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The Theory of Being and the Argument for Forms in Plato's *Sophist*

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Abstract

This paper argues for two claims. First, that in the *Sophist* a metaphysical theory of being is constructed from the ground up, largely on the basis of a claim treated as an axiomatic principle, the 'dunamis proposal' (247d–e), which, I will argue, ought to be understood as Plato's own definition of being. Second, once its core is in place, the theory is put to use to provide dialectical arguments against proponents of alternative metaphysical theories for the existence of various entities in the ontology. These include—notably—an argument for the existence of Forms.

Keywords

Sophist – being – Forms – theory – dialectic – power

Introduction

This paper argues for two, closely related, central claims. First, that Plato in the *Sophist* (*Sph.*) constructs a metaphysical theory of reality or 'being' from the ground up as it were, which is presented as establishing its core claims largely on the basis of a premise that functions as an axiomatic principle. This foundational element of the theory is articulated in the (so-called) 'dunamis proposal'

at 247d–e,¹ which, I will argue, ought to be understood as the Stranger's (and so Plato's) own definition of being, as whatever has the power to act upon or be affected by something. We will also see that the theory's development depends on several assumptions: a certain conception of formal causation, the reality of intelligence, and the possibility of knowledge. Taken together, the principle and assumptions allow the Stranger to argue for a theoretical account that postulates different sorts of entities as members of the ontological population, and which culminates in the discussion of the 'greatest kinds' (254d–259e). The second core claim of the paper is that, once the Stranger's theory-building project is brought to light, the theory's basic claims are shown to be put to use in providing arguments for the existence of various entities in the ontology. These include an argument—hitherto unnoticed—for the existence of Forms, i.e. for counting them as items in the ontological population. This argument contends, *inter alia*, that Forms are in relations of acting upon or being affected by one another, including, most importantly, the relation of being acted upon by the Form Difference. This is significant because, in the context of the overarching concerns of the dialogue, it allows the Stranger to analyse the state of affairs in which something 'is not' as a state of affairs that clearly involves beings—really existing things—and does not require or point to a mysterious absence of being. It also paves the way for the Stranger to forge an account of the legitimate use of the negative particle and of negation generally, as well as of falsehood.

To be sure, many readers of the dialogue have understood Plato to present a theoretical account or analysis of being or reality within its pages. The present paper diverges from those interpretations in several respects. First, I claim that the Stranger develops the account or theory considerably earlier in the dialogue than has been previously supposed, from 247d in the *gigantomachia*; second, I argue that the Stranger's theoretical account begins with the explicit postulation of a premise that he treats as a principle, from which, granted the abovementioned assumptions, the other elements are established and the theory takes shape; and third, that rather than have the Stranger introduce Forms into the account as items whose reality or existence is presupposed, Plato takes care to have his central character provide an argument for the existence of certain entities—property natures—that he will go on to identify with (recognisably Platonic) Forms.

1 Lesley Brown first coined the phrase '*dunamis* proposal' to refer to the Stranger's postulation concerning being at 247d8–e4 in Brown 1998, 189.

The paper will trace the development of the theory, and its work to establish the reality of Forms, with a view to the dialectical context of that development. Paying attention to the step-by-step construction of the Stranger's account in the course of his discussions with various rival metaphysicians allows us to see that he takes his account to be forged through engagement with these other thinkers. The procedure that facilitates this dialectical production of the Stranger's account is that of question and answer. By questioning those thinkers, the Stranger reveals to them that they themselves either hold views that in fact commit them to the basic building blocks of his and Theaetetus' account (however unwittingly), or are in fact committed to other claims (again however unwittingly) that turn out to be consistent with, rather than to contradict, the basic elements of his nascent theory. One effect of the Stranger's dialectical procedure is that his account is presented as especially plausible, since proponents of very different conceptions or accounts of reality or being cannot help but agree to its central tenets. The arguments for the existence of various Forms are thus presented in a particularly noteworthy fashion in the *Sophist*: as established by a theory that emerges from dialectically agreed, hence plausible, foundations.

The paper follows the sequential development of the theory through a central portion of the dialogue, from 247d onwards. In §1 I argue that the Stranger's theory springs from the proposed definition of being, immediately deployed to establish various corporeal and non-corporeal entities in the nascent ontology. Then, after a brief discussion of the Stranger's assumption of the notion of formal causation in §2, we move in §3 to the Friends of the Forms. There, the Stranger shows that by the Friends' own lights, change and some changing things are real and belong in the realm of being, thereby dispatching their objection to his definition of being. In §4 I read 250a–e as utilising the nascent theory to argue for the triad, change, rest, and being, as beings in their own right (soon after to be identified as kinds or Forms), while §5 details the theory's identification of the participation relation as the relation involved in formal causation (251d–253b). §6 traces the theory's deployment at 254e2–255b4 to demonstrate the existence of Sameness and Difference as Forms that are numerically distinct from Change and Rest. In §7 I show how the theory establishes that the greatest kinds participate in Difference and so 'are not', while at the same time each remaining a being. I conclude with a brief examination of two opposing conceptions of (what I regard as) the most controversial element in the Stranger's theory, that of formal causation—the 'transmission theory' model and the 'structural' model—and argue that, compared to its rival, the latter makes for a far more plausible assumption and a significantly better fit with the text.

1 The Definition of Being: the *dunamis* Proposal

At 247d the reformed Giants (let us call them the ‘gentle’ Giants), whose materialist metaphysics is the subject of a fictional discussion with the Stranger, are at a loss. As materialists, they define being as corporeality, but under questioning they reveal that they think that a soul is just or wise because of the possession (*hexis*) or presence (*parousia*) of justice or wisdom to it (247a2–8). And although they (might) countenance the soul as corporeal, they are unwilling to so countenance justice or wisdom. Hence, they cannot account for the constituent elements of a state of affairs they regard as genuine or real. At this juncture, the Stranger offers them the ‘*dunamis* proposal’. Here it is in its immediate context:

STR. So let’s go back to questioning them: because if they are willing to admit that among the things that are there is even a little bit of a thing that is without body, that will suffice. What they need to tell us is what common feature is to be found equally among these things that lack body and those that have it, and allows them to say that both sets of things are. Well, perhaps they’ll be at a loss for an answer; if that’s pretty much their situation, then see whether they’d be ready to accept an offer from us, and agree that to be is something like the following.

THT. Like what? Say, and we’ll soon know whether they’ll agree.

STR. Well, I say that whatever sort of thing possessing the power (*dunamis*) by nature either to act on some other thing, or to be acted upon even to the smallest extent by the most insignificant thing, and even if only on a single occasion, every such thing really is. For I lay down a definition (*horos*) defining (*horizein*) ‘the things that are’ as being nothing else besides power (*dunamis*).² (247c9–e4, tr. Rowe, modified)

The *dunamis* proposal is offered as sufficient for the task of articulating what justice or wisdom—which the Giants evidently think are real—have in common with bodies. Following others, I take the proposal to be the Stranger’s own

2 ΞΕ. Πάλιν τοίνυν ἀνερρωτῶμεν αὐτούς· εἰ γάρ τι καὶ σμικρὸν ἐθέλουσι τῶν ὄντων συγχερεῖν ἀσώματον, ἐξαρκεῖ. τὸ γὰρ ἐπὶ τε τούτοις ἅμα καὶ ἐπ’ ἐκείνοις ὅσα ἔχει σῶμα συμφυῆς γεγονός, εἰς ὃ βλέποντες ἀμφοτέρωθεν εἶναι λέγουσι, τοῦτο αὐτοῖς ῥητέον. τάχ’ οὖν ἴσως ἂν ἀποροῖεν· εἰ δὴ τι τοιοῦτον πεπόνθασι, σκόπει, προτεινομένων ἡμῶν, ἄρ’ ἐθέλοιεν ἂν δεχέσθαι καὶ ὁμολογεῖν τοιόνδ’ εἶναι τὸ ὄν. ΘΕΑΙ. Τὸ ποῖον δὴ; λέγε, καὶ τάχα εἰσόμεθα. ΞΕ. Λέγω δὴ τὸ καὶ ὅποιαν οὖν τινα κεκτημένον δύναιμι εἶτ’ εἰς τὸ ποιεῖν ἕτερον ὅτι οὖν πεφυκός· εἶτ’ εἰς τὸ παθεῖν καὶ σμικρότατον ὑπὸ τοῦ φαυλοτάτου, κἂν εἰ μόνον εἰς ἅπαξ, πᾶν τοῦτο ὄντως εἶναι· τίθεμαι γὰρ ὅρον ὀρίζειν τὰ ὄντα ὡς ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι πλὴν δύναιμι.

(and so Plato's).³ It is clearly marked as such in the text (note *hêmôn* at 247d5, *legô* at d8, and *tithemai gar* at e3), and the only question is whether the Giants would be willing to agree to it or not. Moreover, as G.E.L. Owen pointed out, although the verb *horizein* and the noun *horos* can be translated either as 'to mark off' or 'to define' and 'mark' or 'definition' (respectively), the broader context shows that the Stranger is offering a definition here. For at 247e the terms pick up on and revise the earlier use of the participle form at 246a–b, where it characterises the view of the as yet unreformed Giants, and clearly conveys the sense of definition:⁴

STR. One group [i.e. the as yet unreformed Giants] drags everything down to earth from the heavenly region of the invisible, actually clutching rocks and trees with their hands. When they take hold of all these things, they insist that only what offers tangible contact is, since they define (*horizomenoi*) being as the same as body ...⁵ (246a8–b1, tr. White)

So the revised version presented to the gentle Giants at 247d–e ought likewise to offer a definition. We can add to these considerations that the *dunamis* proposal articulates 'the sort of thing being is' (*toiond' eniaï to on*, 247d6, cf. d2–4), common to all cases: being both universal in its scope and seeking the nature of being in its aim, the proposal bears the distinctive hallmarks of a definition, not the articulation of a mere mark.⁶

Last, I note—again, with others—that being is defined in terms of causal power: the use of *poiein* ('to act upon') and *pathein* ('to be affected') evokes the idea of the asymmetrical relation of causation (as elsewhere in Plato),⁷ in which the cause acts on the bearer of the effect, and what bears the effect is acted upon by the cause: being able to occupy the role of either *relatum* in a causal relation—and in *this* sense possessing causal power—is what it is to

3 Owen 1966/1986, 41–4.; Owen 1970/1986, n. 13, 109; Gill 2012, 16, n. 68, 42–3, 96, 229–36; Hestir 2016, 108; Wiitala 2018, 182–4. See also my 2010, 64–7.

4 As pointed out by Owen 1970/1986, n. 13, 109. Among the many others who have read the proposal as a definition (however tentative), see e.g., Diès 1932, ch. 2; Taylor 1961, 48–9; Notomi 1999, n. 25, 218.

5 246a8–b1: Οἱ μὲν εἰς γῆν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀοράτου πάντα ἔλκουσι, ταῖς χερσὶν ἀτεχνῶς πέτρας καὶ δρυὸς περιλαμβάνοντες. τῶν γὰρ τοιούτων ἐφαπτόμενοι πάντων δισχυρίζονται τοῦτο εἶναι μόνον ὃ παρέχει προσβολὴν καὶ ἐπαφὴν τινα, ταῦτόν σῶμα καὶ οὐσίαν ὀρίζόμενοι ...

6 See also my 2010, 67: the proposal's announcement is clearly signposted and introduced with what I there characterised as the appropriate 'fanfare' for a definition of being or 'what is', which is, after all, the central topic of a large chunk of the dialogue.

7 For the claim that Plato makes use (*inter alia*) of *poiein* to indicate causation in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere (though not in the *Sophist*), see Sedley 1998, 115.

be a being. The dialectical context, too, lends further support to the 'causal power' construal of the definition. For the proposal was introduced to account for cases such as just or wise souls, the occurrence of which was described in the kind of language Plato uses to indicate a causal relation: at 247a5–7, the Stranger makes use of the causal dative to claim that such states of affairs arise *by or through* the presence of justice or wisdom to the soul, a claim with which the gentle Giants agree.⁸ Such cases, evidently of cause and effect, are well explained by (what I will refer to from now on as) the 'causal power' definition of being. Indeed, such a definition of being is particularly appropriate in discussion with the Giants: as M.M. McCabe has observed, being materialists, they are very likely already enamoured of mechanistic causation as a necessary feature of being, before encountering the Stranger.⁹ So, once they are confronted with the fact that they take things like virtues (justice, wisdom) as real, and understand souls to become virtuous through the presence of them, it is but a short step for them to *extend* the domain of causal relations they previously countenanced (mechanistic causal relations between material things) to include relations between virtues and souls, and so to be primed for acceptance of the *dunamis* proposal—understood as articulating the causal power definition of being. Such acceptance, of course, has far-reaching implications for their materialism. But since they recognise the case of being just as a genuine aspect of reality which, moreover, they regard as an outcome of one thing being present to another, they have every reason to accept the Stranger's definition. This, I suggest, is why they do accept it and thereby expand their notion of being to include the virtues, before dropping out of sight.

To return to the Stranger's theory-building: in the exchange with the giants, to possess the power to be in a causal relation emerges as *what it is to be* (or be a being), for the Stranger (and Plato).¹⁰ As a definition of being, it is fit to serve as a principle from which the being of other entities can be deduced, or with reference to which their being can be explained. As we have seen, in discussion

8 247a5–6: ΕΕ. Ἄλλ' οὐ δικαιοσύνης ἕξει καὶ παρουσίᾳ τοιαύτην αὐτῶν ἐκάστην γίγνεσθαι, καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων τὴν ἐναντίαν; See Sedley 1998, 115–17 for Plato's use (*inter alia*) of constructions involving the causal dative to have his characters speak in pointedly causal terms; for this, and other sorts of Platonic 'causal talk' identified by Sedley (but in the *Sophist*), see further my 2010, 72–3.

9 McCabe 2000, 74–5.

10 One worry here might be generated by the thought that the existence or reality of something must be prior to its possession of a power or capacity—if so, we might doubt that Plato intended the proposal as a definition. I respond to this worry in n. 50 below (in the concluding section) by suggesting that it is both coherent and plausible for Plato to conceive of the ability to be in a causal relation as constitutive of the reality of things.

with the giants, wielding the principle allows the Stranger to account for the existence of souls and virtues, so that these count as items in the ontology. Of course, material things were also postulated by the Giants, and their reality is never questioned by the Stranger. This fits well with the ‘theory development’ reading I am advancing: viewed in context, it is abundantly clear that the definition of being is intended as accounting for the reality of the material world, since material things are obviously able to act upon or be affected by other things in mechanistic causal relations. The definition ought therefore to be understood, in its immediate context, as taken to implicitly justify the postulation of corporeal things as well as virtues and souls (the precise status of which remains unclear) as members of the ontology. Moreover, the introduction of the definition by way of discussion and agreement suggests that it is the sort of reputable foundational premise Aristotle described in *Topics* I.1 as that which is able to serve as the basis of a deduction (a dialectical deduction), because it is agreed upon by most people or by the wise (as opposed to being a premise that commands belief in and by itself, and about which it is not proper to ask for further reasons).¹¹ I submit, therefore, that its announcement marks the beginning of the construction of the metaphysical theory the Stranger will develop in execution of the project, articulated at 242c–243d, of getting clear on just what the term ‘what is’ (or ‘being’, *to on*, 243d3), refers to.

2 The Causal Power Definition of Being and Platonic Causation

Viewed in context, then, the *dunamis* proposal gives expression to a very broad notion of causation, incorporating mechanistic causation between physical entities like sticks and stones, as well as a very different kind of causation, between entities such as virtues and souls. At this point in the dialogue, I want to suggest, the reader familiar with the metaphysics of Plato’s previous dialogues, particularly the *Phaedo*, would be expected to prick up their ears: The example of a soul being just by or through the presence of justice is strongly reminiscent of Socrates’ claim at 100c4–6 in the *Phaedo* that ‘if anything is beautiful besides the Beautiful itself, it is so for no other reason than that it

11 Aristotle, *Topics*, I.1 100a29–30; 100b18–23. The definition of being could not be understood as a foundational premise of the kind that commands belief in and by itself, and which it is improper to question, since both the Stranger and Theaetetus take care to leave open the possibility that the Gentle Giants might object to it at some point in the future at 247e5–248a2. I am grateful to Peter Adamson for this suggestion.

participates in the Beautiful, and I say so with everything.¹² After Cebes agrees to this sort of cause (*aitia*, c6), Socrates also declares of a particular beautiful thing that ‘nothing else makes it beautiful other than the presence of, or the sharing in, or however you may describe its relationship to that Beautiful we mentioned ...’ (100d4–6; note the use of ‘present to’ (*parousia*) at both *Phd.* 100d5 and *Sph.* 247a6).¹³ The causal relation postulated in the *Sophist* between justice (*dikaiousunê*, 247a5, cf. b1) and the just soul, therefore, ought to give the well-tutored reader pause, and prompt her to ask after the metaphysical status of justice in this passage, beyond its agreed-upon incorporeal nature.

Forms are, of course, so far nowhere in sight in the dialogue. All the same, I want to suggest, there is excellent reason for the reader to understand the reference to justice (for instance) as picking out something significantly like a Form, namely the property, justice, considered by itself or on its own, apart from any instances of it as an attribute of something. For, only a few passages earlier, in the debate with the Monists, the Stranger had repeatedly distinguished between a property itself (e.g. *to hen auto*, *to hen*), which he speaks of as having a nature (*phusis*), and the property as possessed by something as an attribute or character (e.g. *pathos tou henos*, *peponthos hen*).¹⁴ The distinction is not a clear or particularly heavy-duty metaphysical one: the nature of a property (or a ‘property nature’ as I will call it) is something that the Monists countenance, which is conceived of independently from instances of that property as an attribute or quality, about which various predications can be made. The Stranger nowhere challenges this conception in his debate with the Monists. By the *gigantomachia*, then, the ground has already been prepared for the reader to understand the talk of properties considered apart from their instances as talk of the properties themselves, that is, talk of the relevant property natures. So, when the Stranger speaks of, for example, justice and just souls, identifies justice as that which may come to be present to or absent from souls at 247a2–10, and applies the definition of being to such cases, the reader is primed to understand justice (*dikaiousunê*) as the property nature of justice,

12 100c4–6: εἴ τί ἐστιν ἄλλο καλὸν πλὴν αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, οὐδὲ δι’ ἕν ἄλλο καλὸν εἶναι ἢ διότι μετέχει ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ· καὶ πάντα δὴ οὕτως λέγω. (Unless noted otherwise, translations of the Greek are my own.)

13 100d4–6: ὅτι οὐκ ἄλλο τι ποιεῖ αὐτὸ καλὸν ἢ ἡ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ εἴτε παρουσία εἴτε κοινωνία εἴτε ὅπη δὴ καὶ ὅπως προσγενομένη.

14 The Stranger distinguishes the attribute or characteristic of oneness or unity at 245a1, b4 (*pathos tou henos*), b8 (*peponthos hen*), c1–2 (*to peponthenai to hup’ ekeinou pathos*) from the one itself at 245a5–6 (*to hen auto*) and the one at 245b8 (*to hen*). He also speaks of what is and the whole as each having separate natures (*phusin*) at 245c8–9, and refers to the attributes (*peponthos*) of oneness and wholeness and being at 245a5.

and a just soul (*dikaia psuchê*) to be a case of justice *qua* attribute (*pathos*) that belongs to some particular soul.

Moreover, the context makes it clear that justice and wisdom are examples from which one is meant to generalise. Hence, the reader ought to understand the application of the *dunamis* proposal to these sorts of cases as indicating that the very broad relation of causation it articulates includes, as one type of causation, the relation that holds between a property nature quite generally and the possession of that property (as attribute) by some particular property-bearer. If this is right, the *dunamis* proposal is intended to incorporate, as one kind of causation, what can be characterised as ‘formal’ causation: the specifiable nature of some property bears causal responsibility for instances of the corresponding attribute in particular individuals.

We may conjecture, then, that it is at this point in the dialogue that the well-tutored reader is expected to ask herself whether the formal causal relation between property natures and individual cases of the relevant properties *qua* attributes is none other than the relation of participation between Forms and participants (as in the *Phaedo* in particular)—a relation that we might, following David Sedley, call ‘Platonic’ causation.¹⁵ In the *Phaedo*, according to Sedley, the relation of Platonic causation ought to be seen as informed by the ‘like causes like’ principle found in ancient Greek thought generally, such that the Form of F, itself characterised as ‘being F’, is responsible for its participants being F.¹⁶ More recently, this sort of causal responsibility has been understood as a kind of ‘transmission’ of F-ness between Form and participant: Mary Louise Gill has described the ‘transmission theory of causation’ as ‘the view that a cause has the character it explains in its effects’.¹⁷ In relation to Platonic causation, Gill claims that ‘the Form has the same character as its participants and has it in a preeminent way’, and insists that it is not the case that ‘the Form stands to F-ness in a different relation from the one in which its participants stand to that same character’.¹⁸

15 Sedley 1998.

16 Sedley 1998, 116–17.

17 Gill 2012, 24. See also Sedley 1998, 123–4; Hankinson 1998, 92–4.

18 Gill 2012, 24–5. Note, however, that in Gill’s view, although participation is the relevant causal relation in Plato’s version of the transmission theory of causation in the *Phaedo* and the first part of the *Parmenides*, by the time Plato wrote the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, he had abandoned participation as otiose (235, 240). On her reading, Forms operate as causes in the *Phaedo* and *Parmenides* by transmitting the feature they themselves possess as an attribute as a separate entity *via* participation, while in the *Sophist*, they operate as causes by being immanent structural features of entities that, being immanent, transmit the feature they possess to that in which they are immanent (24–7, 235, cf. 151–7).

We will see (in §5) that later in the dialogue the Stranger does indeed identify property natures with kinds or Forms, and that he treats Forms as causes. I will argue, however, in the concluding section that the text of the *Sophist* supports an alternative way of thinking of Platonic causation, one that does not involve transmission yet which is still consistent with the 'like causes like' principle. But no matter what particular conception of Platonic cause—no matter what conception of Forms as causes—one might ultimately plump for, I hope in the present section to have established two claims: one, that the announcement of the *dunamis* proposal inaugurates the development of the Stranger's metaphysical theory and introduces a very broad conception of causation that incorporates both mechanistic and formal causal relations; and, two, that the nascent metaphysical theory is designed to provoke the reader to ask herself whether the property natures, justice and wisdom, are entities similar or equivalent to Platonic Forms, and, likewise, whether the 'formal' causal relation between them and particular things that have the relevant property as an attribute is similar to or the same as the Platonic causal relation of participation, as characterised in the *Phaedo*.

3 The Friends of Forms and the Definition of Being

The Stranger's next imaginary interlocutors, the 'Friends of the Forms', hold that true being consists of intelligible and incorporeal Forms (246b). The passage detailing the encounter with the Friends is brief and dense, and has spawned a huge literature covering a range of issues, which I cannot hope adequately to address here. For the purposes of this paper, my aim will be the more modest one of presenting what I take to be a plausible (though not mandatory) reading of the encounter in the context of the Friends' response to the *dunamis* proposal, and the metaphysical claims they agree to in the dialectical exchange with the Stranger.

At the outset, the friends summarily reject the Stranger's definition of being as soon as it is proposed (248b–c), since by their lights only things in the realm of becoming are capable of acting upon or being affected by something, not those in the realm of being (*ousia*, 248c8)—in particular, their Forms. Their position is illustrated with the example of knowledge and its proper objects, Forms. In response to the Stranger's question whether knowing or being known is, according to the Friends, a case of acting upon or being affected, Theaetetus replies on their behalf that neither is a case of either, on pain of contradicting what they have just said. The clear implication is that if knowing were a case of acting upon, then the object of knowledge, Forms, would

be affected, and if knowing were a case of being affected, then the object of knowledge, Forms, would be acting upon something (*viz.*, the knowing mind). But then, in the first case, to the extent that Forms are known, to that extent they would be affected and thus changed (248e3–4), which could not happen to something that they, the Friends, claim is at rest. And though the Stranger does not present the Friends' argument concerning the second case, by parallel reasoning it is evident that they insist that knowing could not be a case of being affected (248d8–9) because they think that, to the extent that Forms are known, to that extent they would act upon that which knows them, and thereby undergo change. So, although the Friends regard Forms as objects of knowledge, the relation between knowledge and its object must, in their view, be other than that of agent and patient, since they take the relation of acting upon and being affected to implicate both agent and patient in relations of change.

The Stranger's strategy in response to the Friends' rejection of his definition of being is parallel to that deployed against the Giants. Just as he demonstrated to the Giants their unwitting commitment to the being or reality of some non-corporeal entities, so too he now aims to show the Friends that they are unwittingly committed to some changing things belonging to the realm of being, in turn disarming their objection to the proposed definition of being. Here is the text:

STR. But by Zeus what is this? Are we in any case going to be so easily persuaded that change and life and soul and wisdom are truly absent from what completely is, and that it does not live, or think, but sits there in august holiness, devoid of intelligence, fixed and unchanging?

THT. We would be agreeing to a terrible account of things, Stranger.

STR. But are we to say that it has intelligence, but not life?

THT. How could that be?

STR. But do we say that it has both of these in it, and deny that it has a soul in which to have them?

THT. How else could it have them?

STR. But do we say then that it is in possession of intelligence and life and soul, but nevertheless stands there, with a soul but entirely unchanging?

THT. All of this appears to me unreasonable.

STR. Then one ought to accept that what changes and change are also things that are. (248e7–249b3, tr. Rowe, modified)

The Stranger begins at 249a2 by securing agreement from the Friends (at 249a3) that they include mind or intelligence (*nous*) in 'what completely is' (*tôi*

pantelôs ontî). The Friends' ready agreement here is consistent with their earlier stated view that while it is with the body, through perception, that we are in contact with (*koinônein*) things in the realm of becoming (*genesis*), it is with the soul, through reasoning (*logismos*), that we are in contact with things in the realm of being (*ousia*) (248a10–13). But if intelligence belongs to the realm of being, what is living must also belong to it, and so too soul (249a): living intelligent ensouled things are real.¹⁹ And since what has intelligence, life, and soul cannot be unchanging, the Friends must concede that according to their own underlying metaphysical and epistemological commitments, including to the possibility of knowledge, both what is changed and change are real things, i.e., elements of the realm of being (249b2–3). As a result of this dialectical exchange, the Friends, just like the Giants, are brought to see that their ontology ought to be expanded, in their case to include some changing things (ensouled intelligence and life). And just as it was sufficient for the Stranger's purposes if the Giants conceded that at least one non-corporeal thing was real (247c9–d2), since the concession falsified their initial conception of being, so too the Friend's concession falsifies *their* conception of being as what 'remains forever just as it is' (248a12), i.e. is unchanging. Crucially, the Friend's grounds for objecting to the definition of being (expressed in the *dunamis* proposal), are thereby undermined.

By addressing Theaetetus directly at 249b5, the Stranger signals the close of the encounter with the Friends, and the resumption of the development of their own metaphysical theory. He signals straightaway his own commitment to the possibility of knowledge and the reality of intelligence, by affirming two claims on the basis of transcendental reasoning: first, that if real things (*onta*) generally are unchanging, nobody will possess intelligence about anything at all (249b5–6), and second, that without rest, nothing could come to remain exactly what it is, in relation to the same thing, which would similarly entail that intelligence could not be or come to be anywhere (249b12–c4). What, exactly, the Stranger means to pick out as that to which the state of 'being the same' applies is unclear.²⁰ What is clear, however, is that the possibility of intelligence and knowledge requires that at least some things remain the same in some respects, and that this is only possible on condition that some elements of reality are, or come to be, at rest. Nonetheless, given the possibility of

19 See also Cornford 1935, 244–7; Ross 1951, 110; Brown 1998, 201–4; Leigh 2010, 76–77; Crivelli 2012, n. 66, 92. Note, with Ross, that the Stranger goes on to assert at 249b5–6 that if beings were changeless, nobody would have any intelligence at all about anything.

20 The Stranger could have in mind the claim that the exclusion of radical (Heraclitean) flux is a condition of intelligence and knowledge, or the claim that the self-same nature of Forms (which are thereby at rest) is necessary for intelligence and knowledge. Neither way of taking the Stranger's remark, however, is significant for the purposes of this paper.

knowledge and that coming to know is a case of change, they affirm that not all things are at rest. Similarly, though some things change, since some things rest, not everything changes (249c–d). He goes on to conclude that ‘what is and the all’ (*to on kai to pan*) must incorporate both as many things as are changeless and as are changing (249d3–4). Significantly, he sums up by speaking of their account (*logos*) as doing a good job so far of comprehending being or ‘what is’ (*to on*) at 249d7, emphasising that the critical discussion of other thinkers’ views in the *gigantomachia* is for the sake of development of the Stranger’s (and Theaetetus’) own theory of being.

There are several significant developments of the Stranger’s nascent account in the exchange with the Friends. Most importantly, the Stranger’s definition of being—the *dunamis* proposal—has been successfully defended against the objection that whatever counts as belonging in the realm of being must be immune from change. Thus, the fundamental principle of the theory emerges from the *gigantomachia* unscathed. But in addition, a premise that was previously, if implicitly, endorsed in the exchange with the Giants, that some things undergo change, such as souls that become just, is reaffirmed and amplified by the Stranger’s assumptions of the reality of intellect and the possibility of knowledge. For, these assumptions entail, as we have seen, that the knowing mind changes. Moreover, these assumptions lead the Stranger to endorse the further claim that, parallel to the case concerning change, some—but not all—things are at rest. The Stranger’s endorsement of these further assumptions, then, allows him to defend the definition of being as well as argue that resting things, as well as changing things, belong to the realm of being, or to reality.

4 The Emergence of Being

No sooner has the Stranger congratulated himself and Theaetetus on doing a good job of comprehending or capturing being in their account (*logos*, 249d6–7),²¹ than he raises a potential objection to it. He articulates the objection after first putting elements of their account to work.

He begins by eliciting Theaetetus’ agreement to the claim that both and each of change and rest are (250a11–12). He is right to do so, since the account they have developed so far entails just this, for at the conclusion of the *gigantomachia*

21 At 249d6–7 he asks ‘Well then! Don’t we, therefore, seem to have done a decent job of capturing being in our account?’ (Τί οὖν; ἄρ’ οὐκ ἐπιεικῶς ἤδη φαινόμεθα περιειληφέναι τῷ λόγῳ τὸ ὄν;)

they argued that reality includes instances of the property, change, exhibited by changing things, and things at rest, which exhibit or display the property of being at rest. It follows, then, from their definition of being in the *dunamis* proposal (and the assumption of formal causation we saw to be operative), that things in the world that undergo change and rest must be as they are (changing or resting) as a result of being acted upon by the relevant property natures being present to them. Therefore, change itself and rest itself—the respective natures of the properties, change and rest—are each one of the beings. That is, they are items in the ontology, things that the Stranger will treat as themselves subjects of declarative statements in the very next lines. This result, however, might appear to raise a problem: if their account so far sanctions the inclusion of these two property natures, change and rest, one might suspect that it is none other than a ‘dualist’ way of accounting for or defining being, by way of reducing it to some pair of properties (e.g. the hot and the cold)—a strategy the Stranger earlier rejected as problematic (243d–244b).²²

In response, the Stranger undertakes to demonstrate that their account is not dualist by showing that it entails the postulation of a third entity, the property nature ‘being’, which cannot be reduced to the nature of either change or rest. He first examines what is attributed to each of the property natures, change and rest, in saying that they ‘are’, drawing a negative conclusion: in predicating ‘being’ of each and both of them (*einai*, 250a11, b3, b6), Theaetetus does not attribute the quality or property of changing to either change or rest, nor does he attribute the property of being at rest.²³ So, in predicating being of change and rest, Theaetetus means to assert that each possesses an attribute qualitatively distinct from the attribute of changing, and from the attribute of being at rest, namely, the attribute ‘being’.

The Stranger next argues, in four terse and complex lines of text at 250b8–11, that it follows from this (*ara*, 250b8) that Theaetetus postulates being as a third thing alongside them both. Theaetetus postulates being as a third thing—the Stranger somewhat cryptically reasons—since he (Theaetetus) takes change and rest together as both surrounded or embraced by being, and, looking to change’s and rest’s sharing or partaking in being (*tên tês ousias koinônian*),²⁴

22 And so, as the Stranger says, it would be right to question them in just the same way that they questioned those who said that everything (*to pan*) was hot and cold (249e6–250a2).

23 The use of the infinitives *kineisthai* (250b2) and *hestanai* (b5) in constructions indicating indirect speech give the sense of a finite verbal form: the thought is that Theaetetus does not say or signify that change and rest are either changing or resting, whenever he says that each of them ‘is’.

24 As discussed in detail below, I here follow Ackrill (and Ross) in taking it that in Plato, constructions of *koinônia* (and cognate terms) with the genitive indicate the asymmetrical

Theaetetus says that both change and rest 'are' (*einai*).²⁵ At first sight, it is not obvious how to interpret the Stranger's reasoning here, which concludes with the claim that being is a third item in the ontology. In response, I want to suggest that—in contrast to the majority of scholars who regard the Stranger as taking a new tack from 249e, so that his argument therein is not continuous with what has gone before it in the *gigantomachia*²⁶—the Stranger's reasoning is best understood when we recall that the discussion from 249e was initially framed as a further investigation of the account (*logos*) they have so far constructed, and of what follows from it (249d). His reasoning becomes clear, that is, when viewed within the context of the construction of his theory.

So understood, we can take the Stranger at 250c8–11 to be drawing out and making explicit the metaphysical state of affairs that is entailed, according to their nascent theory, by the claim that each and both of change and rest 'are' (where that is not reducible to either of them changing or resting). The key element in this metaphysical state of affairs will be a third entity, the property nature, being. The Stranger says that Theaetetus postulates being as a third thing on the grounds that he conceives of the relation between change and rest on the one hand, and being on the other, a certain way—and the way that Theaetetus conceives of this relation, I submit, is the direct result of applying their theory of being, in particular the definition of being. The relation in which change and rest stand to being, according to their theory, is described in two distinct ways: first as the relation of being *embraced or surrounded by* being, and second as the relation of *sharing of or partaking in* being. Let us take them in turn.

When the Stranger says that Theaetetus takes change and rest together to be encompassed or embraced (*periekhomenên*, 250b9) by being, the spatial imagery suggested by the semantics of *periekhomenên* can be read as conveying the idea that being as a distinct entity surrounds the other two in conceptual space. That is, the semantic content of the verb (which appears in participle form here)—to surround or embrace—signifies an asymmetrical spatial relation whereby one thing does something to another in being present to it in

relation of enjoying a share in something or other, most commonly attributed to sensible things *vis-à-vis* Platonic Forms: Ackrill 1997, 89–90; Ross 1951, n. 6, 111–12.

25 250b8–11: STR. 'So in your mind you are postulating being as a third thing alongside these, since, taking both change and rest as together embraced by it, and looking at them in relation to their sharing in being, in this way you say they both are—right?' (Τρίτον ἄρα τι παρὰ ταῦτα τὸ ὄν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τιθεῖς, ὡς ὑπ' ἐκείνου τήν τε στάσιν καὶ τὴν κίνησιν περιεχομένην συλλαβῶν καὶ ἀπιδῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς τὴν τῆς οὐσίας κοινωσίαν, οὕτως εἶναι προσείπας ἀμφοτέρα;)

26 A recent example is Gill 2012. But see also (for instance) Cornford 1935, 252–3 (cf. 238–9), and Crivelli 2012, 100–102.

a particular way, namely in surrounding or enfolding it. The deployment of *periekhomenên* here is metaphorical, to indicate an abstract asymmetrical relation between abstract objects, which has, moreover, causal connotations.²⁷ Within this semantic context, the use of the passive participle conveys that change and rest are those to which the embracing or surrounding is being done, those to which the embracing, surrounding thing is present. So while the passive participle need not in itself suggest causation, the semantic content of the word strongly suggests that the relation is not only asymmetrical but causal.

So read, the participle neatly recalls the earlier case at 247a–b of justice (and other virtues) being present to a soul. The Stranger deploys the participle to convey that this state of affairs follows from what they have already agreed: since change and rest both are (i.e. since they possess the attribute of being), then, given the assumption of formal causation, there is some property nature present to change and rest, namely being, that, in being present to them, causes them to be. And according to the definition of being, the property nature, being, which is present to them, ought to be counted among the items in the ontology. So, in attributing to Theaetetus the thought that change and rest are surrounded by being, I submit, the Stranger is pointing out the metaphysical consequences of applying the definition of being to what they have just concluded in the immediately preceding lines (i.e. that change and rest are), namely that being acts upon them both, and causes each of them to be. If this is right, then the relation of causation which lies at the heart of the theory the Stranger is developing is a relation that can obtain between property natures themselves.

The Stranger also describes the relation that change and rest bear to being as that of the relation of sharing or partaking in being (*koinônia*, 250b10–11). We ought to take his doing so, I suggest, to convey that the asymmetrical relation of being embraced or surrounded by a property nature ought to be understood

27 The sense of 'being surrounded' or 'being encompassed' must be conceptual rather than physical, since the property natures, change and rest, are purely intelligible—and so in that sense abstract, non-physical—entities, just as justice, wisdom, etc. were agreed to be non-corporeal (247b6–c2, cf. c9–d1). The participle occurs again a little later in the dialogue at 253d8, in the interpretively vexed passage concerning the expertise of dialectic. Although the passage is fraught with various difficulties, the majority of scholars take the Stranger's use of the participle to express some sort of conceptual relation between kinds or Forms (see, e.g., Stenzel 1964, 96–106, and Gómez-Lobo 1977, 47). For other uses of the middle-passive participle in Plato to articulate conceptual relations between intelligible entities (which are referred to in the language of property natures, e.g. 'the one'), see *Parmenides* 138b3, 151a1, 151b3.

as none other than the asymmetrical relation of having a share of or partaking in that property nature. In taking *koinônia* this way, I follow Ackrill (and Ross before him) in reading *koinônia*, when used in Plato's works in a construction with the genitive, rather than the dative, as indicating that the subject enjoys a share of, or is a participant in, that to which the genitive refers. I also follow Ackrill (though not Ross) in taking the difference to be significant: while the latter dative construction points to a more general and symmetrical relation of 'associating with', the former genitive construction signifies, for Plato, an asymmetrical relation, such that A's partaking of or sharing in B does not entail B's partaking of or sharing in A, and, moreover, frequently (though not always) characterises the relation sensible things bear to Forms.²⁸ Indeed, given the frequent sense of this construction in earlier dialogues, where it is used, at times synonymously with *metekhein* and other terms, to indicate the relation of participation between sensible things and Forms (e.g. *Phaedo* 100d5–6), the reader familiar with Plato's earlier metaphysical works would once again be expected to prick up their ears, and wonder whether the relation here at 250b in the *Sophist* between change and rest on the one hand and being on the other is the same as (or relevantly similar to) the relation between participants and Forms elsewhere in the corpus. And if so, the well-tutored reader will wonder whether Forms ought to be understood as being able to participate in one another.

As detailed above, the reading argued for so far understands the Stranger to be, in effect, applying at 250a–b the definition of being contained within the *dunamis* proposal. According to that reading, an entity emerges as that which acts upon both change and rest and which change and rest partake of—as a result of which, both and each are. The Stranger calls this entity being, and asserts that it is a third entity, distinct from change and rest. He does this because the property attribute of being (a being) was agreed to be qualitatively distinct from both the attribute of changing and of being at rest, and it follows from this that the natures of these qualitatively distinct attributes are different from one another, that is, that the property natures are numerically distinct. Hence, the Stranger concludes this piece of reasoning (*ara*, 250c3) by stating

28 Ackrill 1997, 86–91. To be sure, Ackrill suggests that this distinction in uses should not be applied to 250b10–11, since the discussion is not part of the 'communion of kinds' section running from 251–9 (90). Against this, however, we must note that Ackrill himself takes the distinction to apply to 251d–252d, even though talk of 'kinds' or 'Forms' is not introduced until 253b—presumably because he takes the talk of property natures at 251d–252d to prefigure that of kinds and Forms. But then, if the interpretation argued for here is right, and the Stranger is also discussing property natures at 250b, there is nothing to prevent us applying the distinction at 250b, as well as at 251d–252d.

that being (*to on*) is not change and rest taken together, but is indeed something different from them (*heteron ... ti*) (250c3–4). The Stranger's account, it seems, is no dualism. And with respect to the theory the Stranger is developing, being itself—the property nature of being, or what it is to be a being—has emerged as a member of the ontological population, alongside the property natures change, rest, justice, wisdom, the virtues generally, souls, and material things characterised as changing and resting.

It is at this point in the dialogue, however, that the Stranger says something that may be read as surprising: he claims that being, in accordance with its own nature, neither changes nor rests (250c6–7). The use of finite verbs to deny resting and changing (*oute hestêken oute kineitai*) are most naturally taken to indicate that the Stranger is denying that the attributes of rest and change belong to the property nature, being, in conformity with (*kata*) its own nature. This is surprising because it is not obvious that anything about the attributes of the property nature, being, follows from what has immediately gone before. In particular, if we understand the Stranger to infer here that the property nature, being, lacks or fails to possess the attributes of changing or being at rest, then it is clear that the inference fails. For the emergence of being as a numerically distinct entity leaves it an open question whether being has the attribute of being at rest, or of changing (or indeed both).²⁹

29 In response to this difficulty of apparently fallacious reasoning, the majority of scholars have sought to read the passage not as denying that both attributes belong to being, but rather that the use of the adverbial phrase *kata tèn autou phusin* indicates a special way in which 'being at rest and changing' is denied of being, *viz.*, it is denied that the nature of being is, or has as any part, the nature of change or the nature of rest. For an early example, see Cornford 1935, 250. For a thorough explanation of this reading, a version of which he also endorses, and a list of others who have proposed it, see Crivelli 2012, 98–101: 'The special way in which the kind being neither is stable nor changes is that whereby neither stability nor change constitutes the nature of the kind being' (99). As already indicated, however, the fact that Plato has the Stranger use finite verbal forms to say that being of its nature is neither at rest nor changes militates strongly against this interpretive strategy. If Plato had wanted to have him say instead that being of its nature is something other than what change is of its nature or what rest is of its nature, or even that being of its nature is neither change nor rest, he could have done so very easily: the fact that he did not tells against the standard interpretation. Another, less common reading understands the Stranger as deliberately confusing identity claims and predication claims, the resources for avoiding such confusions being supplied a little later on, when the Stranger clearly distinguishes the two kinds of assertion at 255e–256e (e.g. Owen 1970/1986, 129, 132–3). Against this view, as Crivelli argues, is the consideration is that it is very hard to read the key confusion that is alleged (at 250c2–4) into the text. For further discussion see Crivelli 2012, 99–100.

If, however, we view the claim in the context both of the Stranger's overarching project of developing or elucidating a metaphysical account of being and the immediate task of establishing that the account is not dualist, the claim can be construed as neither specious nor surprising. To see this, first consider that, since the property nature, being, has been admitted as a third thing alongside change and rest in their ontology, it is real, or one of the beings. So, on the assumption of formal causation, it has the attribute of being (or of being a being) just as change and rest do.³⁰ But since, as we saw earlier, this property is qualitatively distinct from both change and rest, *just insofar as* it is being a being (in conformity with its own nature, i.e. in conformity with the definition of being), being itself neither changes nor rests. To put the same point slightly differently, insofar as being conforms to the very nature it constitutes, it neither changes nor rests. The Stranger has thereby not only shown that, according to their theory, the property nature being emerges as a third entity alongside the nature of change and the nature of rest, but also that according to that theory *what it is to be a being* (articulated by the definition that specifies the nature of being) is completely different from what it is to change or rest. The Stranger's reasoning from 250a–c therefore constitutes an excellent proof that, on their account, being cannot be reduced to either change or rest (or both), and, therefore, that their account is not dualist.

The Stranger concludes this section with an *aporia*, asking Theaetetus whether it is possible for what does not change not to be at rest, and *vice versa*. Though there is insufficient scope to offer a proper defence of it here, I offer the suggestion that the *aporia* is designed to focus the reader's mind on the question whether being—and indeed any other property nature—moves or rests (or both, or neither), and so to alert the reader to the fact that the question is not explicitly dealt with, but is left open by the argument at 249e–250e. This interpretation is lent further plausibility by the fact that the *aporia* does not prove devastating for their investigation (or for their nascent metaphysical theory, as interpreted here): the Stranger does not resolve it, but urges them to carry on pushing forward with their account (*logos*, 251a2) despite it being obscure in this respect (250e–251a).

In this section, then, the theory the Stranger is forging has seen the emergence of the property natures, change, rest, and being, the postulation of causal relations between property natures, and an argument designed to show that the theory is not a dualist account that reduces being to a pair of metaphysically fundamental properties. A significant upshot of the reasoning provided

30 It has this property attribute by acting on itself, or causing itself to be a being. The property nature being, then, is an entity we might characterise as *causa sui*.

in this section is that to satisfy the definition of being embodied in the *dunamis* proposal, by acting as a causal agent or being acted upon as a patient, is at one and the same time to be acted upon by the property nature, being, which relation to being is also described as partaking in, or having a share of, being.

5 Participation and Forms (or Kinds)

The main thrust of the next section of our dialogue is to defend the postulation of, and establish the scope of, a relation that will prove particularly important in the Stranger's theory—the relation of having a share of, or partaking in, some property nature, which was introduced in the previous section. Determining the scope of this relation as it holds between property natures themselves will be of particular concern to the Stranger. He declares at 251a and 251c that he wants to push forward with their account or theory, and develop it in dialogue with anyone at all who has said anything about being. As we will see, this ambitious aim includes defending it against those who would reject it out of hand. This cohort includes, notably, the so-called 'late-learners' who don't allow anything to be predicated of anything else, e.g. 'a human is good', and restrict predication to self-predication of properties, e.g. 'the good is good', 'the human is human' (251b9–c2).³¹ Such people say that nothing has the capacity or power of associating with anything else, and they deny that change or rest have a share of being (251e8–10)—prompting the Stranger to show how the nascent theory can deal with a position such as theirs.³² Once he has defended his postulation of the relation of partaking (or having a share) against this objection, the Stranger's next concern will be to restrict the relation's scope in the developing theory, particularly between property natures. Finally, with the introduction of the language of 'kinds' and 'Forms' towards the end of this passage, Plato signals to the reader familiar with his earlier works that the property natures argued for in the theory, as the well-read reader was earlier primed to anticipate, are indeed to be identified with the Forms of those earlier works—or so I will argue.

31 The Stranger's careful employment of the definite article in referring to the subjects in the statements the late-learners endorse makes it clear that the subjects of those statements are not particular sensible individuals, such as a particular good thing or a particular man, but the corresponding property, such as the good itself or humanity itself.

32 The late-learners appear to assume (as do the Stranger and Theaetetus) that what makes a predication true, when it is true and is not a self-predication, is some kind of association or communion between the referents of the subject and predicate term. So 'X is Y' is true when there is some kind of association between X and Y (or perhaps, Y-ness).

The Stranger sets out the three mutually exclusive and exhaustive options for the scope of the relation of communion or association between things, asking whether everything is unmixed (*ameikta*, 251d7) and incapable of partaking (*metalambanein*, d7), whether everything communes with everything (*panta ... epikoinônein allêlois*, d8–9), or whether some things commune and others do not (251d9–e1).³³ His strategy is once again dialectical: to explore the theoretical consequences that ensue, for their fictional opponents and themselves, on each alternative (251e5–6). Considering the first of the three positions stated, the Stranger starts off by elaborating the position of those who deny all association, reasoning that if nothing has the power (*dunamis*) of communion or association with anything (*koinônia* with the dative), then change and rest will not participate (*metechein*) in being. But if they don't partake of it (*proskoinônein* with the genitive), they will not be (251e–252a).³⁴ Hence, very clearly, this alternative would constitute a serious objection to the Stranger's and Theaetetus's theory or account of being.

However, the Stranger alleges that the consequences for denying any communion, and therefore any partaking, are severe. For, adopting this position has the disastrous result of destroying theories—first, the theory of the people who say everything is changing, next that of those who say that the all is comprised of Forms always at rest and the same (252a6–8), next those who put things together at one time and divide them up at another (saying things are both one and many, 252b1–5), and last, those who, like the late-learners, 'refuse to allow anything to be called something different because it has a share of the character of that different thing' (252b9–10).

In the first case, that of the proponents of a 'change-centric' or 'rest-centric' theory, their theory is destroyed because in asserting that all things either really change or really are resting, they are adding being (*to einai*, 252a8–9).

33 As we will see, he is particularly concerned with property natures, and will develop his theory with a continued focus on change, rest, and being. Nonetheless, the domain over which he is inquiring in respect of this relation is intended to be extremely broad. This is indicated both by his signalling to Theaetetus that they will understand the inquiry to apply to all those thinkers they have already discussed, as well as others (251c–d), and that the terms used to frame the question regarding the extent of communing or blending are themselves extremely general: he asks about entities in general i.e. without qualification, and about the relations as applied to *panta* (251d8).

34 Here the symmetrical relation of association or communion (marked by *koinônia* plus dative) is understood as a necessary condition for standing in the asymmetrical relation of sharing or partaking. This is eminently plausible, if we think of the asymmetrical relation of sharing in or partaking of as a species of the more generic, symmetrical relation of communing with or being associated with: if nothing stands in the more general relation, then nothing can stand in the more specific one.

The Stranger's reasoning here, I suggest, must be something like the following. To say that all things are characterised by one property, e.g. change, is to be committed to the claim that changing things (and, it seems, only changing things) are real, or really are. But then evidently there is some sort of association between things and the property, being, which is added to each—and to deny it would contradict and undermine this particular theory.³⁵ The second case, that of the 'one-many' proponents, is dealt with very briefly (252b1–6). With others, I take the Stranger to be alluding to theorists of the physical world discussed earlier (242d–243b).³⁶ They claim that their favoured entities (unities, pluralities, etc.) change into one another, either ceaselessly or in cycles. So, similarly to the 'change-centric' theorists, they are committed to the reality of changing things, and so vulnerable to the same reasoning suggested above.³⁷ In the third case also, that of the late-learners, denying all association between things is fatal for the theory. For, the late-learners refuse to allow that something can be called by a different name when it has the characteristic of a different kind—e.g. when a man has the characteristic of goodness—allowing only that 'goodness' can be predicated of the property, the good. All the same, they use terms such as 'being', 'separate', 'from others', and 'by itself' when speaking of the referents of the subject terms (e.g. goodness) (252c2–4)—perhaps, for instance, claiming that 'the good is real', and so characterised by being, that it is by itself, separate from other things, and is, therefore, apart or different from them, and so on. If this is right, then the late-learners unwittingly presuppose that goodness is in some way associated with the property of being real, the property of being separate or different from other things, etc., and thus, contrary to their prohibitions, that there is some association or communion between these properties, e.g., between being good and being, and between being good and being different.

So, in relation to the first possibility for communion (that there is none)—a possibility potentially devastating for the Stranger's theory—its own proponents prove variously unable to maintain their position consistently with their own particular metaphysical account. On dialectical grounds, then,

35 Another (equally speculative) alternative is that the Stranger reasons that on the 'change-centric' position, the property, change, is real, or really is (and presumably the opposing property, rest, is denied reality)—otherwise the nominated property could hardly count as the criterion of reality. But this is to add being to the property change, which is to sanction some communion between things. This alternative seems less likely, however, since the Stranger presents this view as concerned primarily with 'things' in general being in communion, not properties alone.

36 E.g. Taylor 1961, 154; Notomi 1999, 233.

37 A similar reading is given by Crivelli 2013, 113.

the possibility is therefore to be disregarded, and is no obstacle to the postulation of the (asymmetrical) relation of sharing of one property nature in another, argued for previously in the Stranger's account. The second possibility for communion, that everything shares in everything, is quickly dispatched by Theaetetus. For on that view, the property natures change and rest would partake of one another, and then—*per impossible*—change itself would be in every way at rest and rest itself would change.³⁸ By a process of elimination, then, the Stranger concludes that only the third option remains, that some do and some don't mix together (251e). And since it has already been established that some property natures share in at least one other (as both change and rest share in being), it follows that partaking must be restricted, and holds only between some property natures.

Next, a little later in the dialogue at 253b—alluding to the way that only some notes mix in producing musical sounds, and only some letters are joined together to produce words—the Stranger draws an analogy between these cases and that of kinds. He then says, in an obvious backwards reference to 251b–252a in our present section, they have agreed that *kinds* mix with one another in the same way (*genê* 253b9, used interchangeably with *eidê*, Forms, from 253d1). But what they in fact agreed at 251e was only that some *property natures* share of, and so associate with, others. What, then, should we make of the Stranger referring to property natures as kinds and Forms from 253bff? In answer, I want to suggest that the Stranger is here signalling to Theaetetus—and that thereby Plato is signalling to the reader—that property natures are none other than kinds or Forms, i.e. that the entities under discussion since 250a–b are in some significant sense to be identified with Platonic Forms, familiar from other dialogues.³⁹

To begin with, the Stranger's so signalling at 253b–d would not, on the interpretation offered so far, come as a surprise to the reader familiar with Plato's earlier metaphysical works, particularly the *Phaedo*. As discussed in §2, the well-tutored student of Plato would have paid close attention to the

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- 38 Why exactly this state of affairs is 'by the greatest necessity impossible' (252d9–10) is not explained, and discussion of Plato's view on the matter is beyond the scope of the present paper. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that unlimited sharing of properties in other properties, such that the partaking property is caused to possess the attribute corresponding to the partaken property, and unlimited sharing of all things in all properties, is *prima facie* implausible and so would be undesirable in any metaphysical theory.
- 39 With, of course, the caveat that Forms are not the only things to be counted as beings in the *Sophist*. By contrast, Forms are, at least in the *Timaeus* (27d–28b), the only entities to be counted as 'beings' or as 'what is'. Matters are less clear in the *Republic* (476e–478e, 484d–486d, 507b–c).

formal causal role allotted to justice, in making souls just through its presence (247a5–7), and wondered whether justice there ought to be understood as a Form, or something very like it. But in addition, the Stranger's treatment of property natures in the intervening discussion, or of property-natures-cum-Forms in the present discussion, reveals that he takes them to be characterised by features generally attributed by scholars to Forms in the middle-period dialogues: imperceptibility, changelessness, and separateness from sensible things (at least on one understanding of that controversial term).⁴⁰ Take imperceptibility first: at 247b1–c2 the Stranger argued that justice, intelligence, and the virtues generally were non-corporeal and imperceptible. Then recall that the Stranger points out at 250b8–11 that Theaetetus sets up being as a third thing 'in his soul', having looked to the communion of change and rest with being, thereby underscoring the purely intelligible and non-perceptible nature of these three property natures, accessible by intelligence, not perception. Next, the feature of being changeless (and perhaps, therefore, being eternal or sempiternal) seems to be attributable to property-natures-cum-Forms in the *Sophist* in connection with their role as objects of knowledge. After the encounter with the Friends, the Stranger had asserted the unchanging nature of the object of knowledge (249b8–10), before concluding the *gigantomachia* with the claim (in *propia persona*) that 'being and the all' includes what changes and the changeless (249d3–4)—the latter clearly referring (at least) to the objects of knowledge. Then, in the passage on dialectic, in which kinds and Forms are linked *via* the backwards reference to property natures, the objects of the dialectician's study and knowledge are kinds or Forms.⁴¹ Last, consider the feature of separateness from sensible things. The question of whether Plato considered Forms to be separate is controversial (not least because Plato does not argue for this feature in the middle-period dialogues), and the precise conception of separation at play varies from commentator to commentator. One plausible conception of it argued for by Gail Fine, rooted in Aristotle's criticism of Forms as separate, is the Forms' independent existence from sensibles. Now, it seems to me that independent existence is presupposed by the case of justice and the other

40 For an excellent discussion of Forms in Plato, including features commonly attributed to them in the middle-period dialogues, see Harte 2011, 191–216.

41 It is of course true that some commentators think that the upshot of the encounter with the Friends is that Forms in the *Sophist* do undergo one kind of change or another. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that Forms or kinds are nowhere said to change in our dialogue, and that even if Plato means the reader to understand that Forms change in some special sense, that sense is widely agreed to be distinct from the 'ordinary' or real change that sensibles undergo, and which is elsewhere contrasted with the changelessness of Forms (see e.g. *Phaedo* 78c–79a; *Symposium* 210e–211a).

virtues in the debate with the Giants: what is contingently present to something for a time, and acts as a cause upon it, cannot depend for its existence on that thing. For if it did so depend, it would depend for its existence on something to which it might never have been present. That is, the possibility that it not (ever) be in the relation of 'being present' to that thing suffices to establish its independent existence. So the property nature, justice, enjoys independent existence from any particular sensible thing, and since, moreover, it is possible for it not to be present to any soul (or city)—it is possible that no soul or city has the character of being just—its existence is independent from all sensible things.⁴² So although, as I have argued, the Stranger extends the realm of being to at least some changing entities in the *Sophist*, property-natures-cum-Forms constitute a distinct ontological category from those to which entities experienced by the senses belong, a category that in numerous significant respects is recognisable as that to which Forms in the middle-period dialogues belong.⁴³

42 As Gail Fine 1984/2003 has shown, Plato (in contrast to Aristotle) was not explicitly concerned with the separateness of Forms, and, moreover, although 'separateness' is understood differently by different scholars, the core of Aristotle's criticism of Plato on this score lies in the notion of independent existence. With the exception of Forms of artefacts, however, Fine herself argues that Plato was not committed to the separation of Forms (except on a controversial reading of the creation myth in the *Timaeus*). Interestingly, Fine considers, but rejects, a version of the argument I have given for separation of Forms above—that if it is possible for Forms (which she understands to be universals) not to be instantiated then they must enjoy independent existence and so be separate. Her grounds for rejection are unclear, however: the possibility of non-instantiation does not seem to her to be a strong enough consideration to commit Plato to separation (291). As detailed above, I disagree. For the conception of 'separateness' as the independent existence of a Form from any individual sensible particular, see Allen 1970, 132; for the stronger notion of independent existence from all sensible things, see Irwin 1977, 154, both cited in Fine 1984/2003, n. 4–5, 252–3.

43 With this understanding of Forms and kinds in the *Sophist*, this paper belongs on the 'realist' side—as opposed to the 'logico-linguistic' side—of the debate concerning the metaphysical status of *eidê* and *genê* in our dialogue, in which realists consider Forms or kinds to be substantive metaphysical entities, with or without causal power, and logico-linguistic proponents understand them to be logical forms of judgment or statements. The former group includes Ross 1951, 104–119, Nehamas 1982; Frede 1967 and 1992, 397–424, Silverman 2002, 137–181, and Crivelli 2012; the latter includes Ryle 1939, and Owen 1953 and 1970 (see Silverman, 2002, 141–3 for further discussion). The debate is alternatively characterised as that between 'developmentalists' who take Plato in his later period to have seriously revised his previous commitment to substantive Forms (e.g. Ryle 1939), and 'unitarians' who read the later dialogues that mention Forms as maintaining a view of them as substantive in one sense or another. For recent examples relevant to the *Sophist*, see Kahn 2007 and 2013, 94–130.

This reading immediately raises the question why Plato would have the Stranger casually allude to entities that have been under discussion for some time as Forms, rather than, as he does elsewhere, have his central character carefully and explicitly introduce the entities his central character is concerned with as Forms in the first place (e.g. *Phaedo* 74a–75d, 100b, 102a–b, *Republic* 475e–476d, 596b, *Symposium* 211a–212a). The reason for the different approach to the introduction of Forms can be found in the wider context of the project of developing a theoretical account that I have argued Plato is undertaking in the *Sophist*. For, while in other dialogues the supposition that there are Forms, or the stipulation of the reality of Forms, may be appropriate for Plato's purposes in those works, in our dialogue he is concerned to argue for, and so *legitimately establish*, the introduction of entities into the ontology (and whatever relations there may be between them), on the basis of dialectically agreed upon principles or premises. The introduction of the property natures that have so far featured in the metaphysical theory—change, rest, and being—has been justified on each occasion (for instance by the arguments that reality includes things that change, and rest, and the adoption of the definition of being in the *dunamis* proposal).⁴⁴ It is appropriate, then, that it is only once he has grounded the introduction of these entities (i.e. these property natures) in argument that the Stranger identifies them as kinds and Forms (for which reason I will from now on refer to individual property natures with an upper case first letter).

Once that identification is made, moreover, it seems that there is no obstacle to understanding the asymmetrical causal relation of having a share or partaking as none other than the participation relation—between Platonic Forms and their participants—familiar from other dialogues. If this is right, formal causation in our dialogue ought to be understood as 'Platonic' causation after all. However, here in the *Sophist*, for the first time in the corpus, the participation relation is said to hold between Forms (and between some Forms only).⁴⁵ Crucially, the argument for the sharing of Forms in the Form Difference will furnish the Stranger's theory with the resources to explain, against the sophist, the possibility of 'not being' and lay the groundwork for the account of

44 Note that the postulation of justice, wisdom, virtues generally (and their opposites) in the debate with the gentle giants is justified in the same way.

45 It is worth noting that although this is the first time in the dialogues Forms are explicitly claimed to participate in one another, it could be argued that participation between Forms is presupposed (and so implicit) in the *Phaedo* (104a–b). I am grateful to an anonymous referee for the journal for this suggestion.

falsehood. It is first necessary, however, for the Stranger to argue for the inclusion of Difference in the theory's ontology.

6 Expanding the Theory: Sameness and Difference

The Stranger suggests restricting their investigation to a sub-set of kinds which he also styles the 'greatest of the kinds' (*megista tōn genōn*, 254d4–5). Summarising the three they have already focussed on, Being, Change, and Rest, he points out the undeniable fact that each has the attribute of being the same as itself and different from the others (254d14–15). The Stranger then—in the very next lines—directs Theaetetus' attention to the Forms or kinds corresponding to the attributes being self-identical and being different (from the others), asking whether Sameness and Difference are two further Forms or not:

When we have spoken this way, what, in turn, does 'the Same' and 'the Different' refer to? Are they two kinds, other than the three, but always of necessity mixing with them? And should we inquire into them on the assumption that there are five of them, not three? Or are we referring to one of the three with this 'the Same' and 'the Different'?⁴⁶ (254e2–255a2, tr. after Rowe)

The Stranger's inference here, that there are, as items in the ontology, the kinds or Forms, Sameness and Difference—whether or not they turn out to be numerically distinct from the three previously established Forms, Being, Change, and Rest—is striking. He clearly takes the inference to be warranted, but, although he will later on assert that Difference partakes of Being, and that all kinds or Forms share in Being (259a6–7; 256e3–4, 259a5–6), here no such participation relation is cited as justifying the postulation of Difference and the Same as beings.

But if we once again take the Stranger to be positing these on the basis of the theory developed so far, we can see that his postulation is fully justified. That is, on the assumption of formal causation, from the fact that Change, Rest,

46 Τί ποτ' αὐτῶν οὕτως εἰρήκαμεν τό τε ταῦτόν καί θάτερον; πότερα δύο γένη τινέ αὐτῶ, τῶν μὲν τριῶν ἄλλω, συμμειγνυμένω μὴν ἐκείνοις ἐξ ἀνάγκης αἰεὶ, καὶ περὶ πέντε ἄλλ' οὐ περὶ τριῶν ὡς ὄντων αὐτῶν σκεπτέον, ἢ τό τε ταῦτόν τοῦτο καὶ θάτερον ὡς ἐκείνων τι προσαγορεύοντες λανθάνομεν ἡμᾶς αὐτούς; Note the employment of *thateron*, crasis of *to heteron*, to refer to the Form, and mark it off as something distinct from the attribute of being different (*heteron*), predicated of Being, Change, and Rest in the previous lines at 254d14.

and Being each possess the qualities of being self-identical and being different from one another, it follows that a property nature in each case is present to the subject (Being, Change, or Rest) and is causally responsible for it being the same as itself, or different from the others. In turn, given the definition of being in the *dunamis* proposal, it follows, from the nature of the property, difference, acting on each of Being, Change, and Rest, that the property nature, difference, is one of the beings—and similarly for the property nature, sameness. Next, as we have seen, the Stranger identifies property natures with Forms or kinds, allowing him to assert that the Forms Sameness and Difference are members of the ontological population according to the theory proposed. Finally, on that theory, Being, Change, and Rest are caused to be self-identical and different from one another through standing in the causal relation of participation to the Forms Sameness and Difference respectively (and explicitly asserted by the Stranger at 255b3). So understood, the Stranger's inference at 254e2–255a2, from the fact that some Forms have a property as an attribute, to the inclusion of the corresponding property nature or Form in the ontology, mirrors his earlier inference at 250a11–12, from the fact that there are things with the attributes of changing and being at rest, to the postulation of the two property natures, change and rest (a little later to be identified as the Forms or kinds, Change and Rest).

Now, as we saw, the property nature, being, emerged as a third property nature according to the Stranger and Theaetetus' account, and was a little later identified as the Form (or kind) Being. And since, on the reading of 254e2–255a2 given above, the Forms Sameness and Difference satisfy the definition of being captured in the *dunamis* proposal, which definition specifies the nature of being (or what it is to be a being), it will be the case that Sameness and Difference, like Change and Rest, have a share of Being.⁴⁷ The Stranger's next task is to establish that they are two *new* kinds or Forms, which he completes by providing three separate proofs. The finer details of these (sometimes) controversial proofs need not detain us, although it will be instructive for the purposes of this paper to see how the first, very brief proof makes use of the theory developed so far. In it, the Stranger reasons that if Sameness or Difference were identical to Change or Rest then, contrary to the facts, Change

47 It is for this reason, I submit, that the Stranger asserts several times either that all the Greatest Kinds (or perhaps, all Forms, 256d12, cf. 259a5–6)—and so Sameness and Difference—participate in Being (256e2–4) or that Difference shares in Being (259a5–6, 259a6–7), without ever providing an argument that either Sameness or Difference participates in the Form Being.

would rest and Rest would change. The sub-argument for the counterfactual is terse and demands interpretation:

For, concerning both [Change and Rest], whichever of the two becomes Difference, will in turn force the other to change to the opposite of its own nature, in as much as it will have come to have a share of the opposite. (255a11–b1)⁴⁸

The Stranger's argument proceeds by showing how the impossibility follows from the supposition that one of Change or Rest is identified with Difference. Let Change be Difference. Since, as we have seen, Change and Rest each have the attribute of being different, it follows from their theoretical commitments that each of Change and Rest share in the Different. But since, on the above hypothesis, Difference is identical to Change, it would then follow that both share in Change. So Rest would share in Change. Rest's sharing in or being embraced by Change is understood, on the *dunamis* proposal, as a way in which Rest is affected by Change and a way in which Change acts upon Rest. On the assumption of formal causation, Change acting upon Rest (and Rest being affected by Change) causes Rest to have the property of changing, i.e. being a changing thing. However, if Rest were one of the changing things, then it would be changed into the opposite of its own nature insofar as it would possess the quality—changing—that is the opposite of the quality whose nature it constitutes—being at rest. And since such a state of affairs is contrary to the facts on pain of impossibility, as agreed at 252d (and again at 254d), the initial supposition that Change is identical to Difference is shown to be false. By the same reasoning, Change cannot be identical to Sameness, and nor can Rest be identical to Difference or Sameness.

After offering two further proofs (of the distinctness of Sameness from Being, and of Difference from Being) the Stranger and Theaetetus conclude that the Forms so far postulated in their metaphysical account do indeed number five. Having completed the first part of the programme announced at 254c4–d2, to say 'what sort' each of the Greatest Kinds is, the Stranger turns to its second part, the power they each have to partake in other kinds or Forms. It is here that the Stranger puts the theory to work to account for 'what is not'

48 *περὶ γὰρ ἀμφοτέρα θάτερον ὅποτερον οὖν γιγνόμενον αὐτοῖν ἀναγκάσει μεταβάλλειν αὐθάτερον ἐπὶ τοῦναντίον τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἅτε μετασχὼν τοῦ ἐναντίου.* The translation follows that of Rowe, with modifications: '... since in both cases, that is to say, whichever of them becomes difference, that will force the other to change to the opposite of its own nature, insofar as it will have come to share in that opposite.'

or 'not being' as something that—despite the sophist's earlier protestations to the contrary (241a–b, 241d–e, cf. 237a–b)—can credibly serve as the object of thought and speech.

7 Not-Being as a Way of Being

At 255d9–e6, the Stranger asserts that Difference, or the nature of difference (255d9), pervades each of the five greatest kinds or Forms according to their theory. He explains, using distinctively causal language, that each of the greatest kinds is different from the others not because of its own nature (*ou dia tēn hautou phusin*), but because of partaking in (*dia to metekhein*) the Form of Difference (255e4–6). So each is acted upon by Difference and caused to be different from each of the others. He will go on to make further appeal to this formal causal relation, identifying it as the metaphysical ground for correct use of the negative particle.

Selecting the Form Change as his candidate subject from 255e11–256d12, the Stranger continues to emphasise that participation is the relevant causal relation, explanatory of the various ways that Change is different and the various ways in which it is 'not'. He asserts that it is because of sharing (*dia to metekhein*, 256a1) in Being that Change is (*estin*). Change is also the same through participation (*dia tēn methexin*) in Sameness with respect to itself (256b1). Yet it is also different from the Same, through partaking of Difference (*dia tēn koinōnian thaterou*) (256b2–3), from which, our interlocutors infer, it follows that Change is not the Same.⁴⁹ So, just as, *via* the participation relation, the Same causes Change to be self-identical, i.e. have the attribute of being the same relative to itself, so too *via* the participation relation Difference causes Change to have the attribute of being different relative to the Same, which state of affairs also makes it correct to assert that Change is not the Same. Similarly, Change is different from Difference, in just the same way (*kathaper*) as it was other than Sameness and Rest (256c4–5), i.e. through sharing in Difference relative to Difference, and so it is both different and not different. Once again, the *dunamis* proposal and the assumption of formal causation are in play—though not, this time, to establish new entities in the ontological population. Instead, the theory is used to analyse particular cases in which the subject, Change, 'is not' as states of affairs in which Change is caused to have the determinate property of being different from something or other.

49 Note the *ara* at 256a5, and Theaetetus's echoing *oun* at a6.

Last, and most relevantly *vis-à-vis* the sophist's challenge, Change is agreed to be different from Being, and so not Being, but also to be because of sharing in Being (*epeiper tou ontos metekhei*, 256d9). This final result is generalised for all the Forms (256d12), again in distinctively causal language: the Stranger says that the nature (*phusis*) of Difference makes (*poiei*) each of them not being (*ouk on*) by causing (*apergazonemê*) each to be different from Being (256d12–e3). The Form Difference causes Forms to be different from Being, and so to have the attribute of 'not being'.

Of course, the Stranger still has much work to do to in order to complete his account of Not-Being. As is well known, the passage just discussed in fact forms only the start of a complicated and connected series of arguments that culminates at 259d–e with the Stranger assimilating Not-Being (which turns out to be a Form, with its own nature: 258b11, 258c3–4) to the Form Difference. The nature of the assimilation is controversial, since although it is clear that the Stranger analyses (and thereby offers an explanation for) cases of not being as cases of being different, the details of the analysis are less clear. How, in particular, the analysis applies to cases in which subjects 'are not' some property in the predicative sense, as well as those that 'are not' identical to something else, is much debated. Nonetheless—and without entering into the controversy—for our purposes the important point is that the Stranger has developed a theory that provides the resources to begin to account for cases in which it is correct to say that the subject 'is not' something or other, and which promises to account for all such cases: they are ultimately explicable in terms of having a share of—and in that way being acted upon by—the Form Difference. Far from being cases of a mysterious absence of being, about which it is not possible to think or speak (237d–239a), cases of not being are therefore understood in terms of being affected by Difference. And since whatever is affected by Difference satisfies the *dunamis* proposal, and counts as one of the beings or an item in the ontology according to the Stranger's metaphysical theory, something that 'is not' must be regarded as a being, as what is.

Conclusion: Models of Platonic Causation

In this paper, I hope adequately to have traced the development of a theoretical account of what entities are real and the relations between them in Plato's *Sophist*. This metaphysical theory consists in an account developed dialectically, i.e. by way of an imagined critical conversation with other metaphysical thinkers, which deploys the definition of being expressed in the *dunamis* proposal as a foundational principle to argue for the reality or being of different

sorts of things—centrally, corporeal or sensible things and purely intelligible, non-corporeal Forms. Thus, I hope to have justified the core claims of this paper, that Plato's project from 247d–e in the *Gigantomachia* to 259e is that of constructing a metaphysical theory that warrants postulation of certain entities in the ontology, and which delivers, *inter alia*, an argument for the existence of Forms.

In conclusion I would like to dwell briefly on the question of the plausibility of that theory. The question of plausibility rests, I think, in large part on the acceptability of the most controversial assumption of the theory as I have understood it: that of formal or 'Platonic' causation.⁵⁰ As noted in §2 above, exactly how we should understand the conception of Platonic causation—in what sense, that is, we ought to take Plato to have thought that the Form of F causes its participants to be F—is not something Plato makes explicit in any dialogue. I will close this paper, then, with a sketch of two alternative interpretations of Platonic causation, the 'transmission theory' interpretation and my own 'structural' interpretation, and suggest that the latter makes the assumption of formal causation significantly more plausible in our dialogue, and is, moreover, supported by the text.

According to the 'transmission theory' account of Platonic causation, the Form of F, which is itself F (in line with the 'like causes like' principle), transmits F-ness to its participants, and thereby causes them to be F.⁵¹ In Gill's recent version of the transmission theory account, each Form is understood to possess or exemplify the property it is named after just as its participants possess or exemplify that same property, but to do so in a perfect or eminent

50 I take it that two of the other assumptions foundational to the theory, that of the possibility of knowledge and the reality of intelligence, are relatively uncontroversial, at least in the context of ancient Greek thought. And although the plausibility of the claim that it is in virtue of possessing the capacity to be in a causal relation that something is a being has been questioned by Brown, I take it that the worry can be assuaged. Brown argued that it would be implausible for Plato to suppose that something was a being in virtue of possessing a capacity (or disposition), rather than the other way around (1998, 193). Against this, I have argued elsewhere that having the power to act on its participants in formal causation can be considered constitutive of what any Form is, as part of its essence (2010, 83). The Form Being would therefore enjoy a certain kind of essential ontological priority over other Forms (though in this paper I did not put the point this way). If it is similarly plausible to suppose that Plato thought that possessing the (actualised) capacity to be affected in formal causation is constitutive of being a non-Form, then the Form Being would similarly be essentially ontologically prior to non-Forms. For a different argument that responds to the worry by appealing to the inter-dependence and inter-definability of (at least some) of the Greatest Kinds, see Gill 2012, 235–6.

51 See n. 17 above.

way.⁵² However, in the case of most Forms it is unclear that it would in fact be possible to exemplify the property each is named after. This is because in a great many cases, the possibility of exemplification of the property in question is conditional upon the prior possession of other properties, which properties, however, Forms *qua* purely intelligible entities could not and do not possess. Consider the properties being large and small. The natures of the Forms the Large and the Small are defined (respectively) in the *Parmenides* as the power to exceed and be exceeded (150c–d).⁵³ But since, *qua* Forms, they are purely intelligible entities, they are not manifested in the sensible realm (or, as we might say, are not in time or space), and so are not the sort of entities that have any size or magnitude at all. Therefore, the Large and the Small are incapable of either exceeding or being exceeded, relative to another thing (or, indeed, of being of equal size or magnitude). It is impossible, then, for these Forms to self-exemplify. So too, in the *Republic*, the possibility of having or possessing the attribute of being just depends upon having parts (exactly three parts, perhaps), such that when each performs its function the unified whole exhibits a certain harmony (443a–444a). Hence, only entities that have functional parts are able to exemplify the property, being just. However, it is doubtful that *qua* intelligible entities, Forms have functional parts, since a functional part is by definition able to perform its function well or badly. So, things with functional parts are able to undergo substantial change—namely when one or more of its parts goes from functioning well to functioning badly (or *vice versa*)—and it is hard to see how this would be possible for purely intelligible entities. If this is right, Justice itself does not display the property of being just, i.e. does not self-exemplify. The same line of reasoning applies to many, if not all Forms of substantial properties. But even if it only applied in these three cases, it would be enough to illustrate the serious implausibility of the transmission theory account. For according to that account *every* Form itself displays as an attribute the property it is named after, in virtue of which it in turn causes its participants to also display that very property.

By contrast, the alternative ‘structural’ conception of Platonic (formal) causation that I favour is eminently plausible. According to that conception, the Form of F constitutes the purely intelligible nature of the property, F-ness, where that nature is understood as some particular, specifiable (abstract) structure. This structure is expressed by way of the (true) definition of F. The relation of Platonic formal causation is the participation relation, such that

52 Gill 2012, 24, 36, 72–5, 235. Gill also regards Plato as committed to the transmission theory at the time of writing the *Sophist* (73).

53 For discussion of these specifications as definitional, see Sedley 1998, 128.

as a result of standing in the participation relation to some Form, each of the participants conforms to that structure. A participant may conform to the structure that the Form constitutes in respect of the arrangement or organisation of its parts, or, perhaps, in respect of some other feature of itself, such as attaining or being a particular size or magnitude that exceeds or is exceeded by that of something else. In this way, the causal effect of participation is a certain kind of structural isomorphism between participand and participant, whereby the participant can be said to possess or exemplify the property, the nature of which the Form constitutes.

This conception is compatible with the 'like causes like' principle, provided we grant, with others, that for Plato in the *Sophist*, constituting the nature of a property is one way of being that property, such that if X constitutes the nature of F-ness, we can say that X is F, i.e. we can predicate F of X. To be sure, we might think that this is a peculiar way of 'being F'.⁵⁴ And Plato, I want to suggest, would think so too: for, the way of being F that is constituting the abstract structure that is the nature of the property, F-ness, is radically distinct from the way of being F that is conforming to that structure, and thereby exhibiting or displaying that property as an attribute. Indeed, this distinctness, on the theory attributed to Plato in this paper, is what underwrites the causal power that the Form of F has over its participants.

We ought to conclude, then, that the structural model offers a far more plausible conception of Platonic formal causation than the transmission theory model. What is more, there is solid evidence for the structural model in our text, while such evidence is not apparent for the transmission theory model. For the single example of Platonic causation in the *Sophist* involving a Form for which we are given a definition (i.e. Being) fits the structural model far better than the transmission theory model. As we have seen, the *dunamis* proposal expresses the definition of being, and is taken to apply to the case of justice and the other virtues, which the Giants agree make souls just, etc., in virtue

54 This distinction between ways of being some property, F, one of which corresponds to being the nature of the property F, and is true of the Form the F alone, is indebted to a similar distinction articulated by Michael Frede (who also attributed it to Plato in the *Sophist*). Frede's distinction, however, does not suppose that the relation between the entities that enjoy the different ways of being F is causal, nor that it is explicable in terms of the notions of constituting or conforming to (abstract) structure. Moreover, Frede argued that the distinction he delineated turned on distinct uses of the verb 'to be', whereas I make no such claim here (1967, 19–24, 29, 30–35; 1992, 400–402). See also Crivelli 2012 who follows Frede's distinction in distinguishing a 'definitional' use of predication in the dialogue, in contrast with ordinary predication, which is again not construed in causal terms.

of being present to them. Justice, that is, is taken to satisfy the definition of being offered in the *dunamis* proposal, and in doing so to conform to the structure expressed in that definition. Of course, at this point in the dialogue, the property of being (a being) is not explicitly identified as something of which there is a nature, corresponding to a Form—these things are made explicit a little later (250c; 253b–d, 254c–d), making it clear that the relation between justice and just souls is one of Platonic causation. Nonetheless it *is clear* at 247e that the virtue of justice conforms to the structure specified in the definition by being capable of being present to souls, and thereby being something that has the power to act upon things. Thus, the relation between justice and just souls, which will turn out to be that of Platonic causation, is explicated in terms of justice (and souls) being in the agent-patient relation, i.e. conforming to the structure specified in the definition of being. Note that there is no indication in the text whatsoever of transmission. There is no indication—here or elsewhere in the dialogue—that the Form Being transmits its own attribute of being (a being) to its participants (or indeed that justice transmits a property that it, itself, possesses as an attribute to souls). We ought to conclude, therefore, that the theory the Stranger develops, and from which he argues explicitly for the inclusion of specific entities and kinds of entities in the ontological population, turns on the definition of being and the assumption of formal causation as a kind of structuring of participants in Forms.⁵⁵

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