

## Plato's Central Conception of Being as *Dynamis* in the *Sophist*

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It has recently been argued that the so-called '*dynamis* proposal' at *Sophist* 247d-e – which defines or delineates being as having the power either to act upon or be affected by something – is not only presented as the Stranger's own proposal, but ought to be understood as articulating a definition of being that is, moreover, couched in specifically *causal* terms: only that which has the power or capacity to stand in a causal relation, in the role of either causal agent or patient, counts as a being. According to some proponents of this reading, the Stranger introduces the definition of being in the debate with the Giants, and defends it, one way or another, in his encounter with the Friends of the Forms. Not all proponents of the view regard the Stranger as retaining the definition beyond the *Gigantomachia*, but those who do – including myself – have argued that it is at play in later passages concerning the 'greatest kinds' (254eff.). In those passages, the account of participation between Forms is argued to be presented in causal terms: a Form in which other Forms participate is causally responsible for the characteristics those Forms possess as a result, while the latter is acted upon by the former.<sup>1</sup> One stumbling block for this strong 'being as *dynamis*' view, however, is found in the passage from 249e-250e. For, on the one hand, this passage is explicitly presented by the Stranger as following on directly from the *Gigantomachia*, while on the other,

1 Proponents of the view that the *dynamis* proposal expresses the Stranger's own causal definition of being, and is deployed in the later 'Greatest Kinds' passage, include myself (Leigh 2010: 65–7, 72–6, 79–84; 2012: 239–59), Blake Hestir (2016: 107–79), and Michael Wiitala (2018: 179ff). For the view that the *dynamis* proposal is the Stranger's definition of being, which is operative throughout the dialogue, but which does not define being as the power to be a causal agent or patient, see Mary-Louise Gill (2012: 95–100, 228–233). It is perhaps noteworthy, however, that Gill understands the definition to assert that being is the power to either remain the same – and so be at rest – or to affect or be affected by other things, i.e. be in causal relations, where these include formal causal relations – and so to change.) For the view that the *dynamis* proposal does not present a definition, but is at play in the *Gigantomachia* – although it is uncertain whether it is the Stranger's own and so whether it applies to Forms – see Lesley Brown (1998: 189–203).

the account ends in aporia – an aporia about being, no less. So, if one major feature – or even the central feature – of the argument with the Giants and the Friends is the introduction and clarification of the Stranger’s definition of being, we would expect the continuation of his discussion to similarly feature, or at least somehow involve, that definition. Even more pressingly, the argument’s termination in an aporia about being must be explained if the strong being-as-*dynamis* view is to stand.

This stumbling block can be overcome on both counts. As I have argued elsewhere (and will rehearse here), there are textual and conceptual grounds to read the relevant passage from 249e-250e (hereafter, ‘the Aporia passage’) as relying on the definition of being to postulate the existence or reality of the three entities it is concerned with, ‘being’, ‘change’ and ‘rest’ – entities that will very soon (from 253b9) be called ‘kinds’ and ‘Forms’ interchangeably. In this paper I will argue that the aporia itself, moreover, can be read as presenting a puzzle for Theaetetus, but not the Stranger, since the resources for the resolution of the puzzle are contained in the Aporia passage and the preceding debates with the Monists and Giants. I begin, in Section 1, by briefly reviewing the evidence for taking the *dynamis* proposal to be the Stranger’s own definition, before turning in Section 2 to a defence of the view that the Stranger clarifies the definition of being by distinguishing causation from change against a recent objection by Michael Wiitala. I then review the central reasons for reading 249e-250c as deploying the *dynamis* proposal in section 3. In Section 4 I argue that the interpretation of the conception and role of the *dynamis* proposal in the Aporia passage offered is to be preferred to that advanced by Mary-Louise Gill, before arguing in Section 5 that while the aporia at 250d-e is genuine for Theaetetus, it is not so for the Stranger.

## 1 The Stranger’s Definition of Being: the *Dynamis* Proposal

Here is the proposal:

Well, I say that whatever sort of thing possessing the power (*dynamis*) 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 (*dynamis*).<sup>2</sup> (*Sph.* 247c9-e4, tr. Rowe, modified)

<sup>2</sup> 247d8-e4: STR. *Legō dē to kai hopoianoun tina kektēmenon dynamin eit’ eis to poiein heteron hotioun pephykos eit’ eis to pathein kai smikrotaton hypo tou phaulotatou, kan ei monon eis*

Following Gwil Owen, I have argued elsewhere that the use of the noun and verb, *horos* and *horizein*, at 247e3 in the *dynamis* proposal ought to be taken as a correction of the first statement of the Giant's materialist metaphysical position at 246b1. There, the use of the participle form, *horizomenoi*, clearly indicates that they define body and being as the same. Therefore, what is offered in the *dynamis* proposal should be understood as a new definition of being, that replaces the older one. Moreover, the definition should be understood as offered as the Stranger's own – and, thus, as a definition Plato endorsed, at least at the time of writing our dialogue: it is introduced as something they (the Stranger and Theaetetus) put forward (note *hēmōn* at 248d5), and then presented emphatically by the Stranger in the first person (using *legō* at 248d8, and *tithemai* at 3). Further, the talk of reciprocal relations of acting and being affected, particularly when viewed within the dialectical context of the Stranger's engagement with the Giants, strongly suggests that being is defined in terms of the power or capacity to be in a causal relation.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the applicability of the definition of being to the case of justice (*dikaiosynē*), described as what is present to a just soul (247a-c), shows, I have argued, that the conception of causation appealed to in the definition is very broad, and extends beyond causal relations between corporeal things. In particular, it is such as to include within its scope the relation between properties (properties considered on their own, apart from any particular instantiations of them), and the things that come to bear an instance of the property. So properties themselves are construed as causal agents, and things that exhibit or possess properties ('property bearers') are construed as patients.<sup>4</sup>

Once they are offered the *dynamis* proposal, the giants – who are by this stage thoroughly bewildered – accept it, and we hear no more of them for the remainder of the dialogue. The so-called Friends of the Forms, however, reject the causal definition of being articulated by the proposal, since in their view both what acts and is affected thereby undergoes change, and change cannot characterise their preeminent beings, Forms (248c7-9). The general strategy employed by the majority of commentators is to argue that the Stranger's goal is to show, against the Friends, that there is an unproblematic sense in which Forms do in fact undergo change (which majority view is discussed below in more detail).<sup>5</sup> Others, however, have suggested it is possible to read

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*hapax, pan touto ontōs einai. tithemai gar horon horizein ta onta hōs estin ouk allo ti plēn dynamis.*

3 For an alternate view, see ch. 2, pp. 8–9.

4 Leigh 2012: 254–9; 2010: 64–7. See also Owen 1986a: 109 n. 3.

5 E.g. Moravcsik, 1962: 39–41; Owen 1986b: 42–3; Silverman 2002: 157–9. A large proportion of adherents to the 'majority view', including those listed, argue that the benign change Forms undergo is that statements become true of them that weren't true of them previously (thus

the Stranger in his encounter with the Friends as arguing that by the Friends' own lights, the realm of being ought to be expanded to include some entities – knowing minds or souls – that undergo change (248e7–249a10).<sup>6</sup> To this I have elsewhere added the further suggestion that the Stranger also aims to highlight, and so subtly query, the Friends' conflation of relations of acting and being affected with relations of change (248e2-5).<sup>7</sup> The first suggestion, if it is right, suffices to disarm the Friends' objection to the *dynamis* proposal (i.e., that 'what is' cannot change), thereby preserving as unscathed the Stranger's permissive conception of being as including e.g. bodies, as well as knowing minds. The latter carves out conceptual space for the possibility that Forms are agents or patients – and thereby satisfy the Stranger's definition of being – without, however, undergoing change of any kind. On this reading, the Stranger resumes his discussion with Theaetetus at 249b5, concludes at 249d3-4 that 'being and the all' incorporates changeless and changing things (*hosa akinēta kai kekinēmena*), and speaks of the Friends no more.

## 2 A Challenge: Wiitala

Before examining the fate of the *dynamis* proposal in the Aporia section (249a-250e), let me defend the reading sketched above against a recent challenge, from Michael Wiitala. In his paper, 'The Argument Against the Friends of the Forms Revisited: *Sophist* 248a4–249d5', Wiitala explicitly takes issue with interpretations, including my own, that understand the Stranger's encounter with the Friends as designed to establish that the realm of being includes, according to the Stranger and Theaetetus, entities that the Friends relegate to the realm of becoming (the 'becoming-is-being' reading). Wiitala also argues that the Stranger conceives of Forms as changing – so he is a recent proponent

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undergoing 'mere Cambridge Change'). I take it that Lesley Brown has argued conclusively that the ability to undergo mere Cambridge Change cannot fall within the scope of the power to be affected in the *dynamis* proposal. One of her central reasons for rejecting the reading is that the Giants would never agree to a *dynamis* proposal with such wide scope: on the mere Cambridge Change reading the Stranger smuggles in a new, expanded sense of 'being affected' that is too remote from anything the Giants would recognise or sanction as a case of being acted upon. So on this reading, the proposal the Giants accept and the proposal the Friends are urged to accept would involve radically different senses of affection. (Brown 1998: 191–2).

6 E.g. Cornford 1935: 241–2, 246–7; Ross 1951: 110, Brown 1998: 202. See also ch. 2, ch. 6, ch. 7 for similar readings of the exchange with the Friends, and compare ch. 9.

7 Leigh 2010: 77–9; Leigh 2024: 411–13. On this point, compare ch. 6, p. 5ff.

of the majority view noted above – and so rejects the other strand of the proposed interpretation, that Plato seeks to disentangle relations of change from those of acting and being affected. Against the ‘becoming-is-being’ reading, Wiitala argues that (i) its proponents incorrectly read the Friends’ ontology as exclusive, and (ii) it does not receive clear support from the text because it relies on particular readings of ambiguous texts that can be read otherwise (i.e. ‘*to pantelōs on*’ at 248e8–249a1, and ‘*hosa akinēta kai kekinēmena ... sunamphoterā*’ at 249d3–4).

In relation to (i) Wiitala points out that unlike the Giants the Friends do not reject everything which is not one of their favoured entities from their ontology as not-beings or nothing, but accept many things such as bodies into their ontology within the category of ‘becoming’. So *contra* the ‘becoming-is-being’ reading the Stranger’s goal cannot be to persuade the Friends to accept into their ontology entities they have hitherto excluded.<sup>8</sup> Proponents of the ‘becoming-is-being’ reading, however, including myself, do not take the Friends to exclude entities such as bodies from their ontology, but from the realm of being, or what is fully or genuinely real.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, on the interpretation previously proposed, the Stranger’s goal is to show them that their grounds for *this* exclusion is spurious.

In relation to the first ambiguous phrase in (ii), Wiitala first distinguishes between extensional and intensive readings of ‘*to pantelōs on*’ at 248e8–249a1. According to the former, the Stranger is asking (rhetorically) whether change, life, soul, wisdom (and *nous*, *a2*), is present to or in ‘what altogether is’, i.e. belongs in the extension of the whole or totality of reality, while according to the latter, he is asking whether the corresponding characteristics (changing, being alive, ensouled, wise) are found in the entities that are beings to the highest degree. Wiitala then reasons that ‘[t]he very fact that *pantelōs* is an adverb rather than an adjective indicates the intensive reading is to be preferred, since adverbs indicate intensity rather than inclusivity or extension’.<sup>10</sup> In the case of this particular adverb, however, it is unclear that this very general observation holds. For *pantelōs* can, and often does, mean ‘altogether’,<sup>11</sup> so that our phrase can be read as ‘what altogether is’ just as happily as ‘what in

8 Wiitala 2018: 177–8.

9 Leigh 2010: 76–7. Brown (1998: 195) also makes this point explicitly. Cf. Cornford 1935: 245–7, Ross 1951: 108.

10 Wiitala 2018: 188–89.

11 For examples in Plato where *pantelōs* should be taken as ‘altogether’ rather than indicating an intensity or highest degree of something, see *Phdr.* 94a3, 94a6; *Plt.* 299e5; *Prm.* 157c4; *Phlb.* 21a12.

the highest degree is'.<sup>12</sup> This is why commentators have appealed to the context, and explored various ways the Stranger's reasoning in the passage can be understood in offering considerations in favour of one reading or the other. However, Wiitala also appeals to *Rep. v*, 477a3, the only other occurrence in the corpus of the same phrase, '*to pantelōs on*', where, he says, the adverb must be taken intensively. It is not clear, however, that this is right. For the phrase could be being used in this deeply puzzling passage to point to the extension of 'what is' or 'being' and then artfully employ the same adverb (in the statement that *to pantelōs on pantelōs gnōston*) to convey that the members of the extension are in every way or sense knowable, in contrast to what is in no way or sense (an empty set), which is in every way or altogether unknowable (*pantēi*, 477a4).<sup>13</sup>

The second phrase Wiitala thinks is questionable evidence for the 'becoming-is-being' reading, is '*hosa akinēta kai kekinēmena ... synamphotera*' at 249d3-4. In context, the phrase could be understood as attributing to the Stranger either the claim that being and the all (or 'the totality of being', *to on kai to pan*) is 'as many things as are, each of them *both* unchanged and changed' or is 'as many things as are unchanged and as many things as are changed'. The former is compatible with taking 'being and the all' to refer to Forms alone and predicating both changelessness and change to each of the Forms, while the latter is compatible with taking 'being and the all' to refer to the totality of beings and asserting that this set of things includes both those that change and those that are changeless. As Wiitala acknowledges, both are possible readings, but he prefers the former on the grounds that '*hosa*' (as many as) is not repeated and '*synamphotera*' (both together) is used.<sup>14</sup> Again, however, this consideration is less than persuasive. First, since, as Wiitala notes, *hosa* modifies both *akinēta* and *kekinēmena*, its repetition is not required for the latter reading. Second, although '*synamphotera*' can be taken, with Wiitala, to indicate that everything that counts as being is both changeless and changing, it can equally well be taken as asserting that the totality of being includes both

12 As it seems to be read by A.E. Taylor (1951: 148), who translates the phrase as 'the plenitude of being'. Dana Miller (2004: 357-9) translates our phrase here as 'what all-completely is', and understands its meaning to be 'extensional' in Wiitala's sense, as I do. Interestingly, Cornford (1935: 241-5) translates as 'what is perfectly real' but understands it to be equivalent to '*to on kai to pan*' at 249d4, which he reads as 'the real or the sum of things', thereby taking our phrase in the extensional sense.

13 It is also noteworthy that the phrase is not used, in *Rep. v*, to contrast 'being' with 'becoming'. Wiitala (2018: 187-190) argues for a philosophically plausible reading of the phrase, taken intensively. But since he does not argue that the reading is decisive, merely plausible, I pass over discussion of it here.

14 Wiitala 2018: 196.

sorts of entities, viz., changeless and changing ones. Indeed, given that the previous lines speak of both the view that everything is at rest and the view that being changes in every way, the reference to the 'children's prayer' – alluding to the fact that children do indeed pray or plead to be given both of two alternatives offered to them – *synamphotera* seems more likely to indicate that the whole of being must include both groups of entities just discussed, i.e. both kinds of entities. The textual support for the 'becoming-is-being' reading, then, as much as its alternative, requires a particular interpretation of two ambiguous lines, with neither interpretation proving decisive, in each case. So, it does not follow, as Wiitala claims, that the textual evidence for the 'becoming-is-being' reading is 'poor'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Wiitala acknowledges, one attractive feature of this reading is that it views the Stranger's goals in discussion with the Giants and Friends to be complementary – to persuade the one to expand their notion of being to include non-corporeal entities, and the other to expand theirs to include non-intelligible entities. And as we have just seen, this aspect of the reading is as plausible a reading of the text as the alternative.

Finally, let me briefly discuss Wiitala's interesting assertion that we ought to read the *Sophist* as suggesting that Forms change insofar as they are affected, as causal patients, by participation in other Forms. The second part of this claim, that Forms are affected by the Forms of which they have a share, is one I have presented detailed argument for elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> The question at issue is whether, in the *Sophist*, occupying the role of causal patient in the participation relation is treated as a case of undergoing change, as the majority reading described above would have it. Wiitala's central reason for proposing that Forms change through participation is that it makes perspicuous Plato's motivation for the encounter with the Friends in light of the central concerns of the dialogue: their view prohibits participation between Forms, which will be a key element of the Stranger's account of not-being later in the dialogue. The Friends reject the *dynamis* proposal because they take it that being in relations of action and affection implicate the relata in relations of change. So (on Wiitala's reading) the Stranger's task is to show that the kind of change they undergo is benign. But unlike those who take the (allegedly) special and benign change that Forms undergo to be 'mere Cambridge change',<sup>17</sup> Wiitala proposes that this special

15 Wiitala 2018: 179.

16 Leigh 2010: 79–84; see also Leigh 2024: 414–18, 428–32. Wiitala (2018: 182ff.) makes it clear that he is following this line of reasoning (from the 2010 paper) and seeking to develop it with the proposal that Forms are changed (in some sense) by participation in other Forms.

17 For criticism of the 'mere Cambridge change' reading, see n. 4 above.

kind of change is being affected by other Forms in the sense of participating in other Forms. The chief piece of evidence he finds for this view is found at 248e3-4, which he understands as asserting that 'to be affected is to be moved'.

This reading, however, misconstrues the dialectic of the passage in question. The Stranger puts the *dynamis* proposal to the Friends (248b), and when they reject it, he asks whether the soul knows and being (*ousia*) is known, and, further, whether knowing or being known is a case of acting upon, or of being affected, or of both (248c-d). When Theaetetus says they say that neither is a case of either, otherwise the Friends would be contradicting what they said earlier (*viz.*, that being has no share in the power to act or to be affected), the Stranger says he understands, and goes on to explain the Friends' reasoning. It is *this* reasoning, i.e. that of the Friends, that contains the thought that 'to the extent to which something is known, to that extent it is changed through being affected'. That this is the case is clear from the rest of sentence, 'which, indeed, we (i.e. the Friends) say would not happen concerning what is at rest' (248e4-5).<sup>18</sup> So the 'we' at 248e4 represents the Friends' self-reference, which explains their resistance to the *dynamis* proposal, and the assertion that *to be affected is to change* is theirs. There is, moreover, a lack of evidence for taking the Stranger to understand participation to be a kind of change: later in the dialogue when he describes the Forms' participation in other Forms, he speaks only of their sharing in Being, Sameness, and Difference (255e-259b), and nowhere mentions any Form participating in Change. Indeed, participation in Change would appear to be ruled out, since the Stranger says three times that Change and Rest do not share in one another (252d6-11, 254d7-8, 256b6-c2). But since the properties that Forms possess as attributes are purely logical or formal properties, i.e. properties each possesses in virtue of being a Form, rather than in virtue of being the particular Form each happens to be, whatever property one Form has or lacks (e.g. being self-identical), will be a property they will all have or lack. So, if Rest lacks the property of changing because it does not participate in Change, so too every Form will lack the property of change and not participate in Change.

I hope to have shown so far that the proposed reading of the *dynamis* proposal, i.e., as presenting the Stranger's own, causal definition of being, which is then defended against an objection from the Friends of the Forms, remains a philosophically plausible reading that enjoys textual support. Significantly, at

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18 This claim closely echoes the Stranger's description of the Friends' ontological commitments a little earlier, which he reports as maintaining that true being (*hē ontōs ousia*) always remains the same in the same state, while becoming is otherwise at different times.



the close of the *gigantomachia*, the Stranger speaks of the account (*logos*) that he and Theaetetus have articulated as their own (249d6-7): this, I take it, is the account of being as whatever has the power to stand in causal relations, where such relations are understood as incorporating the relations between properties themselves (or property natures), such as justice, and things that bear the relevant property attribute, such as a soul that is just, as well as mechanistic causal relations between bodies. We turn now to the role of this account of being as *dynamis* in the Aporia section, from 249d-250e.

### 3 The Power of Change, Rest, and Being: 250ac

Having explicitly referred to the view they have articulated in their encounter with the Giants and Friends as their account (249d), the Stranger resolves to investigate a potential objection to it, namely that it could face the same objections they levelled against dualist accounts (243d-244b). So the worry, at the start of the Aporia section, is that their account will turn out to be a form of dualism. He goes on to show how it may be thought to be dualist, before illustrating that it is not, and presenting an *aporia* or puzzle for the account. In these passages, as I have recently argued, his reasoning is best understood as presupposing and making use of the *dynamis* proposal.<sup>19</sup>

Theaetetus stands proxy for their account, answering on its behalf, while the Stranger questions him as he questioned the dualists earlier (250a4-6). Theaetetus agrees that he asserts that change and rest are most opposite to one another, and also that he says that each of change and rest in the same way are (*einai homoiōs*, αἰ).<sup>20</sup> There are two noteworthy features of the second assertion Theaetetus agrees to on behalf of their theory. First, the properties change and rest are treated as entities in their own right, i.e. as subjects of declarative statements. Second, the property, 'being' is predicated of each of them as an attribute. Considered on their own, out of context, these features of the assertion might be puzzling and seem unjustified. Viewed, however, in the context of further scrutinising their account, which pivots on the definition of being in the *dynamis* proposal, both features of the claim are revealed as entailed by their account. For, since they have agreed that the realm of being includes both things that rest and things that change (249b-d), by the same reasoning that was employed in the debate with the Giants (concerning just and wise

19 See Leigh 2024: the interpretation of 249d-250c presented in this section is a distillation of the central arguments from 414-19.

20 Note the second-person *legeis* at 250a9, and *phēis* at αἰ.

souls), it follows that the changing things and resting things are as they are by the presence of change and rest (respectively). And it follows from this, in accordance with the *dynamis* proposal, that change is acting upon changing things, and rest is acting upon resting things, and in turn that change *is* (i.e. is a being) and rest *is* (i.e. a being).<sup>21</sup> This, I submit, is the explanation of why Theaetetus unhesitatingly and emphatically agrees that each of change and rest are: '*Phēmi gar oun*' ('For I do declare it', i.e. that Change and Rest both, in the same way, are, 250b1). Only a little later in the dialogue, change and rest will be explicitly and interchangeably referred to as kinds and Forms – so I will from here on mark their emergence as ontological entities, 'beings', in the Stranger's and Theaetetus's account at 250a11-12 by way of upper-case initial letters: 'Change' and 'Rest'.

Now since they have said that 'being and the all' is comprised of things that change and changeless things (249d), their postulation of Change and Rest may appear to offer a dualist metaphysical explanation of reality as ultimately reducible to two properties, change and rest (and so be a version of property dualism). To dispel this appearance, the Stranger continues to question Theaetetus (at 250bff.) who clarifies that when predicating 'being' of each and both of Change and Rest, he is not asserting that they both change, i.e. he is not predicating the property, changing, and nor is he predicating the property of resting. The Stranger then explains that a third entity (*ti*), namely being, is postulated in Theaetetus's mind (*psuchē*, 250b8) alongside the other two, since he takes both Change and Rest together as embraced (or surrounded) by it. (As 'being' has now emerged as a third item in its own right, alongside Change and Rest, I will from now on also refer to it by way of an upper-case initial letter, 'Being'.<sup>22</sup>) The Stranger then adds that Theaetetus, looking at Change's and Rest's partaking of Being, says that they both are (*einai*, 250b11).<sup>23</sup>

The Stranger's somewhat terse explanation here (which takes up only four lines of text from 250b8-11) has proved difficult to interpret. However, I suggest that once again considering the statement in its immediate context, i.e. that of interrogating their account of being, we can see that the Stranger is presenting

21 This reasoning would also parallel the Stranger's reasoning in the debate with the Giants: since they are present to, and in that sense act upon souls, according to the *dynamis* proposal justice, wisdom, and the other virtues counted as beings alongside souls and bodies.

22 In a few lines it will also be spoken of as something with a nature (250c6), before being referred to as a kind or Form (253bff.) soon after.

23 250b8-11: *triton ara ti para tauta to on en tē psyche tithēis, hōs hyp' ekeinou tēn te stasin kai tēn kinēsēn periechomenēn syllabōn kai apidōn autōn pros tēn tēs ousias koinōnian, houtōs einai proseipas amphotera?* Taking *periechomenēn* and *sullabōn* together, with Lewis Campbell (1857: 134). Cf. Cornford 1935: 250, n. 1.

a theoretical justification, which flows from their account, for the postulation of Being as a third entity in their ontology, alongside Change and Rest. The passive participle, *periechomenēn*, conveys that Change and Rest are being acted upon by Being in being embraced or surrounded by it in conceptual space, as a result of which they both have the property attribute of being (a being). The active role of Being and the correlative passive role of Change and Rest is amplified in the immediately following statement that Change and Rest partake of Being (*koinōnein* plus the genitive), which provides the grounds, the Stranger says, for Theaetetus's assertion that they both 'are' (*einai*, 250b11).<sup>24</sup> The talk of participation here is strongly reminiscent of Plato's treatment, in earlier dialogues – most notably the *Phaedo* – of participants being caused by a Form, through participation in that Form, to possess as an attribute the property the Form is named after (e.g. *Phd.*, 100d-101c). So for the reader familiar with Plato's work, the suggestion conveyed by *periechomenēn*, that Change and Rest are in a passive causal relation, is immediately reinforced, and the relation is identified as participation. And since, as they have established, the property attribute of being (a being) is not identical with either the attribute, changing, or the attribute, being at rest, that which *via* participation causes the attribute, being, to belong to Change and Rest must be some other thing. Moreover, since that in which they participate, Being, has the power to act upon Change and Rest, according to the *dynamis* proposal it must be a being. Being must be a being, and a third thing alongside the other two, different from them both (250c3-4). So the Stranger's otherwise puzzling reasoning at 250a-b, including his terse statement at 250b8-11 make good sense when read as presupposing and making use of the *dynamis* proposal.

Before turning to the *aporia* itself in the *Aporia* passage, let me first discuss a rival reading of these difficult four lines at 250b8-11 and the understanding of the *dynamis* proposal it gives rise to, recently offered by Mary Louise Gill – which, if correct, would constitute a rival alternative to the proposed reading.

24 As Ackrill observed, in constructions with the genitive, *koinōnein* and cognates indicates the asymmetrical relation of having a share of the object of the verb, and is frequently used in a number of dialogues, synonymously with the similarly asymmetrical *metechein*, to describe the relation in which participants stand to Plato's Forms. By contrast, in constructions with the dative, *koinōnein* and cognates indicates the more general, symmetrical relation of association between two things. (Ackrill 1997: 89–90. Cf. Ross 1951: 111–12, n. 6).

#### 4 An Alternative Reading of 250b8-11ff.: Gill

In her 2012 monograph, *Philosophos*, Gill argued that the participle, *periechomenēn* ('is surrounded / embraced by...'), at 250b9 should be understood together with a word that occurs a little later in our section at 250d2, *ektos* ('outside'). This is because in a later passage of text, concerned with dialectic, the Stranger uses both words together, to assert that one of the four abilities of discernment the philosopher possesses is that of seeing 'many [Forms] different from each other surrounded from outside by one Form' (253d7-8). Having surveyed uses of *periechō* in Plato for compatibility with the notion of being surrounded from the outside, Gill proposed that the spatial language of our passage (suggested by the use of *ektos*) indicates that Plato must have in mind the sense of *periechō* whereby one thing surrounds another, and neither is a part of the other.<sup>25</sup> Noting further that Plato's use of *koinōnia* at 250b10-11 may be taken to signify participation, Gill concluded that the Stranger claims at 250b8-11 that Change and Rest participate in Being in such a way that Being remains 'outside' of them. By 'outside' Gill means to invoke a distinction she finds in the *Parmenides* between, on the one hand, an 'internal' feature that belongs to something either as (part of) its essence or as a feature explained by the thing's essence (as e.g. having a sense of humour is explained by being a rational animal), and, on the other hand, an 'external' feature that belongs to something either as an accidental property or a necessary property that is not explained by that thing's nature (as e.g. being a different thing, relative to others, is not explained by being a rational animal).<sup>26</sup> So at 250b8-11, on her reading, the claim is that being is an attribute that belongs to both Change and Rest *via* participation in Being, the having of which attribute is not explained by the essence of either Change or Rest. As a result, Being is something that is 'outside' both Change and Rest (250d2).

However, Gill goes on to argue, since this result is aporetic (Theaetetus says it is 'most impossible' at 250d4), Plato's overarching intention is to press the reader to see that Being is not, in fact, 'outside' Change and Rest, but rather that being is an attribute that belongs to each of them as something 'inside' them, intimately connected to both as something that 'essentially characterises'<sup>27</sup>

25 Gill 2012: 207-8. The sense of 'space' Gill envisions as applicable to 250b9-10 is clearly conceptual space.

26 *Ibid.*, 51-57, 152-3, 208-9.

27 *Ibid.*, 229.

each of them.<sup>28</sup> The way in which Being essentially characterises other Forms, for Gill, is revealed by the definition of being in the *dynamis* proposal, as she reads it: "The Stranger defines being with reference to change and rest as the capacity both to remain the same (rest) and to act on other things or be affected by other things (change)."<sup>29</sup> Forms are beings, on this reading, because it is part of their essential character to retain the same nature while participating in other Forms – and in that sense, change.

Let us note first that, although Gill's overall reading of the Aporia passage presents a challenge for the reading I have proposed – particularly her rendering of the *dynamis* proposal as defining being in terms of rest and change – several aspects of her reading are in line with the proposed reading. First, Gill's suggestion that *koinōnia* at 250b10–11 can be read as indicating the participation of Change and Rest in Being is clearly compatible with the above argument that *koinōnia* with the genitive ought to be read as signifying participation.<sup>30</sup> Next, her suggestion that at 250b8–11 Plato is deliberately contrasting (what she describes as) necessary, external characteristics with characteristics that are either essential to, or explained by the essential features of, the subject, is broadly compatible with a contrast I will argue for in the case of Forms participating in Forms: on the one hand, where a Form is a participant in a Form, this results in the (participant) Form possessing a formal, so necessary, property as an attribute, which can be contrasted with the nature of the (participand) Form, i.e. the nature or essence of the property the Form being participated in is named after.<sup>31</sup>

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28 Being is regarded by Gill as a 'structural' as opposed to a 'categorical' kind, where the former indicates kinds or Forms corresponding to properties that things – including other Forms – have in a perfectly general way, while the latter indicates kinds or Forms corresponding to properties that are related to one another in genus-species trees. In addition, structural kinds enable Forms to relate to one another (*ibid.*, 29, 151). Most structural kinds are necessary and external properties of things, but Being is not, since it is essentially related to other kinds or Forms (*ibid.*, 229).

29 *Ibid.*, 235.

30 Another facet of her account that is compatible with mine is that Gill takes it, as I do, that participation in a Form is for Plato a causal relation. So, although she does not make much of it, it follows on her view that Being is causally responsible for the being of Change and Rest (and anything else that participates in Being), i.e. for each of them (being a) being (*ibid.* 208–210).

31 Note, however, that on the reading I will argue for in the next section, the textual basis for the distinction on my proposed reading is talk of Being's 'nature' (*physis*) at 250c6, rather than the use of '*ektos*' at 250d2 and in the later section on dialectic. My interpretation also does not suppose that a distinction that can be discerned in the *Parmenides* is at play in the Aporia section, or at 250b8–11.

However, Gill's further suggestion that the aporetic conclusion of the Aporia passage shows that Plato is pressing the reader to in fact *reject* the claim that Change's and Rest's sharing in Being results in Change and Rest having a characteristic that is necessary but non-essential, in favour of the claim that in so participating, Change and Rest have the property of being (a being) as an essential characteristic, is incompatible with my proposed reading. To see this, recall first that on my proposed reading, sharing in Being accounts for Change having the property of being (a being), and for Rest having the property of being (a being), which property (being) is not reducible either to the property of changing or to that of resting. As I argued in the previous section, the qualitative distinctness of the property of being, and each of the properties of changing and resting, is what grounds the Stranger's argument that the corresponding natures of the properties are numerically distinct and illustrates that their account is not dualist. But on Gill's reading, by contrast, to share in Being *just is* to share in Change and Rest, i.e. is reducible to the conjunction of participating in Change and participating in Rest. So on that reading, no third, numerically distinct Form of Being emerges, since the being of anything is fully explained by its participation in Change and Rest. To see this, consider Change and Rest themselves, the subjects of the Stranger's reasoning at 250a-b: on Gill's account Change counts as a being through sharing in itself and sharing in Rest, while Rest is also a being as a result of sharing in Change and in itself. No further Form is necessary to explain or account for being or reality, and Plato's account turns out to be dualist after all. This aspect of Gill's reading, however, creates problems for her interpretation.

First, Gill's interpretation does not square with the text. The Stranger explicitly isolates Being 'as a third thing alongside Change and Rest' (250b8), and nowhere says, as we would expect him to on Gill's reading, that the account is after all a version of dualism (and nor does he treat Change and Rest as the two preeminent or foundational Forms). Moreover, the Stranger never defines being in terms of sharing in Change and Rest, or in terms of the properties of changing or resting, or says that Change (or Rest, or any other Form) is, or is a being, through participation in Change and Rest. And third, as we have seen, the Stranger several times strongly denies that Change and Rest share in one another. To be sure, Gill maintains that Plato 'presses his audience to accept what the speakers in the *Sophist*...find impossible to accept – that change rests and rest changes'.<sup>32</sup> So she claims that *on this point* Plato's own view is not the Stranger's. However, Gill does not claim that the Stranger's account *tout court*

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32 *Ibid.*, 228.

is sharply to be distinguished from Plato's own, which he left for the reader to discern. Her claim is rather that the Stranger is Plato's mouthpiece in general in the *Sophist* with the exception of the mutual participation of Change and Rest in one another, and what she takes to follow from this, i.e. the Form-pair's central place in Plato's metaphysics.<sup>33</sup> In support of this reading – that the repeated insistence in the dialogue that Change and Rest cannot share in one another is, exceptionally, not Plato's own view – Gill points to the aporetic conclusion of the *Aporia* section: the *aporia* is the reader's cue, she argues, to look for that part of the Stranger's account that Plato does not endorse. In response to this aspect of Gill's interpretation, however, it ought to be objected that if this was Plato's argumentative or dialectical strategy, he deliberately chose to be deeply obscure.

Last, Gill proposes that the special way in which Forms change is in virtue of being affected, *via* participation in other Forms,<sup>34</sup> which, we saw above, is one aspect of Wiitala's interpretation. It is, therefore, vulnerable to the same objections levelled against this part of Wiitala's interpretation above, i.e. that, first, there is a lack of positive textual evidence for Forms sharing in Change, and second, since the properties Forms possess are purely logical and are therefore properties possessed by each and every Form, and Rest is explicitly said several times *not* to participate in Change, it follows that no Forms participate in Change. So, if a philosophically plausible interpretation can be found that explains the *aporia* in such a way that its solution is compatible with what Plato has the Stranger assert and argue for, it ought to be preferred over that offered by Gill. We turn, then, to what I will try to show is such an interpretation.

## 5 The *Aporia* (250c6-e4)

Having demonstrated that Being is a third thing (soon to be referred to as a kind or Form, along with Change and Rest), the Stranger draws an inference that has

33 A good example of Gill's adoption of the 'mouthpiece' reading of the Stranger's claims in the dialogue in general (with the exception of his denial that Change and Rest share in one another) is her reading of the Stranger's claim that some beings are (or are spoken of) themselves by themselves (*auta kath' hauta*) while others are always spoken of relative to others (*pros ta alla*) (255c13-14). Gill understands this distinction to be crucial in marking off what each Form is by itself and in accordance with its own nature, and what Forms are in virtue of their interrelations with one another through participation, according to Plato in the dialogue (see Gill 2012: especially 163–6; cf. 173–6).

34 Gill 2012: 235–40. Gill also argues that Forms are changed in the sense of mere Cambridge change in being known (237–40).

long puzzled commentators. He says ‘Therefore, in accordance with its nature, Being is neither at rest nor moves’ (250c6-7).<sup>35</sup> It is a puzzling inference for two reasons. First, there is disagreement over whether it should be understood as denying that the nature of Being is constituted by either rest or change, as an entailment of Being’s (just previously established) non-identity to either Rest or Change, or as denying that the nature of Being has the attribute of either resting or moving. Second, whether the denial concerns either the attributes or the constitution and identity of the nature of Being, the Stranger’s reasoning in the passage has appeared dubious. On the one hand, although the inference that Being’s nature is not identical to that of Change or Rest follows from the conclusion stated at 250b8 (and emphasised at 250c4), i.e., that Being is a third thing alongside Change and Rest, it does not licence the Stranger’s claim only a few lines later that Being neither moves nor rests, and so is outside both of them (250c12-d3). On the other hand, the inference that the nature of Being neither rests nor moves does not follow from the (just previously established) non-identity of Being, Change and Rest (since nothing about Being’s attributes follows from its non-identity with any other kind or Form). The scholarly response has been to explain the Stranger’s fallacious reasoning as deliberate, in order to set up the *aporia* for Theaetetus, the resources for the resolution of which lie in a crucial distinction the Stranger draws later in the Greatest Kinds passage. Those who take 250c6-7 to assert that neither change nor rest constitute the nature of Being argue that the Stranger’s reasoning in our passage fails to observe the distinction (drawn later at 255e-256e) between the constitution of the nature of a property and possession of a property as an attribute, reasoning (fallaciously) from a denial that Being is constituted by either change or rest to a denial that Being has either the attribute of changing or resting.<sup>36</sup> Those who take 250c6-7 to assert that Being does not possess the attribute of changing or resting on the basis of the previously established non-identity of Being, Change and Rest, argue that a failure to observe the distinction between identity and predication (drawn later at 255e-256e) allows the Stranger to draw this conclusion at 250c6-7.

Let us take the puzzles in turn. In relation to the first puzzle of ambiguity, some have suggested that the verbal forms *hestēken* (‘is at rest’) and *kineitai* (‘changes’ or ‘is changed’) can be taken as predications that assert that the nature of Being is neither at rest nor in motion in a very special way, namely the

35 250c6-7: *kata tēn hautou physin ara to on oute estēken oute kineitai*.

36 Proponents of this view include Cornford 1935: 250–1; Michael Frede 1967: 67ff., and Paolo Crivelli 2012: 99–101. For detailed discussion of the puzzles surrounding the Stranger’s inference at 250c6-7 and its connection with the *aporia* at 250d-e, see Crivelli 2012: 96–101.



way that the natures of Rest and Change are at rest and in motion (respectively) in constituting the natures of Rest and Change (respectively).<sup>37</sup> Against this, however, can be levelled the very serious objection that this reading ascribes to Plato a very unclear – if not downright obscure and confusing – way to make his point, since the verbal forms are most naturally read as indicating possession of the attributes of being at rest or changing.<sup>38</sup> In light of this obvious problem, provided we can make sense of it, the statement at 250c6-7 ought to be read as denying that both attributes belong to the kind or Form, Being, in the usual way or sense.

In relation to the second puzzle, one reading claims that the Stranger deliberately or knowingly confuses or conflates the constitution of the nature of a property with having the property as an attribute, while the other claims that he knowingly conflates identity with predication – in both cases arguing that the confusions or conflation are cleared up later for Theaetetus, facilitating a retrospective resolution of the aporia at 250d-e. Against the first reading, however, it can be pointed out that, as we saw above (and will discuss in more detail shortly), the Stranger has already very clearly distinguished cases of being or constituting the nature of some property from cases of possessing the property as an attribute, in his encounter with the Monists (at 244d-245c). And against the second reading, as Gill has pointed out, the Stranger has already very clearly distinguished identity from predication a little earlier in the Aporia section – arguing that being can be predicated of both Change and Rest, while maintaining that Being is non-identical with either (250a11-c4).<sup>39</sup> So neither reading, and its proposed solution to the puzzle, is satisfactory.

The second puzzle can be dissolved, however, if the Stranger's inference at 250c6-7 – that Being of its nature neither rests nor changes – can be understood as an ordinary predication that denies that Being has the property attributes of resting or changing, which follows non-fallaciously from what has gone before. Such a reading is possible, I want to suggest, if we take the Stranger's phrase '*kata tēn hautou physin*' ('in accordance with its own nature') to be pointing to a corollary of what he has just concluded (i.e., that Being is a third entity alongside Change and Rest, each of which is a property conceived of apart from any instantiation of it): i.e. that Being is something with its own nature.

37 E.g. Cornford, 1935: 250; Michael Frede, 1967: 67–8. Crivelli, 2012: 99–101.

38 As is suggested by the majority of translations. For example, White (1993) gives: "Therefore by its own nature *that which is* doesn't either rest or change" (p. 42), Rowe renders the statement as: "So then being is not by its own nature either at rest or changing" (p. 149), Cornford (1935) renders it as: "In virtue of its own nature, then, reality is neither at rest nor in movement" (p. 250).

39 Gill 2012: 210.

So read, the phrase recalls the previous occurrence of *physin* in the debate with the Monists (245c9), in which the Stranger contrasted properties considered on their own, such as ‘the whole itself’ with the corresponding property attributes, e.g. ‘the characteristic of being whole’, and understood the former as entities with their own natures.<sup>40</sup> Next, recall that, as we saw in the discussion with the Giants, the Stranger regards these entities, properties considered on their own apart from any instantiations of them (e.g. justice, 247a-b), as incorporeal and in that sense as abstract entities. And we have just seen that in the present passage, the Aporia passage, the Stranger has explicitly treated Being, Change, and Rest as purely intelligible entities, emphasising that Theaetetus postulates Being as a third thing alongside the others in his soul (*en tēi psychēi*, 250b8). So these entities are abstract in the sense of being purely intelligible, too.<sup>41</sup> I propose, then, that we read the inference at 250c6-7 to point to the status of Being as a purely abstract thing with its own nature and assert of it, *qua* member of the category of abstract things, that it neither moves nor rests. The aporia that follows – the puzzle of explaining this state of affairs given the impossibility implicated in denying that everything is either at rest or changing (250c12-d3) – can then be understood as a puzzle for Theaetetus, but not for the Stranger. Further resources for the puzzle’s resolution are delivered by a more comprehensive grasp of the participation relations between Forms, which will be spelt out for Theaetetus in the discussion of the *megista genē* a little later in the dialogue, according to which none of the Forms under discussion are said to participate in Change or Rest.

Scholars have traditionally resisted this reading of the dialogue on the grounds that Plato’s Forms must be things that are (at least) at rest, by sharing in Rest. This must be so, it has seemed, since it is in virtue of resting that, in contrast to sensible things, Forms undergo no change or alteration at all, but remain exactly as they are. (It has also seemed to some – for a variety of reasons, some of which are discussed above – that Forms must also undergo change, and so share in Change, albeit a very special sort of change.) But as

40 For instance, the Stranger speaks of ‘being’ or ‘what is’ (*to on*), ‘the whole’ (*to holon*), or ‘the one’ (*to hen*) as entities in their own right (244d11-12, d14, e6, 245a8-9, b4, b5, b7-8, c, c61; cf. *auto to holon* at 244c2, *to hen auto* at 245a5-6), and describes ‘the whole’ (*to holon*), along with ‘being’ (*to on*) as something that has its own nature (*physis*) at 245c8-9. Such cases are contrasted with cases of ‘being one’ by having the attribute or character (*pathos*) of oneness or unity (*tou henos*) at 245a1, b4, and c2 (cf. *peponthos... hen* at 245b7-8, and *to peponthenai* at c1), and with the case of having the attributes or characteristics (*peponthos*) of being (*on*) and of being one whole (*holon hen*) at 245a1-6).

41 For further argument that *en tēi psychēi* at 250b8 points to the intelligibility of Being, Change and Rest, and so in that sense to their abstract nature, see Leigh 2012: 250–2.

pointed out in Section 2 and Section 4 above, against this traditional reading and in favour of the proposed reading – that Forms neither change nor rest – is the Stranger's repeated insistence that Change and Rest do not participate in one another (252d6-11, 254d7-8, 256b6-c2). This, together with the fact that any property a Form possesses as an attribute, as a result of sharing in a Form, is a purely logical or formal property (i.e. a property the Form possesses in virtue of being a Form, rather than in virtue of being the particular Form it happens to be), proves that no Form shares in either Change or Rest. So, if Change does not rest as a result of sharing in Rest, no Form rests as a result of sharing in Rest. By the same reasoning, no Form possesses the attribute of changing as a result of participating in Change. Neither Change nor Rest is present to any of the Forms, and none is affected by their causal power.

The alternative interpretation of the inference at 250c6-7 and of the aporia I have proposed is, therefore, plausible and supported by the text. Moreover, in contrast to the readings of the majority of scholars (discussed above), it does not require us to read the Stranger (or Plato) as reasoning spuriously at 250c6-7, or to attribute doubtful formal properties to Forms. Summarising the entire Aporia passage, then, we ought to understand the Stranger to start out by assuming the definition of being expressed in the *dynamis* proposal, to postulate the Forms, Change and Rest and then Being, before exploiting the non-physical, abstract quality of entities with 'natures' (Forms) in order to assert – much to Theaetetus's puzzlement – that the Form or kind, Being, is the sort of thing (namely, a purely abstract thing) that neither moves nor rests.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper I have detailed the central reasons for taking the Stranger's definition of being, expressed in the *dynamis* proposal, to be understood as a background assumption that is in play in the Aporia section of the *Sophist*, having been established and defended just previously in the *Gigantomachia*. I have also defended the part of this reading that concerns the *Gigantomachia* against a recent criticism and an alternative interpretation put forward by Wiitala, and I have offered (what I hope is) a compelling argument against a competing interpretation of the Aporia section proposed by Gill – which, if it were correct, would constitute a serious objection to the reading I have proposed. Last, I have argued for an interpretation of the aporia itself, in which the Aporia section culminates, as presenting a puzzle for Theaetetus, but not the Stranger: since Forms belong to the category of the non-corporeal and purely intelligible, they do not share in either Change or Rest, and lie outside of them

both, as unaffected by the power of each – a suggestion that receives further support in the discussion of the ‘greatest kinds’ a little later in the dialogue. Overall I hope to have demonstrated that the *dynamis* proposal can be read as the Stranger’s (and so Plato’s) definition of being in the dialogue: Far from being dropped in the passages immediately following the *Gigantomachia*, it forms a crucial element in the account the Stranger develops, playing a central role in the postulation of Change, Rest, and Being and, most importantly, in the postulation of the relations of action and affection that do and do not hold between them in 250a-e.

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