

**PLATO'S RESPONSE
TO
THE SOPHISTS' REJECTION OF FALSITY**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine Plato's response in the *Sophist* to the problem of falsity as it had developed in ancient Greek philosophy. The problem of falsity has its origins in Parmenides' absolute ontological distinction between being and not-being. This ontological distinction was translated by the sophists into an epistemological distinction between truth and falsity: a true statement says what is; a false statement says what is not. Because the problem of falsity has its roots in the views of these earlier thinkers, Plato's approach to this problem in the *Sophist* is historical. In this paper I attempt to trace out the ways in which Plato's response to the problem of falsity is a response to those thinkers who had made falsity so problematic, viz. Parmenides and the sophists.

It has long been recognized that the first part of Plato's *Sophist* is a response, indeed a challenge, to Parmenides. What has not been recognized is that the second part of the *Sophist* is also a challenge—to the sophists. The role the sophists played in the development of Plato's later period epistemological views has been, I think, quite underrated. Though Plato's middle period views on truth and falsity were not quite the same as those of Parmenides, they were certainly Parmenidean in spirit. In the *Sophist* we see a change. The Parmenides-inspired views on falsity have been quietly dropped. It is the sophists' definition of falsity—a false statement says *that which is not*—which is adopted, though with significant modifications. I believe it is the purpose of the second part of the *Sophist* to challenge the sophists by showing that they didn't understand their

own definition. Though the sophists were right in holding that a false statement says *that which is not*, the implications they drew from this were entirely incorrect. A statement which says *that which is not* is no more problematic than a statement which says *that which is*.

In this paper I examine the *Sophist* as a challenge directed towards Plato's predecessors. I believe this dialogue can only be properly understood against the historical backdrop of the problem of not-being and falsity as it developed out of the philosophies of Parmenides and the sophists. It is only by looking at the *Sophist* against this backdrop that Plato's accomplishment in this dialogue can truly be appreciated.

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Introduction

Throughout his philosophical career Plato struggled against the views of the sophists. In many dialogues the views of a particular sophist are the central topic of discussion, and even in dialogues where the focus is on more general topics, the views of the sophists are still reckoned with. Though the *Sophist* also deals with the views of the sophists, it must be set apart from these earlier works. Instead of dealing with the views of an individual sophist or with a general topic on which the sophists had expressed opinions, this dialogue focuses on the sophist as such. The central purpose of this dialogue is to seek out the sophist and give a clear account (*λόγος*) of what he is.¹ For this reason the *Sophist* must be considered Plato's final reckoning with the sophists. If the sophist as such can be exposed, his general position may become vulnerable to attack. If the general sophistic position can be successfully attacked, the views of all the particular sophists, or at least the philosophical basis for those views, collapses.

But is it even possible to define *the* sophist? It is a well known fact that the sophists never formed a single school of thought. They were paid teachers who competed with each other for public favour (and wealthy clients). This fact suggests that there is no general sophistic position—no *Kind* sophist (*τὸ τοῦ σοφιστοῦ γένος*)—only the

¹*Sophist* 218c, translated by Nicholas P. White (except where otherwise indicated). As in all Platonic dialogues, however, the *Sophist* ends up dealing with much more than what it set out to work on. Underlying Plato's attack on the sophists is an

different views of individual sophists. Without a general sophistic position it would be impossible to define the sophist. The Eleatic Stranger's project would be doomed from the start.

Of course, there were similarities between the different sophists, and in the numerous failed attempts to define the sophist Plato brings out some of these. The sophist is a hired hunter of rich young men; a retailer and wholesaler of knowledge of the soul; an athlete in verbal combat, distinguished by his expertise in debating; and so on.² But, though a list of such similarities between the different sophists may constitute a good *description* of the sophist—"they are the different ways the sophist has appeared to us"³—, they fail as a *definition* of the sophist: they fail to give an account of what he is.⁴ To define the sophist it is necessary to get behind these appearances. It is not enough to pull out facts about how the art of the sophist is practiced, the fundamental *doctrinal* similarity—the epistemological and ontological basis of the sophistic position—must be uncovered if the sophist is to be defined.

It is not until the sixth attempt to define the sophist that the Eleatic Stranger hits upon the description of the sophist which will eventually lead to the fundamental

attack on Parmenides' conception of being. It is quite likely that this is the central purpose of the *Sophist*.

²*Sophist* 231d-e.

³*Sophist* 231d.

⁴Of course, the Stranger isn't just laying out the difference between a description and a definition of the sophist. Like the other Platonic dialogues that deal with the sophists, the *Sophist* is polemical and in his descriptions the Stranger is almost certainly using irony to ridicule the sophists. More importantly, Plato seems to be acknowledging that his earlier piecemeal attacks on the sophists weren't good enough. The sophistic position as such must be identified and attacked.

doctrinal similarity that exists between them: The sophist is an expert at appearance-making—he produces ‘spoken images’ which, though they appear to be likenesses (of *that which is*), in fact are not.⁵ To put this differently, the sophists are experts at producing ‘spoken images’ of *that which is not*. While this still isn’t a definition of the sophist, it is the description which will eventually lead to a definition. Being both ontologically and epistemologically significant, *that which is not* can function as the basis for the general sophistic position. If it can be shown that the sophists do indeed produce spoken images of *that which is not*, and if the full ontological and epistemological implications of this can be brought out, the sophist as such will be exposed and (possibly) vulnerable to attack.

But what does it mean to say that the sophists are experts at producing spoken images of *that which is not*? This claim alludes to the definition of falsehood which all the sophists seem to have adopted: A false statement or belief is one that involves saying or believing *those which are not* (*τὰ μὴ ὄντα*)—either believing that those which are not are in some way, or believing that those which completely are in no way are.⁶ The Stranger’s claim that the sophists are experts at producing spoken images of *that which is not* hooks up with this definition. The Stranger is saying that the sophists are experts at making and dealing in deception and falsehoods.

⁵Cf. *Sophist* 236c-237a. Though the Stranger does not say here that these images are ‘spoken’, he did earlier at *Sophist* 234c.

⁶Plato himself expresses this definition of falsehood at *Sophist* 240d-241a. The sophistic notions of falsehood will be examined in chapter II. It must be remembered that this is the type of definition the sophists put forward. The definition of a falsehood Plato eventually comes up with will be substantially different.

If it can be substantiated, the claim that sophists are deceivers would represent a serious blow to the general sophistic position. The problem lies in substantiating this claim. All of the sophists—at least those sophists with whom Plato reckoned and whose views on this topic have come down to us—claimed that it is impossible to hold or utter falsehoods.⁷ If it is impossible to hold or utter falsehoods, then obviously the sophists couldn't be experts at dealing in such things—their spoken images would have to be exact likenesses of things that are. If Plato is to show that the sophists do indeed deal in *that which is not*, he will have to show that such a thing is even possible. That is, Plato will have to show that it is possible to believe and speak falsehoods. Looking ahead we can see that, if Plato can show that it is possible to deal in *that which is not*, the general sophistic position will have been seriously undermined. By showing that it is possible to deal in *that which is not* Plato will have shown that the sophists had been false (they had dealt in *that which is not*) when they had claimed it is impossible to deal in falsehoods. This would suggest that either the sophists were ignorant about the possibility of dealing in falsehoods or they had known it but had purposely deceived others. Either way the general sophistic position will have been philosophically undermined and the views of the individual sophists, not to mention the sophists themselves, will have been discredited.

To show that the sophist deals in falsehoods Plato will have to show that *that which is not* is. If *that which is not* were in no way whatsoever, then it would be impossible to utter a false statement. There are two reasons why this is so. First, an

⁷This claim will be substantiated when we consider the views of the individual sophists in Chapter II. For Plato's belief in this see *Sophist* 241a-b, 260d.

intelligible statement must be about something. If *that which is not* were nothing whatsoever, then the false statement would refer to nothing whatsoever. Since the ‘false statement’ would refer to nothing, it would be unintelligible (meaningless), and so neither true nor false.⁸ Secondly, if *that which is not* were in no way whatsoever, then it would be devoid of descriptive content: one couldn’t even say whether it is one or many.⁹ Having absolutely no descriptive content, there is nothing one could say about ‘it’—even saying ‘it is impossible to say *that which is not* ($\tau\acute{o}\ \mu\eta\grave{\nu}\ \acute{o}\nu$)’ would be impossible because to say this is to express *that which is not* in the singular ($\tau\acute{o}$).¹⁰ If it is to be possible to say *that which is not*, then *that which is not* must be something with descriptive content.

Showing that it is possible to say *that which is not* puts Plato on a collision course with “father” Parmenides, who had expressly prohibited one from saying such things.¹¹ In his middle period Plato had tried to attack the sophists without accusing them of saying *that which is not*. In the *Republic* he had claimed that those who are not true philosophers but only *like* philosophers (a class which almost certainly includes sophists, though it may not be confined to them) deal in opinions rather than ignorance. Because an opinion is a power in the soul characterized by the soul being ‘set over’ that which is intermediate between what purely is and what in every way is not¹², those who are ‘like’ philosophers cannot be said to deal in *those which are not*. Consequently, they cannot be accused of

⁸*Sophist* 237c-237e.

⁹*Sophist* 238a-238c.

¹⁰*Sophist* 239a-239c.

¹¹Parmenides, frg. 7, lns. 1-3. (All references are to Diels-Kranz). For Plato’s exposition of this problem see *Sophist*, 237a.

dealing in falsehoods: though not absolutely true, what they do deal in is not absolutely false either.¹³ But this attempt had failed. To decisively refute the sophistic position it is not enough to show that the sophist deals in that which *is* partly true and partly false. Plato must show that the sophist deals in that which *is* false but which nonetheless *seems to be* true—Plato must show that the sophists deal in *semblances* of the truth.¹⁴ To show that the sophists deal in *semblances* of the truth the stranger must commit parricide: Parmenides' prohibition on saying *that which is not* must be rejected. Only by showing that one *can* truly say *that which is not*, and by showing that the sophists *do* in fact say this, can the general sophistic position be decisively defeated.

¹²*Republic* V, 475e-478d, trans. by G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (except where otherwise indicated).

¹³It is worthwhile to contrast Plato's conception of belief from the *Republic* with that expressed in the *Gorgias*. In this earlier dialogue Plato distinguishes knowledge and belief by saying that knowledge is always true while belief can be true or false. (*Gorgias* 454d, translated by Donald J. Zeyl (except where otherwise indicated). We can put this into the language of the *Republic* by saying that knowledge is always about *that which is*, while belief can be about either *that which is* or *that which is not*. This conception of belief is quite different from that of the *Republic*. In the *Republic* belief is not about *either* being or not-being, it is about the *conjunction* of being and not-being. It would seem to follow that, in contrast to the *Gorgias* where belief is either true or false, in the *Republic* belief is not wholly true or wholly false—it is both true and false insofar as what it is about both *is* and *is not*.

¹⁴The difference between the opinions of the *Republic* and the semblances of the *Sophist* is subtle. An opinion and a semblance are similar in that both conjoin being and not-being. But how they conjoin being and not-being is different. The object of an opinion is a mix of *that which is* and *that which is not* (it participates in both (*Republic* 478d-e)). A statement about such an object is true to the extent that its object *is* and false to the extent that its object *is not*. By contrast, a semblance really *is* something (it *is* a semblance of something that really is) it just *is not* what it purports to be (it is neither the object of which it is a semblance, nor an accurate representation of that object) (*Sophist* 235e-236b). A statement about a semblance really is false, it just seems to be true. The mixing of being and not-being in the *Sophist* will be explored in chapter III.

Because Plato confronts Parmenides in the *Sophist*, the significance of this dialogue goes far beyond refuting the general sophistic position. Though Plato had rejected many of Parmenides' views in his middle period, he had still remained under the spell of Parmenides' conception of being. Ontologically, though Plato had pluralized Parmenides' one being into many beings (the Forms), he had still accepted Parmenides' views on the way a being must be. Each Form is Parmenidoid in nature: every Form is uncreated and imperishable, whole and continuous, changeless and perfect. Epistemologically, though Plato's conception of being was much richer than that of Parmenides, he still accepted Parmenides' assimilation of being and truth. Plato also seems to have followed Parmenides in accepting that it is impossible to say *that which is not*. The acceptance of these two claims meant that Plato had to leave the sophist's claim that it is impossible to utter an absolutely false statement unchallenged. Though some statements are less true than others, because it is impossible to say *that which is not*, it is impossible to utter a statement which is absolutely false. To show that it is possible to utter an absolutely false statement, Plato will have to show that a statement which says *that which is not* is meaningful. This means that the conditions for a statement being meaningful must be made separate from, and prior to, the conditions for it being true. The final reckoning with the sophists requires that Plato first reckon with Parmenides.

Chapter 1 - Parmenides of Elea

Though it is impossible to know the exact dates of Parmenides' life, Plato attests that Parmenides was already an old man when Socrates was still "quite young".¹⁵ From this it is generally held that Parmenides was born about 515 BC—roughly ninety years before the birth of Plato. His views on being had a tremendous influence on subsequent Greek philosophy. Though most subsequent philosophers rejected some of Parmenides' views on the nature of being—Melissus rejected the finitude of being; Empedocles, Anaxagoras and the Atomists rejected the singularity of being¹⁶—their conceptions of being remained largely Parmenidean.

The more philosophically inclined sophists were also influenced by Parmenides.¹⁷ But it wasn't so much Parmenides' metaphysical views that influenced them as it was his epistemology.¹⁸ All the sophists seem to have accepted Parmenides' claim that it is impossible to know or say *that which is not*. Where they differed from Parmenides was

¹⁵*Parmenides*, 127a-127c, translated by Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan (except where otherwise indicated)

¹⁶Cf. the appropriate chapters of G.S. Kirk *et al* (1983).

¹⁷For a brief but incisive discussion on the influence of Parmenides on the sophists see Paul Seligman (1974), pp. 7-11.

¹⁸In fact, most of the sophists reacted violently to Parmenides' metaphysical views. Gorgias deliberately parodied Parmenides' style of argument in order to prove that nothing is (Gorgias, frg. 3 (all references to Diels-Kranz)). Protagoras is said to have taken time off teaching in order to write a treatise directed against "those who uphold the unity of being" (Protagoras, frg. 2 (all references to Diels-Kranz)). And even sophists such as Euthydemus who seem to have been more sympathetic to Parmenides' metaphysics than most, still substantially altered his views on being.

over the status of falsity. Despite his prohibition of saying *that which is not*, Parmenides still seems to have believed it possible to utter meaningful false statements and hold meaningful false beliefs. The sophists, on the other hand, collapsed falsehood into not-being, thereby denying falsity in all its forms.

To understand how the views of the sophists were responses to Parmenides' philosophy, and why Plato must attack Parmenides' views on the impossibility of saying *that which is not* if he is to undermine the general sophistic position, it is necessary to consider Parmenides' own views on being and speaking. To this end we do not need to consider Parmenides' poem in its entirety. Instead, we will focus on Parmenides' discussion of the different ways of enquiry (frg. 2,6,7) and his discussion of the signs of the one true way (frg. 8).

According to Parmenides there are only two ways or paths (*óδοι*) of enquiry which can be "thought of".¹⁹ Of these two ways it turns out that only one can be followed: only one of them is a way of enquiry that actually leads to knowledge. The two possible ways of enquiry are the way of '[it] is' (*ἔστιν*), and the way of '[it] is not' (*οὐκ ἔστιν*).²⁰ These two ways are clearly meant to be logically exclusive: if you take one, you cannot take the other. Unfortunately, not everyone realizes this. The "dazed, indiscriminating hordes" attempt to join these two ways into a third way of enquiry: the way of those who believe that to be and not to be are the same and not the same.²¹ This third way, however, is not a way of enquiry that can be 'thought of'. It arises precisely

¹⁹Parmenides, frg. 2, ln. 2.

²⁰Parmenides, frg. 2, lns. 3-5.

because ordinary mortals do *not* think about the different ways of enquiry: they are driven down this route by the force of habit.²² However, because the way of ‘[it] is’ and ‘[it] is not’ cannot be joined, the way of mortals really is not a way at all: it is a path that turns back on itself, leading nowhere.²³ Instead of following a route, mortals who take this ‘path’ are said to “wander” about knowing nothing.²⁴

It is clear from this account that for Parmenides the paths of enquiry characterized as ‘[it] is’ and ‘[it] is not’ are logically exclusive and exhaustive. These ways are exclusive because no enquiry can follow both at the same time (the way of is and is not “turns back on itself”). They are exhaustive because any enquiry must follow one path or the other (‘these are the only two paths which can be thought of’). However, though the way of ‘[it] is’ and the way of ‘[it] is not’ are equal insofar as they are both paths of enquiry that can be ‘thought of’, they are not equally fruitful ways of enquiry. In fact, it is only by following the first way—the way of ‘[it] is’—that an individual can expect to arrive at his ‘destination’ (i.e. it is only by following the way of enquiry characterized as ‘[it] is’ that one can actually expect to gain knowledge). This is so because the way of ‘[it] is’ is the only one that is ‘marked’ with signs.²⁵ Since an individual could not expect

²¹Parmenides, frg. 6, lns. 8-9.

²²Parmenides, frg. 7, ln. 3.

²³Cf. Parmenides, frg. 6, ln. 9. Alternately this passage could be saying that the *journey* of mortals is backward-turning (*κέλευθος* can be translated as either ‘path’ or ‘journey’). Regardless of which translation is used, it is clear that Parmenides holds that the way of mortals is a path of enquiry that could never lead to knowledge.

²⁴Parmenides, frg. 6, lns. 4-5.

²⁵Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 2-3.

to arrive at his destination unless there were signs that marked his way, only the way of '[it] is' is a fruitful way of enquiry.

But what does Parmenides mean when he says that the way of '[it] is' is marked with signs? It becomes apparent in his treatment of these 'signs' that they are the characteristics of the object towards which the way of '[it] is' is directed. Exactly how the characteristics of the object of an enquiry can function as signs which direct an enquiry towards this object is not clearly stated. But Parmenides' point seems to be that the characteristics of the object towards which an enquiry is directed give that object descriptive content. The various things which give the object of enquiry descriptive content can then serve as 'signs' which direct the enquiry towards this object. As an enquiry gets closer to its object it comes across one characteristic that marks the path after another until it finally 'arrives' at the object. Being, which is the object towards which the way of '[it] is' is directed, is an entity which is uncreated and imperishable, whole and of a single kind, unshaken and perfect.²⁶ Because being actually possesses these characteristics, they can function as signs which guide the way of enquiry characterized as '[it] is' towards being. So Parmenides' enquiry into being is first marked by the discovery that being is ungenerated and imperishable (lns. 5-21), then by the discovery that it is one and continuous (lns. 22-25), then by the discovery that it is changeless (lns. 26-31) and finally by the discovery that it is perfect (lns. 32-49). In each case a characteristic of being functions as a marker which guides the path of '[it] is' towards being.

It is important to note that there is a shift in the discussion from a consideration of the paths of enquiry to a consideration of the object(s) of enquiry. This shift is made possible by the fact that Parmenides has made the path of enquiry dependent on the object of enquiry. It is because the object of an enquiry possesses the characteristics which it does that a path of enquiry directed towards this object is marked and thus capable of being followed. It is because the object of enquiry has descriptive content that an enquiry into this object is possible.

What about the second way? The goddess says that this is an utterly ‘unknowable’ (*παναπευθέα*) track.²⁷ There has been disagreement over what Parmenides means by saying the second way is (*παν*)*απευθέα*. Is Parmenides saying that this path itself is unknowable, or that following this path does not give any knowledge? To put this differently, is the way of ‘[it] is not’ an impossible way of enquiry (a way that simply cannot be followed)²⁸, or merely a fruitless way of enquiry: a way which, though it does not produce any knowledge, can be followed?

This is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, Parmenides’ claim that the second way is one of the ways that can be “thought of” (*νοῆσαι*)²⁹ suggests that, though the second way may not lead to knowledge, it can at least be known. On the other hand, his claim that the second way cannot be indicated³⁰ suggests that the path itself

²⁶Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 3-4.

²⁷Parmenides, frg. 2, ln. 6.

²⁸Of course, if the second path of enquiry simply could not be followed, then it would not even be a path.

²⁹Parmenides, frg. 2, ln. 2.

³⁰Parmenides, frg. 2, ln. 8.

cannot be known: a path that cannot be indicated is no path at all. All that can definitely be said about the way of '[it] is not' is that it is not marked with signs, and thus a person who followed this path could not expect to arrive at his destination (a person who enquired into not-being would gain no knowledge about 'it'). But because the signs that mark a path are not the same as the path itself, the mere absence of signs is not enough to establish that the way of '[it] is not' itself is utterly unknowable. Because there seems to be no way to know for sure whether Parmenides held that the way of '[it] is not' is knowable, we will stick to the weaker thesis. The way of '[it] is not' is (at least) a fruitless way of enquiry: it is a way of enquiry that produces no knowledge. Whether or not the way itself is knowable seems impossible to determine.

So the existence of an object with descriptive content (formal ontological characteristics) is a necessary condition for the existence of an enquiry into that object. The descriptive content of an object provides 'signs' which direct an enquiry towards this object. Because not-being is devoid of descriptive content, it is impossible to enquire into its nature: there is nothing that would mark the path of enquiry towards this 'object'.

Parmenides' claim that enquiring is only possible if it has an object with descriptive content is also applied to knowing, thinking and speaking. The movement from enquiring to knowing is quite natural. An enquiry is an attempt to come to know something, knowledge amounts to actually knowing something; an enquiry follows a path towards its object, knowledge occurs when one 'arrives' at the object. And just as one can only enquire into an object that has descriptive content, so one can only know an object that has descriptive content. Because being is the only object with descriptive

content (indeed, because being *is* the only object), it is both the only object capable of being enquired into and the only object capable of being known.

What is true of knowing is also true of thinking and speaking.³¹ Just as knowledge must take *that which is* as its object, so an intelligible statement must also refer to *that which is*. So, ‘x is’ is intelligible only if x is. It follows that an utterance which took *that which is not* as its ‘object’ would not have an object, and so would be unintelligible—such an utterance would be no more than a meaningless sound. Because not-being does not have descriptive content, there is nothing for the speech which took not-being as its object to be about.

How does this relate to truth and falsity? That truth and falsity are central themes in Parmenides’ poem is clear. The way of *ἔστι* is actually said to be about truth (*ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης*)³², while the way of mortals (the way of those who believe to be and not to be are the same and not the same) is said to consist in opinions (*δόξαι*) in which it is not possible to have true faith (*ταῖς οὐκ ἐνὶ πίστις ἀληθείης*).³³ So what are the implications of associating truth with the way of *ἔστι*?

Parmenides’ claim that the way of *ἔστι* is about truth suggests that a true statement is one which takes *that which is* as its object. Admittedly Parmenides does not talk about what makes a statement true, he only says that the path of ‘[it] is’ leads to truth.

³¹Cf. Parmenides, frg. 2, lns. 7-8; frg. 8, lns. 35-36.

³²Cf. Parmenides, frg. 2, ln. 4. Here the way of *ἔστι* is said to be the way of Persuasion (the handmaiden of Truth). That the way of *ἔστι* is the way of truth is also implied at Parmenides, frg. 8, ln. 51.

³³Parmenides, frg. 1, ln. 30.

But because, as we saw above, there is an affinity between enquiring and knowing or speaking, this move seems justified. But what about false statements? Because, on Parmenides' principles, a false statement could not say *that which is* without being true, it must either say *that which is not*, or that which both is and is not. Because, on Parmenides' own principles, not-being cannot be spoken of, if a false statement were one that referred to *that which is not*, there would be no such thing as falsity. As far as utterances are concerned, the only contrast would be between true statements and meaningless gibberish.

I find it extremely unlikely that Parmenides believed that there is no such thing as falsity. In the second part of the poem the goddess claims she is telling Parmenides her opinions so that no thought of mortal man will ever outstrip him.³⁴ This implies that her opinions are superior to those of mortals. But what would make her opinions superior to those of mortals? Clearly it is not because her opinions are true while theirs are false—the goddess has already said that her opinions will be false.³⁵ Instead, the superiority of her opinions consists in the fact that, though her opinions are as false as theirs, her account is more (deceptively) plausible than theirs could ever be. But if it were only possible to utter true statements or meaningless gibberish, there is no way her opinions could be more deceptively plausible than those of mortals: one list of meaningless gibberish is no more deceptively plausible than another. So the goddess seems committed to the notion of meaningful falsity. And because a statement which

³⁴Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 60-61.

referred to *that which is not* could not be meaningful, a false statement could not be one that referred to 'it'. So, if Parmenides is to account for meaningful falsity, a false statement must refer to something different from either being or not-being.³⁶

Because a false statement cannot refer to either *that which is* or *that which is not*, it must refer to that which both is and is not. The problem with this is that, unlike Plato in his middle period, Parmenides does not hold that there is a type of entity which actually is and is not. It is because there is no such entity that there can neither be an enquiry into that which both is and is not, nor any knowledge of it. However, unlike the way of '[it] is not', which is an indiscernible track and thus one that cannot be followed, mortals do in fact 'wander about' on the way of both is and is not. Though this 'wandering about' does not result in knowledge, it does produce opinions. The assertion of an opinion is, presumably, a false statement.³⁷

³⁵Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 51-52. The goddess actually says that that the ordering of her words is deceitful, but this seems to be another way of saying they are false.

³⁶There is some ambiguity in the second part of the poem. At times it seems that the goddess' aim is merely to relay what mortals in fact say (Cf. frg. 8, lns. 51-52. See also frg. 8, ln. 53 where the goddess says that *they* (presumably mortals) name two forms, not that she does). However, her 'account' seems to be entirely original, as far as we know no 'mortal' ever expressed such things.

I think the best interpretation of this is the one offered by Kirk, *et al.* (1983), p. 254. The second part of the poem does not aim to express mortal opinions as they are, but as they might be best. So, the opinions expressed in the second part of the poem are the best that a mortal might ever express. But because no mortal has actually expressed the best opinions, the goddess needs to express these opinions for them.

³⁷We should note that, in contrast to Plato's view in the *Gorgias* (though similar to his views in the *Republic*), Parmenides does not distinguish knowledge from opinion by saying that knowledge is always true (it is always about *that which is*), while opinion can be either true or false (it can be about either *that which is* or *that which is not*). The goddess explicitly says that, in contrast to her discussion of the way of '[it] is', her account of mortal opinions will be deceitful (i.e. false) (Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 50-52).

The status of opinions is highly problematic. Though it is easy enough to see why the assertion of an opinion is false—because being and not-being cannot be conjoined, any statement which took this conjunction as its object would be false—, it is difficult to see how it would be meaningful. Because being cannot be conjoined with nothing, a statement which took this conjunction as its object would actually be referring to something that is not. And because a statement must refer to something that is to be meaningful, the assertion of an opinion would seem to be meaningless.

It is easier to see why Parmenides needs falsity than it is to see how he can account for it. Without falsity both the premises and the conclusion of any argument would necessarily be true. As a result all valid arguments would be sound. But this would mean that, not only are Parmenides' arguments for the way being must be the way it is sound, but any valid argument which proved the exact opposite (that being is generated, corruptible, etc.) would be valid as well. Accordingly it would be no less reasonable to believe what the goddess says than it would be to believe the exact opposite. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the goddess exhorts Parmenides to judge her account with his reason.³⁸ But if all arguments, even those which establish contrary conclusions, are valid, there would be no *reason* to choose her account over another—there really wouldn't be anything to judge. Secondly, Parmenides seems to have held that we do not have direct knowledge of the nature of being. Instead, our knowledge of being is mediated through argument. Now, if all arguments about the

This suggests that the class of things capable of being known does not overlap with the class of things capable of being opined.

nature of being (even those which produce contrary conclusions) are valid, then it would be impossible to know the nature of being. And because we cannot know the nature of not-being, if we cannot know the nature of being, we could not know anything. So without a notion of meaningful falsity, the outcome of Parmenides' views would be a thoroughgoing skepticism.

So Parmenides seems to face a problem over false statements. On the one hand, he absolutely needs falsity to make his own view of being work. But it is difficult to know how his system can account for meaningful falsehoods. Because a true statement says *that which is*, and because a false statement must say something different from a true statement, it seems that a false statement must say *that which is not*. But because it is impossible to say *that which is not*, if a false statement were defined as one which referred to such a 'thing', it would be impossible to utter false statements. Parmenides could hold that a false statement refers to a conjunction of being and not-being. And because no such conjunction exists, if Parmenides were to hold this view, he could explain why a false statement is false. But because a statement must have an object to be meaningful, and because being and not-being simply cannot be conjoined, a statement which referred to such an 'object' would be meaningless. And if such a statement were meaningless, it could not be false.

The sophists seem to have been aware of this problem with Parmenides' philosophy. They accepted Parmenides' absolute distinction between *that which is* and *that which is not*. They also accepted that, because the object of a statement must have

³⁸Parmenides, frg. 7, lns. 5-6.

descriptive content, it is impossible to say *that which is not*. Where they differed most fundamentally from Parmenides' views was over the status of falsehoods. If a statement could only (conceivably) say *that which is* or *that which is not*, and if a true statement says *that which is*, a false statement must say *that which is not*. But because it is impossible to say *that which is not*, it must be impossible to utter false statements. So a 'false statement' is really be no more than a meaningless utterance.

Chapter II - The Sophists

In this chapter I will consider the views of the sophists on the possibility of believing and meaningfully saying *that which is not* (falsehoods). Because a consideration of the views of all the sophists would take us far beyond the scope of this paper, I have been forced to be selective. I have used two criteria to decide which sophists I will discuss in this section. First, I only consider the views of those sophists who are actually discussed somewhere in the Platonic corpus. Because our purpose in this paper is to consider Plato's final reckoning with the sophists, it would be pointless to outline the views of the sophists Plato never reckoned with. Secondly, I only consider sophists who said something on the topic of believing and saying *that which is not* which has come down to us. Obviously, we cannot consider the views of a sophist, if we know nothing about what he said on this topic. There are only four sophists who satisfy both criteria: Protagoras of Abdera, Gorgias of Leontini, Euthydemus (and Dionysodorus) of Chios and Prodicus of Ceos.³⁹

As was mentioned above, the sophists were strongly influenced by the epistemology of Parmenides. All of the sophists seem to have accepted Parmenides'

³⁹Hippias of Elis may be another sophist who deserves treatment in this paper. In both the *Hippias Minor* and the *Hippias Major* views on truth and falsehood are attributed to him. Generally, however, these views have not been regarded as Hippias' own (Diels-Kranz do not include these passages). If, on the other hand, these passages are regarded as genuine, Hippias *could* be the exception to the view that the sophists believed it was impossible to utter falsehoods.

view that knowledge and meaningful speech are only possible if they refer to *that which is*. Where they differed from Parmenides was over the status of falsehoods. Parmenides tried to account for meaningful falsity by holding that it referred to that which both is and is not. The sophists, on the other hand, collapsed falsity into not-being, thereby denying the possibility of ever uttering a false statement or holding a false belief. In this section we will consider the views of the individual sophists in order to discover exactly what their views on truth and falsity were.

The sophists denied the possibility of uttering false statements on epistemological and ontological grounds. But there were probably also pragmatic considerations involved. If all meaningful statements, including seemingly contradictory statements, are true, deciding which meaningful statements one ought to make in any given situation becomes highly problematic. One way of resolving this issue is through a consideration of personal advantage: the meaningful statements which will work to your advantage are the ones you ought to utter in any given situation. And, even if people already know what is to their own advantage, they would still need to know how to order their meaningful statements in such a way so as to bring it about. This was a service the sophists were happy to provide. By teaching rhetoric the sophists instructed their students on the means of bringing about any end, and though many would not have wanted to see their teaching abused, they had to acknowledge that this was a distinct possibility.⁴⁰ Because the

⁴⁰Plato illustrates this in the *Gorgias*. Gorgias claims that it is no more the fault of the oratory teacher if his student misuses his teachings, than it is the fault of the boxing instructor if his student knocks down his father (*Gorgias* 456d-457c). Later, because Gorgias is too ashamed to admit that the orator could be unjust, he admits that he will

impossibility of uttering false statements makes personal advantage one of the few ways of deciding which meaningful statements one ought to utter, this doctrine offered epistemic and ethical justification for using rhetoric to bring about any end. Of course, a person who is already committed to the satisfaction of his own ends no matter what they might be probably doesn't need this justification, but it's still a nice thing to have.

II,1 *Protagoras of Abdera*

Two claims Protagoras makes are relevant to the topic of whether or not it is possible to believe or utter a meaningful false statement (a statement about *that which is not*). The first is the claim that on every issue there are two arguments [or perhaps accounts] (*λόγοι*) opposed to each other.⁴¹ The second is the claim that: "Of all things the measure is man, of things that are that [or possibly how] (*ὡς*) they are, and of things that are not that they are not".⁴² This has generally been interpreted to mean that for Protagoras all knowledge is perception.⁴³ In this section I will consider both claims.

teach a student about justice to prevent him from misusing his teachings (*Gorgias* 460a, 461b-c). At this point others who are less restrained take over the argument and push his position to its logical conclusion.

⁴¹Protagoras, frg. 6a; frg. 6b.

⁴²Protagoras, frg. 1.

⁴³*Theaetetus* 151e-152a, translated by M.J. Levett (revised by Myles F. Burnyeat) (except where otherwise indicated) (DK 80 B 1). This is also implied in Protagoras' claim that he could not know anything about the gods because, among other things, they are not perceived (*ἀδηλόγη*). Protagoras, frg. 4.

The relationship between these two claims is a matter of dispute. Some have argued that the first claim is based on the second.⁴⁴ Because the knowledge a person has on an issue is based on perception, and because what one person perceives may not be the same as what another perceives, on any issue it is possible to give (at least) two incompatible accounts corresponding to the different views different people have of it. The problem with this interpretation is that it is quite possible for all men to ‘measure’ things the same. This would result in unanimous agreement on an issue. If there could be unanimous agreement on an issue, then obviously there would not be two opposed accounts of it. So, unless Protagoras held that there *must* be disagreement on every issue—a view for which there is no evidence—, this interpretation cannot account for the first claim. A more promising account is that the second claim is a *response* to the first.⁴⁵ The knowledge of a thing is based on the perception of that thing. But what about things which no one has ever perceived such as god or (Parmenidean) being? Because no one has perceived such things, no one has any knowledge of them. And in the absence of knowledge, it is possible to offer two equally plausible opposed accounts about such things. Because knowledge is based on perception, and because (presumably) no one has ever perceived god, ‘god is evil’ is no less plausible than ‘god is good’.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Cf. W. Guthrie (1969), p. 183.

⁴⁵This view is presented in Untersteiner (1954), p. 41.

⁴⁶In fact, it goes much further than this. If it is possible to offer two equally plausible opposed accounts of things which have not been perceived, then not only does one have no knowledge of such things, but the very words for such things would be meaningless. If, for everything one could say about god, one could say the exact opposite with equal plausibility, then the concept ‘god’ would be meaningless.

How do truth and falsity relate to statements about things which no one has perceived? Clearly, if two statements which assert contrary predicates of the same subject are equally plausible, there is no way of knowing which statement is true and which is false. But does this mean that neither statement *is* true or false? That is, just because (in the absence of perception) we can't *know* whether 'god is good' is true or false, doesn't necessarily mean that this statement *is* neither true nor false. If there really is a god who is good then the statement 'god is good' would be true, regardless of whether we could know it or not. So is a statement about something that has not been perceived true or false, even if we cannot know whether it is or not? I consider this question below.

Regardless of whether or not it is possible to utter a true statement about something which has not been perceived, it most certainly is possible to utter such a statement about something which has been perceived. In fact, a statement is true simply because it refers to a perception. For Protagoras that which appears to a man *is* [true] for that man, that which appears for another *is* [true] for that other.⁴⁷ So, 'x is ϕ ' *is* [true] for S, only if S *perceives* that x is ϕ ; 'x is not ϕ ' *is* [true] for T, only if T *perceives* that x is not ϕ .

It is important to note that Protagoras is not saying that someone *knows* something is true only if he perceives it (S *knows* 'x is ϕ ' *is* [true] only if S perceives that x is ϕ). Protagoras is making the much stronger claim that something *is* true because it is

⁴⁷*Theaetetus* 152a (DK 80 B 1).

perceived to be the case by someone. Protagoras can make this stronger claim because he has collapsed being into *being for* someone. Something *is for* a person when it *appears to* that person.⁴⁸ Because being is collapsed into being for someone, a statement which refers to an appearance refers to *that which is* (for the perceiver) and so is meaningful and true—to that perceiver. But it is not the case that a statement which refers to something which has not been perceived is false. Because the thing to which this ‘false’ statement would refer truly *is not*, a statement which refers to this ‘thing’ is neither true nor false. So it is not the case that one opposed account of something that has not been perceived is true while the other is false. Because the thing of which the opposed accounts are given truly *is not*, that object has no characteristics which could be indicated in an account. Because, for example, god *is not*, ‘he’ really is neither good nor bad, and neither ‘god is good’ nor ‘god is bad’ is true.

So, for Protagoras, because a true statement or a belief is one that refers to *that which is* (a perception), it is meaningful. And because a false statement refers to something that has not been perceived, it refers to *that which is not*, and so is neither true nor false. We can see that there are two differences between Protagoras’ views and those of Parmenides. First, because being has been collapsed into appearing-to-be-to-someone, our knowledge of being is immediate. This means that there is no need to use arguments in order to know being.⁴⁹ Second, Protagoras is willing to do away with falsity, thereby

⁴⁸Cf. *Theaetetus* 152a (DK 80 B 1); *Cratylus* 385e-386a, translated by C.D.C. Reeve. (DK 80 A 13).

⁴⁹On one level this is true. But, though the *content* of being is revealed through sense perception, the nature of being must be established through argument—no one has

eliminating the problem of how a statement could be both meaningful and false. Because our knowledge of being is not mediated by argument, the fact that there is no falsity does not have the disastrous consequences for Protagoras that it would have had for Parmenides.

One thing remains to be considered. After claiming that ‘man is the measure of all things’ Protagoras tells us that man is the measure “of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not” (τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν).⁵⁰ This passage seems to suggest that it is indeed possible to truly say or believe (measure) *that which is not*, which we have just claimed is impossible. How does the interpretation offered above account for the second part of this passage?

It seems that Protagoras would allow for the perception of negative facts. Just as it is possible to perceive positive facts such as the cold wind, so it is possible to perceive negative facts such as the not-warm wind. If someone perceives that the wind is not warm, then ‘The wind is not warm’ is true—for the person who perceived it.

II,2 *Gorgias of Leontini*

ever perceived that being is no more than what is perceived. This seems to present a serious problem to Protagoras’ system. If the nature of being cannot be perceived, then it seems that the nature of being *is not* (being does not have a nature). And if being does not have a nature, then Protagoras cannot claim that being is the same as appearing-to-be-to-someone. Without this assimilation of being and appearance, it is hard to know what could be saved of Protagoras’ system.

⁵⁰Protagoras, frg. 1.

In a curious work entitled *On That Which Is Not or On Nature* Gorgias makes three claims: (i) Nothing *is*; (ii) Even if it is, it is unknowable and incomprehensible to man; (iii) Even if it should be apprehended, it would be incapable of being conveyed to another.⁵¹ Because we are concerned with Gorgias' view on the possibility of comprehending *that which is not*, it is the second claim that is of interest to us here.

Before we actually consider the second claim it is necessary to say something about the nature of this work. The work is clearly meant to parody the views of the Eleatics—particularly those of Melissus who is supposed to have entitled his major work *On That Which Is or On Nature*.⁵² Because this is a work of parody, it is fair to ask whether it actually represents Gorgias' own views. It is possible that this is merely a rhetorical exercise or a clever critique of the Eleatics—showing that their own logic can be used to prove the exact opposite of what they intended—and does not express Gorgias' own views on being, knowing and saying.

It is probably impossible to know for sure what Gorgias' intentions were in this treatise. I am going to follow Isocrates, Sextus and the author of the pseudo-Aristotelian text *Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* in taking this to be a work that expresses Gorgias' own views.⁵³ If this assumption is not granted, then not enough has come down

⁵¹Gorgias, frg. 3, 65, lns. 31-33, and 66, ln. 35; 77, lns. 22-23; 83, ln. 16.

⁵²But see G.S. Kirk, *et. al.* (1983), p. 391 n. 1.

⁵³Isocrates: Gorgias, frg. 1; Sextus: Gorgias, frg. 3; The views of Gorgias in the pseudo-Aristotelian *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* can be found in the Bekker edition of Aristotle's works (5, 6 979a11-980b21). According to Diogenes Laertius Aristotle also wrote a monograph entitled *In Reply to the Opinions of Gorgias*. Unfortunately, this work has not come down to us but if it does deal with *On That Which*

to us to say for certain what Gorgias' views on comprehending *that which is not* are. So if the reader is unwilling to grant this assumption, he may wish to skip ahead to the next section.

The first thing to note about the three claims of Gorgias is that they are independent of each other—none of them presupposes the conclusion of another. In fact, each claim actually assumes the exact opposite of what was proved in the previous claim. So as far as the second claim is concerned, it doesn't matter whether or not it is true that not one [thing] *is* because, *even if it is*, it is incomprehensible to man. For this reason we do not need to consider the first claim in this section. Nor will we consider the third claim.

The first argument for the second claim runs as follows:

- 1) If things considered in the mind *are not*, then *that which is* is not considered in the mind (frg. 3—77, lns. 23-24).
- 2) Things considered in the mind *are not* (frg. 3—78, lns. 29-30).
Therefore
- 3) *That which is* is not considered in the mind (frg. 3—78, ln. 31).⁵⁴

Is Not or On Nature (which seems likely), then this would suggest that Aristotle also believed this work represents Gorgias' own views.

⁵⁴Gorgias also presents a similar argument in the form of a *modus tollens*. This argument runs:

- 1) If things considered in the mind *are*, then things that *are not* will not be [are not] considered in the mind (frg. 3—80, ln. 1).
- 2) Things that *are not* are considered in the mind (frg. 3—80, lns. 5-6).
Therefore
- 3) *That which is* is not considered in the mind (frg. 3—80, ln. 6).

As it stands this argument is invalid. The conclusion should read '*Therefore*, things considered in the mind *are not*'. The conclusion does not establish that nothing that *is* is ever considered in the mind, only that not all things considered in the mind *are*. Why Gorgias should even include this argument when the first one is valid is a mystery.

Obviously this is a valid argument. It remains for us to consider the premises. Because our main purpose here is to discover Gorgias' views on comprehending *that which is not*, I will not focus on the question of whether or not this argument is sound (I confine this discussion to a footnote). Instead, I will focus on what these premises have to tell us about Gorgias' views on comprehending *that which is*.

The major premise of this argument tells us little about Gorgias' views on thinking.⁵⁵ It is the minor premise that is of interest to us here. Gorgias backs up the claim that things considered in the mind *are not* by giving four examples of things we consider even though they *are not*. The examples he uses are: a man flying, chariots racing across the sea, Scylla and Chimera. Because we can consider all of these things even though they *are not*, the mind is able to consider things that *are not*.

What is interesting about the argument for the second premise is that it only works if we already *know* that things like flying men and chimeras *are not*. If we do not already know that these things *are not*, Gorgias could not claim that our minds are considering non-existent entities when it considers these things. But how could a person *know* these things *are not* before he has even considered them in the mind? I think the answer is suggested by the examples Gorgias gives. All four examples are things which could

⁵⁵Though the major premise—If things considered in the mind *are not*, then *that which is* is not considered in the mind—has little to tell us about Gorgias' views on knowledge, it is the reason why his argument is unsound. In order to be sound either (α) the antecedent of the major premise would have to state that *all* things considered by the mind *are not* for the consequent to follow, or (β) the consequent would have to state that *that which is* is not considered *in the cases where the mind considers things that are not*. But α is never proved, and the conclusion which follows from β would not prove the

(conceivably) be perceived through the senses. This suggests that sense experience has something to do with how we know that things are or are not. To understand the role sense experience plays in our knowing that things are or are not, we need to consider a third argument Gorgias offers for why things considered in the mind *are not*. This argument runs as follows:

- 1) Just as objects of sight/hearing are visible/audible because they are seen/heard by the appropriate sense organ, and we do not reject the object perceived by one sense organ on the grounds that it has not been perceived by another. . . , so things considered in the mind *are* even if they have not been perceived by ‘another’ sense organ because the mind considers them using its own criterion (frg. 3—81, lns. 6-12).
Therefore
- 2) If someone considers in the mind that chariots race in the sea, even if he does not see them, he is obliged to believe (*ὀφείλει πιστεύειν*) that there are chariots racing in the sea (frg. 3—82, lns. 12-14).
- 3) But this is absurd (frg. 3—82, lns. 14-15).
Therefore
- 4) *That which is* is not an object of consideration and is not apprehended (frg. 3—82, ln. 15).

As it stands the argument is obscure: it is difficult to know how the conclusion is supposed to follow from the premises.⁵⁶ This, however, need not concern us. Because

second claim (that even if being *is*, we could not know it) because it might still be possible to know *that which is*.

⁵⁶The following is a possible reconstruction of the argument:

- 1) If the mind has a criterion separate from the senses for judging that something *is*, then a person is obliged to believe that everything he considers in his mind *is*.
- 2) But a person is not obliged to believe that everything he considers in his mind *is*.
Therefore
- 3) The mind does not have a criterion separate from the senses for judging that something *is*.
- 4) Only if the mind has a criterion separate from the senses for judging that something *is*, would *that which is* be an object of consideration and be

our purpose here is to discover Gorgias' views on comprehending *that which is not*, we need not worry about whether or not this argument is valid.

The crucial premise is Premise P3. Obviously Gorgias is here claiming that it is absurd to believe that chariots are racing in the sea. But why is it absurd to believe this? It seems that, for Gorgias, it is absurd to believe that chariots are racing in the sea because we have not perceived this happening. Because the mind does not have its own criterion for determining that something *is*, the mere fact that the mind is thinking about chariots racing in the sea does not entail that they are in fact doing this. The only criterion for determining that something *is* is the senses. So it is absurd to believe that chariots are racing in the sea because such things are considered in the mind *without having been seen*. If, however, one were to perceive chariots racing in the sea, it would not be absurd for this person to believe that chariots racing in the sea *are*. In fact this argument implies that, if a person had perceived such things, he would be obliged to believe that they *are*.⁵⁷

In contrast to the other two arguments for why a person only considers *that which is not*, this argument introduces something new: the idea of being obliged to believe something. According to Gorgias a person is obliged to believe that something *is*, only if he has actually perceived that thing through the senses. It follows from this that we are not obliged to believe that something *is* if we have not perceived it through the senses.

apprehended [by the mind on its own].

Therefore

- 4) *That which is* is not an object of consideration and is not apprehended [by the mind on its own].

Because we have not perceived flying men, chariots racing in the sea, Scylla, or Chimera, we are not obliged to believe that these things *are*. Of course, it is possible that these things really *are*, and we just have not experienced them—Gorgias does not explicitly deny this here. But because we have not perceived these things, we are not obliged to believe that they *are*.

But we still face a problem. It is one thing not to be obliged to believe that something *is*, it is quite another to be obliged to believe that something *is not*, and Gorgias does not say when we are obliged to believe something *is not*. Perhaps, like Protagoras, he adopted a radical relativist position and would say that we are obliged to believe that anything we have not perceived *is not*.⁵⁸ An answer that is, perhaps, more agreeable is that Gorgias would just appeal to *common sense* (conventional beliefs)—no one living in fifth century Greece, at least no one with the education required to consider this treatise, really believes there are such things as flying men and chimeras. So, even though we are not obliged to believe these things *are not*—because being obliged to

⁵⁷However, as we shall see below, not all appearances involve *that which is* (frg. 26, lns. 11-12). So, presumably, a person is not obliged to believe that everything he perceives *is*.

⁵⁸Cf. Gorgias *Encomium Of Helen* (frg. 11—lms. 11, 7-9). There Gorgias writes: “So that on most subjects most men take [their] opinion as counselor to their soul, but since opinion is slippery and insecure it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure successes”. This suggests that there is no truth about any subject, only opinions. Of course Gorgias only says that on *most* subjects (but not all) *most* men (but not all) are governed by their slippery and insecure opinions. But you could hardly expect anything else from someone who is offering a defense of Helen. If Gorgias’ own views were no more than slippery and insecure opinions, why should anyone believe that what he has to say is right?

For a further discussion of the view that Gorgias was a relativist, see Guthrie (1969), p. 273.

believe something depends on perception, a person could never be obliged to believe something *is not*—, because *common sense* suggests that such things *are not*, a person should believe that they *are not* (provided he hasn't actually perceived that they *are*).

So, for Gorgias, we are only obliged to believe that something *is* if we have actually perceived it. When a person considers something which he has perceived, he considers *that which is*; when a person considers something which he has not perceived, he considers something which he is not obliged to believe *is*. If Gorgias adopted a radical relativist position, the fact that the thing had not been perceived would be sufficient for *knowing* that that thing *is not*. If Gorgias did not adopt a radical relativist position, then the fact that something had not been perceived would be a necessary but not sufficient condition for knowing (being obliged to believe) that that thing *is not*. In this case a different criterion—such as conventional views—would have to be used to determine whether or not a person should believe that something *is or is not*.⁵⁹ Either way the failure to perceive something is the basis of knowing that that thing *is not*. Because no

⁵⁹That Gorgias was not a relativist, or at least that he was not a Protagorean-type relativist, is supported by Gorgias' theory of perception. According to Plato Gorgias followed Empedocles in believing that different objects give off effluences of different size (and shape) which, because of their different dimensions, can pass through certain sense organs, though not through others (*Meno* 76a-e, translated by G.M.A. Grube (except where otherwise indicated) (DK 82 B 4). From this it follows that, in contrast to what Protagoras believed, the being of things is not dependent on their being perceived by someone: for Gorgias there really are things 'behind' our perception of them. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Gorgias was not a relativist—it could be that the eyes of one person have a different shape from the eyes of another with the consequence that the effluences that pass through the eyes of the one are different from those that pass through the eyes of the other—but it does mean that he denied Protagorean relativism.

one has perceived flying men, chariots racing in the sea, Scylla, or Chimera, we know such things *are not*.

How does this relate to what Parmenides had said about experience? Parmenides had claimed that the way of mortals—the way of those who use the senses—does not lead to knowledge. Instead, this is the way of opinion (*δόξα*)—a way which, because it does not lead to *that which is*, cannot be relied upon. Only by ignoring the testimony of the senses and using reason can one hope to discover how *that which is* truly is.⁶⁰ By contrast, for Gorgias the senses are the only way one can come into contact with *that which is*. Only if *that which is* appears to us, can it be known. As he writes: “*that which is* is unknown if it does not involve seeming, and seeming is weak if it does not involve *that which is*”.⁶¹ It is only by relying on the testimony of the senses that a person can know *that which is*. If what is considered in the mind is not perceived, then, as far as knowing is concerned, it might as well not be—there is no difference between considering something in the mind which truly is not and considering something that is, but which has not been perceived. In both cases the thing is unknown.

So, appearances to the contrary, Gorgias actually does *not* believe that we can only know *that which is not* (that we don’t know anything). We can only know

⁶⁰Parmenides, frg. 7, lns. 1-6.

⁶¹Gorgias, frg. 26, ln. 10-12. *τὸ μὲν εἶναι ἀφανὲς μὴ τυχὸν τοῦ δοκεῖν, τὸ δὲ δοκεῖν ἀσθενὲς μὴ τυχὸν τοῦ εἶναι*. It must be remembered that *τὸ δοκεῖν* (to seem to be) was frequently opposed to *τὸ εἶναι* (to really be)—not just in the philosophy of Parmenides, but also in common speech. The significance of this passage, then, is that seeming and reality are not opposed to each other. Rather, though they are not always present together, seeming and reality complement each other and must be combined if one is to have knowledge of what *is*.

confirmed in a separate dialogue.⁶⁴ Furthermore, because the reason given in the *Cratylus* for why contradiction is impossible entails that there is no falsity⁶⁵, it seems safe to attribute this view to the historical Euthydemus as well. If the denial of contradiction and falsity are views which the historical Euthydemus actually held, it is likely that the arguments offered in the *Euthydemus* for why there is no contradiction and falsity are similar to the arguments he actually offered: it seems doubtful that Plato would accurately attribute a view to someone and then totally misrepresent his reasons for holding that view. So, even if the arguments in the *Euthydemus* aren't Euthydemus' own, because they are probably similar to arguments the historical Euthydemus actually offered for his views, studying them here does not seem out of place.

At *Euthydemus* 283e-284b Euthydemus argues against Ctesippus that it is impossible to tell a lie. The argument runs something like this:

- 1) Only when one speaks the thing one is speaking about, is it possible to speak falsehoods (283e6-284a1).
Accordingly
- 2) If a person speaks the thing he is speaking about, he does not speak of another one of the things which are than that [thing] of which he is speaking (284a1-3).
Accordingly
- 3) The thing of which he speaks is one of those things that *are* (284a4-5).
Accordingly
- 4) The person speaking that thing [the thing of which he speaks], speaks [what *is*] (284a5-6).
- 5) The person who speaks *what is* and things that *are* speaks the truth (284a6-7).
Therefore
- 6) No person speaks falsehoods (284a7-9).⁶⁶

⁶⁴Cf. *Cratylus* 386d.

⁶⁵If all things possess all attributes as Euthydemus claims, then anything one could say about a subject would be true.

⁶⁶A possible reconstruction of the argument is as follows:

It remains for us to consider the premises of this argument. In what follows I will focus on the third premise. As it was when I analyzed the arguments of Gorgias, my main purpose is not to determine whether this argument is sound. My purpose here is to discover what Euthydemus' views on falsehood are.

At 284b Ctesippus denies the conclusion of the argument. There he claims that a person who speaks falsehoods does not speak things that *are*: the speech of the person who speaks a falsehood says things that *are not*. Against the claim that a false statement says things that are not Euthydemus offers the following argument:

- 1) The things which *are not*, *are not* (284b2-3)
Accordingly
- 2) There is nowhere that things which *are not*, *are* (284b3-4)
- 3) It is impossible for a person to do anything to things which *are not* in order to make things that are nowhere *be* (284b4-7).
- 4) When orators speak, they do something (284b8-9).
- 5) If orators do something, they make something (284b9-c1)
Accordingly
- 6) Speaking is doing and making (284c1-2).
Accordingly
- 7) Someone who spoke things that *are not* would make something (284c3).
Accordingly
- 8) No one speaks things that *are not* (284c4-5).
Therefore
- 9) No one speaks falsehoods (284c5).⁶⁷

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- 1) If a speech is to be a falsehood, then the speech must [still] be about the thing which the speech is about.
 - 2) A speech can be about the thing which it is about, only if that thing *is*.
 - 3) If the thing which the speech is about *is*, then the speech is true.
 - 4) If the speech is true, then it cannot be a lie.
Therefore
 - 5) A speech cannot be a lie.

⁶⁷If this is the correct interpretation, then it is possible to reconstruct the argument as follows:

- 1) If a thing *is not*, then it exists nowhere.

The point of this argument appears to be that the *being* of a thing is a necessary condition for there being a speech which refers to this thing.⁶⁸ If the thing to which a speech could refer *is not*, then the speech could not refer to this thing. Unfortunately, why a speech must refer to the thing which it is about, and what would happen if it did not, is not explored in this dialogue. I suspect that Euthydemus would have said that a speech which did not refer to the thing which it is about would be meaningless. But there is no support for this interpretation in the dialogue.⁶⁹

Because speaking a falsehood involves saying things that *are not*, and because it is impossible to say things that *are not*, it is impossible to speak falsehoods. Though Euthydemus does not discuss beliefs in this dialogue, he would undoubtedly have applied the same reasoning to them: because a false belief involves believing things that *are not*, and because it is impossible to believe things that *are not*, it is impossible to have a false belief.

2) If a thing exists nowhere, then a person cannot make that thing *be*.

Therefore

3) If a thing *is not*, then a person cannot make that thing *be*.

4) All speaking involves making something *be*.

5) Speaking a thing that *is not* involves making that thing *be*.

Therefore

6) It is impossible to speak a thing that *is not*.

⁶⁸This point is obscured by the notion that to be is to be somewhere and conversely that to not be is to be nowhere.

⁶⁹That a speech would be meaningless if it did not refer to a thing that *is* is argued for by Cratylus in the dialogue of that name. Cratylus claims that a speech which did not refer to a thing that *is* would be as pointless as the banging on a brass pot. Cf. *Cratylus* 429c-430a.

The topic of contradiction is closely related to that of truth and falsity. Two statements are contradictory if it is the case that one is true if and only if the other is false. Because contradiction is based on the distinction between truth and falsity, if there is no falsity, there can be no contradiction. So the denial of contradiction is a corollary of the denial of falsehood.

Like Protagoras, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus denied contradiction.⁷⁰ But the denial of contradiction by these two brothers is not the same as Protagoras' denial of it. Protagoras denied the *possibility* of contradicting—except when dealing with an abstract (unperceivable) subject matter; because such subject matters do not refer to *that which is* (appearances), they are empty and so one can say whatever one wants about them, even opposed things. For Protagoras, because all *being* is collapsed into *appearing to be to someone*, a seeming contradiction—like ‘the wind *is* both cold and warm at the same time’—is resolved by saying that the wind *is* (*appears to be*) cold to one person, and *is* (*appears to be*) warm to another. Since there is no reality behind these appearances—there is no wind that *is* both cold and warm at the same time—, there is no contradiction. In contrast to Protagoras, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus did not just deny the possibility of contradicting, they denied the very *existence* of contradiction. These two brothers held that everything always simultaneously possesses every attribute.⁷¹ So, for Euthydemus and Dionysodorus the wind itself *is* both cold and warm at the same time. Now, because every statement refers to a subject that *is*, and because the subject of

⁷⁰Euthydemus 285e. For the denial of contradiction in Protagoras see Cf. DK 80A19.

any statement simultaneously possesses every attribute, anything one can say about this subject is true. Consequently, it is impossible to contradict.⁷²

So, though there are some differences between the views of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus and those of Protagoras and Gorgias, all these thinkers believed that a person could not believe or meaningfully say *that which is not*, with the consequence that a person could never utter a false statement.

II,4 *Prodicus of Ceos*

Our sole evidence for Prodicus' opinions on the topic of falsity comes from a papyrus commentary on the book of *Ecclesiastes* by a certain Didymus in the fourth century AD. Because this passage is not found in Diels-Kranz, I quote the relevant section in full.

To Prodicus is attributed a paradoxical opinion: it is not possible to speak in contradiction. . . For if people speak in contradiction of one another, then they both speak. But it is impossible that they are both speaking with regard to the same subject matter. For, he says, he who tells the truth, and reports subject matters as they are, is the only one who is speaking; and the one who opposes him does not speak of the subject matter. . .⁷³

⁷¹*Cratylus* 386d.

⁷²Dionysodorus offers a somewhat different argument at *Euthydemus* 285d-286b, but the outcome is the same: contradiction is impossible.

⁷³Cf. Denyer (1991), pp. 26-27. There is good reason to doubt that this is an authentic account of Prodicus' views. On the other hand, given that a number of better known sophists held the view that it is impossible to contradict, it would be surprising for Didymus to have ascribed this view to Prodicus if there wasn't some basis for it in fact. It

Prodicus' views on this topic seem to be fairly straightforward. In order for there to be a contradiction two people must be speaking opposed things on the same subject matter. The utterance of the one who tells the truth refers to the subject matter as it *is*. The utterance of the one who (hypothetically) tells a falsehood does not refer to the subject matter as it *is*. But it is only by referring to a subject matter that *is* that an utterance is meaningful (this is the only way one can be speaking). Consequently, the false utterance either refers to a subject matter which *is not*—in which case it is meaningless (and so does not contradict the true statement)—or it is a true statement about another subject matter that *is* (in which case there is no contradiction because it refers to something else). Like the other sophists Prodicus seems to have held that it is impossible to say falsehoods. Because a statement or belief must refer to *that which is* (a subject matter that *is*) in order to be meaningful, and because a falsehood would refer to *that which is not*, a falsehood would be meaningless, and so neither true nor false.

A consideration of the views of the sophists with whom Plato has actually reckoned seems to confirm our earlier suspicion that these sophists believed it to be impossible to utter meaningful falsehoods. A statement must refer to *that which is* in order to be meaningful. Because a false statement could only refer to *that which is not*, and because it is impossible for a statement to refer to *that which is not*, it is impossible to utter a false statement. This represents a serious obstacle to the Eleatic Stranger's

must also be remembered that Prodicus was a pupil of Protagoras, and he may well have adopted some of his master's doctrines.

project. The Stranger set out to define the sophist in order to undermine the general sophistic position. In order to define the sophist it was necessary to discover the fundamental doctrinal similarity that underlies the views of all the sophists: the Stranger needs a general description of the sophists that could lead us to the definition. We thought we had come to this when the Stranger had discovered that all the sophists have practice dealing in *that which is not*. But if the sophists are right and it is not even possible to deal in *that which is not*, then this doctrinal similarity cannot function as the description that will lead to the definition of the sophist. In order to defeat the sophists the Stranger must show that it is indeed possible to deal in falsehoods. Only by doing this will the general sophistic position be exposed and vulnerable to attack.

Chapter III *Plato's Sophist (part i) - A Challenge to Parmenides:*
that which is not must in some sense be

Against the charge that they are deceivers the sophists were able to employ a remarkable defense. By denying the very possibility of making a meaningful false statement or holding meaningful false belief the sophists were able to show that, they not only do not deceive, but that deception itself is impossible. If deception itself is impossible, then the charge of deception isn't just false, it is absurd. But as remarkable as this defense may have been, it left the sophists more vulnerable to attack than they would have been without it. By claiming that meaningful falsehoods are impossible, the sophists committed themselves to a general epistemological position. This commitment left them vulnerable to one sustained attack—instead of having to pick off the views of the individual sophists one by one, the basic sophistic position could be attacked and (possibly) destroyed at one stroke. This is precisely the strategy of the *Sophist*—to attack the general epistemological position rather than the views of the individual sophists.

In order to show that the sophists are deceivers Plato must show that it is indeed possible to make meaningful false statements or hold meaningful false beliefs. To do this Plato must demonstrate two things. First, because false statements and beliefs amount to saying or believing *that which is not*, Plato will have to show that *that which is not* in

some sense *is*.⁷⁴ Because having a referent is a necessary condition for meaningfulness, if *that which is not* were in no way whatsoever, any statement or belief that referred to 'it' would be meaningless.⁷⁵ Second, if a true statement refers to *that which is*, and if *that which is not* is, then it seems that a statement which referred to *that which is not* would be true. If this is the case, then, even though Plato will have shown that it is possible for a statement to say *that which is not*, he will not have shown that it is possible for a statement to be false.⁷⁶ Consequently, Plato will have to show that a statement which says *that which is not* is a false statement, even though *that which is not* is. To put this differently, the existence of *that which is not* may be a necessary condition for a statement to be false, but it is not sufficient. Unless Plato can show that a statement which says *that which is not* is actually false, he will not have shown that it is possible to utter meaningful false statements or hold meaningful false beliefs.⁷⁷

In this chapter we will consider the first claim; the second claim is examined in chapter four. Before we can consider these claims, however, it is necessary to make some

⁷⁴Plato's way of putting this (through the character of Theaetetus) is to say that *that which is not* is woven together (*σμπλοκῆ*) with *that which is* (*Sophist* 240c).

⁷⁵*Sophist* 237c-e. See also the introduction to this paper (pp. 3-4).

⁷⁶This will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁷⁷The Stranger's way of putting this does not suggest that this is what he is going to do. At *Sophist* 260b-d he says that they must discover whether speech and belief blend or mingle (*μίγνυται*) with the Kind *that which is not*. However, that speech and belief mingle with not-being is not an issue: if they did not, they would not be things that are, and Plato is not setting out to prove that speech and belief *are*. So this passage must be interpreted as saying that the Stranger must discover whether speech and belief blend with *that which is not* in such a way as to result in false statements and beliefs. More will be said on this in chapter four.

general remarks about the approach to the *Sophist* these chapters will take. There are at least two current approaches to this dialogue. The first might be called the ‘logical-linguistic’ approach. Those who take this approach tend to interpret the first claim in light of the second. Though the first claim reads like a work of ontology, actually it is an attempt to lay bare the logical structure of language (and belief)—whatever the Forms may have been in the middle period dialogues, in the *Sophist* they are essentially concepts or “significations of expressions”.⁷⁸ Once Plato has laid bare the logical structure of language, he can cash out this discovery in terms of false statements (and beliefs) in order to show how they can be meaningful. The second type of approach to the *Sophist* might be called the ‘ontological’ approach. Those who take this approach tend to interpret the second claim in light of the first. Though Plato is indeed concerned with language and the possibility of meaningful discourse in the *Sophist*, he remains “ontologically committed”.⁷⁹ Whatever linguistic problems Plato faces in this dialogue will be dealt with at an ontological level.

Both of these approaches to the text have had powerful defenders. But I think that the best way to approach this dialogue is suggested by the text itself. More than any other

⁷⁸Cf. Ackrill (1957), p. 210. In footnote 2 Ackrill claims that, though the Forms may be more than ‘mere’ concepts, much of the interpretation of the *Sophist* can proceed on the assumption that they are at least concepts. The expression “significations of expressions” is derived from Frede who, according to Seligman (1972), p. 2, argues that the Forms can be adequately accounted for with such a phrase. According to Pelletier (1990), p. 48, Peck and Xenakis believe that the *Sophist* is not about Forms but rather about concepts (Peck) or the conceptual framework of language (Xenakis). If this is indeed what they held, then both would seem to be taking a logical-linguistic approach to the *Sophist*.

⁷⁹Cf. Seligman (1972), pp. 1-4.

of Plato's dialogues the *Sophist* has an *historical* element. Plato anticipates the method of Aristotle by considering the views of his predecessors and contemporaries (including his own middle-period doctrines) before he actually expounds his own views on the topic of being and non-being.⁸⁰ This discussion isn't filler. It is a deliberate methodological procedure for discovering the historical roots of the problems with which Plato himself is dealing and for demonstrating why the earlier attempts to solve these problems were inadequate. The fact that Plato's own approach to the problem of non-being is historical suggests that the best way for us to understand this text is to also consider it historically: as an attempt by Plato to solve the problems posed by his predecessors.⁸¹ If Plato's own approach is historical, we would expect each of the two major claims of the *Sophist*—that *that which is not* must in some sense *be* and that a statement which refers to *that which is not* is false, even though *that which is not* is—to be a response to one or more of Plato's

⁸⁰In addition to considering the views of Parmenides (*Sophist* 237a-259c) and “the people who say everything is one”: *Sophist* 244b-245e (a critique that will apply to all monist philosophies), Plato also considers the views of the “hot and cold philosophers”: *Sophist* 242b-244b (this phrase may specifically refer to Anaximander, though the criticism of these views will apply to those thinkers for whom being is divided up into a finite number of beings e.g. Heraclitus, Empedocles and (perhaps) Hesiod); the “giants”: *Sophist* 246a-247c (Plato probably has the Atomists in mind here); the “gods” or ‘friends of the Forms’: *Sophist* 248a-249d (Plato's own middle-period doctrine); and the views of the “late learners”: *Sophist* 251a-252e (traditionally taken to be the views of Antisthenes).

Of course, Plato was not an historian of philosophy in the modern sense. His attitude to most of his predecessors is humorous and ironical rather than objective (as Plato's way of referring to these thinkers suggests). Nonetheless, the discussion of their views plays an important role in the overall project of the *Sophist*.

⁸¹Though Seligman's approach is best characterized as ‘ontological’, he is more sensitive to the historical element in the *Sophist* than most. Pelletier's approach also has strong historical elements. He sees the *Sophist* as a response to problems Plato had with Parmenides' philosophy (e.g. if Parmenides is right, then all true meaningful sentences

predecessors. The question is to which of Plato's predecessors is each of these claims a response?

The first claim, that *that which is not* must in some sense be, is explicitly presented as a response to Parmenides.⁸² As we saw above, Parmenides held that it could never be maintained that things which are not are.⁸³ Consequently, if Plato is to show that *that which is not* is, he will have to commit parricide: 'father' Parmenides' view that not-being is not in any way whatsoever must be destroyed. The second claim—even though *that which is not* is, a statement which refers to it is still false—is not explicitly presented as a response to any one thinker. However, the way it is presented suggests that it is directed towards the sophists. As we saw above, for the sophists a statement which says *that which is* is true because it says things as they really are; a statement which says *that which is not* is false because it does not say things as they are. Now, if *that which is not* actually is, then a statement which says *that which is not*, would be saying something that is. And if a true statement is one which says something that is, then a statement which referred to this sense of not-being would be true. If Plato is to show that a false statement is indeed one that says *that which is not*, then he will have to show that, even though a false statement says something that is (*viz.* his 'enlightened' sense of not-being), it is still false. This is a problem that is clearly directed towards the sophists. The sophists could accept that there is a sense of not-being that is, while still maintaining that

mean the same thing, which is the death of discourse). See the treatment of Parmenides Pelletier gives in Pelletier (1990), pp. 8-21.

⁸²*Sophist* 241d-242b; 258c-259c.

a statement must refer to absolute not-being in order to be false, with the consequence that it is impossible to utter a false statement. So, if Plato is to show that it is possible to utter a meaningful false statement, he will have to show that a false statement actually does say something that is.

If the two main claims of the *Sophist* are specific responses to the views of Parmenides and the sophists, then neither reading the first claim in light of the second (the ‘logical-linguistic’ approach) nor reading the second claim in light of the first (the ‘ontological’ approach) is the best way to understand this dialogue. Each claim must be taken as a specific response to a specific thinker (or group of thinkers). Of course, this does not mean that these two claims are unrelated—because the views of the sophists are related to the views of Parmenides, a challenge to one will quite likely involve the other. But it does mean that we cannot confine our search for the relation between these two claims to the text itself: an examination of the relationship between them must also consider the historic relation between the views of Parmenides and those of the sophists.

There are two problems with which the Stranger must deal if he is to show that *that which is not* must in some sense be. (a) First, the Stranger will have to show that being and not-being are not contraries. If being and not-being were contraries, then it could not be the case that they both *are*. Because the only way something can be is by participating in being, and because one contrary cannot participate in the other, if being

⁸³Parmenides, frg. 7, ln. 1. This passage is twice quoted by the Stranger (at *Sophist* 237a and 258d).

and not-being were contraries, not-being could not be. As we saw above, the view that being and not-being are contrary was Parmenides' position. Accordingly, Plato's strategy for showing that being and not-being are not contrary is to show that Parmenides' own conception of being involves not-being. (b) Second, because being and not-being are not contrary, the Stranger will have to show how they are in fact related to each other. If being and not-being are not contraries, then there are three ways they could be related to each other. (i) the relation between them could be one of identity: 'being' and 'not-being' could just be two words for the same thing. (ii) One could be dependent on the other (what being is could be dependent on what not-being is, or what not-being is could be dependent on what being is)⁸⁴; or (iii) they could be complementary (what being is depends on what not-being is and what not-being is depends on what being is).⁸⁵

III,1 *That being and not-being are not contraries*

The Stranger is careful to distinguish his own sense of non-being from that of Parmenides. In contrast to the former, which is simply referred to as *τὸ μὴ ὄν*, when discussing not-being in connection with Parmenides, the Stranger uses such phrases as 'absolute not-being' (*τὸ μηδαμῶς ὄν*) and 'that which is not by itself' (*τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ*

⁸⁴To use an Aristotelian expression one could be "prior by nature" to the other. (Cf. *Cat.* 12 14a29-35; *Met.* 5 11,1019a1-14).

⁸⁵To use the Aristotelian expression being and not-being could be "simultaneous by nature" (Cf. *Cat.* 13 14b26-32).

καθ' αὐτό).⁸⁶ Parmenides, of course, never used expressions like these to denote not-being—there was no need to do this. The goddess' chastisement of foolish mortals—those who believe that to be and not to be are the same and not the same—makes it clear that being and not-being are absolutes.⁸⁷ Plato, however, needs room to maneuver. Having accepted that it is impossible to talk about absolute not-being, if Plato is to maintain that not-being is, he will have to show that not-being is not absolute.⁸⁸

Because Plato first suggests that being and not-being are not contraries in his treatment of Parmenides at *Sophist* 244b-245e, it is necessary to consider this section of the dialogue in detail. The problem is that it is difficult to know what approach we should take to this part of the text. On the one hand, Parmenides is presented as just another philosopher who had expressed views on the nature of being—his views are presented alongside those of the 'hot and cold philosophers', the 'gods' and the 'giants'. In this context a discussion of Parmenides' views is simply part of an investigation into how many beings there are and what they are like.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the highly

⁸⁶Cf. *Sophist* 237b; *Sophist* 238c. The Stranger also characterizes this sense of not-being as that which is contrary to being at *Sophist* 258e-259a.

⁸⁷Parmenides, frg. 6, lns. 4-9.

⁸⁸Plato was not the first to hold that not-being must in some sense be. For the Atomists not-being exists as void: as the place between the atoms (Cf. Aristotle *Met.* 1 4,985b4 -19 (DK 67 A 6). Because they held that not-being is, the Atomists were able to discuss its nature without facing the problem of how one can speak of *that which is not*.

⁸⁹*Sophist* 242c. However, this investigation is not simply an attempt to discover what Plato's predecessors had believed. The Stranger's aim in this investigation is to show that his predecessor's discussion of the nature of being is inadequate: it leaves us as much in the dark about the nature of being as we are about the nature of not-being (Cf. *Sophist* 242c; *Sophist* 245e).

charged language which the Stranger had already used in connection with Parmenides—‘We must kill father Parmenides’—makes it doubtful that Parmenides could be regarded as ‘just another philosopher’ anywhere in this dialogue. The central thesis of the first part of the *Sophist* is to show that Parmenides is wrong: not-being must in some sense be.⁹⁰ For this reason it would be surprising indeed if the refutation of Parmenides’ views at *Sophist*, 244b-245e did not also attempt to show that not-being is. So what should we make of Plato’s refutation of Parmenides at *Sophist* 244b-245e? Is it merely an attempt to discover and critique what Parmenides had believed being to be, or does it involve showing that being and not-being are not contraries, with the consequence that, because being is, not-being must also be? This problem must be dealt with if we are to understand this section of the text.

That Plato’s aim at *Sophist* 244b-245e is to show that Parmenides’ notion of being is inadequate is not disputed. What is questioned is whether Plato is also concerned with showing here that being and not-being are not absolute contraries. I think that he is. Plato’s method for showing that Parmenides’ conception of being is inadequate is to show that, if being is a one and a whole as Parmenides had believed it to be⁹¹, then it

⁹⁰*Sophist* 241d.

⁹¹Parmenides asserts that being is of a single kind at frg. 8. ln. 4, and one (ἕν) at frg. 8, ln. 6 (it should be noted that Plato often uses the article when referring to the oneness of Parmenidean being (τὸ ἕν) as at *Sophist* 244d, which would be translated as ‘the one’ or ‘unity’). Plato discusses Parmenides’ view that being is one at *Sophist* 244b-e. That being is a whole (ὅλον) is asserted by Parmenides at frg. 8, ln. 4 and ln. 38 (here too Plato often uses the article when referring to the wholeness of Parmenidean being (τὸ ὅλον) as at *Sophist* 244d, which should be rendered as ‘the whole’ or ‘wholeness’). Plato discusses Parmenides’ view that being is a whole at *Sophist* 244e-246a.

involves not-being—Plato says as much in connection with his discussion of the wholeness of being of Parmenidean being⁹², and at least suggests it in connection with his discussion of the oneness of Parmenidean being.⁹³ If being as a one and as a whole involves not-being, then either (a) being is not a one or a whole, or (b) being truly involves not-being. But because Parmenides had argued that, if being were many or not a whole, it would involve not-being⁹⁴, he cannot accept (a) while still maintaining his view that being and not-being are contrary. So, if Plato is successful, there will be no way for Parmenides to deny that being involves not-being.

The first point to consider, then, is how the Stranger shows that the oneness of being involves not-being. The Stranger claims that, because a name is different from that which it names, both a name and the thing it names must be. But if both a name and the thing named *are*, then being is two (many) rather than one. The only way being could be one is if the name is the same as the thing named. But in this case, either (i) the name is the name of nothing (there is nothing other than the name itself to which the name could

⁹²*Sophist* 245c.

⁹³This is discussed below.

⁹⁴Though Parmenides does not explicitly argue for why the manyness of being would involve not-being, it seems to follow from what he does say about being. Because the only real distinction that there is is between being and not-being, and because not-being truly is not, the only way being could be many is if it were internally divided. But being cannot be internally divided because then it would not be perfected (equally balanced in all directions from the center). Because what is imperfect is deficient, and because what is deficient involves not-being—a thing that is deficient is deficient in everything—, being must be one.

Parmenides' claim that being is a whole seems to amount to the claim that being is complete (i.e. being lacks nothing). Clearly, if being were not whole (incomplete), then it would be deficient which would mean that it involves not-being.

refer), or (ii) the name names itself.⁹⁵ But (i) because the name of nothing involves saying *that which is not*, the name (something which *is*) involves *that which is not*—something which, on Parmenidean principles, we cannot accept. And (ii) if the name names itself, then it is no more than the name of a name. To understand why this is a problem we need to consider Plato's claim in the *Cratylus* that a name is an imitation of a thing.⁹⁶ Now, because a name is an imitation of a thing, the 'name of a name' could only be one of two things. (a) The name of a name could be the imitation of an imitation which is itself the imitation of a thing (this would make a name of a name analogous to a shadow from the *Republic* which is also said to be an imitation of an imitation). (b) The name of a name could be the imitation of an imitation which itself imitates the 'first' imitation: the 'name of a name' could be an imitation of itself (with the consequence that it would be viciously circular). Clearly, neither of these options would be acceptable to Parmenides. Parmenides could not hold that the name of a name is (a) without conceding that being is many, which would mean that being involves not-being. And if he were to subscribe to (b), then he would be forced to admit that being is nothing. Because an imitation derives its being from what it imitates, if a name imitated itself, then it would not derive its being from anything. And if a name did not derive its being from anything, it would be nothing. Consequently, the oneness of being must involve not-being.⁹⁷

⁹⁵The Stranger spells out both these options at *Sophist* 244d.

⁹⁶*Cratylus* 430a-b.

⁹⁷Clearly, this interpretation of the second argument only works if in the *Sophist* Plato still held the same views on names that he had held in the *Cratylus*. This is definitely not the case—Plato's views on names had evolved significantly from the time when he wrote that earlier dialogue. For example, in the *Cratylus* names are said to be

Next, the Stranger shows that Parmenides' conception of wholeness involves not-being. Parmenides characterized the wholeness (completeness) of being by comparing it to the bulk of a perfectly rounded sphere.⁹⁸ Now this comparison suggests that being is a material (corporeal or extended) entity.⁹⁹ If being is a material sphere, then it must have a middle and extremities—it must have (many) parts. If being is a whole of parts, then, though each of its parts could be a one (a unity), being itself could not be that which is really one (being would not be a real unity). But if being is not a real unity, then it falls short of itself (i.e. it is deficient). Because anything which is deficient involves *that which is not*, Parmenides' conception of being as a whole involves not-being.¹⁰⁰

true or false, while in the *Sophist* it is statements (the interweavings of nouns and verbs), not words, which are true or false; in the *Cratylus* names are said to *imitate* things, while in the later part of the *Sophist* Plato will say that words *indicate* things (or actions). However, in spite of these differences I think the fundamental point remains the same in both dialogues: names derive their being (what they are) from the things they name. If Plato still held this view, then a name of a name would be nothing.

⁹⁸Parmenides, frg. 8, lns. 43-45. Plato quotes this passage at *Sophist* 244e.

⁹⁹Whether or not Parmenides meant for this analogy to be taken literally has been a matter of debate. However, Plato probably should not have been so quick to ascribe a literal interpretation to this simile. The Forms in his own middle-period ontology, while essentially Parmenidoid in character, are certainly not material or composite (Cf. *Phaedo* 78c-d). Perhaps Plato's interpretation of Parmenides was influenced by Melissus who seems to have held that being is corporeal (Cf. frg. 3; frg. 7).

Even if Parmenides' being is corporeal, when he calls it a 'whole', he most certainly does not mean that it is a whole of parts. For Parmenides 'wholeness' is virtually synonymous with 'completeness'; when Parmenides says that being is a whole he means that it is self-sufficient—being lacks nothing. The purpose of the sphere analogy is not to *describe* what being looks like, but rather to bring home this very point: like the bulk of a ball, being is perfectly balanced in every direction and does not need anything else to hold it together. For this reason Plato seems to misrepresent Parmenides' position.

However, even if Plato has misunderstood Parmenides' conception of wholeness, if Parmenidean being truly is material, Plato's criticisms may not be out of place.

¹⁰⁰*Sophist* 245c.

The specific criticisms Plato levels against Parmenides are probably unfair.¹⁰¹

There is, however, some truth to his claim that Parmenides' conception of being involves not-being. The Parmenidean conception of being is contrast dependent. Parmenides can only argue that being is the way it is by showing that it could not be any other way.

Without some conception of not-being his arguments for why being must be the way it is will not work.¹⁰² But though Parmenides' conception of being does indeed seem to

¹⁰¹For a good discussion of this see Seligman (1974), pp. 25-29.

¹⁰²We can see why this is so if we consider one of Parmenides' arguments for why being is ungenerated. 'If being were ungenerated, then it could only come into being out of and by the agency of not-being. Because not-being cannot function as the material or the efficient cause of being, being must be ungenerated' (frg. 8, lns. 5-9). Clearly this argument only works if we already have some conception of not-being. If we knew nothing about not-being, then we would not know that it could never function as a material or an efficient cause.

It's not just Parmenides' arguments for why being must possess the qualities it does that are problematic, the mere fact that he tries to predicate these qualities of being presents difficulties of the 'late-learner' sort. Consider the statement 'being is ungenerated'. If 'ungenerated' is to be meaningful, it must have a referent. Now, by Parmenides' own principles this term could only refer to being or not-being. But, (i) if this term were to refer to being, then it would be synonymous with 'being' and the statement 'Being is ungenerated' would be equivalent to 'Being is being'. And (ii) if 'ungenerated' refers to not-being, then it would not have a referent. This would make the 'term' a meaningless sound (a mere name), and any statement which predicated this 'term' of a subject would also be meaningless. So, Parmenides would be forced to either accept that the only thing he can say about being is that it is being (an empty tautology), or grant that the qualities of being refer to something other than being—to not-being—for their meaningfulness, and then predicate these qualities of being.

This problem does not necessarily mean that Parmenides has to accept that being involves not-being. Like the 'late-learners' he could accept that we can only utter tautological statements about being. It does mean, however, that Parmenides' poem is misleading: the whole poem boils down to Parmenides repeating the statement 'Being is being' over and over again. If the goddess was truly concerned that Parmenides know "the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth", she should only have uttered this empty statement once. Moreover, the goddess tells us to judge her refutation 'with our reason'. But if the whole poem is just the statement 'Being is being', what is there for us to judge?

For a somewhat condensed version of this criticism see Seligman (1974), p. 26.

involve not-being, it does not involve it in a way that would suit Plato's project.

Parmenidean being involves not-being in the sense that one could not *say* anything about being (except, perhaps, that it *is* being), or argue that being is the way it is, unless one has some notion of not-being. But this does not mean that being itself could not truly be as Parmenides says it is: totally devoid of not-being with the consequence that it is ungenerated, incorruptible, changeless, one and perfect. In order to show that being and not-being are not contraries, Plato needs to show that Parmenidean being itself involves not-being, not merely that being could not be conceived unless we had some notion of not-being. This is why Plato attacks the oneness and the wholeness of being. The oneness and the wholeness of being are qualities that being itself is supposed to have. By showing that the possession of these qualities means that Parmenidean being involves not-being, Plato shows that being itself involves not-being, not merely that being could not be conceived unless we had some notion of not-being.

Because the oneness and the wholeness of being involve being with not-being, being and not-being are not contraries. Because being and not-being are not contraries, Parmenides' conception of being is incorrect.

III,2 *The relationship between being and not-being*

The claim that being and not-being are not contraries is a key discovery in the *Sophist*. This claim allows the Stranger to establish that not-being is: the existence of *that which is not* being a necessary condition for the possibility of meaningful statement

which takes *that which is not* as its object. But the Stranger pays a high price for this discovery. Now that it has been shown that being and not-being are not absolute contraries, the nature of being has become as mysterious as the nature of not-being.¹⁰³ In his middle period Plato had largely accepted the Parmenidean conception of being. Now, as we saw above, Parmenides' views on being (his arguments for why being must be the way it is) hinged on its contrast with not-being. It is only because not-being cannot be in any way whatsoever that Parmenides can argue that being must be ungenerated, incorruptible, changeless, one and perfect. But now that it has been shown that being and not-being have something in common (both of them *are*), everything Parmenides had said about the nature of being has been cast into doubt. If being and not-being are not contraries, then all of Parmenides' arguments for why being must be the way it is collapse. And because Plato had largely accepted these arguments, his own middle period conception of being falls with that of Parmenides. What is needed is a new conception of being: one that is able to account for the existence of *that which is not*. It is only by discovering the nature of being that *that which is not* can be understood.

But how is the nature of being and not-being supposed to be grasped? In the middle period dialogues things which are (Forms) are understood *intuitively*. A proper education enables one to open the eye of the soul and gaze upon the Forms, thereby grasping their inherent nature.¹⁰⁴ In the later period a new way of grasping the nature of

¹⁰³As the stranger himself says at *Sophist* 250d.

¹⁰⁴See Plato's discussion of the Allegory of the Cave *Republic* VII, 514a-519c. That a Form (at least the Form of beauty) is grasped intuitively also seems to be the meaning behind Plato's account of the 'ladder of love' at *Symposium* 210a-212c. After

the Forms is introduced: the Forms are to be understood *relationally*—a Form must be understood in terms of how it ‘hangs together’ with other Forms.¹⁰⁵ Because the nature of being and not-being must be understood in terms of relation, it will not be enough to consider each one separately. Being and not-being must be understood in terms of how they relate to each other and to the other things that are.

To understand how being and not-being are to be grasped relationally, it is necessary to briefly consider Plato’s notion of relation. For Plato relations are often bound up with similarity.¹⁰⁶ Any likeness between different things indicates that there is a real connection of some sort between those things. In the middle period a ‘horizontal’ likeness (a likeness between two particulars) was explained in terms of a ‘vertical’ relation (a relation between a Form and the particulars which participate in it). The similarity between the justice in the souls of two philosophers, for example, is explained by the fact that both souls participate in the same Form (the Form of Justice).¹⁰⁷ In the later period the Form-particular relationship takes a back seat to the Form-Form relationship. Form-Form relations are extremely important for the science of dialectic (the science of collection and division). The dialectician notes the relevant similarities

rising up through the love of less beautiful things, one at last comes to see the beautiful itself.

¹⁰⁵This does not necessarily mean that individual Forms are no longer grasped intuitively. But the importance of intuition as a way of grasping the Forms has lessened.

¹⁰⁶A possible exception is the relationship between contraries such as hot and cold. In a way it seems that here we have a relation between things which are dissimilar. Still, in another way there is a similarity between hot and cold insofar as they both deal with temperature.

and dissimilarities which really exist between the things he is trying to understand (he ‘collects’). He then traces out the differences which really exist between the things he has ‘collected’ (he ‘divides’ these things according to their kinds).¹⁰⁸ The science of dialectic entails that generally (i.e. for Forms that are indeed related to other Forms) the nature of a Form is determined, at least in part, by its relation to other Forms. For this reason, provided being and not-being do indeed relate to other things that are, understanding their nature will involve considering their relation to each other and to other Forms.

There are only three ways that Forms could be related to each other: (a) no Form could combine with any other Form; (b) every Form could combine with every other Form; (c) some Forms could combine, while others do not.¹⁰⁹ Obviously, there are many combination possibilities with (c): some Forms may combine with only one other Form, while others may combine with a great many Forms, or even with all other Forms.

(a) The Stranger offers a barrage of arguments against the view that no Form partakes of any other. (i) If things such as motion and rest did not partake of being, then they would not be. If it were the case that such things truly are not, then it would be impossible to predicate them of anything (including being). If it were impossible to predicate anything of being, then being (like not-being) would be devoid of descriptive

¹⁰⁷Later Plato also grappled with the problems of ‘vertical’ similarity (the similarity between a Form and a particular which participates in it) in his discussion of the ‘third man’ arguments. Cf. *Parmenides* 132d-133a.

¹⁰⁸*Sophist* 253b-c. See also *Phaedrus* 262a; 265e-266c. For a number of examples of collection and division see the numerous failed attempts to define the sophist at *Sophist* 218e-231c.

¹⁰⁹*Sophist* 251d.

content and so could not be spoken of.¹¹⁰ (ii) Some thinkers believe that the world is made up of material constituents which blend with each other. What they say would be meaningless if it were impossible for things to blend with other things (and presumably though what they say is wrong, it is still meaningful).¹¹¹ (iii) The thinkers who hold that nothing combines with anything else would have to accept the consequence that it is impossible to construct 'synthetic' statements. Because such statements involve combining a subject with a different predicate (e.g. 'man' is combined with 'good' to produce the statement 'man is good'), such 'statements' would be meaningless. But the thinkers who accept that nothing combines with anything else must use synthetic statements to express their views. Consequently, these thinkers betray their philosophy by expressing it.¹¹² For these reasons the view that no Form combines with any other must be false.

¹¹⁰*Sophist* 251e-252a. Though this argument will apply to anyone who held that being has descriptive content, it seems to be particularly relevant to Parmenides. For Parmenides the qualities of being (e.g. resting (being at rest)) are indeed combined with being: Being is at rest. But these qualities are predicated of being without already having a distinct nature. To put this differently, there is a difference between a quality being predicated of being (e.g. Being is at rest) and that quality being what it is (e.g. Rest *is*). Unless a quality already *is* something, it cannot be predicated of anything (including being). Because these qualities do not have a separate nature, predicating them of being does not tell us anything about the nature of being (being is devoid of descriptive content).

¹¹¹*Sophist* 252b. See also Ackrill (1955), pp. 204-206.

¹¹²*Sophist* 252b-c. It is fair to ask whether this snappy argument is really satisfactory. The 'late-learners' were committed to their views for what they found to be compelling theoretical reasons. Consequently, pointing out that they must use synthetic statements to express their views seems to miss the point. It's kind of like trying to refute Zeno's view on motion by walking across a stadium. In both cases unless the problem is dealt with at the theoretical level, the refutation is not wholly satisfactory.

(b) If every Form combined with every other Form, then there would be no contraries (things which are most opposed to each other) such as motion and rest. If motion and rest combined with each other, then motion would be at rest and rest would be in motion.

Because it is ruled out by very strict necessity that motion rest or rest move, these Forms do not combine.¹¹³ Because there are at least two Forms which do not combine, it is not the case that every Form combines with every other Form.

(c) Because the view that no Form partakes of any other and the view that every Form combines with every other are false, the view that some Forms combine while others do not must be correct. It remains for the Stranger to draw out the implications of this view.

Unlike the first two schemes, the view that some Forms combine while others do not entails that not all Forms are equal. There are at least two ways in which some Forms could be considered 'greater' than others. (1) The 'greatness' of a Form could be a function of the number of other Forms which partake of it. 'Great' Forms will be partaken of by a great number of other Forms (perhaps by all other Forms), while few Forms will partake of 'lesser' Forms. I will call this form of greatness 'extensional greatness'. (2) The 'greatness' of a Form could be a function of the *role* it plays in the relations among Forms. 'Great' Forms would be those which make it possible for Forms to participate in each other: 'Great' Forms would be a necessary condition for the

¹¹³Cf. *Sophist* 252d. See also *Sophist* 255a-b where Plato says that motion cannot rest and rest cannot move because then the one would become the contrary to its nature (thus ceasing to be what it is).

coherence of Forms.¹¹⁴ And because, as we saw above, what a Form is is determined (at least in part) by its relations with other Forms, ‘great’ Forms would be responsible for other Forms being what they are. Because it is the nature of the ‘great’ Forms which makes them more important than the others (and not just the number of other Forms with which they combine), these Forms can be said to be *intensionally* greater than others.¹¹⁵ A Kind that is both extensionally and intensionally great is said to be a ‘very great’ Kind (*μέγιστον γένος*).¹¹⁶

Rather than considering all the Forms the Stranger suggests focusing on the ‘very great’ Kinds. There are at least two good reasons for this. First, because the ‘very great’ Kinds combine with the greatest number of other Forms, gaining an understanding of

¹¹⁴Exactly how great Kinds provide a necessary condition for the combination of lesser Forms will be discussed below when we consider the ‘very great’ Kinds in detail.

¹¹⁵Plato illustrates the extensional and intensional greatness of certain Forms by comparing them to the vowels in the alphabet. Extensionally, the vowels of the alphabet are found in more words (combinations of letters) than the consonants. Intensionally, the vowels of the alphabet are a necessary condition for the combination of letters into words. Cf. *Sophist* 253a.

¹¹⁶There is a certain tension between the extensional and the intensional greatness of the ‘very great’ Kinds. The problem is that the difference between an extensionally great Form and an extensionally ordinary Form is merely one of degree, while the intensionally great Forms differ from the others in kind—for this reason Plato’s use of the superlative (*μέγιστον*) when referring to these Kinds can be somewhat misleading: it implies that the only difference between Forms is one of degree (just as there are the ‘greatest’ Forms, so there are some Forms which, though not ‘very great’, are still ‘greater’ than others). While this may be true in an extensional sense, in an intensional sense a Form is either ‘great’ or ‘lesser’.

It is primarily the intensional greatness of a Kind which makes it ‘very great’. This is due in part to the fact that, though all intensionally great Forms will also be extensionally great (because all Forms stand in relations), not all extensionally great Forms will also be intensionally great. Nonetheless, the extensional greatness of a ‘very great’ Kind will be very important for establishing that it is indeed possible to say or believe *that which is not*.

these Kinds will provide the most general knowledge of the other combinations of Forms (including the combination of Forms which will make up the Kind Sophist). Secondly, because the ‘very great’ Kinds constitute a necessary condition for the combination of Forms, they are necessary for the science of dialectic. Because the Stranger’s method for defining the sophist is dialectical, an understanding of the conditions of dialectic seems called for.¹¹⁷ The five ‘very great’ Kinds which the Stranger identifies are being, motion and rest¹¹⁸—the three Forms that played such an important role in his rejection of the view that no Form partakes of any other Forms and that every Form combines with every other Form—together with sameness and difference.¹¹⁹

The Stranger’s first step is to show that sameness and difference are indeed distinct from being, motion and rest. Of course, it has already been shown that motion and rest are distinct from each other—his arguments against those who believe that every Form combines with every other Form showed this. It has also been shown that being is different from motion and rest. If being were the same as motion, then, because rest cannot combine with motion, rest would not be. Because this is false, being cannot be the

¹¹⁷Plato’s discussion of the conditions for combination is aptly termed ‘meta-dialectic’ by Seligman (1974), pp. 52-54.

¹¹⁸Motion and rest will later be dropped. Though they are extensionally great (virtually everything will partake of one or the other), they lack intensional greatness.

¹¹⁹*Sophist* 254d-255a. It is worth noting that not-being is not introduced as one of the ‘very great’ Kinds (though it will later be shown that not-being is, in fact, a Kind of this sort). The reason for this is to be found in the Stranger’s earlier claim that, because being and not-being have been shown to have something in common, shedding light on the nature of one will likely reveal the nature of the other (*Sophist* 250e-251a). Once the nature of being has been revealed, the Stranger will explicitly consider the nature of not-being.

same as motion (and *mutatis mutandis* being cannot be the same as rest).¹²⁰ Because motion, rest and being are distinct, it remains for the Stranger to show that sameness and difference are distinct from these other three Kinds.

The Stranger's arguments for why motion and rest are distinct from sameness and difference are similar to his arguments for why motion and rest are distinct from being. Because both motion and rest participate in sameness and difference, if motion were the same as sameness, rest would partake of motion. Because rest cannot participate in motion, motion cannot be the same as sameness. *Mutatis mutandis* rest cannot be the same as sameness. For similar reasons neither motion nor rest could be the same as difference. Consequently, motion and rest must be distinct from sameness and difference.¹²¹

The Stranger's argument for why being cannot be the same as sameness runs as follows: If being were the same as sameness, then motion and rest (things that *are*) would be the same. But because motion and rest are not the same, being cannot be the same as sameness. Consequently, sameness is a fourth Kind alongside motion, rest and being.¹²²

The Stranger could have used a similar argument to show that difference must be distinct from being. Instead he argues as follows: some of the things that are are said by

¹²⁰*Sophist* 250a-c. As the Stranger points out, this is similar to his earlier refutation of the views of the 'hot and cold' philosophers (*Sophist* 243d-244b).

¹²¹*Sophist* 255a-b.

¹²²*Sophist* 255b-c. This argument is unsound. As we shall see below, a thing always partakes of sameness with respect to itself. Consequently, the claim that both motion and rest partake of sameness does not mean that they would be the same as each other, it means that each would be the same as itself. Because there is no problem with

themselves (*αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ*) and others are always said in relation to other things (*πρὸς ἄλλα*).¹²³ Because the different is always said in relation to something else, if being were the same as the different, all things which are would be said in relation to other things. But many things which are said by themselves. Consequently, being cannot be the same as difference.¹²⁴

It should be noted that 'being different from' is not the same as 'being incompatible with'. Difference is a formal condition which must be satisfied if two or more separate entities are to be separate. A statement that takes the form of 'x is different from y' means that x is numerically distinct (a separate entity) from y. By contrast, incompatibility requires, not only that the incompatibles be numerically distinct from each other, but also that they be directly opposed to each other. In other words, for two things to be incompatible, both a formal and a material condition must be satisfied. Formally, the incompatibles must be numerically distinct from each other. Materially, there must be something about the natures of the things which are numerically distinct from each other which causes them to actually oppose one another. Because incompatibility is not the same as mere difference, Plato uses different expressions to characterize it. Things which are incompatible are said to be "most contrary to each other" or "entirely different from each other".¹²⁵ More will be said on the distinction between mere difference and incompatibility when we consider Plato's definition of a

both motion being the same as itself and rest being the same as itself, this argument does not establish that being could not be identical to sameness.

¹²³*Sophist* 255c.

¹²⁴*Sophist* 255c-e.

false statement in Part 2 of chapter four. This distinction will also be considered in great detail in Appendix A.

Having established that being, motion, rest, sameness and difference are indeed distinct Kinds¹²⁶ the Stranger is now in a position to consider how these different Kinds stand with respect to each other. If we consider the Kinds in pairs, there are four ways in which the Kinds could relate to each other in terms of participation. These possibilities are:

- (1) x partakes of y and y does not partake of x
- (2) x partakes of y and y partakes of x
- (3) x does not partake of y and y does not partake of x
- (4) x does not partake of y and y partakes of x.

The first and the fourth type have something in common: in both cases one Kind partakes of another, while the other does not partake of it. Among the 'very great' Kinds it is clear that the relationship between being and motion and being and rest is of this sort. In both cases motion and rest partake of being, while being does not partake of motion or rest.¹²⁷ The third type of relation characterizes the relationship between motion and rest: motion does not partake of rest and rest does not partake of motion. What remains to be considered is how sameness and difference relate to each other and to the other Kinds that are.

¹²⁵*Sophist* 250a, 255e.

¹²⁶The Stranger does not actually argue that rest is distinct from being, sameness or difference. The probable reason for this is that by a simple act of substitution the arguments which establish that motion is distinct from these three other Kinds will establish that rest is different as well. It is assumed that Theaetetus could make this substitution himself without the Stranger having to do it for him.

¹²⁷Cf. *Sophist* 250c.

The Stranger's method for illustrating how sameness and difference stand with respect to each other and to the other Kinds that are is unusual. He generates a series of seemingly contradictory statements which explicitly or implicitly involve sameness or difference with one other Kind.¹²⁸ He then shows that these 'contradictions' are based on an improper understanding of what sameness and difference are. Once the nature of these Kinds is understood, the fact that the contradiction is merely apparent is made clear. The first two seeming contradictions are semantically identical, even though they appear to be exact opposites. (1) The first contradiction explicitly concerns the relationship between motion and sameness: "Motion is the same and not the same".¹²⁹ If 'the same' has the same meaning in both occurrences, then obviously this is a contradiction. However, the contradiction is only apparent—"the same" has a different referent in both occurrences. (1a) Motion is the same because, like everything else, it participates in sameness with respect to itself (motion is the same as itself). In this case 'the same' indicates motion's *participation* in the Form of sameness. (1b) But motion is not the same because it is different from (participates in difference with respect to) the Kind sameness—motion itself is not identical to sameness itself. In this case 'the same' indicates the Form of sameness, not motion's participation in this Form. Because the way motion is the same is different from the way motion is not the same, 'Motion is the same and not the same' is not self-contradictory. (2) The second seeming contradiction explicitly concerns the relationship between motion and difference: "Motion is different and not different".

¹²⁸The other Kind that the Stranger uses throughout his examination of sameness and difference is motion. But rest, being or anything else would also work.

Though this appears to be self-contradictory, once again the contradiction is merely apparent. (2a) Motion is different because, like everything else, it participates in difference with respect to everything that is not motion—motion is numerically distinct from everything that is not motion. (2b) But motion also is not different because it participates in sameness with respect to itself—the Kind motion is not different from itself.

When we consider the Stranger's solutions to these seeming contradictions, we find that there is an important difference between his discussion of how sameness and difference are related to each other (and to the other things that are), and his earlier discussion of how motion, rest and being are related to each other. In his earlier discussion the Stranger had only considered two Kinds at once. The Stranger first considered how motion and rest stand with respect to each other; he then considered the relationship between motion and being; finally, he considered the relationship between rest and being. By contrast, when, in his discussion of sameness and difference, the Stranger only considered two Kinds at once (motion and sameness or motion and difference), a seeming contradiction arose. It was only by bringing in the third Kind (difference in the case of motion and sameness; sameness in the case of motion and difference) that the contradiction was shown to be merely apparent.¹³⁰ Why should a

¹²⁹*Sophist* 256a-b.

¹³⁰Though a consideration of sameness and difference always involves one other Form, the nature of this Form is unimportant. As was mentioned above, though the Stranger uses motion, rest, being or anything else would also have worked—in fact, even sameness and difference could work (e.g. sameness is the same (it participates in sameness with respect to itself) and not the Same (it participates in difference with

discussion which considered sameness and motion without difference, or which considered difference and motion without sameness result in a contradiction? The reason seems to be that sameness and difference are fundamentally connected. Because these Kinds are connected, merely comparing one or the other to motion was doomed to fail. It is only as a unity that sameness and difference could be related to motion.

But what, then, is the nature of the connection between sameness and difference? In terms of our earlier typology it would seem that the connection between them is best characterized as mutual participation: sameness partakes of difference and difference partakes of sameness. But though this is undoubtedly right, it is not the whole story. The relationship between sameness and difference is introduced in connection with a third Kind (motion). This suggests that the connection between sameness and difference isn't so much about the Kinds sameness and difference, as it is about how these Kinds *function* together in a third Kind (such as motion).

So how do sameness and difference function together in another Kind? As was mentioned above, some of the things that *are* are always said by themselves (*αὐτὰ καθ' αὐτά*), while others are always said in relation to other things (*πρὸς ἄλλα*). Sameness and difference function as principles which allow other Kinds to be said in themselves and in relation to other things. Difference functions in a thing's relation to another thing.

respect to everything else)). However, because this would be an atypical example (it involves self-predication), it is not surprising that the Stranger does not use it.

Without going into detail about self-predication, it seems clear that the Forms do participate in themselves. The Stranger's argument for why motion and rest cannot participate in each other—because then motion would be at rest and rest would be in motion—entails that these Forms do indeed participate in themselves.

It is impossible to say that something is different without specifying what it is different from: 'Motion is different', for example, is incomplete—it must be said what motion is different from (e.g. 'Motion is different from being'). By contrast, sameness functions in a thing's relation to itself, a thing can only be the same as itself. If a thing were the same as something else, then those 'two' entities would really be one. So, 'Motion is the same' is shorthand for 'Motion is the same as itself'.¹³¹

Together sameness and difference function as a necessary condition for something being what it is in its own right. They do this by making it possible for a Form to stand in relations with other Forms. It is only because motion, for example, is the same as itself and different from everything else that it can relate to another Kind such as being. If motion were not the same as itself, it would not be something capable of standing in a

¹³¹Though the *function* of sameness in a thing does not involve that thing in a relation with anything else (a thing is the same as itself), because sameness is itself a Kind, anything which participates in it is in a relation to something else. That is, sameness *qua* function is always said of another thing in-itself, but sameness *qua* Form is always said of another thing as a relation between that thing and the Kind sameness. The reason for this clumsy distinction between sameness as a function and sameness as a thing is the fact that sameness has not lost its entitative character. Though sameness can only be understood in terms of its function in other things, it is still a thing in its own right.

Aristotle's harshest criticism of Plato was not that Plato made his principles transcendent, but that he made his principles entities—because the Forms are entities they do not explain what things such as beauty are: the Form of Beauty is just the word 'beauty' with adjectives like 'ungenerated' and 'incorruptible' tacked onto the end. With sameness and difference Plato is approaching the idea of non-entitative principles—principles which can only be understood in terms of how they function in something else, not in terms of themselves. Nonetheless, sameness and difference have not fully lost their entitative character. It is for this reason that the clumsy distinction between sameness itself and the function of sameness in other things is necessary. The scheme would have been much simpler if Plato had made sameness and difference into principles immanent in other Kinds, instead of Kinds themselves.

relation. And if motion were not different from something such as being, then it would be identical to that entity and so could not be externally related to it. Because, as we saw above, the nature of a Form is determined (at least in part) by its relations with other Forms, by making it possible for other Forms to relate, sameness and difference are ultimately responsible for any Form being what it is. It is this that makes sameness and difference into intensionally great Kinds.

The third seeming contradiction does not explicitly involve sameness and difference: it explicitly involves the relationship between motion, being and not-being. The third apparent contradiction says: Motion really is not and is.¹³² Motion *is* because it partakes of the Kind being and motion *is not* because it is different from (partakes of difference with respect to) the Kind being, and thus is not being.

With this third seeming contradiction the Stranger at last broaches the topic of not-being. Not-being is not the absolute negation of being of which Parmenides had spoken (even though he was not justified in doing so). The true nature of not-being is difference: to *not-be* something is to be *different from* (numerically distinct from) that thing. And because, as we saw above, being *different from* another thing is a necessary condition for an entity to be related to that thing, and because an entity is determined (at least in part) by its relations to other things, not-being actually makes it possible for a thing to be what it is. So, not only is not-being something—not-being *is* difference—, not-being is one of the conditions for something being what it is.

¹³²*Sophist* 256d.

How does this relate to statements? As it stands an utterance such as ‘Motion *is not*’ is incomplete. Because the nature of not-being is difference, a statement which uses ‘is not’ must specify what motion is different from (e.g. ‘Motion *is not* being’). What about the converse statement ‘Motion *is*’? Here we face a problem. Though we are clear on the nature of not-being, the nature of being still remains a mystery. As one of the ‘very great’ Kinds we would expect that the nature of being is revealed through its function. But Plato says nothing about what the function of being might be.

As I see it there are at least two possibilities for what the function of being might be. First, being could be a principle of existence. As a principle of existence, its function would be to maintain the other Forms in existence. Second, being could be the same as sameness, in which case being would function in a thing’s relation to itself. Though I think it is impossible to know for sure which of these is the correct function of being (or even if either is correct), it might not be out of place to briefly consider which is the more likely explanation of what the function of being might be.

The first possibility is that being is a principle of existence, with the consequence that the function of being is to maintain the other Forms in existence. Clearly, this interpretation will only work if Plato actually recognized and marked off the existential sense of being. But did Plato in fact do this? Some have argued that he did. Ackrill argues that the different senses of *ἔστι* are indicated by different expressions in the philosopher’s language. *Μετέχειν* (to partake of) with its variants corresponds to the role of the copula in ordinary language; *μετέχει ταύτου* (partakes of sameness) would point to the identitative sense of being, while the existential sense of *ἔστι* is brought out

by the expressions *μετέχει τοῦ ὄντος* (partakes of being).¹³³ To show that the existential sense is indeed a sense of being that Plato identifies, Ackrill singles out Plato's claim that motion is because it shares in *that which is* (*Sophist* 256a).¹³⁴ Clearly, though, this only shows that Plato identified the existential sense of being if we are already committed to the idea that the Form of being is a Form of existence: it doesn't show that the Form of being must be a Form of existence. If the Form of being is really the Form of sameness, then Plato's claim that 'Motion is because it partakes of *that which is*' is just another way of saying 'Motion is the same as itself because it partakes of being/sameness with respect to itself'. Though there may be other passages in the text which admit of no other interpretation than that Plato identified and marked off the existential sense of *ἔστι*, I must confess I don't see them¹³⁵

The other possibility is that being is the same as sameness, with the consequence that being functions in a things relation to itself. This interpretation faces the problem that Plato explicitly argues that being is different from sameness.¹³⁶ However, as we saw above, the argument is unsound. So one could argue that the view that being is not the same as sameness is the initial stage in a dialectical movement towards the point where we discover that being is in fact identical to sameness. The view that being is identical to sameness is supported by one of Plato's formulations of the definition of a false statement where he says:

¹³³Cf. Ackrill (1957), p. 222.

¹³⁴*Ibid.* pp. 211-212.

¹³⁵For a very comprehensive set of arguments against the view that Plato identified different senses of being see Owen (1971), pp. 223-267.

. . .If someone says things about you, but says *different things as the same i.e. not-beings as being*, then it definitely seems that false speech really and truly arises from this kind of putting together of names and verbs.¹³⁷

This passage seems to suggest that Plato identifies not-being with difference (which we know he did) *and* being with sameness.

The problem with this interpretation is that nowhere does Plato explicitly say that ‘being’ and ‘sameness’ are two words for the same thing. If there truly is a dialectical movement going on from the position that being and sameness are different to the position that they are identical, we would certainly expect Plato to explicitly state this conclusion. The fact that he doesn’t speaks strongly against this interpretation.

Despite problems it seems that the second interpretation is preferable to the first. It is peculiar that, after devoting so much effort to discovering what his predecessors had believed being to be and showing why their views were inadequate, Plato would not clearly state what his own view of being is. At the end of the first part of the *Sophist* Plato has left us in the curious position of having a clearer picture of what not-being is, than of what being is. Still, insofar as Plato has shown what being is not (something which is most opposed to not-being), he has shed light on the nature of being.

So the Parmenidean conception of being has been thoroughly dismantled. First, it is not the case that being and not-being are contraries: it is not the case that a thing must either be or not be. Instead, being and not-being function together: a thing both is and is

¹³⁶*Sophist* 255b-c.

¹³⁷*Sophist* 263d, my translation (italics added).

not—though not in the same way. And, as a corollary of this, since being and not-being are not contraries, because being is, not-being must also be. Second, not only has the Stranger shown that not-being exists, he has also shown that it has descriptive content—the nature of not-being is difference—and so can be spoken of. Finally, and most significantly, the Stranger has shown that not-being has a function in the cosmos. Together with sameness, not-being/difference makes it possible for other things to be what they are. This is, perhaps, the most radical attack of all: for Parmenides even being did not have a function. The Stranger’s attack on Parmenides is thorough and uncompromising.

But perhaps Plato’s attack on Parmenides has gone too far. By showing that not-being is (and that it has descriptive content) Plato has made it possible for a statement to refer to it. The problem is that such a statement would now appear to be true: because not-being is, a statement which referred to it is saying *that which is*, and so would be true. The sophist could still maintain that a statement must say *that which is not in any way whatsoever* to be false. Because Plato agrees with Parmenides and the sophists that it is impossible for a statement to do this, the sophists could claim that Plato himself is committed to the denial of falsity! What Plato needs to do is show that a statement which refers to his sense of not-being (a sense of not-being that is) is false. It is only by doing this that Plato can decisively refute the general sophistic position, and avoid being considered a sophist himself.¹³⁸

¹³⁸This is quite different from how the Stranger expresses the sophist’s objection. The Stranger says that, though the sophist may accept that *that which is not* is, he may

Because Plato's purpose in the second part of the *Sophist* is to show that a statement which refers to something that is false, the second part of this dialogue is best read as an attack on the sophists. If Plato can show that a false statement does refer to something that is (with descriptive content), there will be no reason why such a statement cannot be uttered. If Plato can show that a meaningful false statement can be uttered, he will have seriously undermined the epistemological basis for the sophistic position.

deny that the Form of discourse blends with it (*Sophist* 260d-261a). However, I don't think this objection can be taken at face value. If the Form of discourse did not blend with not-being, it would mean that discourse itself is not different from any other thing—discourse itself is not something that is. But this is not the issue: no one denies that discourse is something. Nor does the issue seem to be whether or not a particular statement can refer to *that which is not*. The claim that a statement cannot refer to *that which is not* was based on the view that *that which is not* is absolute. Because a statement must refer to something with descriptive content, if not-being is nothing whatsoever, then it would be impossible to utter a statement about it. But now that Plato has shown that not-being is something with descriptive content, there is no reason why a statement couldn't refer to it. So what does Plato mean by his claim that the issue is whether the Form of discourse blends with *that which is not*?

It must be remembered that ever since *Sophist* 237a we have known that a connection exists between not-being and falsity. This connection was obscured while Plato investigated the nature of not-being, but is reaffirmed at *Sophist* 260c. Plato's claim that the issue is whether or not discourse or belief blends with not-being seems to hook up with the connection between not-being and falsity. This means that the Stranger's claim that they do not yet know whether belief and discourse blend with not-being means roughly that they do not yet know whether belief and discourse blend with falsity—I say 'roughly' because, of course, not-being is not the same as falsity. The connection between the two is precisely what the second part of the *Sophist* will try to establish.

Chapter IV Plato's Sophist (part ii) - A Challenge to the Sophists:

*A false statement says that which is not,
even though that which is not is.*

The sophists maintained that a true statement is one which says *those which are*, while a false statement says *those which are not*. A statement which refers to *those which are* is true because it says what is—we might say that a true statement speaks the facts. By contrast, a statement which referred to *those which are not* does not say what is—it does not speak the facts—and so is false. The problem is that, because a statement must be about something in order to be meaningful¹³⁹, a statement which referred to *those which are not* would be meaningless, and so would be neither true nor false. So the consequence of this line of thinking is that a statement must either be true or meaningless—it is impossible for a statement to be false.

By showing that *that which is not is*, Plato made it possible for a statement to refer to it. The problem is that, if *that which is not is*, a statement which refers to it would now appear to be true—after all, such a statement is saying what is. The sophist could maintain that, because a false statement *must* refer to that which really and truly is not, Plato's demonstration that there is a sense of not-being that *is* is not relevant to the issue of whether or not it is possible to utter a meaningful falsehood: a statement which refers to not-being in Plato's sense would be true. If Plato is to show that it is indeed possible

¹³⁹For why this is so see Introduction (pp. 3-4).

to utter meaningful falsehoods, he will have to show that, even though *that which is not* is, a statement which refers to it is false.

The sophistic denial of falsity (and contradiction) was based on the assimilation of being (whatever that notion of being might be), meaningfulness and truth. A true statement refers to *that which is*; a false statement refers to *that which is not*. If Plato is to show that meaningful falsehoods are possible, he will have to break the assimilation of meaningfulness and truth: the conditions for a statement being meaningful must be made different from, and prior to, the conditions for it being true. Nonetheless, this break will not be absolute. Both the meaningfulness of a statement and the truth of a statement will be dependent on the being of its referent. It is the way that meaningfulness and truth are dependent on the being of the referent that is different.

III,1 *Meaningfulness*

According to the Stranger there are two conditions a statement must satisfy if it is to be meaningful. First, a meaningful statement must be made up of meaningful words. Not surprisingly the Stranger does not feel the need to argue for this, but his (admittedly brief) discussion of what a word is and what makes it meaningful makes it clear that he held it to be the case.¹⁴⁰ Second, a meaningful statement must 'interweave' the right kinds of words together: a statement is more than just a list of meaningful words.

¹⁴⁰The Stranger takes up the issue of the nature of words from *Sophist* 261d-262a.

Unlike truthfulness, meaningfulness can be a function of either words or statements.¹⁴¹ Because statements are made up of meaningful words, the Stranger must consider what makes a word meaningful, if he is to discover what makes a statement meaningful; because only meaningful statements can be true or false, an investigation into the meaningfulness of words is necessary for the Stranger's overall project of showing that it is indeed possible to utter meaningful falsehoods.

According to Plato there are two types of words: names (*ὄνομα*) and verbs (*ῥήμα*).¹⁴² Names are spoken signs that are applied to the things that perform actions, while verbs are indications of actions.¹⁴³ The key point for the meaningfulness of words seems to be that they indicate (denote) something. A word which did not indicate anything would be no more than a mere sound.

Though the distinction between names and verbs is now platitudinous, it seems to have been a relatively new discovery in the *Sophist*—as late as the *Cratylus* the distinction between *ὀνόματα* and *ῥήματα* was not so clearly drawn.¹⁴⁴ But it is difficult

¹⁴¹As was mentioned above, in the *Cratylus* words as well as statements can be true or false. In the *Sophist*, however, Plato distinguishes a statement from a name and affirms that only statements are true or false (Cf. *Sophist* 262d-263b).

¹⁴²At least there are only two types of words in *simple* sentences. At *Sophist* 262c Plato acknowledges that it is the 'simplest and smallest' kind of speech that involves only names and verbs. This suggests that there are other types of words in 'complex and large' statements, though presumably these other types of words don't have any bearing on the issue of the meaningfulness of statements.

¹⁴³*Sophist* 262a. It should be noted that 'action' (*πράξις*) must be taken in a very broad sense. Some of the things Plato calls 'actions' we would be more inclined to call 'states' (e.g. sitting).

¹⁴⁴Plato does make a distinction between *ὄνομα* and *ῥήμα* at *Cratylus* 425a—though as Guthrie points out the list of *ὀνόματα* includes proper names, nouns,

to know how to interpret this discovery in terms of Plato's ontological views. What is it that names and verbs indicate: Do they indicate Forms or particulars, or can they indicate either?

Names can indicate either Forms or particulars. Of the two true statements Plato uses as examples the name in one ('*Man* learns') indicates a Form, while the name in the other ('*Theaetetus* sits') indicates a particular.¹⁴⁵ But what about verbs? Are there Forms of run, walk, sleep? Though Plato does not discuss this in the *Sophist*, in the *Cratylus* he explicitly says that an action, like a thing, has its own being and essence.¹⁴⁶ So, provided Plato hasn't changed his view on this—and in the absence of any evidence that he has it is safer to assume that he hasn't—it seems correct to say that there are Forms of actions. But this creates a problem. How are we to interpret Plato's claim that verbs indicate actions? do verbs denote the actions themselves, or do they denote the essences (Forms) of these actions—or can they indicate either?

Clearly a verb spoken on its own or as a part of a list could only indicate a Form, not this or that particular action. Because there is nothing performing the action, there is no particular action for the verb to indicate. Things become more difficult in the case of verbs spoken as part of a statement. Because there could very well be a particular action for a verb to indicate, it is possible that the verb in a statement indicates a particular rather

adjectives and adverbs, while the list of *ρήματα* includes at least one noun phrase (Cf. Guthrie (1978), p. 5 n.3; p. 11 n.4).

¹⁴⁵*Sophist* 262c, 263a. It is worth noting that, though the Forms are ontologically privileged, as far as naming goes Forms and particulars seem to be equal: either one can be named.

than a Form. Indeed, because a verb denotes an action, and because the formal ontological characteristics of the Forms—every Form is ungenerated, indestructible, changeless, etc.—seems to preclude them from being actions, it would appear that the Forms are incapable of being denoted by the verb in a statement. On the other hand, if a statement always indicates a particular, then it is difficult to know what to make of false statements. In a false statement the particular action attributed to a subject does not exist: ‘Theaetetus flies’ is false because there is no particular act of flying going on that can be attributed to Theaetetus. Because there is no particular action going on in the case of false statements, there would be nothing for the verb in such statements to indicate. This would make the verb in a false statement, and consequently the false statement itself, meaningless—a rather serious problem given that the whole point of the *Sophist* is to show that it is possible to utter meaningful falsehoods! So it seems that the only way there could be meaningful falsehoods is if the verb in a statement refers to a Form. Even though a particular action may not be, because the Form of an action always is, the verb in a false statement could indicate such a Form and be meaningful.

The fact that there is no particular action for the verb in a false statement to indicate suggests that the verb in any statement must indicate a Form rather than a particular.¹⁴⁷ This means that Plato’s claim that a verb always indicates an action is somewhat misleading. In fact, a verb always indicates the essence or nature of an action:

¹⁴⁶*Cratylus* 386e-387b. Plato doesn’t actually call these essences ‘Forms’, but that they are Forms is clear from his treatment of them.

it indicates something that is not itself an action.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, because the thing indicated by a verb does have a connection to an action—the particular action would not be if it were not for the Form of that action—, Plato’s claim that a verb indicates an action is not entirely deceptive.

Because a verb indicates the essence of an action and not the action itself, the same Form could be indicated by either a verb or a name. The Form of sitting, for example, is indicated by the verb in ‘Theaetetus sits’, and by the name in ‘Sitting is’ (‘The-Form-of-sitting is’). This seems to entail that it is not just the object of the word that distinguishes a name from a verb, it is also the way that object is indicated by the word: the way the Form of sitting is indicated in the statement ‘Sitting is’ is different from the way the Form of sitting is indicated in ‘Theaetetus sits’.¹⁴⁹ Admittedly this involves going beyond what is actually stated in the text—the text suggests that the only difference between a name and a verb is the object denoted by the word. But because the same object can be indicated by either a name or a verb it seems that the way an object is denoted by the word is also relevant.

¹⁴⁷One possibility is that the verb in true statements denotes a particular action, while the verb in false statements denotes the Form. There is, however, nothing in the text to support this view.

¹⁴⁸Cf. *Cratylus* 386e. There Plato says that an action is always performed in accordance with its nature (Form). Clearly, if the nature (Form) of an action were itself an action, then, because this nature would also have to be done in accordance with a higher nature, the result would be an infinite regress.

¹⁴⁹Of course, the object of the word does play a role in distinguishing names from verbs. Some objects (such as Theaetetus or Man) can only be indicated by names. It is with the Forms which can be indicated by either names or verbs that the difference must lie in the way these objects are indicated by the word, and not the objects themselves.

So a word derives its meaningfulness from what it indicates, and, in the case of things which can be indicated by either a name or a verb, from the way it indicates its object. A name can indicate a Form or a particular. A verb must indicate a Form. But because the Forms which can be indicated by verbs can also be indicated by names, it seems that the way words denote these things is also relevant to the meaningfulness of these words.

Though being made up of meaningful words is a necessary condition for a statement to be meaningful, but it is not sufficient. A statement is not the same as a list of meaningful words—something the Stranger illustrates by providing two such lists.¹⁵⁰ Instead, a meaningful statement (at least a meaningful simple statement) interweaves the right kinds of words together: a simple statement interweaves names with verbs.¹⁵¹ The idea that language is more than just a sophisticated naming system is an impressive discovery which even to this day is not always sufficiently appreciated. A statement requires more than that words be related to things or actions, it also requires that words be related to each other in a ‘law-like’ way.¹⁵² To put this differently, not only is there an *ontological* requirement for meaningful statements (words must denote *things which are*),

¹⁵⁰*Sophist* 262b-c.

¹⁵¹It should be noted that Plato does not say that a simple statement interweaves *one* name with *one* verb. This is interesting because it is possible to construct (seemingly) complex statements which are only made up of names and verbs: e.g. ‘Theaetetus walks [a] dog [to a] marketplace’ (in Greek this statement would not have articles or a preposition). Though this statement is only made up of names and verbs, I doubt Plato would consider it simple. He does not use a comparable statement in any of his examples.

¹⁵²Plato’s way of putting this is to say that a statement does not merely name, it also *accomplishes* something by weaving names and verbs together (*Sophist* 262d).

there is also a *syntactical* requirement (words must be related to each other in the proper way). Without syntax there is no language, only a collection of words.¹⁵³

The importance of syntax for Plato's project of showing that meaningful falsehoods are possible cannot be overestimated. Syntax frees the meaningfulness of statements from being merely a reflection of the patterns of things in the world. *As far as the meaningfulness of a statement is concerned* it does not matter *what* the name and the verb in a statement denote, only *that* there is a name and a verb. This does not mean that ontology is irrelevant to the meaningfulness of a statement: it is only by denoting *things which are* that words are meaningful; the distinction between things which can be indicated by names and things which can be indicated by verbs is ontological. But it does mean that in the final analysis it is not ontology that frees meaningfulness from truthfulness, it is syntax: even names and verbs that do not denote things which actually mingle with each other can still be combined in a meaningful statement. This is the discovery which will ultimately make meaningful falsehoods possible.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³My distinction between the ontological and the syntactical is somewhat artificial. Plato would say that the syntactical requirement for meaningfulness is based on the very nature of Discourse itself: the syntactical requirement for meaningfulness is itself ontological. However, because the syntactical requirement of meaningfulness has nothing to do with the relationship between word and thing, it is useful to distinguish it from the properly ontological requirement of meaningfulness.

¹⁵⁴The fact that the meaningfulness of statements is not directly based on the patterns of things in the cosmos may suggest that it has a certain *subjective* element: it may suggest that the speaker is in part responsible for the meaningfulness of statements. But, though the speaker is the one who weaves names and verbs together, and though he can choose which names and verbs to weave together, the meaningfulness of a statement is in no wise dependent on the speaker. The syntactical requirement for meaningfulness—*that* a name and a verb must be woven together for a statement to be

So, in contrast to what the sophists believed, the meaningfulness of a statement is not simply a function of the being of its object: a meaningful statement is not one that simply refers to *that which is*. The meaningfulness of a statement also depends on how the meaningful words that make it up are put together.

The claim that as far as the meaningfulness of a statement is concerned it does not matter whether or not the things indicated by the name and the verb in a statement actually interweave seems to be at odds with the Stranger's earlier claim that it is on account of the weaving together of Forms (i.e. things) that statements (*λόγοι*) are produced.¹⁵⁵ What are we to make of the apparent discrepancy between these two claims?

It seems that there are two possible interpretations of Plato's claim that statements are a result of the weaving together of Forms. First, Plato could be saying that every statement actually involves the weaving together of Forms. This might be called the 'correspondence view': the weaving together of words corresponds to the weaving together of Forms. The second possibility is to read the second occurrence of *λόγος* as 'Form of discourse'. In this case Plato would be claiming that the interweaving of Forms makes it possible for the Form of discourse to exist—the existence of this Form being a necessary condition for the existence of statements—but it would not be the case that

meaningful—is grounded on the very nature of Discourse itself and has nothing to do with the speaker. Plato's account of meaningfulness remains thoroughly objective.

¹⁵⁵*Sophist* 259e. The complete passage is: "The complete break up of every one thing from all things is the dissolving of all *λόγοι*. For [it is] on account of the weaving together of the Forms with each other [that] the *λόγος* has been produced" (my translation).

every statement actually interweaves Forms. This means that the interweaving of Forms provides a backdrop to the interweaving of words into statements, but because the Forms are not necessarily interwoven with each other, there is no necessary correspondence between the interweaving of words and the interweaving of Forms.

The first interpretation faces the problem that the name in a statement can indicate either a Form or a particular. If the name in a simple statement indicates a particular, then it does not seem that Forms are being woven together in a simple statement.¹⁵⁶ One possible response to this problem is to hold that a simple statement which weaves together the name of a particular with the name of a Form (e.g. 'Theaetetus sits') weaves together Forms insofar as the particular partakes of a Form. So, because Theaetetus partakes of man, 'Theaetetus sits' indirectly weaves together a Form (man) with another Form (sitting). The problem with this is that it cannot account for the meaningfulness of false statements. A false statement such as 'Theaetetus flies' does not even weave together a Form with a particular, much less a Form with a Form. But if a statement is made meaningful by weaving together Forms, then a 'false' statement would be meaningless, not false. Given that the central purpose of the second part of the *Sophist* is to show that it is possible to utter meaningful falsehoods, this is a rather serious problem. Because there does not seem to be any defensible way for a correspondence theory to account for the meaningfulness of false statements, it should be rejected.

¹⁵⁶Cornford suggests that *Sophist* 259e means that every statement has at least one Form in it. The claim that statements require Forms to be 'woven together' does not seem to be compatible with this.

The ‘backdrop’ view faces the problem that the same word must be translated in two different ways in two succeeding sentences. The plural (*λόγοι*) in the first sentence could only be translated as ‘statements’: because there is only one Form of discourse, *λόγοι* could not possibly indicate it. Since the next sentence uses the singular (*λόγος*) it could be translated as either ‘statement’ or ‘Discourse’ (the Form), but because translating the same term in two different ways is generally poor practice, it seems that here too *λόγος* should be translated as ‘statement’. On the other hand, because Plato has made no mention of a particular statement which *has been* produced through the interweaving of Forms, his use of the perfect (*γέγονεν*)—“[it is] on account of the interweaving of Forms that the *λόγος has been* produced”—lends itself to translating *λόγος* as ‘the Form of discourse’. Because, like every other Form, the Form of discourse derives its identity (at least in part) by partaking of difference with respect to every other Form, there is a sense in which it *has been* produced through the interweaving of Forms. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that just a few lines later Plato says that, if they hadn’t shown that things blend, they wouldn’t have been able to establish that discourse is one of the kinds that are.¹⁵⁷ This passage links up the interweaving of Forms with the establishment of the Kind discourse as a thing that is.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷*Sophist* 259e-260a.

¹⁵⁸A possible problem with this interpretation is that what is true of the Form of discourse is true of every other Form as well; just as the Form of discourse would not be if it weren’t for the interweaving of Forms, so no other Form would be either. Yet *Sophist* 259e seems to be saying something specifically about discourse. Why should Plato single out the Form of discourse, if the claim he is making about it is true of every other Form as well?

Despite some problems the backdrop view is preferable to the correspondence view. This means that there is no discrepancy between Plato's claim that meaningfulness is a function of the interweaving of words and his claim that it is a function of the interweaving of Forms. The interweaving of Forms provides a necessary condition for the existence of the Form of discourse—the existence of this Form being a necessary condition for the existence of meaningful statements. But a particular meaningful statement is produced when the right sort of meaningful words are interwoven into a statement.

There is a third point Plato makes which, even though it is not a condition for statements to be meaningful, nonetheless is a characteristic of all statements (true or false) and so is worth mentioning here. This third point is that statements are always *about* something: a statement always has a subject.¹⁵⁹ The subject of a statement—that which the statement is about—is what is indicated by the name (e.g. Theaetetus).¹⁶⁰ The significance of this will be discussed when we consider Plato's treatment truth and falsity.

I think the answer is suggested a few lines below. The overall problem with which the *Sophist* is concerned is the problem of uttering a false statement. As a precondition to examining this problem it must be established that discourse is a Kind that is—obviously it would be impossible to talk about the problem of uttering a false statement if there was no such thing as discourse. Plato singles out the Form of discourse because the existence of this Kind is particularly relevant to his subsequent discussion of the possibility of uttering a false statement.

¹⁵⁹*Sophist* 262e.

¹⁶⁰There is a sense in which the subject of a statement could be taken to be what is indicated by the verb (e.g. it could be said that 'Theaetetus sits' is *about* sitting). The reason why Plato privileges that which is indicated by the name over that which is

IV,2 *Truth and falsity*

There are at least two different things Plato's investigation into truth might be seeking to do. First, it could be an investigation into what truth (or falsity) is: Plato could be seeking a definition of truth. Second, it could be an investigation into how one is to determine when a statement is true (or false): it could seek to discover the criteria a statement must satisfy in order for us to know that it is true. If we are to understand Plato's treatment of truth, it is necessary for us to be clear about what he is trying to do in this section of the *Sophist*.

Plato's investigation into truth seems to be an attempt to discover a definition of truth, not the criteria for determining when a statement is true. The second part of the *Sophist* sets out to show that meaningful falsehoods are possible—something it does by showing that there is nothing about the meaningfulness of a statement that precludes it from being false. To show that meaningful falsehoods are possible it is necessary to know what truth and falsity are; it is not necessary to know what sort of test one could use to determine when a particular statement is true or false. It is for this reason that, though Plato does give a definition of truth—a true statement says *those that are*, as [or that] they are, about what the statement concerns (about the subject of the statement)¹⁶¹—, he does not explicitly say how one is to determine when a statement is true; being unnecessary for the project at hand, a consideration of what sort of test we might use to determine when a

indicated by the verb is not discussed in the text. It seems that Plato merely accepts the common sense view of the matter.

statement is true is not given. Because Plato's own consideration of truth (and falsity) is *definitional*, our treatment of Plato's notion of truth will also focus on his definition of truth.¹⁶² Verification will not be considered in the body of this paper.¹⁶³

Like the meaningfulness of a statement the truthfulness of a statement involves ontological considerations. But ontological considerations play a much more important role in the truthfulness of a statement than they do in its meaningfulness. As we saw above, the meaningfulness of a statement is more or less independent of the patterns of things in the cosmos: whether or not what is indicated by a name in a statement actually mingles with what is indicated by the verb in the statement is irrelevant to its meaningfulness, all that matters is that a name mingles with a verb.¹⁶⁴ This is not the

¹⁶¹*Sophist* 263b (slightly rephrased).

¹⁶²Seligman (1972, p. 105 n.6) claims that Plato's answers to the questions 'What is a false statement' and 'How do we know that a statement is false' would coalesce into one: the reason why a statement is true or false is also the reason why it can be known to be true or false. This claim is, however, inconsistent with Seligman's subsequent discussion on the matter. According to Seligman the knowledge that a statement is true or false is based on perception: we know 'Theaetetus sits' is true because we perceive it; we know 'Theaetetus flies' is false because it says something incompatible with what is truly said of the same subject. But perception is certainly not what makes a statement true. If it were the case that 'Theaetetus sits' is true only if we saw Theaetetus sitting, then anything we did not perceive would be false. But obviously this is not Plato's view on the matter: perception does not play a role in the definition of a false statement, though it almost certainly plays a role in how we know that a statement is false. For this reason I don't think Seligman's claim that the two questions would coalesce into one is correct.

¹⁶³See Appendix A for a discussion of the verification of contingently false statements.

¹⁶⁴Of course, there is an important sense in which the pattern of Forms (the participation of Form in Form) is necessary for meaningfulness. If nothing participated in the 'very great' Kinds, there would be nothing for words to denote. However, the patterns of Forms are more the basis for the meaningfulness of words than of statements: the syntactical requirement for the meaningfulness of statements does not depend on the pattern of the Forms.

case with truthfulness. For a statement to be true, not only must it satisfy the conditions for being meaningful, it must also reflect the actual relationship that exists between things in the world. In other words, for a statement to be true the statement *as a whole*—the interweaving of names and verbs—must correspond to the interweaving of things in reality. A statement which satisfies the conditions for meaningfulness without satisfying the conditions for truth is false. This means that, though the individual words which make up a false statement will indicate things that are—the false statement wouldn't be meaningful otherwise—the false statement *as a whole* will not correspond to the way things are. It is because a statement can satisfy the conditions for meaningfulness without satisfying the conditions for truthfulness that falsity is possible.

For the sophists a true statement is one which says *that which is*, while a false statement says *that which is not*. Because a true statement says *that which is*, it has a referent and so is meaningful; conversely, because a 'false statement' says *that which is not*, it does not have a referent (it literally says nothing) and so is no more than a meaningless sound (and thus not false after all). Though Plato accepts that a true statement says *those which are*, he does not take this definition to be complete. A true statement says *those which are*, as [or that ($\acute{\omega}\varsigma$)] they are, about what the statement concerns (*for* the subject of the statement).¹⁶⁵ It remains for us to consider what is meant by this definition.

Though it may appear that Plato's definition of a true statement does no more than add some qualifications to the sophists' definition, in fact the difference is much more

fundamental. For the sophists a true statement is *about* that which is. For Plato a true statement says that which is *about* what the statement concerns: a true statement is not about *that which is* as such. To put this differently, for the sophists *that which is* is the subject of a true statement; for Plato *that which is* is said of the subject of a statement. Though the subject of a true statement must *be*, the statement is not true because this thing is: the statement is true because, among other things, *that which is* is said of this thing.¹⁶⁶

So what is the subject of a simple statement about which *those which are* are said? It is clear from the examples Plato gives that the subject of such a statement is the thing indicated by the name (e.g. Theaetetus).¹⁶⁷ Because the subject of a simple statement is the thing indicated by the name, '*those which are*'—which are said of the subject—must be the 'things' indicated by the verb in a statement ('action-Forms' such as the Forms of sitting and flying); because these Forms *are*, calling them '*those which are*', while potentially misleading, is not out of place. So the subject of a statement is the thing indicated by the name and *those which are* (the 'things' which are said of the subject) are the 'action-Forms' indicated by the verb in statement. A true statement says *those which are* of the subject. That is, a true statement says that *those which are* are interwoven with a subject.

¹⁶⁵*Sophist* 263b (slightly rephrased).

¹⁶⁶It must be noted that Plato's discussion of the truth and falsity of statements is confined to *simple* statements (i.e. those which interweave a name with a verb). The definition of a true complex statement could very well be different.

¹⁶⁷*Sophist* 263a.

But this is not enough for truthfulness. A true statement says that an ‘action-Form’ is interwoven with a thing (a Form or particular)—a claim it expresses by interweaving a verb with a name. But though saying that an ‘action-Form’ is interwoven with a Form or a particular is a necessary condition for a statement to be true—if the ‘statement’ were not saying this, it would not be interweaving names with verbs and so would not even be a statement—it is not sufficient. For a statement to be true, not only must it claim that an ‘action Form’ is interwoven with a Form or a particular, but the ‘action-Form’ must actually be interwoven with the Form or particular: what the statement says is the case must actually be the case. As Plato puts it, a true statement must say those that are *as they are* about the subject of the statement.¹⁶⁸ A statement’s syntactical interweaving of a verb with a name must say action-Forms *as they are* with respect to the subject of the statement: the syntactical interweaving of name and verb must correspond to the ontological interweaving of the things which these words indicate. If the things indicated by the words in a statement do not actually mingle, then, though the statement will be meaningful, it will not be true.

So there are two requirements a statement must satisfy if it is to be true. First, such a statement must be meaningful. This means that it must weave together the right kinds of words, and all of the words that are woven together must individually indicate something that is. Second, the statement *as a whole* must correspond to a particular state of affairs. This means that the interweaving of the verb with the name in a statement

¹⁶⁸*Sophist* 263b.

must correspond to the actual interweaving of the ‘action-Form’ (the thing indicated by the verb) with the subject (the thing indicated by the name).

It is worth noting that Plato’s definition of a true statement applies as much to statements about Forms as it does to statements about particulars. It is no less the case that ‘Motion is most contrary to rest’ is true because this statement as a whole corresponds to an actual interweaving of things (motion, rest and difference), than it is that ‘Theaetetus sits’ is true because this statement as a whole corresponds to the actual interweaving of things (a Form with a particular). There is, however, a difference between true statements about Forms and true statements about particulars. A true statement about a Form is necessarily true: there is something about the natures of motion and rest that makes them absolutely incapable of not being most contrary to each other. By contrast, a true simple statement about a particular can be either necessary or contingent. In each case the necessity or contingency of the true statement is based on the patterning of the Forms. Because the Form man blends with all sorts of ‘action-Forms’ which indicate bodily positions (e.g. sit, stand, run), a statement which predicates one of these ‘action-Forms’ of a particular man will only be contingently true: because ‘Theaetetus sits’, ‘Theaetetus stands’, ‘Theaetetus runs’, etc. could all be true, if one of them happens to be true, its truth is will not be necessary. By contrast, because motion and rest are most contrary to each other, ‘this moving thing is not resting [at the same time, in the same respect, etc. as it is moving]’ is necessarily true.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹This distinction between statements about Forms and statements about particulars with regard to truth, also applies to falsity. A false statement about the Forms

Plato's definition of a true statement is fairly straightforward. The text seems to support the view that a statement is true if what it says corresponds to how things really are. It is Plato's definition of a false statement that is problematic. For, unlike his definition of a true statement, Plato provides no straightforward definition of a false statement. What he does say about false statements runs as follows:

. . . The false one [statement] says things different from *those that are*. . . So it says *those that are not*, as being. . . But they're different things that are from the things that are about you [the subject of the false statement]. . .¹⁷⁰

A little further on he says:

. . . If someone says things about you [the subject of the statement], saying different things as the same i.e. not beings as being, then it definitely seems that false speech really and truly arises from that kind of putting together of verbs and names.¹⁷¹

It remains for us to consider what Plato means by this.

Plato agrees with the sophists in holding that a false statement says *those that are not*.¹⁷² But there are two fundamental differences between Plato's definition and that of the sophists. First of all, *that which is not* must be understood as *difference*, not absolute not-being.¹⁷³ Second, as it was with true statements, a false statement is not about *those which are not*. A false statement says *those which are not* about the subject of the

is necessarily false; a false statement about a particular will be either necessarily or contingently false depending on the patterns of Forms.

¹⁷⁰*Sophist* 263b, my translation.

¹⁷¹*Sophist* 263d, my translation.

¹⁷²*Sophist* 263b.

¹⁷³This, of course, was the discovery in the first part of the *Sophist* that makes it possible to speak of not-being.

statement—a thing that is. As it was for true statements, the subject of a statement is the thing indicated by the name.¹⁷⁴

Because a false statement must be meaningful, it must satisfy the same conditions for meaningfulness that a true statement satisfies: it must interweave the right kinds of meaningful words together. Obviously, though, a false statement will not satisfy the conditions for truthfulness: a false statement will not say those that are *as they are* about some subject. So what is it that makes a statement false?

A true statement claims that an ‘action-Form’ is interwoven with another Form or with a particular. It expresses this claim by interweaving the word for the ‘action-Form’ with the word for the subject (another Form or a particular)—the interweaving of such words being necessary for meaningfulness. What will make this statement true is if the syntactical interweaving of the name with the verb corresponds to an ontological interweaving of the things expressed by these words: ‘Theaetetus sits’ is true because the syntactical interweaving of ‘Theaetetus’ and ‘sits’ corresponds to the actual ‘interweaving’ of Theaetetus with the Form of sitting.¹⁷⁵ Like a true statement, a false statement also claims that an ‘action-Form’ is interwoven with another Form or with a particular. And like a true statement it expresses this claim by interweaving a name with a verb. But that is where the similarity ends. For, unlike a true statement, the syntactical interweaving of a name and a verb does not correspond to an actual interweaving of a Form or a particular with an ‘action-Form’: ‘Theaetetus flies’ is false because the

¹⁷⁴*Sophist* 263a.

syntactical interweaving of 'Theaetetus' with 'flies' does not correspond to an ontological interweaving of Theaetetus with the Form of flying. Because there is no correspondence, a false statement says something different from *those that are*. A false statement says something different from *those that are* [the 'action-Forms'] which are actually interwoven with a subject.

As was mentioned above there are at least two distinct senses of difference in the *Sophist*.¹⁷⁶ The first sense of difference is 'numerical distinctness'. Two entities are numerically distinct if they are separate things. So 'x is numerically distinct from y' means that x and y are separate entities. The second sense of difference is incompatibility. Two entities are incompatible if, in addition to being numerically distinct from each other, there is also something in the nature of those entities which causes them to be opposed to each other. Because there are these distinct senses of difference, it is fair to ask which one is relevant to Plato's claim that a false statement says something *different* from *those that are*.

Because incompatibility presupposes numerical distinctness, if 'incompatible' is the correct sense of difference, then it will be necessary to show that mere numerical distinctness is not enough for a statement to be false. So if a statement which says something numerically distinct from *those that are* is sufficient for that statement to be false, then numerical distinctness is the correct sense of difference. So is it sufficient for a statement to be false if it says something numerically distinct from *those that are*?

¹⁷⁵The interweaving of Theaetetus with the Form of sitting manifests itself as Theaetetus' 'action' of sitting.

It seems clear that it is. A statement is true if the interweaving of the name and the verb corresponds to the interweaving of the things indicated by those words. Because there will be no such correspondence in the case of a statement which says something numerically distinct from *those that are* actually interwoven with a subject, such a statement will not be true. So it is not necessary for a statement to say something incompatible with *those which are* actually interwoven with a subject for that statement to be false. As long as what is said of a subject is numerically distinct from what is actually interwoven with that subject, a statement will be false.¹⁷⁷

Because a false statement says something different from *those that are* [actually interwoven with a subject], it says *those that are not* as being. Though this sounds paradoxical, because not-being is difference (something that is), there is nothing problematic about it. A false statement does not say *those which are not in any way whatsoever* as being, it says *different* things that are from the things that really are about the subject of the statement. Because these ‘different things’ (‘action-Forms’) *are*, it is possible to indicate them with the verb in a statement and interweave this verb with a name. But because these ‘action-Forms’ are different from those which are actually interwoven with the subject, the statement is false: there is no correspondence between the interweaving of verb with name and the interweaving of ‘action-Form’ with Form or particular.

¹⁷⁶See p. 65.

¹⁷⁷Though incompatibility does not play a role in the definition of a false statement, it does play a role in the verification of a contingently false statement. For a

So, if someone puts together verbs with names in such a way that this union indicates things ('action-Forms') different from those which are actually interwoven with the subject (a Form or a particular), the result is a false statement. The failure of the syntactical interweaving of a name and a verb to correspond to the ontological interweaving of a thing with an 'action-Form' results in a false statement.¹⁷⁸

So, even though *that which is not is*, a statement which says it is still false. What enables Plato to sidestep the sophistic objection that, because *that which is not is*, a statement which says it is true, is the fact that Plato has made a distinction between atomic and holistic correspondence. The sophists did not distinguish different types of correspondence between a statement and being. They only recognized actual correspondence, which results in a statement which is both meaningful and true, and a failure to correspond, which results in a meaningless utterance. Plato, on the other hand, has distinguished the way a word corresponds to (indicates) being, and the way a statement as a whole corresponds to being. A word must indicate a being to be meaningful: every word must correspond to something that is. This is not the case with

detailed discussion of the distinct senses of difference in connection with a Plato's notion of verification see Appendix A.

¹⁷⁸There is another possibility for what would make a statement false. It is possible that what makes a statement false is not that it fails to correspond to what is, but that it says something different from (e.g. incompatible with) what a true statement says. This would make the definition of falsity into a linguistic matter: 'Theaetetus flies' is not false because Theaetetus is not combined with flying, this statement is false simply because it says something different from what the true statement said of Theaetetus.

Despite being an intriguing possibility, I doubt Plato held that this is what makes a statement false. Though Plato would certainly accept that a false statement says something different from what a true statement says, this seems to be a corollary of the

statements. A statement as a whole does not derive its meaningfulness from corresponding to an actual state of affairs. As long as the words which make it up are meaningful, and as long as the right kinds of words are woven together, a statement will be meaningful. Instead of being a condition for meaningfulness, holistic correspondence is the basis of truth. A statement which corresponds *as a whole* to an actual state of affairs is true; a statement which fails to correspond *as a whole* to an actual state of affairs is false. It is because the conditions for meaningfulness have been made different from, and prior to the conditions for truth, that it is possible to utter a false statement.

failure of the false statement to correspond to what is, and not the reason why a statement is false.

Conclusion

So the problem of falsity is solved. Because *that which is not* is something (with descriptive content), it is possible to speak of it. Plato has shown that the nature of not-being is difference. And because a false statement, by saying something different from what is the case about something, actually says what *is not*—though only with respect to what really *is* the case—it is false. However, because what *is not* with respect to the subject of a statement, nonetheless *is* something in its own right with descriptive content (it is a Form), a statement which predicates this thing of a subject is meaningful. So a false statement is no more problematic than a true statement.

But Plato's examination of not-being and falsity was not done for its own sake. The purpose of the *Sophist* is to define the sophistic art with the aim of undermining it. How does Plato's discovery that not-being is and that it is possible to utter meaningful falsehoods enable Plato to define the sophist and undermine his position?

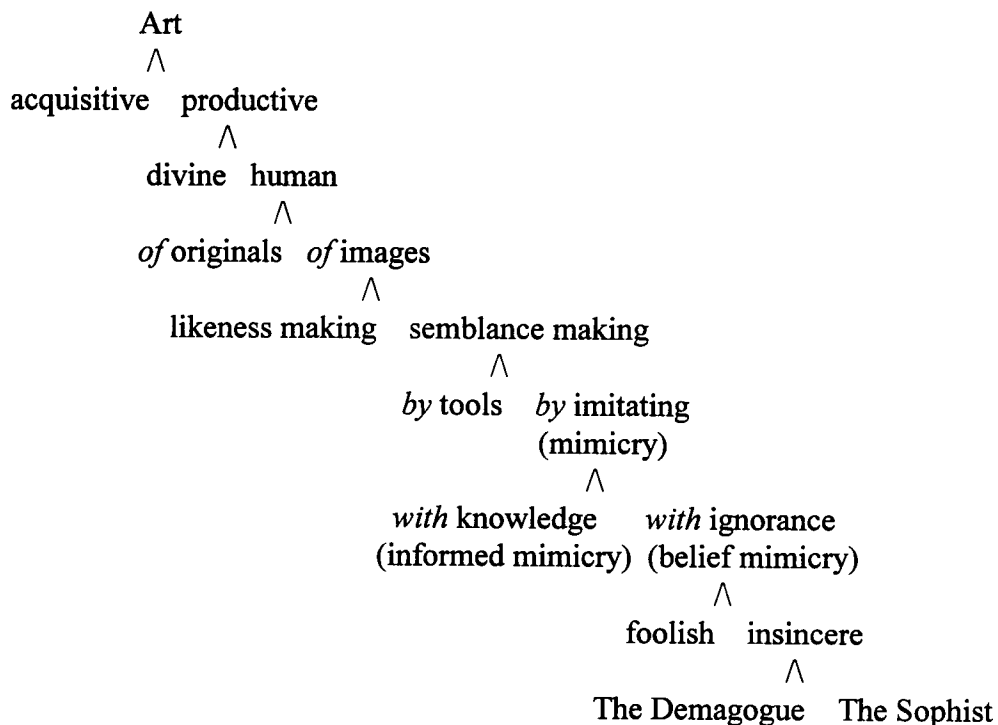
Though it was a simple enough matter to describe how the art of the sophist was practiced, the sophistic position as such—the epistemological and ontological basis of this art—was surprisingly difficult to uncover. The sophists only seemed to be committed to two epistemological positions: (1) it is impossible to say *that which is not*, (2) a false statement is one which says *that which is not*. As support for the first position the sophists could fall back on no less a figure than the “venerable and awful”

Parmenides. Because a statement must have a referent to be meaningful, a statement about not-being is literally about nothing, and so is meaningless. And even if not-being could somehow be pointed out, because it is devoid of descriptive content, there is nothing one could say about it. As support for their second position the sophists could reasonably argue that, if there are only being and not-being, and if a true statement says *that which is*, then a false statement must be one which says *that which is not*. And because it is impossible to say *that which is not*, it is impossible to utter falsehoods. If Plato is to undermine the sophistic position, he must attack these basic epistemological positions.

The claim that it is impossible to say *that which is not* and the claim that a false statement says *that which is not* were the only descriptions of the sophist which held any promise of revealing his nature. If Plato was to define the sophist as such and undermine the general sophistic position, it is these two claims which had to be attacked. The first part of the *Sophist* was an attack on Parmenides. It showed that, not only are being and not-being not contraries (with the consequence that, because being is, not-being must also be), but also that not-being has descriptive content: not-being is difference. The second part of the *Sophist* was an attack on the sophists themselves. By identifying not-being with falsity the sophists were able to deny the existence of meaningful falsehoods. Though Plato had shown that there is a sense of not-being which *is*, because a statement which says it would be saying *that which is*, and because a statement which say *that which is* is true, the sophists could still maintain that Plato has not shown it possible to utter meaningful falsehoods. To expose the epistemological foundation of the general

sophistic position, Plato had to show that a statement which says his sense of *that which is not* is still false, even though this sense of not-being *is*. He does this by showing that a false statement says something *different from* what is truly blended with the subject of the false statement. Though with respect to the subject of the false statement the thing that is different from what is really blended with the subject *is not*, because this thing is a thing that *is* (a Form), the word in a statement that indicates it is still meaningful.

By exposing the epistemological foundation of the sophistic claims the Stranger is now in a position to define the sophist. The division that defines the sophist runs as follows:¹⁷⁹



The sophist as such has been unmasked.

¹⁷⁹*Sophist* 265a-268d.

Appendix A The verification of (contingent) falsity in Plato's Sophist

Because Plato's concern with falsity in the *Sophist* is definitional, it is not surprising that he does not explicitly discuss how one is to know that a statement is false. Nonetheless, from what he does say it is possible put together the most likely explanation Plato would offer for how one would verify the contingent falsity of a statement. In this Appendix I will consider the most likely explanation for how one is to know that a particular statement is false.

Plato's notion of verification seems to be grounded on two ideas. First, at least in the case of sensible particulars, verification seems to be based on perception. It is because one perceives Theaetetus sitting that one knows 'Theaetetus sits' is true.¹⁸⁰ Secondly, it seems to be Plato's position that we do not perceive any negative facts. That is, it is not the case that we know 'Theaetetus flies' is false by perceiving the negative fact of Theaetetus' not-flying. Plato's discussion of the not-x (discussed below) does allow one to utter true statements of the form 'S is not-x'. But the not-x does not appear to be a thing in its own right: the not-x is an umbrella term for things which share a generic similarity to the x. The not-large, for example, appears to be an umbrella term for the

¹⁸⁰There doesn't seem to be any other way of verifying a contingent truth. Clearly a contingent truth cannot be verified by simple reference to the patterns of Forms. Knowing that man blends with sitting (along with a number of other Forms of bodily positions) will not establish that this man (Theaetetus) blends with sitting.

equal and the small.¹⁸¹ Because it seems to be Plato's position that it is only possible to perceive things that are, and because the not-x is not something in its own right, the not-x is not something that can be perceived. So, rather than perceiving the not-x as such, one perceives the positive fact that 'falls under' it. And by perceiving this positive fact, one can then utter a true statement of the form 'S is not-x'. More will be said on the nature of the 'not-x' below.

Because verification is based on perception, and because we cannot perceive any negative facts, we cannot directly know that a statement is false. Rather, we infer that a statement is false from our prior knowledge (gained through perception) of which 'action-Form(s)' are actually blended with the subject of the false statement. By knowing which 'action-Form(s)' are actually blended with a subject, and by knowing that a particular statement says something different from this, one would know that a particular statement is false.

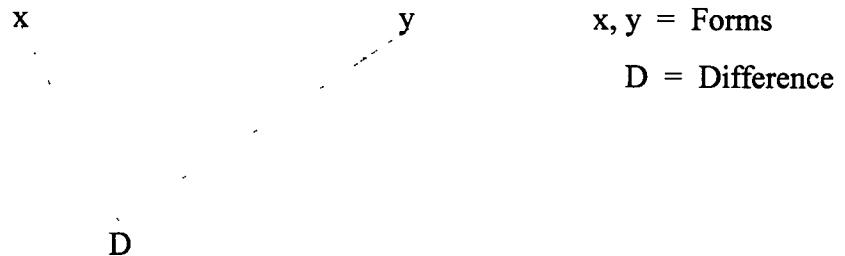
Clearly, difference (*ἕτερον*) plays an important role in the verification of falsity. It is by knowing that a false statement says something different of a subject from what a true statement says of it that we know the statement to be false. The problem is that there

¹⁸¹Some passages in the *Sophist* seem to suggest that there are Forms of the not-x. However, at *Sophist* 257b Plato says that when we speak of something as not-large, we may just as well mean what is equal in size as what is short. This seems to suggest that the not-tall is not something in its own right, but only an 'umbrella' for the equal and the small. Furthermore, in the *Statesman* (a dialogue probably written right after the *Sophist*) Plato explicitly says that there are not Forms of not-x (such as the not-Greek and the not-ten-thousandth) (*Statesman* 262c). Of course, it is possible that Plato changed his mind in this later dialogue, and that in the *Sophist* he did believe there were Forms of the not-x. But in the absence of any positive proof in the *Sophist* that he did believe there were Forms of the not-x, it is probably safer to assume that he did not.

are at least three distinct senses of difference in the *Sophist*, and it is quite possible that the method of verification will be different, depending on which sense of difference is employed. The three types of difference which are found in the *Sophist* are: (1) 'numerical distinctness', (2) 'exhaustive contrariety' and (3) 'opposition'. If we are to understand how one comes to know that a statement is false, it is necessary to consider these distinct senses of difference, and see what the method of verification follows from each.

(1) The first type of difference might be called 'numerical distinctness'.

Numerical distinctness occurs when two things partake of the Kind difference with respect to each other. We might represent this as follows:



The difference between two things which are numerically distinct is merely *formal*. Both the natures of things which are numerically distinct and the relations (of participation) which these things have apart from their 'relation' of numerical distinctness are irrelevant to this type of difference. As far as numerical distinctness is concerned, it does not matter

what x and y are or whether they are related to each other in terms of participation. All that matters is that both Forms partake of difference with respect to each other.

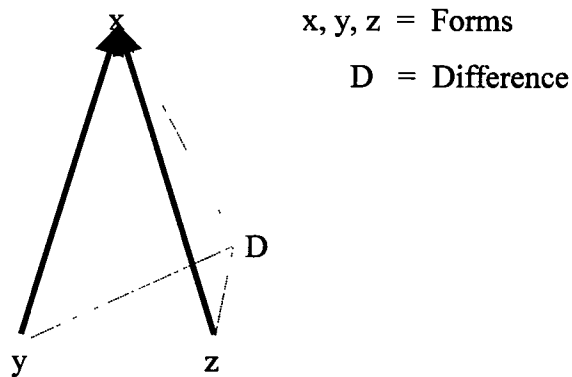
Because numerical distinctness constitutes the formal difference between things, it is presupposed by both exhaustive contrariety and opposition. That is, all things which are contrary or opposed are numerically distinct, though not all things which are numerically distinct are contrary or opposed. What sets things which are contrary or opposed apart from things which are merely numerically distinct are their natures: things which are contrary or opposed to each other are incompatible with each other in addition to being numerically distinct.

As far as the truth and falsity of statements which predicate numerically distinct Forms of the same subject are concerned, there is no relation between the truth of one and the falsity of another: both statements could be true; both statements could be false; one statement could be true and the other false.¹⁸² In each case the relations other than numerical distinctness between the Forms must be considered if one is to discover whether both can be predicated of the same subject in the same way, at the same time, etc. or not.

(2) The second type of difference might be called 'exhaustive contrariety'. Plato's way of characterizing the difference between 'exhaustive contraries' is to say that they are

¹⁸²It should be noted, however, that when one statement is true while the other is false, it is often (though not always) because the Forms which are predicated of the same subject are incompatible.

“most contrary” to each other or “entirely different” from each other.¹⁸³ ‘Exhaustive contrariety’ characterizes the difference between two Forms which cannot participate in each other, though they both participate in another Form which is common to them. We can represent this as follows:



The contraries in this schema are y and z. We can see that this type of difference presupposes numerical distinctness. Taken on their own the xDy , the xDz and the yDz relation are examples of numerical distinctness and without these relations exhaustive contrariety would not exist. Nonetheless, though contrariety presupposes numerical

¹⁸³Cf. *Sophist* 250a, 255e. It should be noted that Plato does not always use a separate expression to designate the difference between exhaustive contraries. At *Sophist* 254e-257a, where Plato is trying to discover whether there are indeed five ‘very great’ Kinds or whether in some cases two words designate the same Kind, he does not use a separate expression to indicate how motion and rest are different from each other. However, because all Forms which are contrary are also numerically distinct, this need not concern us. At *Sophist* 254e-257a Plato is only trying to establish that there are in fact different (i.e. numerically distinct) Kinds, he is not concerned with what (other) relations might exist between these Kinds. For this reason the fact that Plato does not use a separate expression for how Forms are different from each other is entirely understandable.

distinctness, it is not merely numerical distinctness. There seem to be two things which set contrariety apart. First, the natures of y and z are such that of necessity they cannot “belong” to each other (i.e. they cannot blend, nor does one partake of the other).¹⁸⁴ This is not the case for numerical distinctness, for which the natures of the Forms and the relations in which they stand is irrelevant. Second, both y and z must be related to a common Form (x). Admittedly Plato does not say this or indicate what the common Form would be in his treatment of motion and rest (the paradigmatic example of exhaustive contrariety). But that there is a common Form in which two exhaustive contraries partake is implicit in Plato’s divisions at the beginning of the *Sophist* where each Kind bifurcates into what are meant to be two (exhaustively) contrary Forms.

In addition to these differences exhaustive contraries have another feature: they are the only two Forms which directly partake of the Form which is their common genus. This last feature doesn’t set exhaustive contrariety apart from numerical distinctness, but, as we shall see below, it is the most important difference between exhaustive contrariety and opposition.

The fact that exhaustive contraries cannot belong to each other has important implications for the truth and falsity of statements which predicate such contraries of the same subject. Both contraries cannot be predicated of the same subject in the same manner, in the same place, at the same time. This means that, if a statement which predicated one exhaustive contrary of a subject were true, then a statement which predicated the other of the same subject would be false. For example, if ‘Theaetetus

¹⁸⁴*Sophist* 252d.

moves' is true, then 'Theaetetus rests' is necessarily false. And because there are only two exhaustive contraries which partake of their common genus, if a statement which predicated one exhaustive contrary of a subject were false, the other would necessarily be true. If 'Theaetetus rests' is false, then 'Theaetetus moves' will necessarily be true.

(3) The final type of difference is introduced in connection with Plato's discussion of the 'not-large', the 'not-beautiful' and the 'not-just'.¹⁸⁵ The Stranger claims that a person who says *that which is not* (e.g. not-large), does not say something contrary (*ἐναντίον*) to *that which is* (e.g. large), but only something different (*ἕτερον*) from it. The not-large, for example, does not say something contrary to the large because it could just as well indicate the equal or the small.¹⁸⁶ A little further on he says that, when names are prefixed with a 'not' or a 'non' (*οὐ* or *μη*), they indicate something 'other than' (some one of the other of - *τῶν ἄλλων*) the things to which the names following the negation are applied.¹⁸⁷

Because this type of difference involves more than two Kinds which are 'other than' each other, it is necessarily distinct from exhaustive contrariety. But is this kind of difference also distinct from numerical distinctness? It is to this question that I now turn.

This is a difficult question to answer. It is clear that Plato wants to distinguish being 'other than' from being 'contrary to'. But obviously this distinction does not mean that the not-x represents a class of the different that does not overlap with contrariety.

¹⁸⁵*Sophist* 257b-258c. Following Seligman I will use the term 'not-x' to indicate what is designated as different in this sense.

¹⁸⁶*Sophist* 257b.

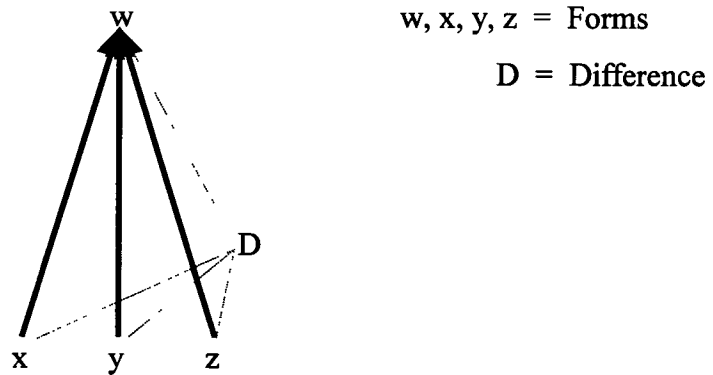
¹⁸⁷*Sophist* 257b-c.

The not-large, which Plato uses to illustrate the nature of the not-x, includes the small—something which surely is contrary to the large. One interpretation sees no difference between Plato’s discussion of x/not-x difference and what we called ‘numerical distinctness’ above. According to this interpretation ‘other than’ is simply a general expression which includes contrariety, though it is not confined to it.¹⁸⁸ This would mean that all Forms which are contrary to each other are ‘other than’ each other, but not all Forms which are ‘other than’ each other are contrary. I agree with this interpretation insofar as I think the x/not-x difference will presuppose numerical distinctness. But I don’t think this explanation goes far enough in spelling out the difference between the x and the not-x. The problem is that the examples Plato gives of things which are different from the x are all things which are incompatible with it. The examples of the not-large Plato gives do not include Forms like the beautiful and the just—Forms which are merely numerically distinct from the large—, they only include Forms which have a generic similarity to the large *viz.* the small and the equal. Though only the small is actually the contrary to the large, the equal is also incompatible with it—a fact that can be seen when we consider statements (the same thing cannot be both large and equal in the same way, etc.).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸Cf. Owen, 1970, p. 232n19, Seligman, 1972, pp. 82-83. See also Cornford, 1935, p. 290. There he says that the not-beautiful signifies every Form other than the beautiful. This would seem to indicate that the not-beautiful includes its contrary (note #1 on this page reinforces this interpretation).

¹⁸⁹The implied claim in the *Sophist* that the equal ($\tau\omicron\ \acute{\iota}\sigma\omicron\nu$) lies between the large and the small may seem like an odd thing to say. We would be more inclined to say the ‘middle-sized’ lies between the large and the small. But that Plato held that it is equality

What is needed is a way to account for the fact that the examples of things Plato claims are not contrary to the x are in fact incompatible with it. I think the most promising solution lies in distinguishing two different types of contrariety: exhaustive contrariety and non-exhaustive contrariety.¹⁹⁰ Though contraries are always exclusive—the same thing cannot partake of both contraries in the same way at the same time—, not all pairs of contraries are exhaustive. It is often the case that one or more things lies ‘between’ the extremes. We can illustrate this as follows:



In this case y lies between the polar contraries of x and z . Though only x and z could properly be considered contraries, because the y also partakes of the same generic Form (w) while not blending with x or z , it is incompatible with x and z .

which lies between these two extremes is clear from his discussion of the large, the small and the equal at *Parmenides* 161c-d.

¹⁹⁰The following interpretation follows that found in Pelletier 1990, pp. 40-41. Pelletier does not offer this interpretation as something that Plato most certainly did hold, but merely as something that is consistent with the text.

Now it is important to note that all the contraries which Plato considers in his discussion of the not-x are of the non-exhaustive sort.¹⁹¹ This means that, when Plato claims that the not-x does not necessarily indicate the *ἐναντίον* of the x, he does not mean that it indicates any old thing which is merely different (numerically distinct) from it. The beautiful and the just, for example, are different from the large, but the not-large does not indicate them. Instead, the not-x indicates things which, though not necessarily the polar contrary of x, are nonetheless opposed (*ἀντιτιθέμενον*) to it.¹⁹² Because the beautiful and the just are not opposed to the large, they do not ‘fall under’ the not-large. Instead, the class of things which are opposed to the x only includes things which have a generic similarity with it, though they do not blend with it. It is for this reason that the not-large includes only the small and the equal (the non-exhaustive contrary of the large and the intermediate that lies between these contraries) and not the beautiful and the just.

So the not-x indicates the things which are opposed to x in cases where there is more than one thing which is ‘set against’ x. The class of things opposed to x includes the polar contrary of x, though it is not confined to this since it also includes that which is intermediate between the x and the polar contrary of x.

Though opposition is distinct from exhaustive contrariety, as far as the truth and falsity of statements is concerned the difference between them is small and insignificant. In both cases, if a statement which says one incompatible Form of a subject is true, then a statement which asserts another of the same subject is false. It is no less the case that, if

¹⁹¹The examples Plato gives at *Sophist* 257d-258a are the large/not-large, the beautiful/not-beautiful and the just/not-just.

‘Theaetetus moves’ is true, then ‘Theaetetus rests’ is false, than it is the case that if ‘Theaetetus is ugly’ is true, then ‘Theaetetus is plain’ is false. The only difference between things which are opposed and exhaustive contraries lies in the inference from the falsity of a statement to the truth of another statement which predicates an incompatible Form of the same subject. In the case of exhaustive contrariety it is possible to infer the truth of a statement from the falsity of a statement which asserts a contrary predicate of the same subject. If ‘Theaetetus rests’ is false, then ‘Theaetetus moves’ is necessarily true. But the same does not apply to things which are opposed. It is not the case that, if ‘Theaetetus is plain’ is false, then ‘Theaetetus is ugly’ will be true—it is possible for Theaetetus to be beautiful.

So a close reading of the *Sophist* has revealed that there are three types of difference: numerical distinctness, exhaustive contrariety, and opposition. It remains for us to consider the method of verification which would follow from a false statement saying something of a subject different in each of these senses from what a true statement says of it. Once we have considered the method of verification which would follow from each type of difference, we will be in a position to decide which is the one Plato would most likely have accepted.

Before we do this, however, it is necessary to say something about how we are to decide which sense of difference yields the most likely explanation for how we know that a statement is false. Because Plato does not explicitly consider verification in the *Sophist*,

¹⁹²Plato uses this term when talking about the not-beautiful at *Sophist* 257d.

it is impossible to decide on strictly textual grounds which sense of difference forms the basis of verifying the falsity of a statement. But if we cannot rely exclusively on the text, how are we to decide which sense of difference is most appropriate? As a basic guideline to answering this question it will be assumed that the sense of difference which yields the most effective method of verifying the falsity of a statement is the one to which Plato actually subscribed. To help determine this, I will use the criterion of *completeness*. The correct sense of difference must provide both a necessary and a sufficient condition for a statement being false. If a particular sense of difference provides both a necessary and a sufficient condition for a statement to be false, then by knowing the true statement, and by knowing that another statement says something different in this particular sense from what the true statement says, one would know that this other statement is false. Any sense of difference which does not provide such conditions will be rejected unless there is compelling textual evidence to support it. If more than one sense of difference provides a necessary and a sufficient condition for a statement to be false, we will consider the actual procedure one must employ in each case to discover that a statement is false. This may suggest which sense of difference yields the most likely explanation for how one is to know that a statement is false.

The debate over the sense of difference that yields a method of verification which provides both a necessary and a sufficient condition for knowing that a statement is false centers on those who adopt an 'incompatible' reading (it does not matter whether those incompatibles are exhaustive contraries or things which are opposed to each other), and

those who adopt a simple ‘other than’ (numerical distinction) rendering of difference—a false statement says things ‘other than’ (numerically distinct from) *those which are*.¹⁹³

We will consider both of these possibilities below. For now, though, it is worth noting that, regardless of which sense of difference is adopted, the method of verifying a false statement will be incomplete. Claiming that we know a statement is false because it says things ‘other than’ (numerically distinct from) something that is truly said of a subject provides a necessary condition for a statement being false, but it is not sufficient. There are a whole host of things which could be truly said of a subject, even though they are ‘other than’ something else that is truly said of that subject. Just because learning is other than sitting does not mean that, because ‘Theaetetus sits’ is true, ‘Theaetetus learns’ is false. Claiming that a false statement says things ‘incompatible’ with something that is truly said of a subject will leave the method for verifying falsity incomplete because, though stating something incompatible with something which is truly said of a subject is a sufficient condition for a statement to be false, it is not necessary. There are many things which, though compatible with what is truly said of a subject, are still false. Eating and sitting are compatible, but even though ‘Theaetetus sits’ is true, ‘Theaetetus eats’ is (presumably) false. So regardless of whether we adopt an ‘other than’ reading or an ‘incompatible with’ reading, the method of verification will be incomplete. In each case something will still have to be added to the definition of a false statement to make it both necessary and sufficient.

¹⁹³Ackrill (1955) and Seligman (1972) adopt an incompatibility reading. Cornford (1935) and Owen (1970) adopt a difference reading of this passage.

The first sense of difference I will consider is numerical distinctness: we know a statement is false because it says something numerically distinct from what a true statement says.¹⁹⁴ As was mentioned above, the class of things which are numerically distinct includes things which are incompatible with what is actually blended with a subject, but is not confined to such things. So, whether or not the false statement says something of a subject that is also incompatible with what a true statement says of it is irrelevant—all that matters is that the formal condition of difference is satisfied. The principal problem with this interpretation is the one mentioned above: saying things other than what is truly said of a subject is only a necessary condition for a statement to be false, it is not sufficient. This means that, if ‘other than’ is the proper sense of difference for verification, another condition must be satisfied for us to know that a statement is false.

Clearly, saying something numerically distinct from what is truly said of a subject is not sufficient for one to know that a statement is false. But there is another possibility. Plato’s use of the plural—a false statement says things different from *those that are*—suggests that a false statement does not say things different from a particular thing that is [actually blended with a subject], but rather says things different from *all* the things that are [actually blended with the subject].¹⁹⁵ If this is the case, then rendering difference as ‘other than’ (numerically distinct from)—a false statement says things

¹⁹⁴Cf. Cornford 1935, p. 316. Cornford’s use of ‘different’ must be rendered as ‘other than’ here, not ‘incompatible with’.

numerically distinct from *those which are* [actually blended with a subject]—provides both a necessary and a sufficient condition for a statement to be false. And because it is both necessary and sufficient, by knowing all the things that are true of a subject, and by knowing that another statement says something different from all these things, one would know that this other statement is false. So adopting the ‘numerically distinct’ sense of difference yields a satisfactory account of how one is to know that a statement is false—provided that a false statement says something numerically distinct from *all* the things which are actually blended with a subject.¹⁹⁶

Before accepting this account of verification, it is necessary to consider what happens when the sense of difference employed is incompatibility (contrariety or opposition). As was mentioned above, using this sense of difference to explain how one knows that a statement is false suffers shortcomings. Though saying something incompatible with what is truly said of a subject is a sufficient condition for knowing that a statement is false, it is not necessary. There are many things which, though compatible with what is truly said of a subject, are nonetheless false. If ‘incompatible’ is the most likely sense of difference for the verification of falsity, then another condition must be satisfied before we can accept this account. Is it possible to complete this account?

¹⁹⁵ Actually, we don’t even need to put the ‘all’ in this account of verification: ‘a false statement is one that says something numerically distinct from *those that are* [actually blended with a subject]’.

¹⁹⁶ This seems to be Owen’s interpretation of verification. See Owen (1971), pp. 237-238. Cornford may also subscribe to this interpretation, though it is difficult to be sure.

Perhaps there is. The reason why saying something incompatible with what is truly said of a subject is not sufficient for one to know that a statement is false, is that there are many things which, though compatible with a particular thing which is actually blended with a subject, are nonetheless false. But what if a false statement asserts a thing of a subject that is incompatible with *something* which is actually blended with the subject? This would be enough to make the definition of a false statement necessary—everything that can be falsely be said of a subject is incompatible with *something* which is actually blended with that subject. To return to our earlier example, even though eating is not incompatible with sitting, because it is incompatible with *something* that can be truly said of Theaetetus (whatever that something might be), ‘Theaetetus eats’ is false. So by knowing what is truly said of a subject, and by knowing that another statement says something of the same subject which is incompatible with what is truly said of this subject, one would know that this other statement is false.

There is, however, a serious problem with rendering difference as incompatibility. If a false statement is one which says something incompatible with what is truly said of a subject, then we would expect the two examples of a true and a false statement (‘Theaetetus sits’, ‘Theaetetus flies’) to be incompatible. That is, if we know that ‘Theaetetus flies’ is false because ‘Theaetetus sits’ is true, then we would expect sitting to be incompatible with flying. Though some have argued that sitting and flying are indeed incompatible¹⁹⁷, on the face of it this does not appear to be correct. When we compare the sitting-flying relationship with the motion-rest relationship (exhaustive contrariety),

we find that they are not the same. The same thing cannot partake of both motion and rest. But nothing precludes the same thing from partaking of both sitting and flying (as a modern airline passenger does or, to use an example which would have been familiar to Plato, as Perseus did when he rode Pegasus).¹⁹⁸ Nor does the sitting-flying relationship appear to be one of opposition. Though it may be possible to put sitting in an oppositional set with such other bodily positions as standing, lying and squatting, flying would not be a part of this set: flying does not normally indicate a bodily position.¹⁹⁹

Though the fact that sitting and flying do not appear to be incompatible weakens this interpretation, perhaps we should not make too much of it. It could be that Plato really did think that sitting and flying were incompatible. It could be that the contrast between sitting and flying is meant to be short for the contrast between sitting on the ground and flying through the air (two things which are incompatible). So, though the apparent compatibility of sitting and flying does speak out against this interpretation, we

¹⁹⁷Cf. Seligman (1972), p. 104.

¹⁹⁸It could be objected that, because Perseus is not sitting and flying in the same respect, the relationship between sitting and flying is entirely analogous to that between motion and rest. Nothing precludes the same thing from partaking in both motion and rest provided it partakes of them in different ways (e.g. Theaetetus partakes in motion with respect to his heart and in rest with respect to his hand). Analogously, though a thing could partake of both sitting and flying, because it does not do it in the same respect, sitting and flying are still incompatible.

I don't think this objection works. A thing can partake of motion and rest because a *part* of it is in motion while another *part* is at rest. But it is not the case with Perseus that a part of him is sitting while another part is flying: *all* of Perseus is sitting and *all* of Perseus is flying. This seems to indicate that sitting and flying are not incompatible.

¹⁹⁹If, however, by 'flying' Plato means something comparable to 'flying like a bird', flying could indicate a bodily position that is incompatible with sitting.

should not use it alone to decide which sense of difference provides the most likely account of Plato's notion of verification.

So it seems that there are two possible ways in which one could verify that a statement is false. If the relevant sense of difference is 'numerical distinctness', then a false statement will say something numerically distinct from all of *those that are* [actually blended with a subject]. By knowing all the things which could be truly said of a subject, and by knowing that a particular statement says something that is numerically distinct from all these true things, one would know that that statement is false. If the relevant sense of difference is 'incompatibility', then a false statement would say something incompatible with something that is truly said of a subject. By knowing a particular thing that is truly said of a subject, and by knowing that another statement says something incompatible with this thing of the same subject, one would know that this other statement is false. Because both senses of difference enable one to know that a statement is false (provided one already knows what is true of a subject), we will have to use different grounds to decide which sense of difference provides the most likely explanation for how we are to know that a statement is false. To help decide which sense of difference Plato actually bought into, we will consider the actual procedure involved in deciding which statement is false in both cases. From this it may be possible to determine which sense of difference results in the most likely explanation for how one is to know that a statement is false.

So what method of verification does each sense of difference require? How do we know that 'Theaetetus flies' is false? The method of verification in the case where a false statement says something numerically distinct from what a true statement says has two conditions which must be satisfied if we are to know that a statement such as 'Theaetetus flies' is false. First, it is necessary to know (perceive) every single thing which is true of a particular subject. That is, it is necessary to know every Form capable of being indicated by a verb with which the subject of a statement actually blends. So, in order to determine that 'Theaetetus flies' is false, we must first determine everything which is true of Theaetetus. The second step is to determine whether or not flying is one of those things which do in fact blend with the subject. Because we cannot perceive negative facts, this is done by comparing flying with every other thing which is true of Theaetetus to see if it is numerically distinct from those things. If flying is numerically distinct from each of the things which are actually blended with Theaetetus, then 'Theaetetus flies' is false.²⁰⁰

The method of verification in the case where a false statement says something incompatible with what a true statement says also has two conditions which must be satisfied if we are to know that a statement such as 'Theaetetus flies' is false. First, we must know the patterns of compatibility and incompatibility among the Forms. We must, for example, know that the Form of flying does not blend with the Form of sitting (if indeed it doesn't). Second, we must perceive the positive fact that the incompatible Form

²⁰⁰Owen sums up this position quite well when he says that verification is an interminable business. Owen (1972), p. 238 n. 31.