactus.’ [Thomas, 2002, p. 67] Perhaps this is true, but if it is true, it shows that ‘that’ is not anything like a logically proper name. Suppose that the cactus were named ‘Fred;’ we would think it strange if someone claimed that thinking or saying ‘Fred’ is insufficient to establish the cactus, as opposed to the book next to the cactus, as the referent of the thought or speech. If this were a true view of ‘Fred’-thoughts and ‘Fred’-speech-acts, it would show that names do not function as we think they do, and certainly not as logically proper names.

Moreover, Thomas's view faces a textual problem. She suggests that one of the *koina* must be added to ‘this’ or ‘that’ in order to secure reference to an item. [Thomas, 2002, p. 67] Yet, in the discussion of perception at 184-186, the *koina* include such items as being and sameness (see [Thomas, 2002, p. 57]), which do not correspond to sortal terms like ‘cactus’ or ‘book.’ Thus not all *koina* avoid the problem of being applicable to anything, and it is not one of the *koina*, *qua* being one of the *koina*, that will solve the problem. As the very name *koina* (roughly, “common”) suggests, the function of such terms seems not to be to identify some terms as opposed to all others.

a certain simplicity of structure that amounts to its bearing only one feature, or bearing only one feature in a certain privileged way.

Beyond this attempt to explain a Platonic notion of uniformity, one might draw a variety of broader lessons from the texts and considerations that I have discussed. I have said very little about any theory of Forms so far, because my suggestions about what to make of the term *monoeides* are largely independent of one's preferred view of the Forms (and of such questions as whether Plato's considered views of Forms changed between dialogues).

The subject of uniformity is of obvious interest in any complete theory of Forms, but what I have said so far leaves open the relationship between a view of uniformity and a theory of the Forms. I conclude by surveying a few options for what that relationship might be.

A first option is to conclude that there is a Platonic doctrine of the uniformity of Forms: that is, that a theory of Forms or some version of such a theory includes Forms that are uniform in this sense. On this view, these texts and considerations are intended as elaborations of a metaphysics that Plato would have endorsed, and this doctrine is intended to be fully consistent with (or perhaps even a necessary accompaniment to) other doctrines about the Forms.

So, for example, one might consider two reasonably Platonic-sounding doctrines about Forms: first, that for all  $F$ , anything that is  $F$  is so by its relationship to The  $F$ , so that The  $F$  is  $F$  in virtue of itself and that any other  $F$  item is  $F$  merely by its relationship to The  $F$ ; second, that there is a deep difference between an item's bearing a feature in virtue of itself and bearing that feature in virtue of its relationship to something else. From these two claims, it then follows that there is a deep difference between the way that a Form bears one feature and how it bears every other feature. A doctrine of uniformity might be thought to be an elaboration or explanation of this consequence.

Alternatively, one could diagnose either of those two claims as a sloppy formulation of some Platonic doctrine, and one could hold that any such “deep difference” between the way The *F* is *F* and the way it is anything else is not to be made out in terms of kinds of predication. Thus, one might hold that the objects said to be uniform are only images about Forms or items used in the development of Forms, and that those items or images are disanalogous to Forms in respect of uniformity. On this view, for example, the “communion of kinds”<sup>44</sup> might be taken as straightforward evidence against the claim that the Forms are uniform, rather than as a revision or extension of a classic theory of Forms. Deciding which of these two alternatives is preferable requires settling, or at least considering, many questions that I do not take up here. (These include questions about the correct interpretation of self-predication, the unity of Plato’s thought, Plato’s view of identity and his use of *einai*, and many more.)

Even on this second alternative, however, it would remain true that there is a set of texts and arguments that, however briefly, suggest that basic items are uniform. There would also be at least a few textual connections and structural analogies between these basic items, so elaborated, and the Forms. On this view, what Socrates says about *stoikheia* still has nontrivial connections to a theory of Forms: the Dream of the *Theaetetus* would still count as a dream about the Forms, albeit a fuzzier one.

Finally, one might hold that these texts have nothing much to do with the Forms at all: on this view, the great sea of beauty in the *Symposium*, for example, is not intended to represent a Form, or is intended only as an inspirational image of a certain sort. Even on such a view, however, these various suggestions about one-feature-bearing items—from the great sea of beauty, to the *stoikheia* of the *Theaetetus*, to the uncompounded “realities” of the *Phaedo*, to everything in the Late-Learners’ metaphysics—would still be importantly similar, even if they

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<sup>44</sup>See *Sophist* 254b ff.

are all only foils to which the Forms are to be contrasted.

Whichever of these views one prefers, understanding Plato's various discussions of uniformity is useful for understanding his metaphysics more generally.<sup>45</sup> I hope to have shown that these discussions are more unified and more interesting than they might first appear.

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<sup>45</sup>This is true even on the third view. It is widely thought, for example, that Socrates' arguments for the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* are not very good, and indeed that Plato recognized this. If the argument from dispersion is such an argument, it would be useful to recognize its dependence on metaphysical views that Plato elaborates elsewhere.

## Chapter 3

# The distinction between being and becoming as a distinction in kinds of predication

### 3.1 Introduction

There is general agreement that the distinction between being (*to einai*) and becoming (*to genesthai*) is an important part of Platonic metaphysics. There is much less agreement on precisely what is thus distinguished. Here I will examine one dimension along which interpretations of the distinctions differ: whether the distinction is to be understood as a distinction between kinds of predication. After discussing what is meant by a distinction in “kinds of predication,” I will offer several indirect arguments that the Platonic distinction *is* indeed such a

distinction, or at least that some such distinction is at various places suggested (whether or not Plato would have endorsed it).

From now on I will use “*PD*” to refer to the claim that the distinction between *einai* and *gignesthai* is a kind of predication. But what *is PD*? It is often said that *PD* is mysterious or even unintelligible.<sup>1</sup> *PD* is perhaps most easily introduced by a metaphor: In the state of New York and elsewhere, one has committed grand larceny if one has committed larceny and other conditions are true (e.g., if the object of the larceny has a value over \$1000, or if the object is a public record, or if the object is stolen from an ATM). *PD* is the claim that *gignesthai* does *not* stand to *einai* as grand larceny stands to larceny; it is not simply some qualified sort of being. So to say that *X* becomes *F* is not to say that *X* is *F* temporarily; or that *X* is *F* accidentally; or that *X* is some *G* such that *G* and *F* are suitably related (by approximation or similarity, say); or that *X* is undergoing some process that will culminate in *X*’s being *F*.

This essay collects a set of indirect arguments for *PD*; none is intended as an independent proof that Plato must have endorsed *PD*, but each presents some evidence for the claim or answers some objection to it. The first of these looks at the poetry-interpretation scene of the *Protagoras*, and observes that Socrates’ first remarks on the Simonides passage seem to entail a *PD*-requiring view of the *einai-gignesthai* distinction. The second indirect argument begins from the observation that non-historical or “pre-theoretical” considerations are explicitly or implicitly involved in many arguments against *PD*. I argue that such considerations do not weigh nearly as strongly against *PD* as is often supposed: Our ordinary ways of talking and thinking suggest *PD* or something that is compatible with *PD*, as do some difficult puzzles about predication and identity. The final argument is that familiar conclusions about “*einai*” and “*gignesthai*” themselves, as they are used in Plato’s Greek, gives some support

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<sup>1</sup>On this, see section 3 below.

for *PD*. This argument will also include a digression into the *Sophist*, which is the subject of a debate that is taken to undermine *PD*-involving readings of the *einai-gignesthai* distinction; I will suggest that the *Sophist* does not so clearly show what it is sometimes taken to show, and that *PD* is largely independent of this debate in any event.

These arguments partially establish that Plato found *PD* worthy of discussion; this leaves the question whether Plato *endorses* *PD*, perhaps as an aspect of a theory of Forms. I do not attempt to decide that question, but I conclude by suggesting that *PD* is more compatible with a full range of Platonic texts than it is sometimes taken to be. There, *Phaedo* 79 will serve as a case study.<sup>2</sup>

If these arguments succeed, they might fit into some such traditional picture of Form-metaphysics as the following:

- For any property *F*, there is exactly one Form (“The *F*,” “The Form of *F*-ness,” “The *F* itself”) corresponding to *F*.
- The *F* can be said to *be F*.
- Any ordinary item that manifests *F*-ness cannot be said, strictly speaking, to *be F*; rather, it *becomes F*.
- For any Form of *F*, its property (*F*) is unique (so that different Forms must correspond to different properties).

On this view, Forms are the only items that can be said to *be* anything, and participants cannot be said to be anything at all, strictly speaking. This outline should be treated as a first approximation, as it leaves many questions

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout this essay I follow tradition in using “becoming” as a translation of convenience for forms of *gignesthai*. In doing so I do not intend to presuppose that any single English sense of “become” does or does not capture the sense of Plato’s technical sense of *gignesthai*. I also do not claim that *every* Platonic usage of *gignesthai* is of the sort described here; my claims rather concern the technical sense of *gignesthai* as it appears at *Theaetetus* 153, *Protagoras* 339, and elsewhere.



unresolved (for example: What is the status of such claims as “The Good is one”? Is that a case of full-fledged being, thus entailing that items other than The *F* can *be F*, or is it a case of mere becoming, in which case Forms take part in that deficient form of property-manifestation?). I take up such questions and defend this picture of Form-metaphysics elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2 The *Protagoras* and the Frede-Code exchange

In a scene of the *Protagoras*,<sup>4</sup> Socrates and Protagoras discuss an ode of Simonides’, and in the course of the conversation, Socrates invokes a distinction between being and becoming in order to defend himself from Protagoras’ charge that he, Socrates, has endorsed contradictory claims. Socrates first agrees that Simonides’ ode was composed *panu kalôs te kai orthôs* (quite well and properly).<sup>5</sup> But Socrates also agrees that a poem is not well made if the poet contradicts himself. Yet the ode says both that that it is hard to become good (*agathon genesthai*) and that Pittacus was wrong to say that it is hard to be good (*esthlon emmenai*). Thus Socrates is committed to the consistency of those two latter claims, and thus to the claims that it is hard to become good and that it is not hard to be good. These seem to the audience plainly to contradict each other.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See “Plato on uniformity.”

<sup>4</sup>*Prot.* 339a1 *ff.*

<sup>5</sup>*Prot.* 339b6.

<sup>6</sup>It might be objected at this stage that it is a non-starter to claim that this *Protagoras* passage is at all relevant to the four-point metaphysical schema outlined at the end of the preceding section: after all, the passage deals with a given human being’s either being or becoming good. Since human beings are participants, and thus “in the realm of participation” according to the above schema, that schema must not be applicable.

This objection is too quick, however, for two reasons. First, for Socrates’ interpretation of the poem to make sense, he only needs the truth of the claim that being and becoming are different; his reputation is staked on the claim that Simonides’ ode is *consistent*, not that its every line is *true*. Thus, it might be acceptable for Socrates to leave Simonides committed to the view that a human being could really *be* good without himself endorsing a counterexample to the claim that participants only become. Second, Socrates in fact does *not* commit even Simonides to the claim that a human being can be good: he finally interprets the poem in such a way that the reason it is not hard to be good is that it is *impossible* to be good (344e).

Socrates, to everyone's surprise, resolves this problem, at least temporarily, by invoking a distinction between being and becoming—that is, he claims that because *to einai* differs from *to genesthai*, Simonides does not contradict himself by asserting that only one of *agathon genesthai* and *esthlon emmenai* is easy.<sup>7</sup> We can already see that there is something strange about Socrates' plan here: while loudly making a fine distinction between two verbs of being, he quietly ignores any differences between *agathon* and *esthlon*. For Socrates to be insisting on one distinction while ignoring such an obvious other one suggests that he is not, and does not take himself to be, reporting facts about the most natural understandings of the words in the poem, or how those words would ordinarily be understood by Greek speakers. His exegetical method is not one that is strongly beholden to facts about ordinary language; if it were, he would have been more likely to examine the distinction with a stronger basis in ordinary Greek usage.<sup>8</sup> Rather, Socrates is taking a distinction that is not primarily linguistic and mapping it onto the linguistic distinction between *einai* and *gignesthai*; he is redeploying language to philosophical ends.<sup>9</sup> I will hold that *PD* is true of Socrates' distinction between *einai* and *gignesthai* here;<sup>10</sup> he is not saying that undergoing a certain process is hard whereas having finished that process is easy, nor that being good for a long time is hard but that being good for a short time is easy, nor that being good essentially is easy whereas being good accidentally is hard. Rather, he is saying that manifesting goodness is hard but that having a good character is, for a good person, easy. Even if he only says this

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<sup>7</sup>*Prot.* 340b7.

<sup>8</sup>This is consistent with independent analysis of the usage patterns of *einai* and *gignesthai*, which have long been held to have been close in meaning and frequently interchangeable in the Greek, in a tradition that goes back at least to [von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 1913].

<sup>9</sup>This is supported by the philological work (e.g., that in [Carson, 1992] and [Woodbury, 1953]) on Socrates' use of hyperbaton; [Carson, 1992, pgs. 112, 122-3] (on *alatheôs* and *hekôn*) are particularly useful and emphasize the unnaturalness, from a purely poetic point of view, of Socrates' reading. The less natural Socrates' exegesis is as a matter of literal interpretation of the poetry, the more reasonable it is to think that he is intentionally redeploying language for the sake of a philosophical lesson.

<sup>10</sup>Again, "here" in this context will indicate the

in the context of a first, provisional definition, it requires *some* metaphysical explanation, and this explanation will indicate something about what might have been intelligible to Plato.

This way of understanding how Socrates resolves his problem is controversial, and the passage has generated a debate in which there are two major camps. One roughly follows the line set out above; the other holds that “*gignesthai*” simply means “coming to be,” thus rejecting *PD* (in the context of the *Protagoras*, at least). Here I will use an exchange between Michael Frede and Alan Code<sup>11</sup> to represent the debate; Frede famously defended (what I call) *PD* in this context, and Code has disagreed both by arguing directly against Frede’s view and by holding that a better reading of the distinction can be had by taking ‘becoming’ as simply ‘coming to be.’

For Frede, *PD* is true of *einai* and *gignesthai* in Plato, and moreover it is at least latent in Thucydides and other sources with which Plato would have been familiar. To become *F*, on this view, is to *manifest F-ness* or to *display its marks*.<sup>12</sup> It is not to be *F*, to be engaged in a process that would naturally terminate in being *F*, or anything similar.<sup>13</sup>

Why might one think that there is a whole kind of predication reserved for “displaying marks” or “manifesting features” and that this sort of predication is not somehow reducible to being or paraphrasable in terms of being, the way that the definition of grand larceny can be built entirely upon the definition of larceny? A very general sort of answer is that there appear to be cases where an item in some sense manifests *F*-ness but where we would not want to say that it *is F*. I now turn to these examples, each of which leads to some further

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<sup>11</sup>[Frede, 1988] and [Code, 1988]; these are revised and edited versions of a paper and comments from the twenty-sixth Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy.

<sup>12</sup>[Frede, 1988]; one discussion appears on p. 47.

<sup>13</sup>As I implied above, there are other views of this type, articulated in such texts as [Mann, 2000] and [Meinwald, 1991]. Much of the Frede-Code debate applies to this larger class of views and to those views’ critics.

reasons why one might hold *PD*.

As a first example, we might take the example of a white item with which Socrates introduces the being/becoming distinction in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>14</sup> According to the conjectural theory of vision that Socrates lays out,<sup>15</sup> an instance of whiteness is not to be identified with the perceptive agent or the perceived patient, but is rather something that arises from the appropriate motion's hitting the eye.<sup>16</sup> The whiteness of the white item, then, is the most transient sort of item (so transient that it has no location<sup>17</sup>), and the item is said to be white because of the most temporary and coincidental sort of relationship to it. We don't make a *mistake* when we talk about, for example, "that white cloud," but a correct analysis of color and of perception reveals that the item merely *shows up as* white, and should not be described as really *being* white; as Socrates sets the scene, there is no stable whiteness for it to *be*, and the whiteness is quite literally separated from the white item.

This example from the *Theaetetus*, besides establishing Platonic precedent for *PD*, suggests reasons for holding *PD* (about *einai* and *gignesthai*) that do not rely on a certain theory of color or of perception: A thing's features sometimes "float free" from it in such a way that we are tempted to say that the thing isn't really *being* them. (Consider how we sometimes say that someone "has the shakes" or "is having a laugh.") Moreover, we might think that there are categorical constraints on features that a thing really *is*—e.g., that they must have a place or must persist over time—and that certain features do not meet those constraints ("an anger flared up in him...").

Frede draws a second sort of example from ordinary usage. When we see

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<sup>14</sup>Here I am using this example to illuminate the proposed interpretation of the *einai-gignesthai* distinction, not presenting a full interpretation of Socrates' remarks on perception at the beginning of the *Theaetetus*.

<sup>15</sup>*Theaetetus* 153d-4a.

<sup>16</sup>*ek tês prosbolês tôn ommatôn pros tēn prosêkousan phoran phaneitai gegenêmenon*, 153e6-7.

<sup>17</sup>*khôran*, 153d1.

someone about to step on a patch of ice and say ‘be careful!’, we are neither commanding him to change his character nor commanding him to exercise a careful aspect of his character; the comment is felicitous—indeed, often *more* felicitous—if it is generally known that the person is *not* careful. The purpose of the remark is to prescribe a certain kind of *behavior*.<sup>18</sup>

Such examples suggest further motivations for *PD*: There are cases where something is incapable of (really) being *F* in virtue of its nature, yet it is plausible that it can “be *F*” in some sense. Suppose, for example, that a six-year-old needs a painful set of shots. We might ask or tell the child to *be brave* in this situation. Further suppose that one’s view of moral psychology and ethical development entails that true bravery is simply not available to this or any six-year-old: children simply do not yet have certain capacities that are necessary for true bravery. Nonetheless, the instruction to be brave still makes sense: it is an instruction to muster up the psychic resources to *manifest* bravery or to *do what a brave person would do*, and one is not lying when one praises a six-year-old for “being brave.”

Similarly, one might also consider the case of an iron nail’s becoming magnetic after being rubbed against a powerful neodymium magnet. It is perhaps plausible that the nail merely *behaves magnetically* for a while. It is capable of a certain temporary modification to its structure that gives it magnetic properties for a while, but these inevitably fade. It is in the nature of an iron nail to, under appropriate circumstances, take on those properties. Even more, however, it is in its nature to lose them; it is simply not structured in a way that

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<sup>18</sup>That said, however, the comment does not merely prescribe behavior; it is not quite equivalent to ‘do something that is careful!’ or ‘don’t slip and fall!’. Although a reckless person is merely manifesting carefulness instead of *being* careful when he walks attentively on an icy sidewalk, he still counts as careful in that derivative sense as he is doing so, in a way that would not be true if (for example) a snowstorm prevented him from drinking and driving. Although this point is less important for current purposes, the idea of “merely manifested states” as occupying an ethical middle ground is important elsewhere (e.g., at *Lysis* 217, and—much more famously—in *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4, where Aristotle says that one comes to be just by behaving as a just person does).

allows it to have such properties stably. Whereas it might be plausible to say that the neodymium magnet *really is* a magnet, the iron nail can merely *become magnetic* or *serve as a magnet*.

One might or might not find any of these motivations for accepting *PD* compelling, either in the context of the *Protagoras* or more generally. I return to this subject below; for now, simply note that Frede appeals to such intuitions in developing his reading of the *Protagoras*, which reading involves a commitment to *PD*.

Alan Code provides an early and representative example of the other side of this debate: he held, against Frede, that *gignesthai F* in the *Protagoras* (and in Plato more generally) simply means “coming to be *F*,”<sup>19</sup> which in turn seems to mean “being generated *F*-wise” or “being engaged in a process that terminates in being *F*.”<sup>20</sup>

On Code’s reading of *gignesthai*, Socrates attributes to Pittacus this view: Going through the process that ends in being good is hard, but once one *is* good (having finished that process), it is easy to stay good. On this view, goodness is something like enrollment in an elite university: the process of getting in is long and highly selective, so that most people do not complete the process. *Staying* in once admitted, however, is straightforward.

This view gives a familiar and easily understood reading for *gignesthai*, and it leaves Pittacus saying something interesting and intelligible: the path up the mountain, so to speak, is hard, and hanging out on top of the mountain is easy. That this interpretation is so readily understood is a mark in its favor.

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<sup>19</sup>[Code, 1988, pgs. 59-60].

<sup>20</sup>It is not entirely clear what Code means by ‘coming to be *F*.’ He says (i) that he prefers a view according to which it is ‘resembl[ing] imperfectly that which is really *F*’ (p. 55); (ii) that the ‘realm of becoming’ may be importantly characterized by ‘constant and continual generation and destruction’ (p. 54); and that (iii) Frede’s conjecture about the meaning of *gignesthai* cannot be right. Note that remark (i) might suggest a view rather close to Frede’s after all; the remarks summarized in (ii), however, suggest the reading I give above, which also does justice to Code’s various suggestions that a familiar English sense of “becoming” is adequate to the job of interpreting *gignesthai* in the *Protagoras*.

Moreover, Code reminds us that a more exotic reading of *gignesthai* requires one not only to justify that reading of *gignesthai* but also similarly exotic readings of *diamenein* (“persist”) and *diatelein* (“continue [to be good]”). If *gignesthai*, at *Prot.* 344b-c, is not something that terminates in being, then *diamenein* in some state does not entail being in that state, and neither does *diatelein* that state. As Code thinks that “in order to remain in that condition it is necessary that we first be in that condition,”<sup>21</sup> this is (according to him) reason to abandon the exotic view of *gignesthai*.

Besides these arguments from plausibility and from making sense of *diamenein* and *diatelein*, Code offers other reasons to prefer his reading. He holds that Frede is not justified in claiming that non-Platonic Greek uses of *gignesthai* [*F*] support a *PD*-type reading. Although this established use of *gignesthai* does appear to mean something like ‘display *F*-ish features,’ it does not meet an essential constraint that Frede (according to Code) needs to place on becoming: This usage does not, whereas Frede’s proposal for *gignesthai* does, presuppose or entail that *gignesthai F* excludes *einai F*. That is, Frede (according to Code) would have it that something cannot simultaneously become and be *F*, which removes any support he might have drawn from Thucydides (et al.), whose apparently related uses of *gignesthai* are such that something *can* simultaneously be and become *F*.

Finally, Code holds that Frede is insufficiently attentive to Plato’s views about change, and that the ubiquity of change (and therefore coming-to-be) in the material realm explains quite readily what Frede goes to exotic lengths to explain by other means. Once we recognize just how much coming-to-be there is among participants, we should find no need for another reading of *gignesthai*.<sup>22</sup>

On the strength of these arguments, many have taken Code to have par-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59; emphasis original.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 54.

ried what they see as an undermotivated and implausible reading of Platonic metaphysics. Indeed, perhaps Code did so.<sup>23</sup> I will hold, however, that even if Code is correct about Socrates' considered view of *gignesthai*, the interpretation of Socrates' first, joking remarks about *gignesthai* require something like *PD*. That is, we might notice that even if Code's view is correct as a view about Socrates' later, less joking explanation of *gignesthai*, we still need to explain the first, joking explanation, and at least this explanation requires *PD*.

For present purposes, Code's most relevant objection—the one that most threatens the *possibility* of a *PD*-type reading of being and becoming in the *Protagoras*, as opposed to its being Socrates' considered conclusion—to Frede is as follows: He claims that the uses of *gignesthai* that Frede uses to support his view are not exclusive, whereas Frede's proposed sense of *gignesthai* is exclusive. By *exclusive* Code means that for something to *gignesthai* *F* entails that it cannot *einai* *F*. This objection can be answered in a few ways. First, it is not clear that Frede is committed to the view that *gignesthai* is in fact exclusive. In [Frede, 1988], at least, there is nothing that so commits him (as far as I can tell). Indeed, he briefly discusses a closely related question<sup>24</sup> and there seems to be agnostic.

More certainly, there is little in Frede's analysis of *gignesthai* that would entail that—whatever Frede himself might have thought—any Frede-type analysis of *gignesthai* must be an exclusive one. A second response to Code here would question the ways in which an analysis of *gignesthai* must be continuous with Thucydidean or other uses of the verb. An appeal to non-Platonic texts to establish a possible sense of a verb is often most significant insofar as it es-

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<sup>23</sup>For an argument that he did not, see [Mann, 2000, p. 95 ff.]

<sup>24</sup>[Frede, 1988, p. 50]. Here Frede asks: "Why should we not say that Socrates has such a nature as to have the marks of a human being and hence really is a man?" He appeals to the *Timaeus* to motivate the view that there is nothing about that material, destructible Socrates to explain why he should *be* a human being by nature; he also, however, suggests that there "was some wavering on Plato's part" on this question.



tablishes the possibility of a meaning or the possibility that a way of thinking would have been familiar to Plato. Most parties to this debate, including Code, hold that Plato's *gignesthai* is something like a technical term, which Plato and his characters go to great lengths to elaborate, and which they recognize as unfamiliar or surprising in some ways (see, e.g., *Theaet.* 152c ff.). Indeed, Code's own preferred view, that of becoming as coming-to-be, should probably be characterized as exclusive, and thus fails to meet this standard of continuity with Thucydidean and related usage. While it is fair to note that becoming-as-displaying-marks, as sometimes elaborated, might not exactly match all non-Platonic uses of *gignesthai*, this objection ultimately gives little reason to hold that a Frede-type reading of *gignesthai*, according to which *gignesthai* and *einai* mark two different kinds of predication, is something that Plato could not have intended *even in Socrates' first remarks*.

Among Code's objections, only this one entails not only that Socrates could not have been using a *PD*-involving distinction throughout the poetry-interpretation passage, but also that Socrates could not have used one even in the first portion of the scene. Moreover, any claim that "*gignesthai*" consistently means "coming to be" does not make dramatic sense of the full scene. When Protagoras proudly springs his trap at 339c-d, the audience, along with Socrates himself, takes this to be a decisive blow. Even if Socrates' self-report at this stage has an element of irony, the scene does not make sense if there is not a genuine difficulty that Protagoras has raised by suggesting that Simonides has contradicted himself. But it is hard to see how Protagoras could have thought his objection to be damning, and how a careful and thoughtful audience could have agreed with him, if "*agathon genesthai*" could have meant only "come to be good." The force with which Protagoras' objection strikes the crowd is inexplicable unless "*agathon genesthai*" can mean *something* other than "come to be good," and

indeed something that is fairly easy to confuse with “be good.”

Moreover, a view of becoming as coming-to-be entails that, on Socrates’ view of Simonides’ poem, it is not in fact impossible to be good;<sup>25</sup> there is no sign in the dialogue,<sup>26</sup> however, that Socrates revises what he attributes to Pittacus at 344e, which is that it is impossible to be good.<sup>27</sup>

For these reasons, it seems to me that a *PD*-involving view of becoming is required at least by the first portion of this *Protagoras* scene. Further challenges could be raised against such a view, however. I will discuss two of them next.<sup>28</sup>

According to a first objection, one might think that one could treat “*einai F*” and “*gignesthai F*” as indicating predication, but as predication of different predicates; the difference could be packed into the predicate as opposed to the copula. Thus, for example, “becoming good” could be paraphrased as “*being* good-resembling” or “*being* pretty good” or “*being* ready to fight in war.”

Textual evidence weighs heavily against this suggestion, however. First, when Socrates first presents the distinction between being and becoming, he says at least twice not that being-something is different from becoming-something but rather than being, full stop (*to einai*), is different from becoming, full stop (*to genesthai*).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the passage includes a substantial speech that disambiguates “bad,”<sup>30</sup> but gives no suggestion that “good” is to be disambiguated. Indeed, Socrates at 343d-e explicitly dismisses the suggestion that

<sup>25</sup>See [Code, 1988, p. 59]: “Hence Socrates is not claiming that it is impossible to be good.”

<sup>26</sup>I say “in the dialogue” because I am making a claim about the conversation between Socrates and Protagoras: specifically, that Code’s view would require that Socrates—in this conversation, not as a matter of overall Socratic philosophy—hold or be committed to the view that, according to Pittacus, it is *not* impossible to be good. Socrates, however, asserts at 344e, with apparent sincerity and without later revising the assertion, that Pittacus holds that it *is* impossible to be good. Whether Plato’s Socrates or the historical Socrates would have endorsed this claim, and whether it can be made consistent with the picture of virtue we find in the *Republic* or elsewhere, are other questions.

<sup>27</sup>This point, along with a more technical objection having to do with the order of the infinitives *diameinein* and *diatelein* at 344b-c, can be found at [Mann, 2000, p. 96].

<sup>28</sup>Karen Bennett suggested these objections.

<sup>29</sup>*Prot.* 340c-d.

<sup>30</sup>340e-341c.

“truly” is meant to modify “good,” so as for the poem to distinguish what is truly good from what is good but not truly good. Thus we should expect that if the problem were to be solved by disambiguating predicates, Socrates could not have failed to do so for *gignesthai* when he did so carefully in other cases.

Moreover, elsewhere in the dialogues,<sup>31</sup> we find suggestions that becoming *F* really is a matter of being somehow related to *F* and not some other predicate. In the discussion of whiteness at *Theaetetus* 152, for example, it is clear that becoming white is what happens precisely because items cannot *be* white. It is not the case that there on the one hand really *are* some (perceptible, ordinary) white items while on the other hand some items really *are* some other, white-ish feature and are thereby said to *become* white. In the context of that passage, when we mistakenly say that snow *is* white, the mistake we are making is not that of attributing the wrong feature to the snow; otherwise, the elaborate analysis of whiteness (which is never presented as an analysis of anything other than whiteness) would be out of place. The mistake we make, rather, is that of attributing something that arises *between* an object and a perceiver to the object itself; it is the mistake of attributing place to something that does not have place; and so on.

For these reasons, and because Plato nowhere to my knowledge attempts to explain the difference between being and becoming in terms of a change in predicate in this way, I conclude that a Frede-type view is after all best understood as involving two kinds of predication.

According to a second objection, the difference between being and becoming could be explained in terms of being essentially as opposed to being accidentally, or being necessarily as opposed to being contingently, or being permanently as

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<sup>31</sup>It is, of course, possible that different views of being and becoming are found at different places in the dialogues (see the Introduction); this evidence is presented only to motivate the thought that becoming *F* really is a way of bearing some relation to *F* and not to some related predicate.

opposed to being temporarily. We might call this the “larceny strategy,” as it attempts to relate becoming to being in roughly the way that grand larceny is related to larceny: by the addition of some further qualifier.<sup>32</sup> Just as the existence of being-in-Mexico and being-in-Canada does not entail that there are two kinds of being, neither does the existence of being accidentally and being essentially, being temporarily and being permanently, and so on.

It seems unlikely, however, that any such reduction of becoming to being in this way can make sense of the evidence in the dialogues. The famous *Phaedo* passage about fire, snow, The Hot, and The Cold might make one particularly skeptical of such a strategy. There,<sup>33</sup> it is said that snow cannot “admit” (*dexamenên*) heat without being destroyed, and similarly that fire cannot ever admit coldness. It thus seems that fire, for example, is essentially and necessarily hot. Yet the relationship between fire and The Hot must, if analyzed according to the technical distinction between becoming and being, be that of becoming as opposed to being.

Again, *Theaetetus* 152 provides a more direct sort of evidence against such a reading. There Socrates is emphatic that becoming simply is not a form of being, and that in cases of becoming, one is tempted to speak of being either because one is making a metaphysical mistake or because one is constrained by a language that is not always apt for expressing the difference between becoming and being. At least in the *Phaedo* and *Theaetetus*, then, becoming *F* cannot be analyzed as being *F* essentially, being *F* permanently, or anything of the sort.

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<sup>32</sup>I use this example in the Introduction.

<sup>33</sup>*Phaedo* 103d-e.

### 3.3 Is a distinction between kinds of predication intuitively plausible?

Discussions of *einai* in Plato often begin by supposing that we have strong *prima facie* reason not to attribute views involving several kinds of predication to Plato (even as a view that Plato countenances but does not believe or affirm). This supposition often seems to arise from the belief that there *really are not*, as a matter of philosophical fact, several kinds of predication, and that this fact was probably clear to Plato. Relatedly, commentators frequently seem to suppose that we understand pretty well the different uses of the English “is,” and that these uses are so well-defined, distinct, and obvious<sup>34</sup> that we have strong reason to think that Plato’s *einai* has corresponding uses, insofar as he was in touch with the philosophical facts that underlie the behavior of the English verb.<sup>35</sup>

Because such assumptions at least sometimes play such an important role in motivating certain views of Platonic metaphysics, it is worth examining them on their own terms. In the next subsection, I suggest that the identifying and predicational uses of “is” are not as easily distinguished as we often take them to be. In the subsection after that, I suggest that there is something like the distinction between *einai* and *gignesthai* in modern English (among other modern languages), although this distinction can be obscured by the fact that both sides

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<sup>34</sup>Note that, even among those who believe it obvious what the different uses of “is” are, there remains disagreement about what those different uses *are*. So, for example, whereas many commentators list the existential, predicative, and identifying uses, Timothy Gowers lists (what we might call) identifying, predicative, and exemplifying uses—though many philosophers would classify each of the three corresponding examples Gowers gives as standard predications. For these examples and for Gowers’ discussion more generally, see section I.2.2 of [Gowers et al., 2008].

<sup>35</sup>Such assumptions operate, for example, in a diagnosis of Vlastos of a “syntactical ambiguity” in the use of “is,” which he says can be a copula or an “identity-sign.” [Vlastos, 1981, p. 76] Elsewhere Vlastos says that “even a Greek child” would have known the difference, in practice, between existential and predicative uses of ‘is’ ([Vlastos, 1965, pg. 9]). (I am indebted to Lesley Brown’s reference to and discussion of this passage of Vlastos’s; see [Brown, 1999, p. 461–2].) See [Rosenthal, 2011, p. 155] for another example of a commentator taking common sense to weigh strongly against a view that posits a distinction in kinds of predication.

of the distinction use the same English verb (*to be*). Here I go farther than some other commentators have by suggesting that there is also an analogous distinction in the English “know;” I will claim that there exists an epistemic side of the distinction, so to speak, which is also observed and distinguished in English.

### 3.3.1 Is there a clear distinction between identifying and predicational uses of “is”? (Perhaps not.)

Commentators often begin discussions of the Greek copula by distinguishing identifying and predicational senses of ‘*einai*’ in Plato and claiming that these correspond to a distinction we would readily recognize between predication and identification. This, in turn, is often justified, implicitly or explicitly, by the claim that there are sharply distinguished identifying and predicational senses of ‘is’ in English, and that the distinction between predication and identification is similarly sharp and non-problematic. The idea seems often to be that it is easy to distinguish identity and predication, and consequently identifying and predicational uses of ‘is,’ and therefore that we should assume that Plato had those sharply distinguished senses of *einai*.

If such a line of reasoning supports traditional views about Plato’s use of *einai*, it is relevant here to examine its assumptions, and specifically the assumption that we have a sharp and accurate distinction between identity and predication. The less sharp and accurate our distinction turns out to be, the weaker *prima facie* reason we have to attribute it or an analogue of it to Plato.

I suspect that the (‘pre-theoretical’ or ‘non-historical’) distinction between identity and predication is far less clear than commentators on Plato usually assume it to be. I will begin with mathematical examples because they might seem at first to provide the clearest possible cases of identity or predication statements. By showing the distinction between identity and predication to be

problematic, or at least fuzzy, even in the case of mathematics, I hope to argue that it is problematic and fuzzy in general. Here, then, is a list of cases of being- $F$  that might be thought to problematize the distinction between identity and predication.

### Being 5 mod 691

Barry Mazur has asked us to consider what sort of thing 5 mod 691 is.<sup>36</sup> It can plausibly be taken to refer<sup>37</sup> to:

1. An object in a different number system that happens to share symbols with the one we learn in elementary school;
2. An equivalence class of the objects in the number system we learn about in elementary school; or
3. An object in the number system we learn about in elementary school, but with a reminder that a certain equivalence relation is relevant.

Because this ambiguity (if it is an ambiguity) exists, a statement like “5 = 696 mod 691,” or one of its notational variants, is not easily classified as either an identity or a predication: it is not clear whether a property is being attributed to 5 or whether 5 is being identified with some other object. On the second alternative above, it seems like an identity, as “5” and “696” both pick out the same equivalence class. On the first alternative, the sentence is also natural to classify as an identity, as “5” and “696” can be construed as names of the same object. On the third alternative, however, it is more natural to

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<sup>36</sup>This example comes from [Mazur, 2007].

<sup>37</sup>Here I speak of “referring to” mathematical objects, which implicitly takes a position on debates concerning the metaphysical status of mathematical objects. Questions about how to choose between the three options I present here are orthogonal to most traditional questions about the status of mathematics (e.g., whether one prefers some sort of fictionalism, a Balauger-style “full-blooded Platonism,” or something else). If it is metaphysically legitimate to do abstract algebra, these three options all make sense and are different.

think of this as a predication—that is, a claim that 5 has the property of being congruent to 696 modulo 691.

Here one might object that the sentence is simply ambiguous between an identity statement and a predication. But this would come as a surprise to competent arithmeticians, who are very likely simply to consider “ $5 = 696 \bmod 691$ ” as a true statement, and not as an ambiguous sentence that might indicate any of several true states of affairs. If one writes that down as the first line of a proof, one is never asked to disambiguate it or accused of a lack of clarity; one often reasons about such claims independently of, and without considering, questions about the domain of numbers involved.

Moreover, this situation is not rare in mathematics. Sentences that are ambiguous in this way between being (what one might call) identities and (what one might call) predications are common. (When a fully respectable algebra textbook tells us, for example, that “ $2 = 0$  in a field of characteristic 2,”<sup>38</sup> we certainly don’t conclude that fields of characteristic 2 also have characteristic 0, and we don’t revise our beliefs about how to do ordinary arithmetic in “the real world;” it is a lot easier to take the lesson about doing arithmetic with (e.g.) polynomials over  $F_2$  than it is to figure out precisely what “ $2=0$ ” means here.)<sup>39</sup>

The next example is similar to these.

### Being $\sqrt{2}$

We can take powers of  $\sqrt{2}$  without saying whether we are treating  $\sqrt{2}$  as a symbol for a certain positive root of 2 or as a description of any element of a field that when multiplied by itself yields 2. Perhaps one is working in the domain of

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<sup>38</sup>[Dummit and Foote, 1999, p. 494]

<sup>39</sup>See also the “Warning” to the reader at [Lang, 2001, p. 243-4]; there, one is advised to use a notation for  $n$ th roots that does not suggest such roots are unique. Note also that one is not warned against manipulating such (possibly non-unique) roots as one would manipulate any other variable; when we make such manipulations, are we learning something about object underlying the variable, or are we learning about what follows whenever a certain description applies to an object?



natural numbers and is, purely algebraically, considering the properties of some field containing an  $x$  such that  $x^2 - 2 = 0$ ; alternatively, one could be working in the domain of the real numbers, where there are “already” two numbers such that  $x^2 - 2 = 0$ , and using “ $\sqrt{2}$ ” as a symbol for the positive one.

Much mathematical discourse proceeds without any explicit disambiguation of this situation; arguably, there is often simply *no fact of the matter* how this is to be “disambiguated,” and indeed arguably this is not a case of ambiguity at all. Analogously, when one is doing “clock arithmetic” (“it’s 5 o’clock, so in 71 hours, it will be 4 o’clock”), there is arguably no fact of the matter which of the various three above interpretations of  $5 \bmod 12$  is applicable to one’s thought. As a result, it is not clear whether we are proving identity statements involving a certain familiar irrational number, whether we are ascribing certain predicates to items (e.g., that 4 has the property of being the fourth power of  $\sqrt{2}$ ), or whether we are proving things about items that bear certain properties (e.g., that anything that is a square root of 2 is also a fourth root of 4).

## Being Pegasus

Quine famously suggested “ $X$  pegasizes” as an acceptable paraphrase of “ $X$  is Pegasus.”<sup>40</sup> His interest was in the semantics of proper names, and in particular their existential import; one purpose of this substitution is to remove the apparent existential import of “ $X$  is Pegasus.” This move also, however, replaces an identity statement with a predication. On this view, to say that Deep Throat is Mark Felt is just to say that Deep Throat is what markfelts (where “markfelt” is a verb that, as Quine says, expresses an “irreducible attribute”), and that nothing else markfelts.

Now, Quine was attempting to explain the semantics of proper names and to address the problem of referring to (presumably) nonexistent items. That said,

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<sup>40</sup>[Quine, 1948]

his solution is one of glossing identity claims by means of predicational claims. Moreover, these predications are intended not only to *entail* identity claims but to *paraphrase* them. Were it outrageous to paraphrase identity claims by means of predicational ones, Quine’s view and its various Russellian cousins might have enjoyed less popularity than they in fact did and do.

There are, of course, other explanations of this popularity than its being in general unclear how to distinguish identity from predication; in this respect the mathematical examples are clearer, and the reader can ignore this one if she prefers.

### 3.3.2 Is a distinction in kinds of predication so foreign to us? (Perhaps not.)

Commentators (including Code, in places<sup>41</sup>) often write as if common sense weighs strongly against there being a distinction in kinds of predication—that is, that we have no very good reason to think that a distinction such as Frede draws is metaphysically helpful, and therefore that we have strong reason to resist attributing such a distinction to Plato.<sup>42</sup> Because this sort of appeal to intuition or common sense is common, it is worth assessing whether such intuition or common sense is really so decisive as is assumed. I will suggest that it is not.

First, ordinary English usage sometimes suggests something very like Frede’s distinction; some such uses (e.g., “Be careful!” and “He is being brave”) were discussed above.<sup>43</sup> Second, in Romance languages other than English, these different (I claim) uses are in fact marked by different words, as with Spanish

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<sup>41</sup>See [Code, 1988, section 4].

<sup>42</sup>Some version of this has frequently been suggested to me in conversation about this subject.

<sup>43</sup>To take just one example “from the wild,” consider this comment made by a manager of a baseball team: “I’m a firm believer that if you want to be it, you have to be it before you are it.” [Kepner, 2013]

*ser* and *estar*.<sup>44</sup>

There is a lively debate about the precise patterns that *ser* and *estar* obey, but all interpretations begin from the phenomena that certainly make it appear as if *estar* is used with ‘temporary’ or ‘accidental’ features of an item, whereas *ser* is used for ‘permanent’ or ‘essential’ features of an item.<sup>45</sup> This is not to say that the distinction between bearing a property essentially and bearing it accidentally, nor that between bearing a property temporarily and bearing it permanently, is the same as that between merely manifesting a feature and having it as a matter of character. The distinction in Spanish does, however, very roughly track the sense of the being/becoming distinction (as a predicational distinction), and the fact that any such distinction is marked in the Spanish copula(s) is notable.

Attributing a feature to someone as a stable aspect of her character leads one to use “*ser*,” but “*estar*” is appropriate if one is describing one’s temporary behavior. “*Ser*” is appropriate when describing the way a food tastes, if that taste is characteristic of the kind of food in question (as with a strawberry’s sweetness); “*estar*” is appropriate, however, when describing the taste of a food as prepared a certain way or as a result of its being overripe. Although there is dispute about whether such a distinction in kinds of attributes (whether it be a distinction between accidental and essential or that between temporary and permanent) is in fact appropriate as an explanation of the distinction between “*ser*” and “*estar*,” it is telling that the phenomena make such distinctions tempting.

Moreover, attempts to explain the *ser* / *estar* distinction without something at least roughly like the being/becoming distinction often admit of strong coun-

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<sup>44</sup>As Frede points out: see [Frede, 1988, pgs. 45-6].

<sup>45</sup>That the basic usage patterns at least suggest such an interpretation is accepted even by scholars who go on to suggest views according to which the *ser*/*estar* distinction has nothing to do with a distinction in kinds of properties or features; see, e.g., [Maienborn, 2005, p. 156]. One statement of the standard view appears in [Kumo and Wongkhomthong, 1981, p. 101].

terarguments. Maienborn, for example, holds that “any explanation ... that relies somehow on a division of the adjectives into two conceptual categories is essentially wrong and cannot be rescued,”<sup>46</sup> but this contention rests on the observation that either *ser* or *estar* is appropriate in situations when one cannot know whether a property is essential or accidental (or whether it is temporary or permanent). So, in the central example, one may use *estar* to describe the color exhibited by the leaves of a newly-discovered tree before one knows the stable or long-term appearance of the tree.

Maienborn’s example<sup>47</sup> is valuable, but it does not support such an extreme conclusion. Other less extreme interpretations are consistent with the example. It may be that things that essentially or stably have certain features may also (temporarily) exhibit such features in such a way that would support the use of “*estar*.”<sup>48</sup> Alternatively, it may be that ignorance of a thing’s nature might be a reason to speak of features as temporary/accidental even if they might actually be permanent/essential. Thus we can explain Maienborn’s 9’(b), “Los hojas de este arbol estan amarillas,” as saying that the leaves are manifesting yellow-ness—*whether or not* they really are yellow as a matter of the nature of the species.<sup>49</sup> In this way, finding a case in which one can appropriately use either *ser* or *estar* does not establish that the distinction does not suggest different ways in which an item can be related to its properties. It *does* show that there is no exclusive and exhaustive distinction among adjectives, or even between noun-adjective-context combinations, such that one group takes *estar* and the other *ser*; but this is not enough to reject the view that the linguistic

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<sup>46</sup>[Maienborn, 2005, p. 159].

<sup>47</sup>The example is due to [Querido, 1976], but the conclusions drawn from it are Maienborn’s.

<sup>48</sup>In the terminology of the Code / Frede debate, discussed below, Maienborn’s conclusion does not follow if we do not assume that the use of “*ser*” in question is exclusive.

<sup>49</sup>As a different alternative, it might be that Maienborn’s (contextual) account of “*ser*” and “*estar*” tracks the felicitous usage of those verbs, but that underlying many of those felicitous usages is the correct recognition that things really are related to their features in two different ways.

distinction can be viewed as expressing a distinction in the ways things are related to features.

If a distinction very much like the one proposed for *einai* and *gignesthai* is, in other languages, not only present but marked off with the use of different words—even if the correspondence is only approximate, and even if the words in question are also used to track other, purely epistemic, distinctions—we have even stronger reason to believe that the distinction is minimally sensible, and indeed that it might suggest something of metaphysical importance.

Moreover, other verbs (or related sets of verbs) follow the same pattern, where one of the pair denotes a high-standards success-state, and the other denotes a related but fundamentally different state having to do with the temporary, superficial, and/or imperfect features related to those of the high-standards state. Consider the contemporary English *to know* in two of its uses. The first is the sense most commonly studied (at least in approximation) by philosophers: that is, the achievement of a privileged (and, under most views, difficult and noble) epistemic state. I will argue, however, that there is another interesting sense of “to know,” and that the contrast between these two senses of the verb provides something like an “epistemic side” to the contrast between being and becoming, or the contrast between the two English senses of “to be” described above.

Consider such comments as one might hear after a person passes away: e.g., “I knew him to be gentle.” I will claim that the “know [*F*]” here means, roughly, “be acquainted with a thing’s displaying the marks of *F*-ness.” This sense of *know* corresponds to sense III.11.e.(b) in the Oxford English Dictionary: “In perfect tenses: to have had perception or experience of as a contemporary fact.” The OED supports this sense by such references as [Irving, 1824, II., 35]: “I ... have known Hamlet to stalk solemnly on to deliver his soliloquy, with a dishclout

pinned to his skirts.”

We are in general in a better position to felicitously speak of having known a person to be *F* if we have *not* been in a position to know the person intimately: such remarks usually gesture at a superficial and/or occasional acquaintance with the subject.<sup>50</sup> Were it not a violation of Gricean norms, it would be perfectly sensible to say “I didn’t really know him, but I always knew him to be gentle.” Moreover, such a sentence would usually be a violation of Gricean norms precisely because the second use of “to know” is a sense in which knowing *X* [to be *F*] does not entail knowing *X* [simpliciter]; it is therefore usually unnecessary to add “I didn’t really know him.”<sup>51</sup>

This specialized sense of *to know* is, I think, roughly analogous to the *be* in “be careful!” Knowing, in this sense, is a sort of interaction with or grasp of temporary, limited, and external features of the object known; it is an acquaintance with the object as it manifested itself in narrowly circumscribed situations. Interestingly, there is a rough correspondence between those circumstances in which it is appropriate to speak of “having known *X* to be *F*” and those in which it is appropriate, on something like a Fredean view, to speak of *X*’s having become *F* (in the technical sense). One might, that is, think that to say that I have known someone to be *F* is to say that one has experience

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<sup>50</sup>This is not to say that it is *always* infelicitous to say, about someone one knows well, that one has known him to be *F*. Similarly, however, items that really *are F* also display the marks of *F*-ness. Suppose someone accused a good friend of being disloyal; suppose further that I both know this friend’s (loyal) character intimately and have also seen many instances of his displaying loyalty. It seems to me that I could respond either by saying “I know that he is loyal” and “I have known him to be loyal.” If asked for evidence for the former claim, it would be natural to cite evidence about our intimate friendship and about his character in general terms (perhaps he has written eloquently about loyalty in a way that evidences a profound sensitivity to the subject, or he underwent a long regimen of military training of the sort that is intended to shape one’s character in certain ways). If asked for evidence of the latter claim, it would be natural to cite evidence about specific loyal acts that he has performed.

<sup>51</sup>In the proposed sentence, there is perhaps a further slight infelicity caused by uttering “I didn’t really know him” and “I knew him [to be *F*]” in the same context. This is not, however, a sign that I am misunderstanding the functions of the English *to know*. It is generally jarring to hear the same form of words negated and not negated without a change of context, regardless of whether the form of words has the same meaning when it is and is not negated. (“I’m not going to the bank; I’m going to the bank” would sound similarly strange even if one was obviously going to a Bank of America instead of the Mississippi River.)

with the person's having displayed the marks of *F*-ness—if this is true, it is apt in cases when one has experience with the person's having *become F*.

The value of such evidence from ordinary language is of course limited, especially when the language in question is not Plato's Greek. That said, these phenomena at least partially blunt arguments that rely on a strong presumption against there being (in reality or in ordinary thought) a distinction in kinds of predication, or against there being pairs of related verbs, one of which concerns a deficient, temporary, and/or limited version of what the other concerns.

### 3.4 The evidence from Greek “*einai*” and “*gignesthai*”

I now turn to some evidence (and some debates) about the Greek verbs themselves. I begin by surveying some familiar conclusions for which there is a strong consensus; I hold that these conclusions are at least compatible with, and possibly serve as positive support for, *PD*. I then turn to a debate between Frede and Lesley Brown on an aspect of the Greek “*einai*.” Although that debate primarily focuses on the *Sophist*, it is sometimes thought that if Brown has the better of this debate, we will then have reason to reject Frede-type views of *einai* and *gignesthai* more broadly (and with them anything like *PD*). As an indirect defense of *PD*, then, I will argue that Brown's position in this debate is not as strong as it is sometimes taken to be.

Charles H. Kahn has contributed a rich body of work on “*einai*” and “*gignesthai*,” and much of this work derives from his taking up the question whether and how the distinction between existence and predication, which is “so well established in our own thought,” shows up Plato.<sup>52</sup> Kahn problematized the importation of this distinction into Greek texts by arguing, over the years, for a large set of claims, including these:

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<sup>52</sup>[Kahn, 1966, p. 18]

1. There is no distinct sense of the verb *einai* that corresponds to the English “to exist.” [Kahn, 1966, p. 20 ff.]
2. *Einai* generally has durative connotations, and relatedly, being has an “intrinsically stable and lasting character ... in Greek;” *gignesthai*, by contrast, “expresses the developmental idea of birth, of achieving a new state, of emerging as novelty or as event.” [Kahn, 1966, p. 29]
3. Describing the sense of *einai* in a given Platonic passage requires us to invoke, in the general case, meanings that cut across or combine our familiar distinctions between the predicative, identifying, veridical, and existential uses of ‘is.’<sup>53</sup>

None of these claims entails that there are no Platonic uses of *einai* that can be described, without distortion, as doing what we would do in English with an identifying or predicative use of ‘is’ (if it is correct to describe uses of ‘is’ that way). The first and third of these claims, however, strongly support the view that we are not entitled, *a priori*, to suppose that any given Platonic use of *einai* should have some single use that corresponds to a single use that we believe the English ‘is’ to have.<sup>54</sup>

Kahn asked us to reconsider our assumptions about the relationship between (what we would call) existence and uses of *einai* in which the verb has no complement. Thus reconsidering these assumptions might motivate a view of being and becoming along the lines described above, or at least might reduce the motivation to reject such a view out of hand.

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<sup>53</sup>Such claims occur frequently in [Kahn, 1966] and [Kahn, 1981]; particularly notable are the four detailed examples at [Kahn, 1981, pgs. 78-90]

<sup>54</sup>An early remark of Kahn’s expresses the point vividly:

I have seen exegetes frowning their brow over the question whether Plato in a given passage of the *Sophist* means us to take *einai* in the existential or copulative sense, whereas in fact he shows no sign of wishing to confront us with any such choice. [Kahn, 1966, p. 20]



Lesley Brown further called into question our understanding of such appearances of *einai* in a landmark study of the *Sophist*.<sup>55</sup> Brown and Kahn both argue that “syntactically complete” (to use Brown’s phrase) uses of *einai* do not always carry the meaning “exists,” so that *X esti* need not mean “*X* exists.”<sup>56</sup> Although in this respect it is compatible with (and even supports) *PD*, aspects of her views have been taken as evidence against readings of Plato involving *PD*. I turn to these views now.

### 3.4.1 Lesley Brown’s challenge

Brown’s work has been taken to be a challenge to Frede-type views about *einai* and *gignesthai* quite generally. In a series of papers, she has laid out a view that she takes to be a superior alternative to Frede’s as a reading of the *Sophist*; such a view might seem to threaten broader conclusions, such as a predication reading of *einai* and *gignesthai* in the *Protagoras* and elsewhere.

Brown’s argument, as it is laid out in [Brown, 1999], relies on something like an appeal to the best explanation: she holds that what Frede explains with a distinction in predication is better explained by noticing that verbs can exhibit variable polyadicity and that *einai* is such a verb.

The *arity* of a mathematical function is the number of arguments it takes. By analogy (or as a special case, if one views verbs as mathematical functions<sup>57</sup>), the number of arguments a verb takes is described with this vocabulary. A verb that can take a variable number of arguments is thus called *variably polyadic*.

Brown holds that variable polyadicity exists.<sup>58</sup> Considering verbs such as “writing” makes this quite plausible. Both “Alex is writing” and “Alex is writing

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<sup>55</sup>[Brown, 1999]

<sup>56</sup>Indeed, Kahn would suggest that Greek philosophy did not address the concept that we would invoke with such a sentence.[Kahn, 2008, p. 4]

<sup>57</sup>See, e.g., the Fregean research program laid out in [Heim and Kratzer, 1998].

<sup>58</sup>This is not uncontroversial; the problem is discussed at length in [Davidson, 2006], and a proposal on which there is no such phenomenon is discussed at [Davidson, 2006, p. 46].

a letter” are felicitous English sentences. Most of us would not say that different verbs are used in the two sentences, nor that “Alex is writing” is elliptical for “Alex is writing something,” even if we believe that “Alex is writing” entails the truth of “Alex is writing something.”<sup>59</sup>

Recognizing and emphasizing that such verbs exist, including in Plato’s Greek, has paved the way for major advancements in our understanding of Plato. It is, for example, an essential element of the resolution of a long-standing dispute about *Apology* 30, where Socrates says:

*ouk ek khrêmatôn aretê gignetai, all’ ex aretês khrêmata kai ta alla  
agatha tois anthrôpois hapanta kai idiai kai dêmosiai.*

This sentence can (and should) be translated: “Virtue does not come from money, but from virtue money and everything everything else becomes good for people, both in public and in private.”<sup>60</sup> This translation, however, requires that we supply *gignetai* again after the comma, with *agatha tois anthropois* (“good for humans”) as a complement. As *gignetai* does not have a complement in its explicit appearance, some have objected to this translation.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Brown is not always clear about whether she thinks that in the case of verbs of variable polyadicity generally, or *einai* specifically, it is true that what she calls a “C2 complete use” is one that entails the truth of some corresponding sentence with a complement. What she says in [Brown, 1999, section 3] is agnostic on this question, but she may be thought to invoke such a principle when she says that the negation of the incomplete *esti* “is equivalent to ‘is not anything at all;’” this inference seems to rest on her claim that the incomplete *esti* is a “C2 complete” use.

It seems to me false that such an entailment holds in general. Consider the verb “hacking.” This is, I submit, a verb of variable polyadicity. One can felicitously say that “Alex is hacking,” “Alex is hacking a 1969 Ford,” “Alex is hacking a 1969 Ford so that it orders a pizza when you engage the parking brake,” and so on. Yet “Alex is hacking” does not entail that there is something that Alex is hacking. One might object that these are two different verbs, one of which means something like “to exercise one’s technological, esp. computer programming, skills” and the other of which means something like “to modify, esp. with technological ingenuity.” But I would argue that the verb does not change meaning in this way; rather, one is sometimes and only sometimes, while hacking, hacking *something*. (Consider also *playing*. We say that children are “playing” when they are playing hopscotch or chess, but also when they are running around and merely “seeing what there is to see”—that is, when there is nothing *that they are playing*.)

<sup>60</sup>For a thorough discussion of the history of this line’s translation, see [Burnyeat, 2003, pgs. 1-3].

<sup>61</sup>De Strycker and Slings hold “that *gignetai* should in both [antithetical] members

If we understand Brown’s point about the variable polyadicity of verbs, however, this behavior of *gignetai* does not entail that Socrates or Plato was engaging, improbably, in a convoluted bit of zeugma here. We can give the same meaning to *gignetai* in “*ouk ek khrêmatôn aretê gignetai*” (“virtue does not come from money”) and in “*ex aretês khrêmata kai ta alla agatha [gignetai]*” (“from virtue money and everything else [becomes] good”).<sup>62</sup>

Brown’s point about the variable polyadicity of verbs, and especially verbs used for predication in Plato’s Greek, is, then, not only intuitive but also essential to understanding Platonic texts properly. She thinks that it also undermines the motivation for adopting an interpretation such as Frede prefers between predication *auta kath’ auta* and predication *pros heteron* at *Sophist* 255,<sup>63</sup> where it is said:

*tôn ontôn ta men auta kath’ auta, ta de pros alla aei legesthai.*

Among things [*onta*], some are said themselves by themselves, whereas others are always said in relation to others.

Brown holds that this distinction can be taken to be one between complete and incomplete uses of *esti*, where the complete uses are “C2 complete”—that is, they permit but do not require a complement. Brown holds that the point of the sentence above is that sometimes things can simply be said to *be*, as when we say that “change is,”<sup>64</sup> whereas other cases of being involve uses of *is* that require a complement, as when we must complete “change is different” with, for example, “...from rest.”

Frede, however, holds that this distinction is between predications—including self-predications—that are true of an item “in itself” or “of itself” and those that

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mean ‘comes from,’ and that the translation above cannot meet that requirement. See [de Stryker and Slings, 1994, p. 334, n. 2] and [Burnyeat, 2003, p. 3].

<sup>62</sup>This is merely a statement of the view; for a full defense of it, see again [Burnyeat, 2003].

<sup>63</sup>See [Frede, 1992]; for Brown’s discussion, see [Brown, 1999, pgs. 475-477].

<sup>64</sup>For this example, see [Brown, 1999, p. 475].

are ordinary predications. So, for example, “The Beautiful is beautiful” and “white is a color” are *auto kath’ auto* predications, as they state predications that are true in virtue of the nature of a Form, whereas “the White House is white” is an ordinary or *pros allo* predication, as it states a relationship between an ordinary material object and whiteness.

Brown argues that her distinction is preferable to Frede’s for several reasons. First, attributing it to Plato leaves him making a “clear and correct point.”<sup>65</sup> Second, Frede motivates his view by appealing to Plato’s use of an unexpected phrase “*pros allo*,” which Brown takes not to be so unexpected after all. Third, Frede’s view assigns an unfamiliar and unmotivated meaning to *auta kath’ auta*. Fourth, arguments that Plato cannot here be talking about existence vs. predication carry no weight against Brown’s own view, according to which this passage involves “C2 complete” uses of *esti*, so Frede’s view has no advantage insofar as both meet the desideratum of not requiring that the passage be discussing such a distinction.

It may be thought that these objections cast doubt on any project according to which the *einai-gignesthai* distinction is a distinction in kinds of predication; Frede’s view is perhaps the best-developed theory of this type, and Brown’s challenges to these other aspects of his view are serious. One may, however, distinguish claims made about *einai* in an attempt to explain these very difficult *Sophist* passages specifically from claims made about the verb in an attempt to explain the distinction between being and becoming in Plato generally. It might be considered an advantage of certain views about the *Sophist* that they yield or are continuous with acceptable views about subjects like the metaphysics of the *Protagoras*, and it would certainly be an advantage of a view of the *Protagoras* that it also resolve difficult problems from the *Sophist*, but there is no reason to demand in advance that the *auta kath’ auta* - *pros allo* distinction

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<sup>65</sup>[Brown, 1999, p. 475]

from the *Sophist* also give a distinction between *einai* and *gignesthai* that can resolve classic problems for any such distinction, including the problem of the metaphysics of the *Protagoras* or *Theaetetus*.

Indeed, the grounds from which Brown launches her attack on Frede-type readings of the *Sophist* distinction may be thought to add to the motivation for reading the *einai* - *gignesthai* distinction as a predicational distinction. As I have discussed, it is sometimes thought that we have reason to disprefer predicational readings of the *einai* - *gignesthai* distinction because there simply exists a clear, intuitive, and well-understood set of distinctions between existence and identity, between identity and predication, and so on. Brown (correctly, in my view) follows Kahn in denying that Plato has an “is of existence” readily available; she holds, rather, that in the (rare) cases where Plato uses *einai* so as to mean something like “exists,” this meaning is somehow derivative from the predicative meaning or meanings of *einai*. By following Kahn in rejecting the view that we can neatly classify Platonic uses of *einai* as predicative, existential, or identifying, and indeed in doubting that the meaning of the verb can be mapped cleanly onto these meanings of the English “is,” she removes some of the motivation for rejecting a reading of the *einai* - *gignesthai* distinction as predicational.

Even putting those concerns to one side, we may ask whether Brown is correct to diagnose *Sophist* 255 as distinguishing between uses of *esti*, or whether there is reason to prefer, as Frede and others<sup>66</sup> do, an alternative reading according to which it distinguishes predications that hold in virtue of an item’s own nature from predications that hold in virtue of some relationship to another item. Arguably, the former sort of reading provides indirect evidence that a predicational reading of the *einai* - *gignesthai* distinction is unmotivated, whereas the latter would evince some general concern of Plato’s to distinguish

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<sup>66</sup>See, e.g., [Meinwald, 1992].

“stronger” from “weaker” sorts of predications.

Brown does not succeed in showing that her reading makes sense of the passage. She holds that Plato’s “clear and correct” point about uses of *esti*, which is the point he is making here, allows us to conclude that *being* and *different* are not the same, because only the former is said “itself by itself” whereas the latter must always be said “in relation to another.” As Brown says, we can say that ‘change is,’ but “any use of *X is different* must be completed, with a reference to what *X* is different from.”<sup>67</sup>

It is not clear that these claims are all “clear and correct,” however. In particular, it is not clear that “different” and “*heteron*” in fact behave as she claims they do. It is likely that any use of “different” *permits* a complement, if something cannot be different without being different with respect to something else. It is essential to Brown’s argument, however, that to permit a complement is not to require a complement (this is her distinction between “C1” and “C2” complete uses); she needs the stronger claim that these verbs *require* complements. When we say that “cats and dogs are different,” this might require or entail that they are different *from each other*, but that does not mean that the sentence involves a suppressed complement; perhaps we are just attributing a property to the subject “cats and dogs.”

In judging Brown’s claim, it is relevant that Plato uses predicates in what we might think of as unexpectedly complete ways. In the *Phaedo*, for example, we find an inquiry into why bigger things are bigger (*ta megala megala*) and why smaller things are smaller (*ta elattô elattô*).<sup>68</sup> In that passage, although it is surely correct to say that a smaller item is smaller than something else, it also seems correct to say that the smaller item really is smaller, full stop. That is, the phrase “*ta elattô elattô*” seems not to involve an ellipse, at least in the

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<sup>67</sup>[Brown, 1999, p. 475]

<sup>68</sup>*Phaedo* 100e.

*Phaedo.*

Even some uses of *heteron* in Plato may be thought to be complete uses. At *Theaet.* 158e, for example, Socrates says:

We are not to understand the question to refer to something which is the same in some respects while it is different in others, but to that which is wholly different (*all' holôs heteron*).<sup>69</sup>

Soon after that, at 159a, Socrates asks:

*homoioumenon men tauton phêsomen gignesthai, anomoioumenon de heteron;*

Should we say that a likening thing becomes like, whereas an anomalying thing becomes different?

In either case, it would be possible to argue that these uses of *heteron* are in fact elliptical. But these Platonic uses, along with the aforementioned English uses of 'different,' call into question the correctness and certainly the clarity of the point that Brown takes to be "clear and correct."

Moreover, a few lines later, Socrates says that change (*kinêsis*) is both the same and not the same: when we say it is the same, we are speaking of it as it is in relation to itself (*pros heautên*), and when we say it is not the same, we are speaking of it in its relationship with others (*dia tên koinônian au thaterou*). Brown's reading of the *auta kath' auta - pros allo* distinction cannot easily be applied to these claims about the same. The passage describes a difference *between the objects* of change's sameness and difference; it does not describe a difference between one relation's needing completion or saturation by an object and the other one's not needing such a completion.

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<sup>69</sup>Trans. Levett / Burnyeat.

Insofar as *Sophist* 255 ff. is relevant to the question whether Plato describes distinctions between kinds of predication, then, I conclude that Brown's critique of Frede's reading of the *auta kath' auta* - *pros allo* distinction does not give evidence that we should abandon such readings of Plato in general, and indeed that it does not even give evidence that we should abandon such readings of *Sophist* 255 ff.

### 3.5 Conclusion: the *Phaedo* as a brief case study

If the preceding arguments are plausible, they collectively suggest that readers of Plato are meant to take seriously a view of predication according to which there are two kinds of predication, marked off (when one is using words most carefully) with the verbs "*einai*" and "*gignesthai*." These arguments, besides being indirect, are concerned with texts for which the relationship between their metaphysical suggestions and Plato's considered views is unclear or disputed.

If one takes the arguments above seriously, one conclusion to draw is that Plato intends us to take such a distinction seriously; another is that Platonic texts consistently use a view of *einai* and *gignesthai* that is accurately interpreted as a distinction in kinds of predication and that makes an effective foil for theories that Plato or Socrates actually endorses. Either way, it is relevant whether and to what degree this view is inconsistent with others we find in the dialogues. It might appear that *Phaedo* 79a, among other passages, straightforwardly contradicts such a view, and that the *Phaedo* view is also likelier to be endorsed by Plato, all things considered. As a case study, then, I conclude by very briefly considering that passage.

It is true that Socrates at 79a divides *onta* into the visible and the invisible. Because a form of *einai* is being applied to sensible things, this passage might appear to provide evidence against a view according to which there is a



distinction between being and becoming along the lines I suggest.

The import of ‘*onta*’ at 79a, however, depends on the argument that has preceded this conclusion. Socrates and Cebes have agreed that the following distinctions are (at least) coextensional: first, the distinction between what can be dispersed and what cannot be dispersed; second, the distinction between what is composite and what is not composite; third, the distinction between what is variable and what is not variable; fourth, the “uniform”<sup>70</sup> “realities”<sup>71</sup> that we give accounts of and the many particulars that merely “bear the names”<sup>72</sup> of those former items.

Cebes’ assent to Socrates’ proposal that there are two kinds of *onta* reads as a conclusion or continuation of the previous conversation, in which these distinctions and the relationships between them were laid out.<sup>73</sup> While Socrates does use a form of *einai* to describe the status of the deficient items, there does not appear to be a revision of Socrates’ application of *autê hê ousia* (“being itself”) to the former items and the former items alone. Because these deficient items are described as *onta* but not as *ousia* or *ousiai*,<sup>74</sup> and because the argument is establishing the very deficiency of these items, it is reasonable to conclude that this passage does not commit us, when reconstructing Plato’s classic metaphysics, to ascribing full-fledged being to perceptible items.

Finally, it is useful to recall that in one of the central discussions of being and becoming, Socrates says that while it is natural, in ordinary speech, to use forms of *einai* for all kinds of items, this is a way of speaking loosely, and does not entail that those items are in the strictest sense *being* (or being some

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<sup>70</sup>*monoeides*, 78d5

<sup>71</sup>Note *ousia* at 78d1.

<sup>72</sup>They are *tôn ekeinois homônumôn*, where the *ekeinois* are the “uniform” “realities.”

<sup>73</sup>This is clear from the overall progress of the passage; note also that Socrates introduces his suggestion about the two kinds of *onta* by saying *thômen oun...*; the *oun* suggests that this is continuing, rather than departing from, what has come before.

<sup>74</sup>These latter terms more often carry metaphysical “weight” in Greek philosophy, and indeed are often described as honorifics.

feature) as opposed to *becoming* (or becoming some feature):

*...Really, from their motion and changes and blending with each other, everything becomes that we say is, when we're not speaking correctly. For nothing ever is, but only becomes.*<sup>75</sup>

This provides further reason not to take Socrates' characterization of perceptibles as *onta* as entailing that they are strictly being as opposed to becoming, especially when they are, in the same passage, contrasted with *ousia* or *ousiai*.

As such, I do not find that *Phaedo* 79a shows that a view of being and becoming according to which those are two kinds of predication is so inconsistent with metaphysical views that Plato would have more readily endorsed (if there are such views). This is, of course, only one text among many. Considering it in light of this material, however, might suggest that it is closer to being a respectable bit of Platonic metaphysics than one might first suspect it to be.

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<sup>75</sup> *Theaet.* 152d. Compare Sextus Epiricus's note that he uses "it is" in place of "it appears." (*PH* 1.135)

One might object that Socrates is here expounding a Protagorean theory to which neither he nor Plato has any stable commitment. Even so, it suggests that Socrates at least finds such a view intelligible.

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